

ZEN GONG

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His Master's Voice

(...) La fréquentation d'un maître est indispensable. Chacun de nous voit mal sa propre vie ; il est très difficile de démasquer soi-même le caractère illusoire de ses compensations. Et il est impossible de remédier seul au doute sur son propre « être ». La délivrance de ce doute nécessite le commerce avec une intelligence extérieure, une intelligence impartiale qui ne nous juge pas mais qui considère notre pensée et nous réhabilite ainsi peu à peu à nos propres yeux.

(Hubert Benoit)



"Teacher-disciple transmission" in Zen is "teacher-disciple identification" where the experience of the teacher and that of his disciple are in complete accord with each other. They fundamentally originate in one and the same truth.

(Shibayama)

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Le point d'entrée



Monique Dumont

En 1989, au mois de septembre, j'ai franchi pour la première fois le seuil du zendo du Centre zen de Montréal, et au moment où j'ai pénétré dans cette pièce où j'allais tantôt m'asseoir et entendre des paroles si neuves pour moi, des paroles pourtant que je savais être celles que j'espérais entendre depuis si longtemps, dans ce moment qui s'est étendu comme une onde sur toute la matinée, j'ai su qu'il y avait un lieu. J'étais chez moi ici.

Quant à savoir ce lieu, ce que signifie réellement être chez soi, bien que j'en aie eu le pressentiment ébloui ce matin-là, il me faudra des années de pratique pour en avoir, non pas une certitude, trop cérébral, mais une plus grande intimité - une connivence, dirais-je ? Je me rappelle cette image que monsieur Low m'a donnée un jour de dokusan. « C'est comme une toile qui s'enfonce dans l'eau », disait-il, parlant de l'approfondissement de la pratique. Je voyais cette toile se gorger d'eau en s'enfonçant, devenant de plus en plus semblable, de plus en plus prégnante. Entrer dans la présence. J'y vois le sens même du mot « foi » lorsqu'il n'est pas réclamé par autre chose que par lui-même. Être chez soi comme prendre appui. Que l'on n'ait besoin de rien sur lequel s'appuyer, aucune croyance, aucune personne, aucune chose, c'est bien sûr ce que le Zen indique comme voie et aboutissement. Que le chez-soi ne soit pas un lieu hors de soi, qu'il ne soit localisé ni dans le temps ni dans l'espace, il m'a fallu du temps pour l'accepter autrement que sous la forme d'une vérité à laquelle je donnais un consentement intellectuel tout en lui opposant un refus terrifié. Pour que cette réalité puisse faire son chemin en moi, je devais m'enraciner dans un dialogue vivant avec un maître. Il est impossible de remédier seul au doute sur son propre « être » écrit Hubert Benoit. Je devais trouver quelqu'un qui avait découvert le « lieu » et qui aurait la bonté de m'indiquer la direction dans laquelle regarder. Sans ce dialogue avec lui, et sans son inlassable patience, je n'aurais pas fait un seul pas.

« Un des plus grands problèmes que rencontre une personne qui pratique une tradition spirituelle

authentique est la Peur. Elle surgit de la perception simultanée de anicca (non-chose) et de anatman (non-soi). Voilà ce que le Nouvel-Âge ignore lorsqu'il prêche la vie dans le 'ici et maintenant' ; il oublie que cela exige l'abandon total du soi comme entité et cette pensée crée ce qu'on appelle la peur de la Mort. C'est pourquoi nous avons besoin d'une orientation spirituelle. » Et d'un guide.

* * *

Nous étions environ vingt-cinq personnes à un atelier d'introduction donné par Albert Low. Nous étions tous assis à l'attendre dans le silence. Un silence plein d'expectatives. À quoi peut bien ressembler un maître zen ? À quoi peut bien ressembler un homme éveillé ? Comment se comporte-t-il ? L'éveil : une notion fascinante, si étrangère à notre culture, un terrain idéal pour donner libre cours à toutes les imaginations les plus fantaisistes. Un terrain propice aussi à beaucoup de mystifications. Va-t-il, dans sa grande spontanéité, se mettre à faire des pirouettes cocasses ou nous apostropher avec des questions saugrenues ? Ou pire, nous regarder avec des yeux qui nous traversent de part en part comme des rayons lasers ? Pour qui les avait lus en surface, certains textes de la littérature zen pouvaient se prêter à ce genre d'appréhensions. Il y avait aussi dans l'air du temps tous ces clichés sur le Zen anarchiste ou le Zen cool, sans parler du comportement cabotin pour ne pas dire carrément immoral de certains maîtres qui avaient donné au Zen une réputation douteuse. Est-ce le genre de pain qu'on allait nous servir ici ? J'avais déjà des indices qui me portaient à penser autrement.

Je venais de lire son livre *Invitation à la pratique du Zen*. C'est la lecture de ce livre qui m'avait donnée le coup de pouce décisif pour m'inscrire à l'atelier d'introduction. « Si quelqu'un vous demande du pain, ne lui donnez pas des pierres ». Cette phrase du Nouveau Testament m'était revenue en mémoire en lisant ce livre et je me la répéterai si souvent par la suite en écoutant M. Low parler. J'ai toujours été touchée de voir comment il s'adresse aux gens en

faisant appel à leur profonde intelligence. Ce livre était une introduction à la pratique mais loin de la présenter comme une méthode ou une technique qu'il ne s'agirait que d'appliquer, il en laissait pressentir toute la difficulté. En réalité, je devrais dire toute la simplicité. Cette simplicité pourtant qu'il nous est impossible d'apprécier tant que nous sommes empêtrés dans nos revendications et interprétations égocentriques. « Ce n'est pas le Zen qui est compliqué, dira-t-il souvent, c'est vous. » Une pratique spirituelle qui amène la mise à nu de l'impasse fondamentale dans laquelle nous nous trouvons et qui affirme que l'impasse elle-même est la délivrance n'est pas une pratique qui se transmet à la façon d'un livre de recettes. C'est d'ailleurs pourquoi les kôans ont été inventés. Indiquer cette simplicité tout en évitant de la banaliser. Indiquer cette ambiguïté en évitant de la réduire. La banalisation est l'ennemie de toute pratique spirituelle sérieuse, de toute entreprise de compréhension et de toute vie. Je crois que les gens souffrent énormément de la banalité, pour ne pas dire la platitude, à laquelle leur vie et l'intelligence qu'ils en ont est réduite. C'est ça « l'homme unidimensionnel ». « Nous n'aimons pas l'ambiguïté » dira monsieur Low. Nous voulons du noir et du blanc, nous voulons savoir qui est le bon et qui est le méchant. Nous voulons des certitudes.

Il y avait aussi dans ce livre un ton discernable entre les lignes : le ton de la bienveillance. Leonard Cohen en parlant de son maître zen disait : « il y a un blâme dans toutes les autres voix sauf la sienne. » J'ai si souvent expérimenté l'exactitude de ces paroles par la suite. L'intelligence qui utilise le ton de la bienveillance est rare. J'avais vécu dans un milieu culturel et je m'étais nourrie de livres où l'intelligence était trop souvent synonyme de cynisme, un cynisme qui se permettait des indignations vertueuses face aux injustices de ce monde et pour le reste affichait un détachement ricaner. Le ricanement considéré comme le summum du détachement. C'était l'époque. Des mots comme gratitude, compassion, don, émerveillement, n'avaient plus cours. Bien sûr, ils avaient été tellement dévoyés. Ce n'est qu'avec

la rencontre de monsieur Low que ces mots reprendront du sens pour moi, un sens exigeant je dirais. Je venais d'une génération qui avait rejeté avec un haut-le-cœur tous les bons sentiments dérivés d'une moralité un peu niaise et sucrée qui nous avait tenu lieu de religion. Le cynisme avait été une réaction de nettoyage en quelque sorte ; mais il est aussi empoisonnant que les bons sentiments car il est aussi superficiel et menteur. Comment vivre dans un monde où tout est sujet de ricanement ?

Lorsqu'enfin monsieur Low est arrivé, je n'ai pas été déçue. Lorsqu'il a commencé à parler, le ton de bienveillance que j'avais perçu dans son livre était aussi dans sa voix. Avec une pointe d'humour derrière. Mais plus que sa voix ce sont ses paroles qui m'ont profondément touchée. Enfin, enfin, des paroles vraies. Des paroles qui suscitaient en moi une interrogation étonnée. Et comme l'interrogation ne trouvait pas de réponse, elle ouvrait un espace encore plus large, plus vaste. Ce matin-là, monsieur Low posait des questions, non pas à la manière d'un professeur d'école qui attend les bonnes réponses, mais à la manière d'un éveilleur. Il n'y a pas de bonnes réponses, mais il y a de fichus bonnes questions. Ce sont celles qui nous dérangent dans le confort de nos croyances, qui débusquent nos opinions, nos préjugés, celles qui nous éveillent au fait que nous croyons savoir beaucoup de choses, mais en réalité que savons-nous ?

« Pratiquer le Zen, ce n'est pas simplement s'asseoir sur un coussin, faire face au mur dans un zendo, suivre la respiration ou travailler sur un koan. Le cœur de la pratique du zen, et cela est vrai de toute pratique spirituelle, c'est l'étonnement, la perplexité, c'est se préoccuper, s'intéresser à notre humaine condition. » Merveille des merveilles !

Je crois que ma présence au zendo ce matin-là était un commencement et un aboutissement. C'était le commencement et l'aboutissement d'une quête. La quête elle venait de changer de face, ou plutôt elle venait d'en acquiescer une. Et une légitimité. Cette

quête « sans nom » que j'avais menée ou qui m'avait menée la plupart du temps, confusément, souvent honteusement, parce qu'elle se situait hors de tout cadre institutionnel reconnu, - au moins si j'avais été « croyante » mot qui, comme celui de religion, m'était tout à fait odieux et imprononçable - cette quête, elle avait un nom : c'était la quête du sens. Et elle avait une légitimité : non seulement, elle n'est pas le fait de gens qui s'attardent dans une adolescence prolongée, elle n'est pas non plus le privilège de quelques auteurs ayant pignon sur rue ou de philosophes professionnels, elle est le fait de tout humain qui a conservé intacte sa faculté de penser et d'éprouver, elle est essentiellement la seule activité qui a du sens elle-même. Sans cette activité, comme le disait Socrate, « la vie non seulement ne vaut pas grand chose mais elle n'est même pas tout à fait vivante ».

« Quel est le sens de la vie, quel est le sens de votre vie ? » demande de multiples façons le maître dont la compassion - les moyens habiles - se mettent au service de l'esprit qui questionne comme autant d'aiguillons, d'empêcheurs de tourner en rond, d'irritants qui nous délogent de notre torpeur. Eveillez l'esprit qui questionne, dira-t-il. L'interrogation est-elle réelle pour vous ? On accède à une pratique spirituelle comme le Zen par la porte de notre question. Votre vie est un koan, dit-il. C'est vrai au niveau générique, pour tous les humains, et au niveau spécifique à chaque personne, par la couleur, la forme que revêt ce questionnement. C'est d'une certaine façon notre compétence particulière. Cette compétence donne de la chair autour du squelette du questionnement, ce n'est pas une question qui se pose dans les airs, non enracinée, c'est une question qui se pose dans la chair de notre existence. Elle en est la souffrance. Ma souffrance particulière, ma compétence.

C'est une profonde insatisfaction qui m'a menée au Centre zen. Une insatisfaction avec laquelle je n'étais pas réconciliée. La souffrance m'apparaissait comme un échec ; je vivais ce sentiment d'échec sans pouvoir en identifier la teneur véritable. J'avais encore trop tendance à me regarder avec les yeux de l'opinion

courante et à me juger selon les habituels critères de réussite, des critères extérieurs il va sans dire. Je ne savais encore que très obscurément que cette insatisfaction provenait d'une couche beaucoup plus profonde de mon être, qu'elle était liée au fait même d'être humaine et qu'aucune solution dans le monde de la forme ne viendrait la résoudre. Je n'avais encore rencontré personne pour me le faire voir clairement, pour me mettre au fait de la souffrance « telle qu'elle est », sans fioriture ni décoration, *la souffrance radicale qui nécessite une cure radicale*. Jusqu'ici je n'avais rencontré que des gens proposant des cures partielles dont la plupart étaient aussi superficielles que les brises capricieuses de l'air du temps.

Personne encore ne m'avait dit : il n'y a aucun contentement possible en cette vie si vous ne vous posez pas la question du sens. Personne ne m'avait dit que mon insatisfaction était légitime, mais qu'elle était aussi amplifiée, dédoublée par une autre insatisfaction qui poussait à côté d'elle comme de la mauvaise herbe, comme une pâle imitation, et qui était le manque d'audace à vouloir la prendre de face, envers et malgré tout. Le manque d'audace ou le désir de confort qui faisait reculer l'échéance toujours à plus tard - demain. Personne ne m'avait dit que mon sentiment d'échec était bien réel et qu'il fallait pour une fois, une bonne fois, accepter de voir ce qu'il indiquait. « Peut-être avez-vous l'impression d'avoir raté votre vie parce que vous n'êtes jamais allée au bout du questionnement, avec le sérieux d'une personne pour qui c'est une question de vie ou de mort. Quel est le sens de la vie, de votre vie ? Qui êtes-vous ? Le savez-vous ? Et de quoi manquez-vous ? »

Voilà ce que j'étais prête à entendre lorsque j'ai finalement accepté de me rendre au Centre zen ce matin de septembre, et voilà que j'ai eu la chance enfin de trouver une personne pour le clamer haut et fort : « Soyez radicale ». ✱



Teacher-Student

Interview with Albert Low

Monique Dumont



**/In koan 62 of the Hekiganroku it is said,
« activating uncontrived subtle functions by means
of teacherless knowledge, being an unsolicited
friend in a higher sense by means of objectless
compassion... »**

Objectless compassion, that is very good isn't it ?

/What does it mean for you ?

Well it means that when one talks to a person in the dokusan room, one doesn't talk to the personality. One can't. It would not make sense. In other words a teacher does not refer to « someone » or something in the dokusan room. If you like, the subject-object relation of a social relation is absent. This is why it is always difficult when people come in and say good afternoon, or good evening, or how are you, or something like that. It sounds like a social occasion. I suppose really they do this because they are embarrassed. They don't know quite how to handle the situation ; normally beginners are the ones who do that. But this kind of greeting sets the whole thing on the wrong level, in the wrong context.

/Perhaps they think it would be impolite not to say something like that ?

Yes that is right. But that is why the bow is so important. The bow sets the context and it gives a direction. A kind of connection is made with the bow which transcends what I think that the people do when they say good afternoon ; they are establishing some kind of connection, but they do so at the wrong level. They are not used to the bow yet. Of course some people come in to dokusan but who object to the whole master- teacher relation. They come in and say good afternoon in order to set the context for them that is right for them. It is very interesting that people do that kind of thing.

Many people come to the dokusan room and it is always within the same situation : they come in and they bow or they do something and they sit down. After a time, when one sees enough people, everything a person does when he or she comes into the room, including ringing the bell, tells a story about them. I am not referring to anything clever; I am not subscribing to the idea that the teacher has some supernatural powers by which he can divine something in the student that the student can't divine in himself. In my opinion, to give this impression is quite wrong and quite offensive really. The idea that somebody knows more about you than you know about yourself is not good. But nevertheless we do give ourselves away by our body language and people give themselves away just on that level as they come in the dokusan room.

/You learn a lot just looking at them. You learn something about their practice ?

Yes, oh yes. You see when people are really into their practice a kind of alertness pervades the way they come in, a kind of aliveness emanates. If a person is not in their practice then as he closes the door he closes the door like someone making a visit. It is the same with a person's posture. You can see if a person is 'there' or not there.

/So what is a Zen teacher ? You said the only thing you can do is bear testimony. Some people are speaking about friendship, you know, a teacher is a spiritual friend, others about guide...

You see, this is really our problem quite frankly : we do not have a context for what we are doing in Zen. You see a doctor, a psychologist, a teacher at University, they operate within a context, but we don't have a context.

/What do you mean by context ?

Well, when you go to a doctor you go there in order to get cured; you have a pain or you have a problem and you want to get some kind of cure. Or you go to a psychologist, you have some kind of definite psychological problem that you want to discuss. You may not know what the problem is, but you know there is something that you need to talk to the psychologist about. Or you go to a teacher because you want to learn something. So if he is a mathematics teacher, mathematics is the context ; or getting well is the context with the doctor, and finding, or dealing with the problem is the context with the psychologist. So what is the context in Zen ? If you say 'come to awakening' that won't do because what does that mean ? You know what learning mathematics or getting well mean. In the East they don't have this problem, because the context is part of the whole world view that they have. But our world view is Christian, whether we like it or not.

/So we don't know what to expect of a Zen master ?

No. I think this is the problem. What is the context for Zen? How does Zen fit into the West if you like. It doesn't work as a philosophy. Although we try to say it is a religion, it doesn't work as a religion because in the West a religion means a God, a church, certain understandings, rituals and ceremonies. Zen is definitely not a psychology, I always want to distance Zen from psychology. That doesn't mean to say one doesn't use psychological understandings. So what is it? This is what I mean when I say it doesn't have a context in the West.

/Yes but even though, some people are searching... I think I was searching for, I don't know how to define it, but that kind of master-student relationship.

You've said it « I don't know how to define it ». I think there you have it. You see, I am not saying that when you go to a Zen teacher you go with a complete blank mind. One is searching, obviously. But what can this Zen teacher do for you ? What can a Zen teacher do for you ? It comes back to what you were asking about guides and friends...

I don't like the term 'friend'. It doesn't ring at all with me. It is a little bit too casual. A guide yes perhaps. But what about when somebody (a student) comes in that is so arrogant that you just have to sort of go for him and attack the personality, try to get through the shell... are you a guide at that moment or an enemy ?... quite often people leave as a consequence... because you push them more than they like to be pushed, trying to get through to them in a different way. So... it is true that people have read things about Eastern gurus and so on and they very often try to bring that kind of attitude... But that is even worse in a way than looking for a psychologist or some kind of healer or whatever, because the relation of a student to a guru is not at all like the relationship of a teacher to the student in Western Zen.

/What is the difference ?

Well the guru is the all wise, the one who knows. He or she is a representative of the Godhead. A person really submits to the guru, he gives over to the guru. This is the sort of normal understanding at least that people have of the guru, that he is the all wise and so therefore one can put one's life in the guru's hands. That is not how it is here in Zen. The whole thing is how can a person walk on their own feet and see through their own eyes. This is really what we try to get to.

The kind of relationship, also, that a student and a master have in Japan won't work here either. Because in Japan the teacher is very authoritarian. The sensei-student relationship is a very authoritarian kind of relationship. It cannot be transported here.

/Do you mean that it is something that has to be or will be defined here along the years or is it something that is undefinable, it works but cannot be defined ?

Well I think that at one level it is true that it cannot be defined. But then I suppose any relationship has that sort of unknowable quality to it. But I feel also that what you said first is also true. Yes, eventually the relationship thing will develop if Zen develops in the West. And we will get our own ritualistic context. Whenever you get people meeting together in a group, after a while a certain ritualistic relationship

develops. Even in a marriage after a while there are certain rituals, who sits where etc...

Rituals do give a certain sense of continuity, a certain sense of stability. We don't have those at the moment and so we don't have that defining structure by which we can say that we feel comfortable with the teacher-student relationship. Again I am not saying that you or other people that come in to dokusan are not comfortable (laughter). But when we talk about what is the teacher-student relationship, it isn't an easy thing to talk about.

/Well, it is not very comfortable in the dokusan room either (laughter).

Yes. It has to do with center and periphery. One has to abandon being the center when one comes in because the person sitting there is stable, is fixed, and you come to him and so therefore he has to be the center whether you like it or not. A lot of people don't like it and there is a wrestle that goes on.

/And it has to do also with the fact that we cannot play social games.

Games, yes that is also very true. So it is an « off putting » situation.

/This « off putting » quality, do you think it is essential to the dokusan meeting ?

I think yes, with the bows and so on, yes. It is absolutely essential. Because I think it does set the tone of what we are about. It is the « I » that is « put off » We are not there to have a chat. Furthermore a certain kind of respect is essential. The student must have a certain kind of respect for the teacher, not for the teacher's sake but for the student's sake. If one has no respect then nothing is going to go in. And I think that the bow more likely puts one in the position where one will be able to feel that respect than otherwise. It gives over the center.

In Rochester we used to do a full prostration. But I don't think that's very good at all. Because we are not used to prostrating here in the West. And to prostrate to another person I think is an indignity rather than showing respect. But in the East this is not the case. It

is part of the culture.

/Zen tradition is very strong, I mean as a teacher you have all the Zen tradition behind you to support your authority isn't it ?

Yes, I think you are right and I think one has to be extremely careful with that. This is why I don't like to be called roshi or sensei, because it formalizes that tradition too much. It is too powerful and people succumb to it very easily. I've seen a lot of people just succumb to this roshi idea, as much the same as they succumb to the idea of a father (priest). When I was working in a palliative care unit sometimes people would see that I had a pastoral badge and they would naturally think I was a Catholic father and they would sort of melt, they would become quite unnatural with me. It was so embarrassing. But on the other hand, I must confess I sometimes find it rather awkward when a young person just comes in and calls me Albert. It is...

/It is too familiar ?

Yes, particularly for me in my generation as someone born in England. I found it very difficult when I first came to Canada anyway. The first time I encountered this was when I went to the bank and the bank manager came round from his desk and said, « Oh Albert, I'm pleased, a new customer ! » But anyway, that's fine now, but as I say I feel awkward, I don't know how to deal with it, because I don't want, on the other hand, to overformalize the title.

Although I must confess it is partly for my sake I say this, it is also for the student's sake. If they call me Albert, there is already a loss of something in their eyes. You see I am a transmitter, I am like an instrument through which teaching must pass, and the teaching which is passing through me is of immense value. Immense value. And it needs a conduit for its value to get through and part of that conduit is the way that people relate to it. It is not only the way I relate to people, but the way the people relate to me. This is why I find it awkward, but I couldn't go to being called roshi or sensei. Some people call me teacher, and that seems to work somehow. Again this possibly will itself be one of those things that will sort itself over in time.

/You said that one of the main task of the teacher was to make people independent ?

Well it is to make people non dependent, it is not to make people independent. People come in and they want to be independent. In other words, 'I am me; I am not you' kind of thing, there is a separation in independence. With non-dependence there is a relation, but on the basis of equality.

/How is a student dependent ?

One is dealing with an unknowable ; the relationship that a person who is awakened has to the unknowable and the relationship the person who is not awakened has to it is quite different, totally different. An unawakened person can easily confuse this unknowable with sort of unreachable, ungraspable, beyond me, whereas when one is awakened one realizes that it is me. There is nothing to know (laughter)... why do I bother to know if I am it... So in so far as there is that chasm that exists, and it is a chasm, there is that dependency. One has to trust, there has to be that trust. In other words one has the willingness to give the teacher the benefit of the doubt, a willingness to go along with it, with what is being said, even though one does not understand it, even though one does not agree with it, nor even like it. Nevertheless there is that willingness to go along with it. I do not say accept.

Another way that a person is dependent also, is that we are dependent upon any one who holds something valuable that we want. And for a long time one is under the impression that the teacher has that something valuable and that he can give it. Only when one begins to get really into one's practice does one realize that it is not possible for me to get it. Even though one doesn't yet realize that one is it, nevertheless a new found freedom begins to emerge. But until then one has an illusory dependency. In other words it is not a true dependency, it is not something which is necessarily true to the situation, but it comes out of a misunderstanding that a student has. The role of a teacher is to somehow open up a student to that illusion..

/When a student is non dependent, does he still need you ?

It depends on what you mean by the need. I would say no, but the ability to share is wonderful, and if you are going to share then of course you need somebody to share with.

/You said that « you must trust your teacher sixty percent ». Why ?

Sixty percent is being generous. This leads us into one of the difficulties and dangers for a teacher and for a student : one can only ever say fifty percent. The other fifty percent just cannot be said. The danger is that both teacher and student can lose sight of this and think the teacher is saying hundred percent. This is a danger for a teacher unless he constantly works on himself, unless he constantly sits and really works hard to break down those shells that come from that belief that one can say it all. This is how we fell into the trap in the first place. We thought we were seeing the world, we are not seeing *the* world, we are only seeing *a* world if you like, fifty percent.

But nevertheless when trying to get something home, one tries hard, one tries this, one tries that, till eventually you see what you are trying to get home is hundred percent (laughter). One is trying to say it. One sees this person, she is in pain, she works terribly hard, she is still up against this blankness, and so naturally one says alright let's try this, let's do that... and it is not good, you see. As I say one becomes more and more involved in it as a complete truth and it is not. This is why sometimes I say it doesn't matter whether you come to awakening or not. I try to break it. This is why I often say, « look, there is no knowing », « there is no practice », I try to break it, break it, break it, for the student but also for myself.

/Break what ?

This belief that what one is saying is it. My feeling is that somewhere in all of this there is the need to express or create or whatever. This is a dynamic of life. Po Chang says somewhere that in spite of the frustrations that it gives « you cannot go without making an utterance. » But then we believe that we can express something instead of staying within the process of expressing itself. But the drive to express is the drive of life itself.

/Why does the expression always seem to be unsatisfactory ?

If one concentrates on the result too much yes, it will always be unsatisfactory, because the result is always tawdry in comparison with what one knows... at any level. When you write for example the result is never satisfactory... but the process of expressing is always satisfactory. Creativity is not easy; if one is a writer, as you know, there is both an intense pleasure and an intense pain in it. Intense pleasure is in the process itself ; Hakuin talks about writing as verbal prajna. Writing can give that same intense pleasure that deep zazen gives. But the pain of « I can't get it, » « I can't say it, » « that is not what I mean »... is always present.

/The fifty percent that cannot be said...

You know there is the expression 'when you walk, just walk', that is a very fine expression. 'When you talk, just talk', 'when you eat, just eat', that is very good. But that is only half the truth. And if you just say that 'when you walk, just walk', and you sort of really believe that that is how it is, then you think it is hundred percent. That is what it is all about. There are people that have read this kind of saying, they believe that's it, that's the hundred percent truth. But it is not.

So in other words, if you are listening to a teacher and you respect that teacher highly, you'll ask yourself « what isn't he saying, what can't he say when he is saying that ? » You know teisho is a bit like having an unknowable center and one walks round it, keeps on putting things up, pointing to that unknowable center. There is something that cannot be said.

/It is the teacherless knowledge...

Yes that is right, it is teacherless. But one must be careful because one can fall into the belief that you are teaching a teachable knowledge, that is what I am trying to say. It is teacherless and unteachable... There is an impossibility. Yes. It is a teacherless teaching. It cannot be taught. And yet. It is not enough to say it cannot be taught. We can't do that. Somebody comes in, you've got to do something. You've got to respond. And everybody is different, each person that

comes in, you can't have a formula.

/There is a lot of misunderstanding about awakening, many people think or expect an awakened person to be perfect. Have you received some criticisms on that...

Yes. I hear things like, « Oh, I thought you were awakened. Do awakened people act like that ? » I walked by a coca-cola can once at the entrance of the Center's driveway; I walked by it. And a little later this member comes up and says, « how would you do that ? » I said, « Do what ? » He said, « You walked by that can ! » « Oh I did, well so what ? » I should have picked it up, he thought. I remember another member, he was not saying that about me, but he said he was very upset when he first went to a teacher and he found that teacher was very stiff and walked very stiffly when he got down from the tan. So people look at you in that way. And it is difficult sometimes. Because one doesn't want to let people down. When you first start the practice, you don't know what you are getting yourself into, and whatever. And so therefore naturally a certain need arises for some kind of role model, something that will tell you what it is about in action. But unfortunately, generally speaking, the personality doesn't change with awakening. I mean there is nothing in this practice in the personality... one loses one's arrogance to a certain extent and there is this compassion truly and that kind of thing. But this change may not show into the way a person walks or speaks or whatever you know.

But I have tried not to let it worry me. If a person can't live through that, the accepting of me as just another person, then he will have to look for another teacher.

/What do you think of those teachers who get drunk for instance ?

I don't like it. It shows a lack of something if they need to get drunk.

/But I can play the devil advocate and tell you that they are not perfect !

I think that the alcoholics, and there have been a number of teachers that have been, have something

that radically is missing. Getting drunk is the attempt to satisfy some kind of craving and if a person has really worked on themselves, they would have used that craving right at the beginning. That is one of the cravings that you can work with, it is very real, and you can work with it, I think they should.



loses an inner discipline, an inner strength.

/Once you were speaking of unconditional love on the part of the teacher. You said that many people receive it for the first time. What do you mean by unconditional love ?

I used to smoke 40 to 60 cigarettes a day , I was a chimney, and when I started getting interested in spiritual work, one of the things I thought was « If I can't give up smoking how can I really ever get anywhere in any kind of spiritual practice ? »

/ Nisargadatta was smoking...

I still feel that this is something that he could have worked with. All that we know of Nisargadatta are very brief snapshots of parts of his talks, that is about half a percent of his life that we know about. To me he was a very great man, but he had very clay feet. We all have very clay feet and that's okay...

But I think if it gets into where a person becomes drunk and behaves in that kind of way and also encourages his students to get drunk, you know by saying that getting drunk doesn't matter, particularly with womanizing as well, I think it is wrong.

/It is one of the dangers of the position of a teacher here in the West ? Abuse of power ?

Yes, absolutely. It is all part of the context you see. This kind of behavior resulting in an abuse of power comes from a kind of inflation. A teacher can believe what people tell him, not necessarily overtly but in many ways. It is like after a sesshin people come and they really respond to you as a teacher... but what has given them that love, that strength, that joy is the work that they have done, it is not me. I made it possible and so therefore it is nice that people are grateful for that, I made it possible but that is all I have done. But nevertheless that kind of transcendence that one feels after a sesshin can be projected onto the teacher and the teacher can receive it as though it belongs to him. And that I think is where a teacher

It is love without an object like we said earlier. Objectless compassion. It is not because you do this or you do that, because you are this or that kind of person. Objectless compassion is responding immediately to the person, beyond the personality. It is an outcome of the practice.

/Don't you have emotional feelings towards some of the students ? Can it be an obstacle ?

Yes, some. It might be an obstacle for the student. I hope not, but it might be.

You see what I do find distressing is when I say to the people, now you must answer three questions : Do you really want to know who and what you are - Are you prepared to continue with this right through the end even if on your death bed - And will you give me the benefit of doubt. Those are the three questions. « Oh yes, yes » they say. And then later on they say, « Well perhaps it is a bit hard, I don't think I really want to do it ». That I find distressing. If one is going to commit oneself, one must commit oneself. But I think in the West we've come into this kind of 'well, if it pleases me'. I will commit myself if it pleases me. It is like the whole idea of good and bad. We have no sense now that something is right or wrong, good or bad. Instead we say, « I can go along with it, » or « I feel good about that, that suits me, » that kind of thing. In other words, there is a very watered down ability to invest oneself, to engage oneself. I think this is very distressing. I think, quite frankly it has got even worse in the last fifty years.

/What is a serious student ? You said once that Tozan, the Tozan of koan 15, was a serious student.

At the beginning Tozan was not a serious student. But

something must have come out of his encounter with Ummon that brought him up short and made him become a serious student. Mumon said, « he walked all night in the sea of yes and no ». He could not have come to awakening with the next encounter he had with Ummon unless he had not been through hell, and he could only go through hell if he had become serious. But if he were serious at the beginning, he could not have come and answered in the way he did when Ummon asked him where he was coming from. His answers were all very relaxed and sloppy.

/How do you classify your students ?

Well, those who stay are great. Those who stay the course. People that come to seven day sesshins for example. It is truly amazing we've got people like that.

/Why is it amazing ?

This is the West, we are all comfort loving, we are all distracted, we've all kinds of alternatives... and yet last May 42 people applied to a seven day sesshin.

We've very serious students here, without doubt. These others distress me, not the ones who say « look I want to commit myself but I can't, » but those who say, « yes I can do that, that suits me, » and who do not do it. They are unable to realize that there is something real at stake here. It is your soul that is at stake when you say « I will » and then give up when the going gets a bit rough. Once upon a time the notion of « I give you my word », was something sacred. If you've said that, that was it, it was finished. Now it is I give you my word but tomorrow it may be different. The expression, « I give you my word » is a very interesting one is it not ?

/Do you think a person could have a deep spiritual practice without a teacher ?

No, I don't think so. At least according to my own experience for what it's worth. I struggled for more than 10 years trying alone to work on myself and, after I met Yasutani and Taizan, the whole thing changed. The work became real in a way that it was never real before. There was a context of tradition and when they spoke, they spoke from what they knew

and you knew they knew and it was okay.

Otherwise one waffles a lot and the practice can become very narcissistic. Some people come to see me now and again that won't come to sit at the Center, they have to sit at home and they want to come to see me for instruction. I've tried to stop doing this, and I don't do it anywhere near like I used to once. But these are always very narcissistic people. They are wrapped up in themselves. However it is quite different in the case of someone who would like to get to a teacher but is unable to do so because of distance or because they are incapacitated. The narcissistic ones that I am speaking about are those who can get to a teacher but who refuse to do so. That refusal already tells one something about them.

There is furthermore a danger in working without a teacher. One of the big mistakes that I made was thinking that observing myself was remembering myself. This is why I am so heavy telling people who are following the breath, « don't observe the breath ». It caused me a tremendous amount of pain and suffering when I had to undo all the work that I did for that length of time. One of the things about observing yourself is it does give you a certain equanimity, it does give you a certain ability to withdraw from the situation so that you are no longer upset by it. It is a way of separating, a way of distancing. However a person doing that can be very frigid, and have a kind of aloof quality, and be arrogant also. So anyway... when I first really started practicing with Yasutani and had some idea of what following the breath was about, then all that crust, that separation, that arrogance, had to be broken down. That sort of thing can happen with people who are working on themselves alone. They don't have that contact where people can say, « That's not good. What you are doing is not good. »

/The word attention is much used in Zen and much misunderstood isn't it ? Some people think it means they should be attentive to every gesture, a kind of attention to every details. It is not what attention or awareness means in a spiritual practice is it ? It is remembering ourselves, it is not to be attentive to...

That is right. Some teachers teach that kind of thing,

that when you wash the dishes you have to put your attention on your hands, for example. The problem with this is that by focussing on the hands one separates out the hands from the totality, from the gestalt. There is at the same time the tendency to fix the focussing with a concept or even a subvocal word. In other words one pushes to the extreme this tendency to separate out one thing from the rest. This is a variation on observing oneself as opposed to remembering oneself.

/So what is remembering oneself ?

It is like Dogen said : to remember the self is to forget the self; to forget the self is to be one with the ten thousand things. It is Benoit's « inner glance. »

/What do you learn from your students ?

Every time somebody comes in to the dokusan room one has to adapt in a new way, so one is constantly breaking down one's own prejudices, reactions, and so on. And the very need to put the practice in a different way means that one sees it from a different angle so that also broadens one's own perspective. Because there is seeing it and then there is integrating it in life. And working with the students is a wonderful way to help me integrate practice into everyday life.

/Are there some koans in the Zen tradition that deal specifically with teacher-student relationship ?

Yes, that koan 11 in the Hekiganroku in which Obaku says, « Do you know that there are no Zen teachers in all of China ? » which says a great deal about the teacher-student relation. The one that you mentioned already, Tozan Sixty Blows, shows what can happen between teacher and student. That koan shows that compassion is not necessarily all smiles and so on, but can be something else.

But generally speaking, my own experience anyway, I don't think that a Western teacher needs to be quite the kind of aggressive teacher that perhaps some teachers in a monastery would be. Gurdjieff was certainly a man that could use a kind of violence; but even then he was very sparing with it, he was not like that with everyone. It was only with some people

who were actually working with him in his Institute that he would work within that way. I do not feel that this activity is necessary for a Western teacher because life itself is too much, it is hard enough, why add to it unnecessarily. Why not find ways in which the actual life experience can be drawn into the practice and used by the student in the way that abuse by a teacher would have been used by monks. « Okay, you've got that life problem, that is what I mean by the doubt sensation, let's work with it. » This is what I think practice is all about : to make all of life livable through seeing it all as true practice. *

*Everyone of you should work toward self-realization.
Those who really have it live like ordinary people
Those who do not have it should not let time pass
by so easily.*

No one can do it for you but yourself

The old teacher can only bear you testimony.

*If you have gained something within he cannot
conceal it from you*

*If you have gained nothing within he cannot find it
for you.*

*If you find a way to guide your understanding under
a severe master*

You must not care even for your life

*But must struggle with him through all kind of
hardships.*

*Spend ten to twenty years of study under him
Until you are thoroughly enlightened.*

*Don't worry that you may not accomplish it
What a pity one prays for trifles and loses the
important things.*

*To see the way in the morning and die at night
Therein is my satisfaction.*

(Ummon)



Un geste du coeur



Pierre Lanoix

En cherchant à parler de la relation maître-élève, je me rends compte de la difficulté que j'ai à exprimer à la fois quelque chose d'intime et de profond, quelque chose d'ineffable en vérité. Je suis aussi enclin à vouloir témoigner de mon appréciation, de la fortune qui m'est donnée de pouvoir bénéficier d'un enseignement, d'une direction spirituelle et en quelque part de quelque chose de plus essentiel, de plus chaleureux, où on retrouve entremêlés des brins d'amitié, d'admiration, de réelle affection et de respect.

J'entends l'écho d'un petit livre que j'ai trouvé il y a trente ans, et qui m'avait mis sur la piste d'un guide spirituel. On y citait des extraits de lettres d'un maître sufi à ses disciples (Al-'Arabi ad-Darquawi, sufi marocain du 19^{ème} siècle). J'avais été touché par le total abandon du maître pour son disciple et à la fois par la manière directe du message qui touche en quelque sorte jusqu'à l'os. Je dis abandon, dans le sens d'un don du maître qui exprime sa foi, sa confiance à son élève, confiance dont il témoigne en l'ébranlant dans ce qu'il a de plus profond tout en le soutenant sans réserve par la compassion qu'il ressent pour avoir été lui-même au bout de cette quête. C'est l'intuition de cette relation qui m'avait mené à rencontrer monsieur Low ainsi que (selon sa recommandation) quelques autres maîtres Zen. C'est aussi la chaleur de cette relation que je ressens aujourd'hui et que je cherche à décrire avec gratitude.

Dans un livre récent, Sharon Salzberg rappelait qu'en Pali, foi, confiance s'expriment par le mot *sad-dha* qui, littéralement nous dit-elle, signifie confier son cœur (to place the heart upon). Voilà une image à la fois juste et émouvante, qui illustre pour moi la sincérité de la relation que j'ai avec monsieur Low, l'ouverture et l'inconditionnel désir d'approfondir la pratique. J'ai, comme plusieurs d'entre nous, été formé à une école où toute question demande une

réponse. Aussi ai-je obtenu de monsieur Low son attachement à déraciner chez-moi, à chaque occasion, ce besoin incessant d'assouvir la soif de confirmation d'une réponse finale que j'aurais trouvée, pour me désarrimer de ces balises auxquelles nous tentons constamment de nous agripper et qui faussent notre attention ou l'endorment. Je sens dans de tels gestes un engagement si complet envers moi que mon plus profond désir est de demeurer à la hauteur de cet honneur qui m'est témoigné en demeurant dans cette relation avec la sincérité que demande notre pratique.

Et cette pratique peut être aride; aussi ai-je besoin d'une source pour l'alimenter, outre ces paroles de monsieur Low qui restent gravées en mémoire. Cette source pour moi se manifeste dans les écrits de monsieur Low, les cassettes de teisho, qui prolongent les moments de rencontre en dokusan ou encore quelques lunchs bien informels dans un petit restaurant chinois rue Saint Denis. On dit que le divin ne peut pénétrer l'âme que si l'on se rend vulnérable et perméable. Or comment l'être dans ce monde où il est si facile d'être blessé lorsque telle ouverture est manifeste. Avec monsieur Low, cette ouverture devient l'occasion merveilleuse d'être soutenu dans mes moments de clarté ou de noirceur, avec compassion mais aussi avec la fermeté requise par les instants de mollesse.

Il y a aussi quelque chose de remarquable, d'immense; la qualité et l'énergie de cette relation m'ont donné accès et confiance à un univers sans limite et qui était sous mes yeux. Elle enseigne en retour ce que je peux aussi offrir à ceux qui m'entourent, dans mon quotidien, lorsque désintéressé, je me donne entièrement et sans réserve. ✽

The Master's Lessons



Peter Hadekel

The teacher agreed to take the student, if the student would make a firm commitment to follow the practice to the end. It took the student a long time to agree. He had come to Zen not really knowing what he was getting into.

First, there was suspicion. He wondered if the teacher was another false prophet on an ego trip. He looked hard for signs of this but was not able to find any. Perhaps what the student was seeking was an excuse to leave.

The door to dokusan continued to open. Each time he entered the room, the reluctant student found a teacher with infinite patience and complete attention.

"It's a long road and a very painful road," the teacher warned. But the student still held back; he was not ready to hear the words.

The Zendo, with its silence and serenity, its robes and incense, didn't feel like the place of pain it would become. At first, the student simply enjoyed the warmth of meditation, the flowing breath, the release.

The teacher waited patiently, as he always does. After some months, there was a small stirring in the student's heart. "Yes," he said. "I will do this."

A commitment was made, yet the student remained unsure what the teacher expected of him or what he expected of himself. "Do all that you can, and just a little bit more," the teacher advised.

They were troubling words. Giving everything he had was not a practice the student was familiar with. And what about that last step? How does one give more than one can?

It was only later, after many years and many

sesshins, that the teacher said something else. "It is the hardest work you will ever do."

By that time, the student had already realized the essential truth of this remark.

On the first sesshins, the student struggled with exhaustion and imprisonment. "First, we must drill through bedrock," the teacher explained.

Yet even in the depths of pain and fear, the student could hear the truth in what the teacher said: "If it's not gold, let it burn."

The student came back for more, not knowing quite why. He began to understand that the teacher was the only real teacher he'd ever had.

He also realized that the taste of Zen would continue to be bitter. The dry feeling of practice became overwhelming. "I never promised you a rose garden," the teacher said.

It became harder to continue. The peace and serenity of the early days were harder to find. The teacher told the student to persevere. "Drop body and mind," he said.

There was no relief from the doubt that assailed him. "All that is required is to be sincere," the teacher said. But even a single day in complete sincerity seemed beyond the student.

He looked for more energy, deeper resources. But there were none to be found.

He wanted to quit Zen. He wrote a letter to the teacher that he later regretted. It was a terrible defeat.

"Know that I will never judge you," the teacher said. "That makes one less judge," the student

A Question of Trust

Sandra Olney

thought, as he considered how much he judged himself.

After the darkness, comes the dawn. “Surely, I will get there now,” the student resolved.

“There’s nothing to get,” the teacher remarked.

In the middle of a seven-day sesshin, the student carried water bottles from the house to the zendo. He wandered through the desert, beside himself with anger and rage. “What stupid nonsense,” he told himself.

Putting on his shoes after dokusan, the student suddenly saw the world as bright, beautiful and free. Joy poured out of him. But even freedom can’t be held on to.

“Go deeper,” said the teacher.

The student knew the truth was close. It was like living near the ocean. He could hear the lapping waves and smell the sea air. He knew the direction in which to find the beach. And if he could just keep walking, and not stop for an instant, he could get there and feel for himself what it was like to dip his feet in the ocean.

There’s really not so much to say any more when the student meets the teacher. The silence says it all.

The student once considered the teacher to be the most remarkable person he had ever met. That’s still true, in a way. But in another respect, the student has realized that the teacher is just like him. And that’s perhaps the most valuable lesson the student has ever learned. ❀

I can still feel the shard of fear when a young faculty member, commenting on my proposed doctoral research said the chilling words, “What you are proposing is like finding the Holy Grail. Lots of other people (and I read in silent brackets “a lot better than you”) have attempted it and haven’t succeeded. What makes you think you will?” The words echoed in my ears. I had sold my car, gone into debt - there really wasn’t a path back. Suddenly I realized it all depended on whether I trusted my supervisor’s scientific judgment that it could be done and his personal judgment of my ability. I recall the suddenness of my intuitive acceptance – but it was as though I was jumping off a cliff into the dark with only a frayed rope of trust between me and disaster.

There are some similarities with the Teacher-student relationship in Zen practice. The entrance is similar: one arrives with great hope, having searched extensively and been disappointed a number of times. Soon after the initial rush of hope and excitement, however, doubts of one kind or another, or many kinds together, set in. There are many unknowns in both circumstances. We know very little about Zen – will we still find it rings true when we get to know it better, or will we find it unbelievable like all the other paths we have followed? How could Zen be the answer when we have been disappointed so many times before (What makes you think you can find the Holy Grail?). Then there are unknowns about the supervisor or Teacher. We may wonder when the Teacher is going to ask you to do the impossible (When will my supervisor ask me to use methods that are beyond my ability?). In both situations there are nagging self-doubts – worse than the barbs of a thousand young professors but created all by one’s self seemingly for one’s self torture. The unending feeling of inadequacy and self doubt seems to be as common in Zen as in academia. The feeling of significance is also similar: in both cases it feels as though one is investing all of one’s self, and how this works out will determine the totality of what we know as life.

How grateful must we be for that intuitive flash of trusted acceptance of the Teacher! How fortunate to be able to take that first leap. ❀

Ting-a-ling-a-ling-a-ling Bong! Bong!

Colin Hill

While waiting at the front of the dokusan line to meet our teacher face to face for the first time I was not concentrating on my practice as I should have been. Instead, I was remembering having read somewhere about masters hitting their monks with batons, about the “tremendous karmic significance” of the master-student relationship, and I was feeling very anxious and intimidated. I thought about sneaking back into the zendo without going to dokusan at all. As I was deciding what to do, the bell started ringing in the other room, *ting-a-ling-a-ling-a-ling*, and I answered spontaneously with a mindless clang that sounded more like a train wreck than the beautiful, translucent *Bong! Bong!* that sometimes drifts into the zendo when we’re sitting with the windows open in the late spring and early fall.

Needless to say, I didn’t get hit with a baton. Now I try to go to dokusan as often as I can, and it has become a crucial part of my practice, although I rarely think about it, and feel awkward writing about it. After only two short years at the centre I am not sure that I have anything of value to say about the weighty and important subject of this issue of *Zen Gong*. Still, I always enjoy reading contributions by others who are near the start of the practice. There may be others like me, so I’m going to offer a few of my beginner’s thoughts on the master-student relationship.

Although I gave up my Catholicism long before coming to Zen, I found myself in the beginning often comparing dokusan to confession. As a child, while kneeling and waiting for my turn in the confessional to come, I would invent sins that I thought the priest wanted to hear (my real sins had been forgotten, or were too dull, or too embarrassing to be mentioned). I would enter the box, say the speech I’d rehearsed, and the priest would absolve me of my imaginary sins. Then I’d feel incredibly relieved and forget about confession until the next time my mother caught me smoking or swearing. Dokusan, of course, is not the same as confession. For one thing, it is a lot harder to be dishonest in the dokusan room. Or at least it is harder to be dishonest in the same way.

Certainly we don’t consciously make up stories about practice to tell the teacher during those precious few minutes that we sit “eyeball to eyeball”. What I mean is that somehow, in the dim light of the dokusan room, a kind of wonderful, brutal clarity prevails. During this time I sometimes find it is possible to see just how “made up” and dishonest the practice can become, despite my inconstant hard work and best intentions: “I am having such

and such a difficulty that inhibits my practice”; “I think I finally understand the practice: it’s x, y, and z”; “this practice is really making me a better person”; “I didn’t have any problems until I started this practice”; “I’m making great progress in my practice”; “I can’t go on with my practice”. All of this junk that sneaks into the practice, all of the concepts and ideas and misapprehensions of what it’s all about, somehow lose their potency when one presents them to the teacher who usually listens patiently and then says much or little. Sitting on the blue mat, face to face, it becomes hard to deceive oneself.

This is one of the reasons that I am so grateful we have this teacher who is adept at seeing these deceptions for what they are and uncompromising at cutting through them. Without coming face to face with such a teacher regularly my practice would die. It would grow too comfortable and cease to be a practice. Or I would kill it with labels, words, and thoughts. Or I would make it a segregated part of my life instead of trying (and usually failing) to live it fully. Being able to see the teacher keeps me grounded. It provides a “reality check” that keeps the practice honest. This is different from my experience with confession. What the teacher offers during dokusan is not much like the absolution offered by the priest. I certainly never leave the dokusan room with a sense of relief and abandon: “thank God that’s over! What’s for lunch?” Dokusan does not conclude so unambiguously. In fact, it does not really conclude at all: somehow it just grows out of practice and then carries back on into practice. This liquid, amorphous quality to dokusan, indeed to the whole master-student relationship, is part of what makes it precious to me.

You never know what you’re going to get from the teacher when you sit down on the blue mat: kind reassurance, practical advice, firm encouragement, a snap question, a growl, a reminder that you’re not there to “get” anything. And you can’t control dokusan or make it conform to your expectations. You have to be who you are and let the teacher be the teacher. I rarely get what I think I want or expect from dokusan, but I always seem to get what I need. Sometimes I need nothing at all and I come away thinking this: where else can you go and strike a bell, make a bow, and sit for a few minutes in a state of absolute openness, honesty, trust, admiration, and gratitude? To do this part of the practice and then to get up and bow and go back to the zendo: What is more remarkable than this? What is more ordinary? ❀

La relation maître-élève



Carole Beaudet

« Ce qui est important, c'est la relation qui se développera entre vous. » Voilà les paroles que m'adressait Jacques Castermane en 1993, lorsqu'il m'a suggéré d'aller travailler avec Albert Low au Centre Zen de Montréal. Cette phrase m'a profondément touchée à l'époque et elle prend encore tout son sens aujourd'hui.

Cette relation qui se développe entre nous, maître et élève, est impossible à décrire, elle se vit dans chaque instant de rencontre. Par contre elle a grandement marqué ma vie depuis dix ans et je me sens privilégiée de recevoir un cadeau aussi précieux. J'accepte donc avec plaisir d'essayer de parler de ce que peut représenter la relation maître-élève dans une vie.

De prime abord je dirais qu'on retrouve dans cette relation une invitation de la part du maître et une réponse de la part de l'élève... Le maître invite par son enseignement à s'engager sur la voie d'une vie authentique. L'élève se sent attiré par cette invitation et désire y répondre. Ce n'est pas tant l'enseignement verbal qui motive l'élève mais plutôt la reconnaissance d'un maître qui incarne ce qu'il dit, chez qui l'expérience transparaît dans sa façon d'être. Le maître est lui-même l'invitation et l'élève ne peut répondre qu'en devenant à son tour un être authentique.

Pour l'élève, ce travail de vérité commence et recommence à chaque rencontre avec le maître. Aller s'asseoir devant lui implique de faire face à la peur du jugement, le goût de la performance, l'envie de « bien » paraître et amène doucement à se laisser simplement être.

Aller s'asseoir devant lui renvoie à l'image de soi-même qu'on protège, et progressivement on peut laisser tomber le désir de se camoufler.

Aller s'asseoir devant lui, c'est accepter de laisser aller les points de repère habituels, de se retrouver dans un « je ne sais pas » inconfortable qui donne parfois envie de s'enfuir.

Le maître invite à être et l'élève avance petit à petit dans un mystère qui le dépasse, acceptant de se laisser démasquer... allant au-delà des concepts, au-delà des explications, au-delà d'une éducation, d'une morale religieuse, au-delà d'un confort du connu, tout simplement au-delà... un au-delà qui ne se situe pas ailleurs mais qui ramène à ce que nous sommes réellement.

Comment tout cela est-il possible ? Pour moi, cela fait partie du miracle de la confiance qui s'établit dans la relation maître-élève. C'est grâce à cette confiance qu'on accepte de se laisser accompagner à travers les désespoirs liés au dépouillement de nos illusions.

La qualité de confiance que je retrouve dans cette relation, autant que la complicité, le degré d'intimité ou l'affection ne correspondent pas du tout à l'image toute faite que je pouvais imaginer lorsque Jacques Castermane m'a affirmé l'importance de la relation qui se développerait entre Albert Low et moi. Heureusement d'ailleurs, c'est beaucoup plus vivant, plus profond. C'est là que j'ai rencontré un maître.

Je me suis un jour assise devant cet homme et voilà qu'il n'a pas réagi selon mes attentes. Ses sourires n'apparaissent pas lorsque je les attendais et se manifestaient à l'improviste... ses paroles étaient si justes que j'avais l'impression qu'il pouvait lire en moi. Sa patience et son impatience me déroutaient. Son regard m'a vraiment vue et il m'a entendue au-delà des mots que je pouvais prononcer. J'expérimentais l'amour gratuit, vrai, spontané, présent dans la relation maître-élève, présent dans la rencontre de deux êtres qui se voient en toute simplicité.

Au-delà de toutes les questions posées, de toutes les phrases exprimées, il y a la chance de toucher l'essentiel dans cette relation. Elle est extrêmement riche et porte fruit au-delà des rencontres. Peu à peu il devient possible de transposer au quotidien ce qu'on réalise auprès du maître. Grâce à cette relation, l'élève peut intégrer doucement la pratique, la faire sienne, devenant de plus en plus autonome.

J'éprouve beaucoup de reconnaissance d'avoir la chance de faire ce travail auprès d'Albert Low. J'admire ce maître pour le don de lui-même qu'il offre à la pratique et à ses élèves. Je me suis souvent demandé comment le remercier, me disant que je ne pourrai jamais lui rendre tout ce que je reçois...

Aujourd'hui, j'ai l'impression qu'une façon d'offrir cette reconnaissance à la vie ainsi qu'à Albert Low est de rendre grâce en continuant la pratique du zazen au quotidien, en me rendant régulièrement au Centre et en m'asseyant devant ce maître avec qui une relation importante se développe au fil des rencontres... ❀

Sur la relation maître-élève



Marie-Bernarde Pérès

*«Aucun étalage de transcendance mais sa voie est élevée»
(Le pont de pierre de Joshu)*

Regard

Le maître est un homme tout à fait ordinaire. Il ne s'entoure ni de mystère, ni de secret. Tel qu'il est, il est. Pourtant, sa présence suscite un questionnement : Quel est le sens de cet homme? Et, si on s'entête à chercher une réponse, on constate alors, une évidence.

De quelle évidence s'agit-il? D'une évidence qui est là comme un parfum, comme lorsqu'au milieu de l'asphalte et du béton, une fleur surgit, de nulle part, pure merveille! liberté nue! Cette fleur, c'est le maître, c'est ce parfum.

Cette évidence, c'est aussi le cœur : on ne se donne pas comme il le fait depuis tant d'années si on n'aime pas les personnes ou si on est coupé du monde. Le maître dit que pour aimer, il faut entendre avec les yeux : «Il faut aimer le monde pour l'entendre avec les yeux (...) Si on l'entend avec les yeux alors, on comprend intimement» (Albert Low). Son amour est silencieux, pudique, pas dans un sens moral mais dans celui de la délicatesse, du respect et du don.

Cette évidence, c'est également son authenticité. C'est elle qui donne vie à la pratique et c'est toujours elle qui réactive en nous l'intuition, le goût de nous-même. C'est elle qui nous invite constamment à «déguster le repas et non à manger le menu» (Albert Low).

Cette évidence nous montre aussi que le maître, par ses efforts constants, a su équilibrer et accorder en lui tous les aspects de l'être humain. Il possède une vision claire des problèmes et des souffrances des hommes et des femmes, auxquels il est très sensible. C'est pourquoi, la grande préoccupation du maître est de savoir comment éveiller ses élèves «non pas d'une façon zen mais d'une façon réelle». (Albert Low)

Le maître dit qu'il n'a rien à enseigner. Cependant, et là encore se trouve cette évidence, tout son être est un

enseignement. Il met continuellement ses élèves en garde : «le Bouddha, le Zen et le maître sont tous des carcans potentiels pouvant encore piéger le savoir et le cristalliser en «quelque chose» » (Albert Low). C'est pourquoi, il nous montre que zazen, c'est juste zazen, comme la vie, c'est juste la vie, alors que nous avons toujours besoin d'y ajouter toutes sortes de fioritures. Il nous invite à goûter au «non-goût» de zazen.

Enfin, ultime évidence, le maître ne peut être enfermé dans aucune catégorie ni être emprisonné dans aucune définition.

Accueil

La relation entre le maître et l'élève est faite d'ambiguïté : d'un côté, le maître semble dire «ayez confiance en moi» et en même temps, il semble dire aussi «méfiez-vous de moi». Le maître c'est donc celui qui dérange, qui déconstruit nos prétentions, patiemment, habilement. Au besoin, il peut même être dur : il nous accule et élève nos croyances jusqu'à l'extrême afin d'en faire ressortir toute leur absurdité. Le chemin est rude, exigeant, mais c'est un aller-simple ; nous ne pouvons que continuer, continuer.

Dans la relation maître-élève, le maître ne nous domine pas et ne nous considère pas comme différent de lui-même. Par contre, il sait parfaitement tout ce que nous ne sommes pas et que nous pensons être. Et cela, non pas parce que le maître est doté de pouvoirs extraordinaires (peut-être l'est-il mais il n'en fait pas étalage!) mais tout simplement parce qu'il a déjà parcouru le chemin et accompli le travail dans lequel nous nous engageons. Il est un témoignage vivant de ce que nous sommes.

La confiance est totale, que le maître approuve ou qu'il désapprouve nos démonstrations. Il agit comme un chef d'orchestre qui s'adresse à chaque instrument que nous sommes, de façon formelle ou informelle et travaille avec nous, sur nos harmoniques et sur nos dissonances : il nous invite inlassablement à trouver l'harmonie dans les opposés. Ce travail se fait au jour le jour mais c'est surtout pendant les sesshins que ce travail s'accomplit et se vit de façon plus consciente

Trust the Teacher Sixty Percent

Sharon Thompson

parce que le maître nous aide à déjouer les pièges subtils qui se présentent dans notre pratique, laquelle constatons-nous, n'est pas différente de notre vie quotidienne.

Le maître sait rendre ses élèves intelligents non pas dans le sens de l'érudition mais dans celui de la clarté. Pour cela, le maître provoque sans cesse, lance des défis. Cette situation exige beaucoup de foi (dans le sens de confiance et non de croyance) et de persévérance, mais c'est seulement lorsque ces défis sont acceptés (pas dans le sens de la résignation ou de la soumission mais parce qu'on en a compris le sens au niveau intime) qu'on apprend à recevoir et à accueillir le maître. Il y a alors une sorte de reconnaissance d'où surgit la confiance. C'est d'ailleurs cette confiance dans le maître qui nous amène à une authentique confiance intérieure.

Le contact avec le maître ne cesse jamais ; quelque chose est là constamment qui nous donne le goût de ce que nous sommes et qui, paradoxalement, nous libère de l'idée qu'il puisse y avoir un maître ici et un élève là : « même quand le maître fait défaut à l'élève, son sens est toujours là ». (Albert Low)

Reconnaissance

La façon d'être et de faire du maître nous pousse tout naturellement à lui dire «MERCI» pas dans le sens de la politesse mais dans celui de la gratitude parce que c'est un «MERCI» qui apprend la gratuité du don. C'est le plus beau cadeau que le maître puisse nous faire.

Aussi, lorsque nous saluons monsieur Low, c'est une façon toute particulière de lui signifier notre reconnaissance pour le travail accompli et pour sa présence irréversiblement donnée. ❀

Les fleurs répandent leur parfum sur les mains qui les offrent
(proverbe chinois)

One of the quotes that has remained in my mind through the fifteen years of my being a student of Albert Low, is: «Trust your teacher 60%». This came in a teisho by Albert Low but was from someone whose name I no longer remember. It has however been remained in the corner of my mind, something to refer to when the personality was waving its flag. For myself the authority of the teacher has been one of the most difficult and most important factors in practice.

When one begins practice one is awed by the teacher. There is an instinctive trust of the teacher, a deep attraction to the truthfulness of the teaching and a sense that this is home. It is the stage of 100% trust of the teacher.

However, when the practice deepens, the student finds herself confronting her resistances, which are tempting to place on the head of the teacher. There is great doubt and wrestling. Authority in the practice has always been over there on the opposite cushion in the dokusan room but now, instead of being wonderful, this is distinctly uncomfortable. The quote «Trust your teacher 60%» seems a complete puzzle. It is 100% there or 100% here. I can understand why many students quit at this stage. The personality wants to bail out. It feels dishonoured and does not take kindly to this. Looking back now I realize that the honest acknowledgement of this pain, was the real beginning of practice for me, for it was really only when I felt this conflict with the teacher and committed myself to taking responsibility for it that I began to really dig. I realized that there was no way I could leave either the teacher or the teaching and somehow I must go on. By now the quote about 60% is a comfort, a way to steady the mind when it is overwrought. This stage has been lengthy. It required facing a lot of painful things, especially those things which had happened over which I had no control. Those painful things which I felt personally responsible for seemed to crop up early in the practice. It is easier to face these, for in some measure, in so doing «I» am still in the illusion of control.

In time, a different kind of trust arose. «Trust of the teacher», seemed to be replaced by a trust that was removed from anything personal either in myself or in the person of the teacher. There was a natural inner clarity and receptivity about truth, a quickening of the «aha» and the beginning of a dance in the dokusan room. ❀

Une dent de chien



Guy Laramée

« *Même d'une dent de chien
On peut atteindre l'illumination* »
Proverbe Tibétain

(Un moine à qui sa mère avait fait promettre, avant qu'il parte en pèlerinage, qu'il lui ramènerait une relique, se rend compte au retour qu'il a oublié sa promesse. Voyant le cadavre d'un chien mort sur le bord de la route, il lui arrache une dent dans le but de faire croire à sa mère qu'il s'agit de la dent d'un Lama célèbre. Au moment où elle touche la dent, sa mère atteint l'illumination).

Voici la petite histoire de mon arrivée au Centre Zen de Montréal. J'imagine qu'elle a un peu à voir avec ce proverbe, c'est à vous d'en juger.

De 1989 à 1999, j'ai suivi la voie tracée par Carlos Castaneda. Ça me fait drôle d'écrire cela aujourd'hui. C'est comme si je m'apprêtais à écrire l'histoire d'une autre personne. Mais le fait est là : pendant dix ans de ma vie, Castaneda a été toute ma vie. Tous mes choix de vie ont été soumis à celui là. J'ai été un adepte inconditionnel, bref, un disciple.

Ça me fait d'autant plus drôle d'écrire cela que je me rappelle très bien qu'avant de lire les livres de Castaneda, j'avais toujours éprouvé un certain dédain vis-à-vis l'aura que dégageait son œuvre. Les gens qui m'en parlaient m'avaient l'air perdus dans une rêverie nouvelle-âgeuse qui me donnait la nausée. Ils parlaient de « pouvoir », de « sorciers », et avaient l'air de trouver en Castaneda un prétexte pour justifier leur propre consommation de drogue. Mais un jour, je tombe sur le dernier livre de Castaneda : *La force du silence*. Le titre me séduit, j'ouvre le livre et décide de l'acheter. C'est alors que ma vie bascule. Pendant trois semaines, j'ai tout arrêté. J'ai lu et relu tous les ouvrages de Castaneda. Qu'est-ce qui pouvait expliquer mon revirement ? Il y avait dans ces livres une telle force ! Tout d'un coup ma vie avait l'air insigni-

fiant. Bien sûr je connaissais déjà la griserie de l'engagement : j'étais alors compositeur et j'y dédiais ma vie. Mais voilà que j'avais devant moi des gens prêts à tout sacrifier pour ce que Castaneda appelait « la connaissance ». Il y avait dans ce sacrifice une telle beauté, que je n'ai eu d'autre choix que de me laisser tomber dans ce gouffre. Je pense que ce qui m'a surtout fouetté, c'est que pour la première fois je rencontrais ce que Castaneda appelait une conseillère : la mort. En fait, je crois que c'était la première fois que je prenais conscience de ma propre mortalité.

J'étais seul avec ces livres, laissé à moi même, sans aucune possibilité de rencontrer ces gens – Castaneda avait fait du secret sa marque de commerce, pas question de même imaginer le rencontrer. Mais ce n'était pas pour moi un problème, j'étais transporté. Alors je me suis mis au boulot. J'ai essayé de prendre certains épisodes de son récit comme des consignes. J'ai commencé à pratiquer les « techniques ». Celle qui retenait le plus mon attention était la « contemplation ». Je me suis donc assis pendant des heures à « contempler ». Et les résultats n'ont pas tardé. Les rues devenaient des poches de couleur, l'air se mettait à vibrer, bref, j'allais moi aussi un jour arriver à « stopper le monde ». J'étais absolument émerveillé de cette nouvelle présence aux choses. Je n'avais aucun moyen de savoir si ce que je faisais était du « Castaneda » (en fait ce n'en était peut-être pas). Mais une chose importait : tout doute m'avait quitté. Je croyais.

Petit à petit mon apprentissage sans maître avait pris toute la place. Et comme j'étais toujours laissé à moi-même - avec quand même le désir secret d'un jour rencontrer le Maestro- tout ce qui me restait c'était l'émulation. Alors quand l'apprenti d'un chamane péruvien s'est présenté sur ma route, je n'ai pas hésité. J'ai sauté dans l'avion et je suis allé rencontrer son maître au Pérou. Sur une période de trois ans, j'ai passé environ un an à travailler avec

divers guérisseurs de l'amazone péruvienne. J'avais l'impression de vivre un rêve. Ma vie était empreinte d'un héroïsme dont j'avais peine à ne pas me vanter. J'étais en route, j'allais un jour, moi aussi, devenir « sorcier ».

Or voilà le Pérou fût un choc. Rencontrer la mort dans un livre est une chose, la rencontrer en pleine face une autre chose. Plusieurs fois pendant les cérémonies avec les guérisseurs j'ai eu vraiment peur de mourir. Tant et si bien que lors de mon dernier séjour, bien que j'étais parti pour rester – j'avais tout largué – j'ai dû revenir en catastrophe, malade, perdu et fauché. Première déception : ça n'allait pas être possible d'intégrer le monde de ces Chamanes. La distance entre leur culture et la mienne était trop grande.

De retour au pays, j'ai dû me faire à l'idée de réintégrer le monde que j'avais voulu quitter : mon job d'artiste, l'hiver, la vie ordinaire quoi. Je me suis raccroché à mon premier amour : Castaneda. J'ai repris la pratique. Il y avait un exercice que j'avais négligé, parce qu'il me paraissait vraiment trop fastidieux. Ça s'appelait la « récapitulation ». Il s'agissait de dresser la liste de toutes les personnes qu'on avait rencontrées dans sa vie et, avec l'aide d'une respiration particulière, de revivre toutes les interactions qu'on avait eues avec ces personnes. Il fallait se défaire de tout ce que les gens avaient « laissé traîner » en nous, et de reprendre tout ce qu'on avait laissé traîner dans le monde. La voie Castanédienne en était une de salut personnel. Il fallait sauver sa peau coûte que coûte, afin d'atteindre un paradis qui n'était rien de moins que de « bypasser » la mort... Une tâche titanesque, cette récupération. Alors j'ai fait ça, deux à trois heures par jour, assis dans ma garde-robe - il fallait un endroit reclus- assis à « récapituler » ma vie. Ça m'a pris six ans. Vous vous doutez bien que j'étais fier de moi quand j'ai eu fini.

Et puis un jour, j'apprends par hasard que Castaneda a ouvert son groupe au public et qu'il donne maintenant des ateliers ! Je saute dans le premier avion pour Los Angeles et je vais participer à mon premier « séminaire ». Vous dire l'émotion : j'étais au centre du monde ! Enfin je rencontrais le maître ! C'est à dire... pas seul à seul, vous vous en doutez, nous étions deux milles dans la salle, mais tout de même, je l'avais là, Castaneda, droit devant moi ! Pendant

deux ans, je les ai suivis partout aux Etats-Unis et au Mexique. Mon rêve se réalisait. Il n'y avait désormais rien qui puisse m'arrêter. J'étais tout puissant et prêt à tout pour continuer, même tasser des gens ou détourner de l'argent s'il le fallait.

Et puis un jour ça n'a plus été suffisant. Il a fallu que je me rapproche du centre. Il a fallu que j'essaie de devenir un « vrai » disciple, c'est à dire devenir un membre direct du groupe de Castaneda. J'ai tout laissé, une fois de plus, et suis parti vivre à Los Angeles. Cette décision a été l'une des plus difficiles de ma vie, principalement parce que cela signifiait laisser ma conjointe. Ça a duré cinq mois. Au bout de ces cinq mois, j'ai dû revenir. Le doute avait commencé à percer ma conviction. Plus j'approchais du centre, plus le centre s'effritait. Les contradictions devenaient insupportables : l'élitisme du groupe de Castaneda, les jeux de pouvoir, la manipulation, la sauce sectaire habituelle, quoi. Mais il y avait pire : je pouvais voir en chaque disciple l'horreur de mes propres contradictions.

De retour à Montréal, j'appris que mon retour coïncidait grosso modo avec la mort de Castaneda. Drôle de coïncidence... La dégringolade commençait, le mythe touchait à sa fin. En effet, Castaneda était mort d'un cancer du foie, pas du tout la mort glorieuse – une non-mort en fait - qu'il promettait à ses disciples. Ce fût un choc. D'autant plus que l'organisation qu'il avait fondée faisait tout en son pouvoir pour nier cette nouvelle. Et puis il y avait ces « révélations » de plus en plus persistantes sur la vie sexuelle de Castaneda : un harem, disait-on. Je suis retourné à Los Angeles tenter de faire le point avec des praticiens que j'avais connus, et là le choc fût encore plus grand. Deux énergumènes s'étaient amusés à filmer Castaneda et son groupe en cachette et ce pendant plus d'un an. Le maître du secret avait été débusqué par deux vidéastes amateurs ! Et ils avaient capté sans le vouloir des images des derniers moments de sa vie. Là, sur l'écran de la télévision, on voyait le superman descendre d'une voiture, malade comme un chien, à peine capable de marcher. Voilà que mon cœur déjà meurtri recevait les trois coups de poignard qui allaient l'achever, les trois coups de fouet qui ont chassé Siddharta de son rêve : la vieillesse, la maladie, et la mort.

Vous décrire ma détresse du moment est impossible. Quand M. Low cite Eliade pour dire que la perte du centre peut signifier la mort, et bien je peux en témoigner. N'eût été de la compassion de ma compagne, je ne suis pas certain que j'aurais survécu à ma dépression. J'ai essayé tant bien que mal de me recoller un mythe, je suis retourné voir les chamanes, au Mexique cette fois, mais c'était fini. Mon temps au pays du chamanisme était terminé.

C'est dans un état de détresse profonde que je suis arrivé au Centre Zen. Je connaissais déjà M.Low ; il était la seule personne à Montréal qui me semblait assez solide et impartial pour m'aider. Je lui ai demandé s'il pensait que le Zen pouvait être une voie pour moi. Il a dû lire la méfiance dans ma question – après tout, je venais d'être « trahi » par un maître, je n'allais pas aussi facilement me laisser embarquer par le premier venu. Il m'a répondu sèchement qu'il n'avait pas besoin de moi... ! Il avait déjà plus de trois cent élèves, il n'avait pas besoin de me courtoiser pour me faire entrer dans son cercle. Il m'a demandé si j'avais déjà eu des expériences dans une quelconque autre voie spirituelle. Je ne lui ai pas caché mon affiliation passée avec deux lignées chamaniques : celle des guérisseurs péruviens et celle de Castaneda. Au son du mot « Castaneda » il m'a coupé la parole et il a dit : « Castaneda va par là (à gauche), et nous allons par là (à droite) ». Un peu surpris par son insistance à démarquer les deux voies, j'ai baragouiné une réponse : je lui ai dit qu'il y avait pourtant plusieurs cas documentés de filiation entre des écoles bouddhistes et des pratiques chamaniques, le bouddhisme tibétain étant l'un de ces cas. J'ai cité l'exemple du « yoga des rêves » dans le Dzogchen. À cette époque, j'étais encore très fier de mon expertise dans ce qu'on appelle le « rêve lucide ». J'arrivais relativement bien à m'éveiller dans mes rêves et à en contrôler le contenu. Je voyais alors le rêve lucide comme la preuve évidente de mon progrès dans le développement de « l'attention » (Castaneda refusait le mot

« spiritualité »). C'est alors que M.Low me regarde droit dans les yeux et me demande : « Oui, mais à quoi ça sert ? » Et pan ! Voilà qu'à cette minute précise la dernière carte du château s'écroule ! Pourquoi ?

Bien sûr, il avait raison, ai-je pensé à cet instant : à quoi ça sert ? À quoi ça sert d'accumuler tous ces « pouvoirs » ? Mais cette explication n'est pas suffisante. Pour moi la question de M.Low ne soulignait pas uniquement l'inutilité de la compétence. Ce « à quoi ça sert » était en fait un « à QUI ça sert ». M.Low ne venait pas seulement de m'obliger à faire face à l'absolue inutilité de mon égoïsme, l'égoïsme de ma libération à moi. Ce que la question de M.Low faisait en moi est indescriptible. C'est comme se regarder pour la première fois dans le miroir. Voyant mon embarras, M.Low continua : « Regardez les poussières dans la lumière. Vous pouvez vous émerveiller devant la beauté de chacune d'entre elles, mais vous pouvez aussi vous tourner vers la source et regarder directement la lumière ». Il me regarda longuement dans les yeux. Je senti mon individualité fondre comme de la neige sur un tuyau d'échappement. Voilà ! J'étais rendu ! J'étais revenu à la maison ! J'avais trouvé ce que je cherchais !

J'ai mis plusieurs mois à comprendre pourquoi les paroles de M.Low avaient eu un tel effet sur moi. Mais étaient-ce justement les mots qui avaient gagné mon adhésion ? Après tout, je sortais d'un rêve de mots qui avait duré dix ans. Non, ce ne pouvait pas être seulement cela, un mythe plus beau que l'autre. Il y avait dans ce regard, dans cet homme, dans ce moment, une telle... présence ! Voilà ! La présence ! Voilà ce que je cherchais.

Pour accepter de devenir élève de M.Low, vous vous doutez bien qu'il m'a fallu me faire une raison. Bien entendu j'ai d'abord pensé que je devais ce moment de présence inouïe à M.Low. M.Low avait « causé » cette présence « en moi ». Et puis je me suis

dit que cette présence avait été un phénomène mutuel : j'étais prêt, disposé, à recevoir son enseignement. En fait, j'étais complètement défait ; le parfait sujet, quoi ! Mais alors, si j'admettais mon rôle dans le phénomène, le phénomène perdait un peu de son objectivité. Peut-être, après tout, était-ce le même processus qu'avec Castaneda : mon adhésion inconditionnelle fabriquait le phénomène au lieu de le valider. Mais même lorsque le doute remontait du fond de mes blessures, il y avait une chose que je ne pouvais pas nier : la présence. « L'événement » avait bel et bien eu lieu.

Mais tout ça n'explique pas pourquoi j'ai accepté, demandé en fait, de devenir l'élève de M.Low. Après tout, il avait raison, Castaneda et le Zen, ça n'a rien à voir ! Mais attendez un peu, est-ce bien le cas ? S'agit-il vraiment de deux « choses » distinctes, ou de la continuation d'une même chose ?

Mon histoire peut avoir des allures héroïques, mais il n'en est rien. Il ne faut pas oublier que pendant toutes ces années de « Castanédisme », ma vie a été une grande fuite en avant. Qu'est-ce que je fuyais ? La même chose que la plupart d'entre nous : les vissitudes de la vie, la vie ordinaire, les tracas, bref, la douleur d'exister. Et voilà qu'avec M.Low j'arrivais au fond du sac, le cul du sac. Je n'ai pas « choisi » M.Low. C'est juste qu'une fois arrivé devant sa porte, j'ai frappé un mur.

Mais la question demeure : est-ce que l'instant décisif qui a été le motif de mon adhésion a été « causé » par M.Low ou non ? C'est important de le savoir, parce que si ce n'est pas le cas, pourquoi j'accepterais de passer les quatre premiers jours de septembre assis devant un mur ? Pourquoi le Zen et pas autre chose, pourquoi M. Low et pas quelqu'un d'autre ? C'est important de répondre à cette question surtout quand on se rend compte du temps et de l'engagement qu'on risque de devoir y mettre – le reste de

sa vie en fait. Et bien sûr je dramatise. Il n'y a pas eu que ce Moment de Vérité. Au fur et à mesure que je me suis mis à la pratique, mon engagement s'est confirmé. Mais c'est justement ça le cœur de la question: mon engagement s'est confirmé, pas construit.

Tout ce que je peux vous dire aujourd'hui, c'est qu'en toute âme et conscience je crois que je suis là pour le reste de ma vie. Bon, des doutes j'en ai comme tout le monde. Et M.Low n'est pas éternel, quand il s'en ira je n'aurai certainement pas « terminé » mon « apprentissage ». Une chose est certaine : je ne cours plus après les Maîtres et je ne quémande plus leurs faveurs ; j'ai compris que personne ne peut faire le travail à ma place. Et surtout, je n'en veux pas à Castaneda, au contraire : c'est lui qui m'a forcé à prendre la route.

De toute façon je ne suis pas au Centre Zen de Montréal pour le Zen. Ça a l'air drôle à dire mais c'est vrai. Pour être franc ce n'est pas la voie que j'aurais choisie. C'est très loin de ma culture artistique, avec son idéologie libertaire et parfois anarchiste. Il serait déjà un peu plus vrai de dire que je suis là à cause de M.Low. « Sa » présence est encore la plus grande inspiration de ma vie. Mais au fond, je sais qu'il y a plus. Je vais continuer même quand M.Low ne sera plus là. Pourquoi ? Et bien justement parce que je suis là pour répondre à cette question : pourquoi. En fait, vous en connaissez une autre question, vous, que celle-là ? « Pourquoi suis-je ici ? » Quelle magnifique question, n'est-ce pas ?

* * *

Ah oui j'allais oublier la dent de chien. Pour moi aujourd'hui, la question est la suivante : si la mère apprenait un jour que sa dent est une fausse relique, est-ce qu'elle perdrait quelque chose ? ❁

The Master-Student Relationship in Zen Practice

Alison Edwards

In the spring of 2002 my husband died unexpectedly, very suddenly, while we were away on holiday. In a moment my 'I' was decimated. The 'I' that had anticipated the vacation, that had pictured with such certainty the two of us sitting in a cafe in Savannah under Magnolia trees, had vanished, leaving only shock, confusion and utterly painful and penetrating grief. Albert was the first person I called, before family, before friends. I knew I had to call him; I wasn't sure why. What did I think that Albert could do?

Albert was immediately responsive to my call. He gave me a mantra to help me focus, and to keep from getting lost in the whirl of overwhelming thoughts and emotions. He generously offered to perform a memorial service which we planned over the phone and which took place upon my return home. The service satisfied my need to "do" something for Bobby. When I returned to sesshin after his death, Albert worked with me, helping me to use the pain to go more deeply into the practice.

The practice itself has been of immeasurable help and consolation, although I cannot say how. The feeling that something is amiss, that I am an alien in this world, is even more predominant now than ever. I practice in the dark; I question my ability to practice. I still desperately long to see progress, even while Albert's words of caution echo in my mind. I feel I am at the bottom of the class, the poorest student Albert has; I want to run away, but know there is no where to run. And at the same time, I feel so grateful for the practice, and for Albert's being there. I do not know how these feelings can coincide.

In my worst moments of doubt, I remind myself to have faith in the practice. And why should I have faith in the practice? I can't explain the least thing it does for me. I have faith because of Albert. I trust him implicitly. He is the embodiment of the practice. His wisdom and compassion, his unwavering support and utter reliability over the years have

kept me coming back, and back again, to the practice. I don't want to give the impression of blind devotion to a guru. Because as I say these words, and feel them to be true, I also know the practice to be true.

As a young adult, I took horse-back riding lessons. I never became proficient, but I remember one of the attractions the experience held for me was that I realized I could not cheat, I could not 'fake it.' I could not pretend to have mastery over the horse; I either did or didn't, and my proficiency or lack thereof was blatantly apparent to my instructor. I feel the same way with the practice. It is what it is, I am what I am, and no amount of cover-up will succeed in fooling Albert. Albert "has my number," and that, in a strange way, is a great relief. The stripping away of pretence allows for intimacy in the relationship.

In sesshin, during teisho, I often feel that Albert's words are directed straight to me. Sometimes I glean a helpful insight, more often than not, I experience an openness, a melting, a movement within that I cannot explain, but that seems to refresh the very air around me. I approach dokusan in fear and dread. Albert is in turn supportive, encouraging, demanding; he is able to intuit exactly what I need to keep me on track, and invariably I return to the zendo with renewed confidence and determination.

And so I muddle along, having no home, not knowing who I am, and every once in a while, out of the blue, comes a feeling of exuberance and gratitude for life, a strong and deep love for family and friends, and an appreciation for the courage it takes to be a human being.

I am deeply grateful to Albert. To quote an unknown source: "I would repay the bounty (he) has given me, but it is as the sky; it can never be approached." ❁

In the Way on the Way



Varant Arslanian

The Zen master Daito Kokushi described his teacher as “a wild tiger sitting right on the path” (p.135). I’m sure I’m not alone in hoping to never encounter a tiger in the wild. But I must admit that there is a tiger always present in my life, nipping at my heels, gazing into my eyes, rubbing up against my legs. And it’s just a matter of time and... what can one do? Truly, what can one do?

Moment to moment this tiger appears ready to strike, overtaking others and reminding me of its constant threat and mystery. As undesirable as it is to have a tiger follow you around, I must give credit where credit is due. If it was not for its presence, I would have never sat zazen or endured the pain and boredom of sesshin. And of course I would have never gone looking for another wild tiger to help me overcome my fear of cats.

Speaking from experience I must say that dealing with tigers is a strange business. First of all, one never knows what they are getting. Expecting a purr you get a roar, expecting a roar you get a purr, and then when you really need something you get nothing, until you find yourself roaring. “There’s a wild tiger chasing me! Please, tell me what am I to do!!!!” No response... Is this tiger even alive? RRRRRRRR!!!!!! Woow!! What is this? Another wild tiger I’ve brought into my life. But why? Seriously, why?

Was it not this tiger himself who told me he can not do anything for me. So then why do I come face to face with him every chance I get, I might as well leave and never see this tiger again, but that’s impossible, and I know that’s impossible! Everywhere I go a wild tiger eagerly waits to swallow me whole. And who better to help one through this dilemma than a tiger.

Daito Kokushi has written that when encountering a wild tiger the only option one has is to “Lie flat in the tiger’s mouth” (p.135). Yeahh, that’s easy.

Brilliant idea Daito! Excuse my sarcasm, its stemming out of fear. But how can one not be afraid of such an action. How much more life threatening can something be? Is he for real? Of course! He means it, “Lie flat in the tiger’s mouth!” And Mr. Low means it too. He can not do anything for me, nothing at all. But since my first encounter with him, he has never let up on reminding me of the reality of this tiger. *

Iron wall, silver Mountain.

No road to advance upon, no gate to retreat through.

The exhausted fish is stuck in shallow water.

The shrimp can not leap out of the wooden dipper.

Kraft, Kenneth, *Eloquent Zen: Daito and Early Japanese Zen*.
Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1992.

To bare oneself in front of a teacher...



Thibault du Chene

Mr. Low has said many times during sesshins that if you have come here to practice, do not come with the intention to practice Zen. How uncomfortable it is to realize how long it takes to really allow such a question to come up. Well, did I not come here to practice Zen? If I am not practicing Zen, what is it that I am suppose to do? The confusion slowly simmers and bubbles up to the surface.

I found the Montreal Zen Center at the back of the phone book. I don't remember what really pushed me to call. It was a mix bag of feelings and hopes. I had been attending Vipassana retreats for the last three years and although it gave me a good taste of meditation, I was dissatisfied. I had a lot of questions regarding practice that could not be summed up in the technique proposed. I suppose it is simply my lack of faith in what they so generously offered. After one of these retreats, someone told me of Zen and how you work very intimately with a teacher and they took great attention in regards to proper posture. This is what I needed, a teacher to which I could ask the questions that were troubling me, and someone to help me with the preliminary steps to practice. When I found Zen in the back of the phone book, I was determined to practice Zen.

Four years later, I am not altogether sure what it really means to practice Zen. I am more confused than ever in regards to what I am suppose to do and yet there is a certain liveliness that I experience more profoundly. This is especially true, sitting on the mat at the front of the dokusan line as the bell rings. In a flash, a response occurs!

In front of a teacher, any intentions of practicing Zen, seems to strip away. What is left within the attentiveness of dokusan is the immediate expression of what is happening now. The hardest part of going to dokusan is allowing to bare oneself in front of a teacher. I don't think going to dokusan will ever come

easy and yet at times, it seems so natural. But those moments of openness tend to be rare and precious occasions. What is more recurring is the desperate attempt to control the situation by any means possible. It is in dokusan that this becomes so evident that one is in fact attempting to keep everything together, at any cost.

One aspect of working with a teacher that repeatedly impresses me is how a teacher really questions. It is this shared questioning that is so vital to practice. If you don't attempt to control the situation, then what necessarily comes out is a question. What am I then supposed to do? What is it that I truly desire? In dokusan, you have that opportunity to really work with those questions in front of someone who has dedicated his life to it. In a teisho, Mr. Low had said that if the question: What is it? does not grip you, then find the one that does. If you come repeatedly to sesshins then you must have something troubling you, now what is it? It is allowing this trouble to come up into practice, which is so hard because sometimes what really troubles seems so remote from 'Zen' or 'spiritual life'. This is what makes dokusan a precious place. One is faced with someone who has been willing to go into that trouble repeatedly and is willing to work with you, to enter into it, by any means possible. To have the faith in one's practice is almost impossible without the dedicated help of a good teacher. A teacher allows you to cultivate the faith to enter into the question, by being present. A good teacher is instrumental because giving up creeps itself, so easily into everything. But most urgently, a teacher is a constant reminder that a life time is too long to sleep. Thank you Mr. Low and the Sangha, for your unfailing help. ❀

The Student-Teacher Relation

Jacqueline Vischer

This relationship is at once mysterious and mystifying. It is not like any other in one's life. It is a relationship that is constructed around the not-self, unlike all others, that are built by and for the self. In the case of those of us who are students of Albert Low, we have two relationships with him, one of which is that of normal social intercourse, or maybe advisor and friend. This one is built around our two selves, his and mine. The other we see in dokusan and in the sesshins. We speak and interact, but we are seeking out each other's Buddha self in these interactions; our teacher says, "Without you I do not exist".

Early in my practice, I began in dokusan to tell my teacher about early childhood traumas, the effects of therapy I had been through, and other explorations of the psyche. To my (then) surprise, he stopped me before I had even got going, interrupted me in fact, and told me this was neither relevant nor interesting. Perhaps he spoke more kindly than that, but it was a lesson not to be forgotten. This was not what the Zen teacher relationship was there for – we were not in dokusan to explore my psyche, my self.

And yet of course that is often what we are doing in Zen practice, expanding our awareness of the self so that we can eventually be less limited by it. Our teacher helps us with that, as he helps us with every aspect of Zen – but not by being a therapist!

Although or perhaps because he is not a therapist, it is extraordinary to consider what a teacher must hear in the dokusan room over the years. There can be no tiny element of human nature that does not appear there sooner or later. Our teacher has been teaching for more than twenty years – what extraordinary stories he could tell about human nature, about the workings of our culture, about humanity in general. A teacher can sit in that one small room, and in time everything there is to know

about people will come to him or her.

If we are to benefit from the student-teacher relationship we need to work in dokusan, to use it to learn. This can mean listening to the teacher, it can also mean telling, speaking openly, honestly to the teacher, it can mean conflict, even fear, and it can mean love, compassion. It certainly does not mean control – the student is not benefiting from the relationship if he or she tries to control it. On the contrary, there are moments where I am gathering up my 'self' in my hands and placing 'me' in his hands - or at least in the space between us, or perhaps in his mind - when there feels like there is not much of 'me' left. This is so very hard to do outside the student-teacher relationship, it is one reason why one needs a teacher to practice Zen.

Watching our teacher, I see that just as we put our selves in his hands so he puts himself in ours. He works untiringly for us, for our practice – in sesshins, in writing books, in running the Zen Centre, and in long evenings of dokusan three evenings a week for most of the year. The teacher works, whether the students work or not. However, to the teacher, all students work, even if they are beginners, or not very committed, or non-comprehending. To the teachers, all students are equally valuable. In fact it seems to me he must be very clear about demonstrating that, because one of the temptations of the self is to show its importance by considering itself ('myself') special in the teacher's eyes. The vigilant self or I is exquisitely attuned to feedback indicating it is special and important, and a teacher must be equally vigilant to ensure that this tendency is never reinforced in his/her relationship with any student. The teacher must be carefully neutral yet deeply involved. He must be emotionally distant and yet use the emotions that surface in the relationship. He must not love any one of us but he must love all of us.

Une petite victoire

Janine Lévesque

And we in turn tend to make the teacher into what we need, without even being aware we are doing so. For those of us with father issues, he is the father, for those of us with mother issues, he is mother. He can be son, daughter, brother, sister – he has no say in it and neither do we; but we do well to be aware of the role we might be attributing to him, as this helps us learn about ourselves.

The teacher knows how deeply we delve into our emotions in this relationship and therefore how vulnerable we are. Sometimes, during a sesshin, I feel I am played by my teacher like a musical instrument. And yet it is Buddha being and not somebody's manipulation of me. Albert Low has spoken about the 'arrows' that fly out of him at people sometimes in dokusan – he is baffled when the students get offended, and some do not come back! I am baffled too – these 'arrows' are gifts. They fly into our deepest selves to shed light; they help us struggle against feelings of our own importance. Again recognizing and using such arrows in daily life is so very hard to do outside the student-teacher relationship, it is another reason why one needs a teacher to practice Zen.

One way to think of the student-teacher relationship in Zen practice is to consider the teacher as a means to an end, the 'end' in question being the path one is on, and the 'means' being, whatever it takes. The idea of the teacher as a tool or means to help the practitioner along the way helps me: it indicates that I am not alone. The teacher is a resource one learns from, a companion on the journey, a support to lean on, a challenge to complacency, a whip to get one going or a push to move one off one's rock, a light in darkness, a voice in the void – someone who is in there with you, there where you are quite alone. ❀

Laissez-moi vous raconter un événement qui m'est arrivé l'été dernier. Cette anecdote, il faudrait l'épingler sur la poitrine d'Albert Low, comme on épingle une médaille sur celle d'un général, pour cette victoire dans la guerre contre la souffrance.

Je me trouvais dans un stationnement désert, ou presque, vers 20:30hres me dirigeant vers ma voiture. Il faisait encore jour. Il y avait un groupe de quatre jeunes garçons d'environ 11-12 ans, 13 tout au plus. Ils discutaient entre eux et me regardaient à la dérobée, laissant présager un mauvais tour. Ils se sont avancés à ma rencontre, l'un d'eux s'est dirigé vers moi et les autres ont continué d'avancer sur une voie qui s'écartait légèrement de la mienne. Lorsqu'il est arrivé près de moi le garçon m'a simplement dit bonjour et est allé rejoindre les autres. Pour ma part je continuais à me diriger, sans inquiétude, vers ma voiture tout en lui retournant son bonjour. Après avoir fait quelques pas je les entendis qui marmonnaient des choses entre eux et la seule chose que j'entendis clairement venant de celui qui était venu vers moi fut simplement: "**Elle souriait**" ❀

La dernière leçon d'écoute



Sylvain L. Pinard

59 jours. 59 jours alité. Les murs bleus hôpital. Plus «platte» que ça, tu meurs. Méditons. Le défilé des colocs de chambre, toujours irritants mais pour des raisons différentes : l'enfer, c'est les autres (Sartre), mais c'est nous qui le créons... Enfin gagné le bord de la fenêtre, après un mois d'âpres négociations (merci Maman, pour Papa) avec l'administration : le ciel n'est point donné à qui veut. 59 jours de courtes conversations et surtout, surtout, de silences. Papa là pour une opération, cancer du colon (l'organe), puis une autre, l'ultime. Mon gourou de toute une vie terrassé. Failli y passer la première fois. Réchappé cette fois-ci. Puis l'attente. Méditons.

Défilé aussi d'une équipe hors pair de soignants qui ne se défilent pas. Aux p'tits oignons, mon père. Mais difficulté à me concentrer, dit-il. Donc pas de radio, point de t.v., non plus de lectures, aucune distraction. Imaginez, dire non aux Élections Québec 2003, à Bernard Derome... c'est drastique ! Que la réalité sensorielle de la chambre d'hôpital, du couloir et des trois défilés ; le troisième ? Les visiteurs. On a appris plus tard que P'pa avait fait un pacte avec Dieu : pas de distraction contre la guérison. Il semble qu'on ne marchande point avec le Seigneur... Je me disais, moi apôtre du présent qui m'échappe sans cesse : très bien, P'pa devra faire face à la réalité, être vraiment au présent, ce n'est pas un mal, ce black-out des médias. Pour l'aider à accepter tout ça, je me lance et lui propose de méditer le «Que ta volonté soit faite» en suivant l'expiration qu'Albert m'a enseigné. P'pa acquiesce, sans plus. De moi qui fais, comme il disait en badinant le zen, du «zigne», du «zoune», je ne me faisais pas d'illusion sur mes chances de le convaincre. Offrons-lui du moins une oreille attentive, à lui si désespéré, si emparé de son sourd mal qu'il n'est guère attentif à nous, en tous cas en apparence. Bah !

Bien soigné donc, mon cher Papa. Et bien lavé. Un duo sensible et efficace de deux préposées. Et je lui faisais la barbe, le manucurais. Qu'il aimait ça ! Mais une chose restait à faire. Et d'une fois à l'autre, je notais que les préposées éludaient de le

faire. Est-ce exclu de leur définition de tâche ? Ça doit, elles sont si gentilles ! Ma mère, on n'y pense même pas. Frère et sœur ? Ils ne font que passer, donc pas le temps de s'en apercevoir. Même P'pa n'en parle pas. Mais je sais que ce devra être fait, et ça me revient, la situation pointée en ma direction. Pourtant, frerot m'avait confié qu'il l'avait fait une fois en dépit de son aversion, auparavant, à la maison, avant l'hospitalisation. Dans le salon. Mais là, moi ? À l'hôpital ? J'y pense. Je l'oublie. J'y pense encore. Ça titille mais au sens irritant.

Ah ! Et puis, pourquoi pas ?! Dix jours avant l'opération que nous ne savions fatale, je prends mon courage à deux mains (c'est le cas de le dire) et oui, P'pa, je vais te couper les ongles d'orteil. Peu ragoûtants de prime abord ; jaunis comme P'pa l'est au complet, il se fait littéralement de la bile ; cassants, probablement la chimio ; mais propres au moins. Pas si difficile, finalement. Ah ! Tant qu'à être parti, un p'tit limage avec ça ? P'pa, tu auras les plus beaux ongles d'orteil de la Rive-Sud.

Pourquoi ai-je tant tardé ? Si aisé et si simple, au fond. Pour mon père qui a passé tant et tant d'heures à nourrir, à torcher bébé Sylvain... Comment puis-je être aussi ingrat ? Shame on me ! Je lui devais bien ça, une écoute spontanée de son corps, lui qui a été le grand Écouteur du mien durant tellement d'années. Puis il est parti, un jour de pleine lune (et d'éclipse partielle), jour aussi chrétien des Semailles et de la Famille. Chargé de symboles. D'émotions. Toute notre famille autour de lui. En paix. Merci pour tout, P'pa.

* * *

Quelques jours avant le grand Départ, P'pa s'était soudain tourné sur le côté, vers moi, nous étions seuls. Et de me demander : écoute, ti-gars, c'est-tu normal de s'endormir des fois, quand on médite ? (...) Il m'avait écouté, il avait ÉCOUTÉ ! Merci P'pa, pour la dernière leçon. ✱

L'aveugle et le maître Zen



Jean Gagnon

Parfois je trouve que la relation maître-élève correspond bien à cette image attribuée à Shibayama, un maître Zen contemporain qui compare la pratique du koan à la mésaventure de l'aveugle que l'on a conduit au bord d'un précipice et que l'on jette ensuite à terre après lui avoir arraché sa canne et l'avoir fait tourner plusieurs fois sur lui-même. C'est quand je pense davantage aux aspects exigeants, déstabilisateurs et sans aucune complaisance du rapport au maître. Mais l'histoire doit être complétée pour que l'analogie soit juste. Il s'agit tout d'abord d'un homme qui s'aveugle lui-même, « comme une personne immergée criant : 'j'ai soif' » dit Hakuin Zenji. Il faut de plus imaginer que le maître commence par guider l'aveugle avec délicatesse jusqu'au bord de l'abîme en lui expliquant ce qu'il va faire et pourquoi avant de lui enlever tous ses repères. Et il est évident qu'il reste là ensuite tout à côté, à veiller sur lui avec compassion et à le guider dans ses efforts pour sortir de son aveuglement.

Évidemment l'aveugle c'est moi qui, insatisfait de ma vie et souffrant de diverses manières, est venu chercher une issue dans le Zen après avoir emprunté toutes sortes d'autres sentiers spirituels et psychothérapeutiques.

Je dirais que le plus important dans mon rapport avec Albert c'est que je me sens entendu dans mon appel le plus profond, au-delà même de ce que j'entends en moi d'ordinaire. Cela a commencé par le réveil de ma quête de Dieu. Un jour je suis revenu en larmes du dokusan, bouleversé par la phrase de St-Augustin : « Tu ne me chercherais pas si tu ne m'avais déjà trouvé ». Plus tard, la question de fond qui a orienté l'attribution de mon koan fut celle de mes vingt ans, restée intacte de façon souterraine : est-ce qu'il y a un Dieu et est-ce qu'on peut s'unir à lui ? Et j'ai reçu le koan Mu. Bien des années après, au cours d'un sesshin, comme mon interrogation initiale me revenait, Albert m'a proposé de chercher : qu'est-ce qu'être uni à Dieu ? Après quelques jours il m'a demandé s'il y avait une différence entre demander qu'est-ce que Mu et qu'est-ce qu'être uni à Dieu. Et la réponse qui est venue de l'intérieur c'est : bien sûr que non.

Un autre aspect de ma relation avec Albert, c'est son rôle de guide. Il tente par divers moyens de donner une idée du but à atteindre, de ce à quoi il faut s'éveiller, en s'empressant aussitôt de détruire l'idée ou l'image qu'il vient de mettre en place pour éviter que cette forme ne vienne faire écran à ce qui est au-delà de toute forme. La vraie nature qui est à la fois sagesse, amour, et paix, c'est ce qu'il faut pénétrer, mais en réalité il n'y a pas de terre promise à chercher ; elle est déjà là et « ce corps même est le corps du Bouddha » dit encore Hakuin. Pour mieux faire comprendre ça Albert rappelle de temps à autre cette phrase de Saint-Jean de la Croix si poignante et si inspirante à la fois : Abandonnez tout espoir car ce que vous espérez ce n'est pas ça du tout. Une autre façon dont il guide c'est en prévenant des épreuves inévitables sur la voie, du passage obligé par des périodes désertiques où plus rien ne semble tenir. Et il reste toujours là avec une patience inlassable pour raviver la flamme, réconforter, rappeler ce qu'il y a à faire ou qu'il n'y a rien à faire, signaler les fausses pistes et indiquer comment sortir des ornières où l'on s'enfonce régulièrement.

Mais ce n'est pas tout. Il y a aussi l'aspect très exigeant et profondément déstabilisateur du rapport au maître qui correspond dans la parabole de l'aveugle au fait de se faire arracher sa canne et jeter à terre après avoir tourné plusieurs fois sur soi-même. Les méthodes ont changé et sont devenues plus subtiles depuis les cris et les coups de bâton des maîtres Zen d'autrefois mais le fond est resté le même : il s'agit de bousculer l'élève pour éroder le sentiment qu'il a de la suprême importance de son je et le faire sortir de sa torpeur car « c'est l'illusion du moi qui cause notre peine » dit encore Hakuin Zenji.

J'ai toujours senti Albert très respectueux de ma vie quotidienne et accueillant pour les difficultés que je pouvais y rencontrer. Il n'y avait rien à y changer. Je pense même lui avoir entendu me dire que tout ce que je faisais était parfait. Mais sa perspective reste toujours celle de la pratique et ses conseils y prennent leur source. Je vais en donner un exemple. Il y a quelques années, après avoir accepté d'aller donner une conférence aux États-Unis, je remettais mon

Can Only Bow

David Booth

choix en question par manque de temps et aussi par peur de l'échec. J'ai parlé à Albert de mon désir de me décommander pour toutes ces raisons, en ajoutant la crainte que mon attention à ce projet ne nuise à ma vie familiale et à ma pratique du Zen. À ma grande surprise il m'a plutôt encouragé à relever le défi de la conférence tout en la faisant comme une personne ordinaire qui parle à des amis. C'était très encourageant d'un côté mais en même temps un défi impossible à relever compte tenu de mon désir d'impressionner l'auditoire. Il a même ajouté, peut-être avec une pointe de malice, que de toutes façons les gens vont dans ces colloques-là surtout pour se faire remarquer et que quelques jours après ils se rappellent à peine des conférences auxquelles ils ont assisté. Cela m'interrogeait évidemment sur mes propres motivations et rabattait du même coup ma prétention à y faire une marque impérissable.

J'ai finalement décidé d'y aller et me suis mis à me préparer dans l'excitation et la fébrilité. Je me suis donc retrouvé quelques mois plus tard à Cambridge, pas encore vraiment prêt, très anxieux, dormant très peu la nuit mais réservant quand même une heure par jour à ma pratique dans cette tourmente. Mu remontait aussi à la surface dans mes promenades de délasserment. Je me sentais tout autant en sesshin que les membres de la sangha qui travaillaient sur eux au même moment au Centre à Montréal. Puis, trente minutes avant ma présentation, alors que je paniquais, tout s'est organisé et j'ai improvisé ensuite avec calme devant les gens. Cela a été un grand succès pour ce qui a donné la conférence et un échec pour moi qui n'était pas assez prêt. J'avoue que je n'arrive pas toujours à garder l'esprit que Mu a été le véritable auteur de cette conférence.

Aujourd'hui, après toutes ces années, il me semble que le mouvement général de la pratique en est un d'abandon de plus en plus grand à l'oeuvre de Mu dans les diverses circonstances de ma vie : sur le tan, en dokusan, à travers les épreuves et même dans mes entrevues de psychothérapie avec mes clients. Mon fardeau devient moins lourd à mesure que se dissipe l'illusion que je maîtrise ma vie. J'en suis redevable à ma relation avec Albert. ❀

The writer, before joining the Centre community, had already practised a form of zen for a number of years. He had done numerous sesshins directed by various leaders and had read some books on the matter. He believed he knew something about what the practice was all about and would even speak about it with some confidence. Nevertheless, underlying a conviction that the practice was a necessity for his life, there lay a deep distrust. He lived in a constant state of tension between a desire to engage himself in an authentic tradition and a fear of accepting teachings that, in spite of a spiritual allure, seemed to be second hand dogma. The practice offered something essential -- in that he had faith -- but from all those who offered teachings, he held his distance. This is not to say that these teachings were misplaced; as all things teach in one way or another, it was his responsibility to find the essence. Yet he did not feel confident enough to let go. He remained tight minded and on guard.

Many years beforehand, the writer then an adolescent schoolboy became one day convinced that he was natural. Although seemingly obvious, this conviction was to him liberating. Extreme doubts that made the simple word of "I" virtually inutterable were daily companions. The feeling that he was natural offered some measure of reprieve from this doubting. He never explained it to anyone and, in any case, he could not even explain it to himself. It was simply an intuitive feeling that his own being was in order. He could allow himself to be. Thereafter, sermons from the church pulpit had little clout. The feeling gave him a certain inner confidence but did not dispel the anxiety of falling into error. During the decades that followed, anxiety and doubt swelled up periodically to strangle his energies. At first he tried to regulate this through a discipline of reason, but to little avail. He overtly tried making himself into something, but this eventually became distasteful. He attempted adopting a cause, but this became hollow. It was only on stumbling into the practice of meditation that he found some hope of resolving his malaise. After some years, this practice brought him to a stage where he had to admit to himself that he needed help. But to whom could he turn? In whom can one really trust?

While mobilised into requesting information from far and wide, he came upon a slim volumed invitation to zen and soon afterwards found himself at an introductory workshop at the Centre. He arrived with his usual baggage of anxiety but also with some confidence in his own knowledge of the practice. He wasn't simply a beginner, or at least so he thought. Nevertheless, some aspects did trouble him and, for once, here he found an atmosphere that invited his troubled mind to open itself. He posed two simple questions. How should one think during zazen? What is the relationship between master and student? The replies he received then have continued to nourish his practice ever since.

What can a teacher do for a student? What can any teacher do? A classroom teacher, for example, can cajole, encourage, inspire, motivate, present and evaluate but cannot actually do the learning. Conditions favourable for learning can be put in place, but it is the student that must take the step to transform the unknown into the known, the impossible into the possible. The seed can be sown and nourished, but the source of growth is internal. No teacher can replace the innate dynamic of the student, even for mastering the simplest of everyday skills and knowledge. This has enormous implications for education. Is zen any different? Can we expect any more from a spiritual teacher? Does such a teacher have magical powers?

If education is acquiring knowledge, skills or culture, zen is not education; on the other hand if education refers to a leading-onward or to a guiding, then zen is educational. Unlike conventional school-children however, the zen student makes a definite choice to present himself before the teacher, sometimes overcoming certain difficulties to get there. To be a zen student is to put oneself into a situation of vulnerability. It is only then that a teacher can create favourable conditions. But what does it take to be really vulnerable?

The writer of whom I write responded to the invitation and became a zen student. Although the initial mental decision was easy and without doubt,

the integration of this decision into his being was not instantaneous. So began the slow and sometimes painful process of becoming a beginner, a process that continues to this day. It is a sense of deep underlying trust that allows his carapace to soften, if ever so slowly. This is not a trust in some tradition, system, community or person. It is rather a feeling that attention is directed to the heart of the matter, to the principal concern at the centre of life. There is space for terrible doubts and grounding faith; there is time for personal conflict and global questioning. Life is not denied but lived. In the process, every aspect of the practice redirects attention to the heart of the matter. This central concern encourages trust. Unknown to the student, favourable conditions are already under creation.

Student and teacher, are they then companions on the way? Is one just half a footstep in front of the other, or a thousand miles? What is this way that they tread? And the heart of the matter, where can it be found?

Speaking for myself, when considering the relationship between student and teacher the feeling is of gratitude. Although unable to explain what it's all about, I simply sense a surge of gratitude. Spiritual teachers have created and still create conditions that are favourable. They enable my practice. Their work is contained within this practice. When I try, however, to clearly identify the direction of this gratitude, no single source comes to mind. It is not thus a reason for veneration. It is simply an intuitive feeling that pervades the present. With that, I can only bow. ❀

In the Yard



Andrew Lindy

“Write about the relationship between yourself and your teacher.”

I have always thought of a relationship as two things, while this is more like a desperate struggle to see that I am spacious enough to include the both of us, or anything for that matter - with the grounds for this discovery being a very concentrated kind of attachment, and also anxiety.

It has been a year of discovering in what way this practice is about me – the development of independence, sincerity and dignity. Again all of this occurring in an ever-thickening atmosphere of anxiety and longing, fed in this case by a poignant contradiction: it is a relationship where I am trying to get through anxiety and attachment, while these are precisely what the Dokusan climate produces, and yet I continue to invite these types of conditions. The other invaluable part of this contradiction in this acute sense of duality - one to one – is that I meet face to face with an individual who is genuinely and wholly devoted to helping me become free of such ignorance.

I can't imagine how my delusions in everyday relationships and my general full-of-shitness could otherwise have been challenged and begun to be illuminated so quickly, except in this concentrated environment and privileged opportunity where the intention to get out of attachment and delusion forces the subtleties of attachment to arise, and you are forced to brake through the circle.

One reason it seems sincerity is forced-out is because my teacher is not interested in any demonstration of intellect. This has shown me in my life how insignificant is the demonstration of intellect in the success of new friendships.

And I hope to be picking-up on that because I have lost all my friends over the year. This thanks to Zazen. Friends adrift, as I experienced to what extent conversation – its survival and its content is dependent on fear, which is to say more attachment. And really, with these age-old friends, if we're not talking about girls or ego queries – which is less of an occurrence now that I have a teacher – we don't have very much in common.

Of course this is different for everyone, and depending on the nature of the friendship, but

seemingly relevant for me at the moment: a year of sad relief: no friends and all friends: more selfless, alone and available all at once, with emptiness suddenly the manifold of all relationship, new and old.

Every week I am pecking away at these illusions, as I, each week, arrive a layer of ignorance peeled off, or even two fresh layers pasted on, and my teacher sits there seemingly unchanging.

I am walking into Dokusan now for your reading pleasure in the Zen Gong, walking-in, thinking about God and the bewilderment it was for me growing-up in a tradition where the name of God could not be said. “The Name,” was the usual substitute. It seems to me now that the only opposition to something as whole and complete as God or the name, would have to be a redundancy. That is what my extraordinary anxiety in Dokusan, it seems to me, is all about.

And when asked, “what is your name?” I may so readily blurt it out, only to have the words recoil and harden all over the body... and how many words have I invented in spite of that sacred and perfect language of the tummy??

It is the same thing with girls, which I seem to spend a lot of time chasing. Often there is nothing to say and the natural thing is to smile, knowing-and-go, but sometimes her skin is so wonderful, and her breasts as full and whole as any of the Gods from day school, and I ask, “so what did you say your name was again?” But I know her name; and still I keep walking into Dokusan. Walking into that contradiction.

To see that redundancy is to be it, I believe, is the only way to move through it.

I came to Zen out of desperation to get beyond the content of my life, having spent so much time running towards whatever was in arms-reach, running head-on into what the French call ‘lawn-fair’ – this mental yard-sale... having bought into so much.

I remember Albert once asked, after hearing someone say, “I am getting closer, I am getting closer,” he asked in a Teisho, “how near can you get to yourself? Are you two inches away, a meter?” In Dokusan, that yard between the two mats is for me an invaluable first step in getting to where I am. *

Student and Teacher



Marie Lloyd

The library poster read : Workshop With Albert Low, Director of the Montreal Zen Centre, and I went out of mild curiosity. What was Zen ? I didn't know it was connected with Buddhism, not even what Buddhism was. After a stormy break with the Catholic church in my late teens, I'd settled into a rabid, then habitual atheism - and finally into flaccid indifference.

As I took a seat in the library conference room, Albert Low - dressed in a long brown robe - entered. My first impression was fairly favourable : a cultured man with natural dignity. But when he began to talk about The Four Noble Truths, my usual contempt for religion arose. If we all followed the Eightfold Path, we'd get - Nirvana ? Heaven ? The notion of such a transaction filled me with distaste.

Then the presentation took a turn. Mr. Low said, « But talk is talk, and practice is practice. » I was on the alert as I saw him approach a dark mat and slowly fold himself into a low sitting posture. He lowered his eyes and simply breathed. Seconds later, I had a thought : that man just inhaled the universe.

With my remnants of Catholicism, I tried to make some sense of it. This man might be Jesus Christ, except that I didn't believe in Jesus, nor in timewarps, either.

When I left the Zen workshop, I returned to my atheist materialist household, to the young children I had raised with a Voltairean disdain for religion, and take out a sleeping bag. I folded it in the corner, faced the wall and began a halting sitting practice. Weeping began afterward and has never really left me.

After some years of solo practice, during which time I frequently imagined Albert sitting quietly beside me, and after bouts of shapeless and piercing longing, I woke up one morning to « see my fireplace mantel » - an experience so strong that I spent some

time each day flat on the ground. And then I wrote the unknown Mr. Low to tell him, and arranged to come to Montreal.

My Zen had consisted pretty largely in reading about ancient student-teacher encounters, and in many of them it seemed that students would be thrown out of the monastery. Certain that I was an ideal candidate for expulsion, I tried to eradicate myself by keeping a very low profile - a scheme I was fearful Albert would see through. When his teishos touched on the centrality of awakening, I feared I would have to do this very quickly or sesshins might end. And since I didn't know his exact schedule for my awakening, I could get pretty tense. As time passed, though, I could see the return of many veteran sesshingoers. Expulsions seemed less frequent than I had feared ; perhaps his standards for awakening were laxer than I'd thought. It hadn't occurred to me yet that this man was operating in a way entirely different from what I was accustomed to.

I have been working with Albert Low now for about nine years. I've let go of some of my naive conceptions about teachers, students and Zen. What I hope never to lose is my gratitude, my deep thankfulness for this richest of all encounters. ✱

« Montre-moi ta vraie nature... »

Mon maître est la seule personne à m'avoir jamais dit cela.

Depuis, je nage dans une soif comme une bête apeurée...

Avec gratitude.

(Louis Bricault)

Teaching Moments

Fred Bloom

A man was telling me in his therapy session that he can never take time off from work just to do the things he enjoys, because whatever he does, he has to be the best. I asked if he would feel ashamed if he were not the best.

This led to memories of feeling ashamed when he was being sexually molested by the football coach in high school, which he related in great anguish. At the end, holding his head in his hands, he said, "Boy, my life was really fucked."

"And now you fuck yourself," I responded.

He looked up, rather shocked, and asked, "What do you mean?"

"You are so absorbed in being an ashamed little kid that you won't even give yourself an hour off to relax in the back yard."

He was silent for a while and then said, "I guess I have a lot of work to do here, don't I?"

* * *

I had come in on a Sunday evening to see a woman I had recently admitted to the hospital. She had been my patient for only a few months, but had been in psychiatric care for many years, and treated with many drugs for depression. When she first came to me she said she would be content if the drugs could just keep her "stable." One day, as she described her daily struggle just to do the things that were expected of her, I remarked that everything in her life seemed only a duty and a burden- that there ought to be some joy in her life. She said, very quietly and earnestly, "But you don't understand. I am bad." This for her was a painful admission. She had never trusted another person with this awful truth about herself. What made her bad, inherently, as she saw it, so that she did not deserve to have joy, she could not say.

That Sunday evening in the hospital she talked about feeling empty and worthless. Thumbing through an old novel in the day room she had come across an illustration of a young girl walking in a meadow, and

had been struck by the innocence and hope in the girl's face. She commented how lovely it was, and how sad and lost it made her feel.

I said, "You could not have recognized the beauty in that drawing if that beauty were not already within you."

She looked at me quite startled, almost frightened. But, then she said, "That's true, isn't it. How else could I have seen that?"

We then sat for a long time in silence. Every once in a while she would look up at me, as if to see if I were still there.

* * *

My mother taught me to be ashamed of myself, but also to believe that I was better than everyone else. That took some time to work out. Mrs. Wagner in the first grade was very nice about the fact that I did not learn my ABC's, but would have served me better if she had told me that, even though I was smart, I would still have to work at things. Mrs. Shrier, my first Hebrew school teacher saw in me a brilliant, curly-headed, Jewish boy who could do no wrong and gave me the prized role as the youngest son of Hannah and her Seven Sons, about a woman who refuses to bow down to pagan idols. I learned all the parts and prompted the others in their speeches, thinking how nice it was to be the smartest boy in the class, until one day I forgot my own lines and when I joked that I had stuffed my head so full of everyone else's lines that I had forgotten my own, Mrs. Shrier didn't think it was funny, and I was humiliated, which reminded me of how I was supposed to be ashamed of myself. I then got sick and stayed in bed until after the performance was over. It was another lesson from my mother that if you are sick you do not have to appear. It was the beginning of years of sickness to follow.

* * *

The teacher who taught me that I do not have to be sick anymore was Dr. McBride, a New York psy-

choanalyst who came to Maine to retire, but still saw a few patients on the side when he was not painting seascapes out of the back window of his office/studio. He said one day, as I was laboriously cataloguing the possible unconscious motives behind doing something that had hurt my wife's feelings, "Let's just assume, Fred, that you are basically a person of good will." Suddenly, it dawned on me that I do not necessarily have to start from the assumption that I am neurotic. That took a few years to digest, but it was the only significant thing to come out of two years of sessions.

* * *

Dr. Winn was a senior psychoanalyst in Baltimore who came to Sheppard-Pratt one afternoon each week to teach residents. In our first meeting he introduced himself, settled into a chair, installed his hearing aid, and indicated through his benign silence that he was ready to listen.

I talked about a young man who had been admitted to the hospital after he had tried to stop traffic on the New York Through-Way to alert the drivers that the end was coming. If he could make it to the United Nations in time, he would save the world. For almost a year he had been languishing in the hospital, depressed, withdrawn, and apathetic, his bedroom floor littered with dirty tennis socks, jeans, t-shirts, and underwear, mixed in with crumpled Playboy magazines and assorted sports paraphernalia. Since his admission I had been seeing him three times a week for psychotherapy.

He complained bitterly that I called him Mr. Weinberg, and almost begged me to call him Steve. He said that when I called him Mr. Weinberg, it felt like I was talking to his father. I was following the accepted psychoanalytic practice, this to communicate the respect of the analyst, and the analyst's view that he and the patient were on an equal footing in their therapeutic collaboration. After all, Steve did not call me Fred. In refusing to call him Steve I was upholding this

idea, even if he could not see it yet, as well as not indulging his unconscious wish to be my child, or to be taken care of by me. I explained all this to Dr. Winn, as though he might not understand these things.

His response was, "Yes, but this patient is still too sick for that." I was more concerned with my own image of myself as a psychiatrist, than with my patient. From that moment I was flung into the real work of becoming a doctor rather than a self-important little prig, and Steve started actually to improve.

* * *

Teachers come in every form, animate and inanimate. A rusted, frozen bolt is a teacher. A power failure that wipes out hours of work on the computer is a teacher. The suicide of a patient, about whom I was not worried, is a teacher. But, the kind of teacher that I am thinking about is the "other person" who transmits to you that something that you need, or that you are ready for, at that moment.

I have come to understand psychotherapy as essentially teaching in this sense. It is to be there, present in the moment, with the right thing, which is sometimes just a nod of recognition, sometimes an elaborate lecture, sometimes a wise-crack or some other kind of sharp jab, and sometimes just silence. I would say that what the therapist most needs to cultivate in himself is authentic engagement- and selflessness, which is perhaps another way to describe the same thing. Finally, this allows for the spontaneous appearance of what the patient needs at the moment that he needs it. Nowadays, I don't know where what I say comes from, but I know that it is, much of the time, right.

Afterwards, I could give a detailed exegesis on why I said this, or that, at such a moment, in such a manner, and why that would be more the right tone, or the right spirit in which to intervene than some other. But, in going back and explaining those reasons, I

would be realizing them for the first time. The response itself just appears. If it had been thought through ahead of time, it could not have appeared in that "just right" way. It would not have been alive in that way.

I could say that now, by and large, there is no self to get in the way of my response. I am no longer needing something, nor trying to prove something, nor taking care of my "self image." I am still involved, so that if a patient is being contemptuous of me, I feel it, or if a patient is adoring me, I feel that too, but I do not need the adoration, and I do not fear the contempt. I just see it, and so I am free to respond to it.

But this "no self," though hugely important, is still not the no-self of Hakuin. It is the no self of the psychoanalyst who has to some degree come to terms with himself. There is something in this freedom that could be described as self-acceptance. But, there is also something beyond that, which is only very obscurely intimated, still unrealized, which is far more mysterious and wonderful.

Self-acceptance is ultimately self-disappearance. As you gradually come to see that you no longer have to be some thing, you see likewise that what you were having to be was never you, and it then appears as just a relic of your own illusions. In psychoanalysis this process is taken to be complete when it has produced a functioning, relatively integrated, unconflicted, and autonomous self. But is that the last word? However inadequate my own analysis, and it was very inadequate, would even another ten years of it have brought me to that intimation that there is one more step?

Otto Kernberg says that the main task of the therapist is to bring the session to life- to rescue it from its deadness and frozen-ness. You might say that the sickness is the deadness, and that therapy is the process of coming, step by step, to your living self. But, what is this "living self?" If I trust my spontaneous response more than what I have thought through, then when I

say something that comes out of that place, in what sense is it "me" who says it?

How can I say what I have learned from ten years of Zen practice? I know that when I am sounding like Albert, or when I am talking Zen, I am a million miles off base. What has been new in my work with patients has not been anything that could be described as "the application of Zen to psychotherapy." It has not been any kind of change in my thinking, and it is not an identification with Albert, or with Zen. That would be only silly, and transparent. What is different is coming from a place that I cannot know.

As the wonderful and terrifying Dr. Rudolf Marburg, another of the teaching analysts at Sheppard-Pratt used to say in his soul-harrowing German-Jewish accent, "Zee biggest obstacle to treating zee narcissism of zee patient, ees zee narcissism of zee analyst." I am not the good boy; and I am not the bad boy. I am not the proud-of-myself boy; and I am not the ashamed-of-myself boy. These "selves" are just narcissistic conceits of different kinds. That is pretty much settled. But, then, what am I?

* * *

On the afternoon of the second day of my first sesshin, I was in total agony. My head hurt, my back hurt, my legs hurt. I was dying and going out of my mind. Albert gave me some tips in dokusan: my cushion might be too low; I should not hold up my chin (I do that because I am holding on to some tension, probably lots of rage and despair, he said), and I should relax my shoulders. When I returned for the next dokusan, I was doing better, and I told him that he had saved my life. "Too bad," he said. "I wish I hadn't."

Unlike psychotherapy or psychoanalysis, in Zen teaching there is no self-disclosure, no opening up of oneself in that way. Albert has never asked me a personal question- such a relief for someone who has had seven years of psychoanalysis. Albert says, in effect, I

don't care about any of that. But, then, what does he care about? What is left?

What Albert wants from me is even more intimate than my secrets- than my self, and I will not be able to give it to him until I am free to hide nothing from him. So it is not that there is no self-disclosure. Every time I go in to see him I reveal that I am still hiding.

* * *

No teaching is just adding something new on top of what was there before. Even the person who teaches you fractions is concerned with the self. There can be no learning nor understanding which is not also a coming-into-being, or coming-into-the-light, of the self.

In one sense you can learn something that you did not know before, but in another sense whatever you learn is recognizing what was already there. Knowledge, ideas, techniques, skills, facts, concepts, are not the fundamental substance of any teaching. The "content" of the teaching obscures this.

You might say that in every event of understanding, even in every apprehension, something more fundamental is also being conveyed. That "something" is what makes any apprehension or any understanding possible. You could say that every apprehension is inherently a revelation of mind, obscured by the "content," yet, still implicitly revealed. Perhaps it is this which accounts for the joy we feel at that moment of learning anything. To some degree we are coming into being. But whether it is the "yourself" of the psychoanalyst, the concept of fractions of your grade school teacher, or whatever in between, in putting forward a content, inevitably the teacher does deceive the student. The Zen teacher, extricating his teaching from this deception, turns the whole situation around. He teaches nothing.

* * *

It was deep into the heart of a sesshin when I looked up at the wall and was suddenly flooded with love. I don't know how this is possible, but I loved the wall and the wall loved me back. This was as clear as day. It was then also clear that this love is the source of everything. All of my future life would be devoted to allowing this love to flow unobstructed. The trip that I had been avoiding taking with an aging friend, which I had been dreading because he would be so tedious, and so boring, now appeared to me as easy, effortless. I would just give him the time and attention that he wants because I was now free of any concern for my own entertainment or amusement.

In dokusan, Albert said, "But why do you indulge that love. Why do you attach it to something?"

* * *

The Zen teacher puts the personal, the personality, aside. He puts thinking and the understanding that comes from experience, ideas, and knowledge, aside. With a wave of the hand, he brushes aside all content. There is nothing left, nothing to show, no place to hide, and nothing left to be hidden. How can he do that?

It is his engagement- and his selflessness, which, far beyond your own, unknowable, is the no-self of Hakuin. This is the source of his authority, and his freedom. You can only sit before it in awe; you can only bow to it in gratitude. Now, finally, this is the real work. ❀

De mon esprit à ton esprit



Roger Brouillette

Dans le Larousse, voici la définition que l'on donne au mot Zen: (mot japonais; du chinois chan, du sanskrit dhyâna, méditation): Importante école bouddhiste, originaire de Chine, introduite au Japon au XIII^{ème} siècle et qui privilégie l'enseignement de maître à élève par rapport à celui des écritures.

En peu de mots, vu de l'extérieur, cela rend bien compte de l'importance de cette relation dans notre pratique. Cependant, c'est bien sec et vide pour exprimer ce qu'implique réellement cet enseignement vivant, ce rapport d'esprit à esprit qu'est la relation maître/élève. À vouloir la décrire, la cerner, la mettre sur papier je me rends compte jusqu'à quel point les mots sont impuissants.

Comment expliquer cette incroyable compassion qui habite Albert à chacune de nos rencontres en dokusan? Depuis dix ans déjà que sans relâche il me guide et m'aide à continuer à travailler ce qui fondamentalement ne s'explique pas, ne se définit pas et de toute façon ne se travaille pas. Il y en a qu'il guide ainsi depuis plus de vingt ans. À chacun selon son besoin, selon sa nature, il dispense cet enseignement qui n'en est pas un. À chaque dokusan, complètement disponible, présent, sensible à la moindre nuance, au moindre signe. Si le travail est mou, un grognement d'impatience; si le travail est tendu, une parole d'apaisement. Il le fait même parfois au détriment de sa propre santé comme je l'ai vu à la dernière sesshin, mais sans que cela ne paraisse de quelque façon que ce soit dans l'enseignement qui est donné, dans la présence.

Comment décrire par des mots cette énergie qu'il me donne quand la personnalité flanche et que le désespoir m'étouffe au milieu d'une sesshin? Parfois ce n'est qu'un geste de la main et voilà tout est dit: continue! Parfois ce sont des questions pointues ou très englobantes pour s'assurer que je ne me leurre pas.

Comment rendre compte du profond bouleversement que j'éprouve à chaque teisho au cours d'une sesshin? Impossible! Quand j'approche de cette description, je sens les mots se fendre et se détruire sous l'effort (T.S. Eliot). Une heure au cours de laquelle Albert, au détriment de sa propre pratique, nous ouvre sa gorge pour qu'on y voit son cœur comme disait Mumon. Des dizaines et des dizaines de teisho et chaque fois, ce oui profond qui résonne en moi et qui me permet de continuer une respiration de plus. Comment expliquer tout cela?

Je laisse donc la parole à Mumon:

Un jour, alors que le Bienheureux se trouvait au Pic des Vautours pour prêcher, il tint simplement une fleur devant l'assemblée. Tous ceux présents demeurèrent silencieux ne sachant que faire, sauf le vénérable Mahâkâshyapa qui sourit. Le Bienheureux alors dit: «Je détiens le trésor de l'oeil de la Vraie Loi, l'esprit profond du Nirvâna, l'enseignement exquis de la forme sans forme, la porte subtile du Dharma. Ils ne dépendent pas des mots et des lettres. C'est une transmission spéciale en dehors des écritures. Je les confère maintenant à Mahâkâshyapa».

Mumon ajoute dans son commentaire: «Si vous dites que l'oeil de la Vraie Loi peut être transmis alors le vieux maître au visage jauni et à la voix forte a trompé les simples villageois. Si vous dites que cela ne peut pas être transmis, alors pourquoi seul Mahâkâshyapa a-t-il été approuvé?»

Avec un profond gasshō à Albert Low qui tient la fleur depuis si longtemps. ❀

Quand l'élève est prêt



Carl Pelletier

Quand l'élève est prêt / Le Maître apparaît. C'est la première phrase bouddhiste qui se soit vraiment fait une place dans ma tête. D'un recueil de « mots zen » ouvert au hasard dans un rayon de librairie jusqu'à un coussin rond face au mur, elle a fait avec moi une partie du chemin. Pour une fois, c'était simple, direct et facile à retenir... J'avais été séduit par la beauté de la phrase mais aussi par la façon qu'elle a de durer, de sonner « juste » tout en spiralant d'une drôle de manière vers une zone floue de la pensée. Qu'est-ce que ça veut dire, être prêt? Et qui est le Maître? Quel est donc son rôle?

D'autres lectures ont suivi avec l'impression persistante d'entendre des propos familiers, comme quelque chose qu'on a oublié et qui nous serait remis en mémoire... Et puis un jour une recherche internet sur les centres Zen à Montréal et l'atelier avec M. Low...

Maintenant, qui est ce Maître qui semble être apparu sur mon parcours?

Le maître est celui que je choisis comme étant la personne qui sait, bien que je sache qu'il m'est impossible de vérifier immédiatement la validité de ce savoir. C'est donc celui à qui je donne ma confiance. C'est capital puisque de lui j'attends les réponses et les directives qui doivent m'aider « à faire le travail ». Il est celui que je veux voir comme le modèle de ce que j'aime et de ce à quoi j'aspire, celui à qui je souhaite pouvoir m'exposer hors des mises en scène habituelles et de qui je me dispose à approuver le jugement. Il est celui sur qui je projette bien des désirs mais aussi celui de qui je compte accepter sans réserve la direction.

Étrangement, l'essentiel de ce choix se joue avec quelqu'un que je ne connais pas intimement et qui ne porte pas d'auréole ni ne fait de miracles, en des rencontres de quelques minutes dont la brièveté est accentuée par l'urgence de savoir, le besoin d'honnêteté et la perplexité étourdissante devant mon ignorance des questions apparemment les plus fondamen-

tales. Quelqu'un à qui je ne parle presque pas puisque les romans philosophiques qui me farcissent la tête avant la cloche du dokusan se transforment toujours devant lui en quelques mots banals mâchonnés dans l'espoir d'une approbation...

Et pourtant, je reviens encore vers cette personne dont j'appréhende la rencontre souvent avec impatience bien qu'il m'indique invariablement la direction de ce que j'ai tendance à fuir comme étant détestable.

Parce que c'est bien ça: Il est celui qui sait m'inciter à jeter un regard dans ma perplexité, mes doutes et mes peurs. Celui qui m'invite à ne pas fuir la brûlure de l'humiliation quand le réel passe mes prétentions au feu. Celui qui me propose de recevoir les difficultés du quotidien comme des occasions de laisser tomber les espoirs déplacés. Celui qui m'invite à participer à des seshins avec leurs longues périodes de zazen où je dois faire l'effort de demeurer dans l'ennui claustrophobique ou encore dans les tempêtes de mots qui se lèvent dans ma tête. Celui qui m'invite à demeurer dans la douleur parfois déchirante qui surgit dans la pratique, quand le souffle en devient difficile et que les pensées s'usent à planifier la fuite. Il est celui que j'écoute puisqu'il m'affirme que ce n'est pas impossible, celui de qui j'apprends donc à demeurer dans toute cette souffrance sans autre raison qu'elle constituerait la base de la vie et que si tel est le cas, il devient stupide de la nier.

Au bout du compte il est une Invitation. Invitation continuelle à aimer tout ça et de mieux en mieux, dans le rappel que ça arrive toujours ici, maintenant, à l'instant où cette vie me traverse... En gardant à l'esprit que rien n'est gagné... L'élève doit rester prêt. ✱

Trust and Faith

Bill Byers

Trust

When I first came to practice Zen I was at a dead end. Somehow the methods that I had evolved to steer me through my life had stopped working. These methods involved using my intellect to protect me and control both my inner world and the world around me. It was as though I was surrounded a cloud of ideas and thoughts and I had taken up permanent residence within that cloud. I call it a cloud but the boundaries of my world were rigid and inflexible. Within that world I felt completely self-sufficient, protected, trusting almost nobody.

Events in my life conspired to show me in very dramatic terms that the way I was dealing with life did not work. It was mortality that raised its ugly head and blasted away my protective covering. In my pain and confusion I had the good fortune to stumble across Zen. I immediately and without a doubt recognized the practice as authentic. Zazen was fine but sitting was not enough. There was something else that needed to be done and I could not do it on my own. I would have to trust someone. I can vividly remember the occasion when I decided to trust Philip Kapleau who was my teacher at the time. It was a decisive moment, born of desperation. Without trust in the teacher with whom you are working there can only be an impoverished practice.

Faith

Albert Low and I have had many conversations in and out of sesshin but I would like to say something about a remark he made to me many years ago. It is a remark that I don't remember precisely but the sense of it has stayed with me. It had to do with the value of the "difficult" parts of our personality. Sometimes in practice we have the feeling that we are consciously directing ourselves towards the light. We imagine that we know where we want to go and we set out for that place. In my experience things don't work like that. Our work is rather done in the dark—the light comes of itself. With this notion of heading towards the light we sometimes feel the way

to the light is through the elimination of those parts of our personality that we find objectionable. Albert cautioned me against this tendency. What we find most objectionable may have great value. That terrible ego that so many spiritual people are tearing down is not so far from the destination that they are pursuing.

Sometimes when one is sitting or just when getting up in the morning there is a really heavy, negative feeling. Maybe something comes to mind that you are really ashamed of. Maybe there is a feeling of anxiety or fear. What does one do with this feeling? Often one pushes it away, gets involved in doing something else because the feeling makes you feel irritable. Yet if one can stick with this feeling in Zazen, just letting it be, then it changes. Sometimes it evokes great energy, a vast intensity. Then there are those moments when the negativity just lifts. One moment all was black, there was no hope. The next there is an expansiveness, a light, and one cannot even imagine what that darkness was all about.

This sitting through the negative without thinking one's way out requires faith. Faith is a commodity that is in short supply these days, certainly I find it lacking in myself. Yet faith is not alien to us, it is this faith that has brought us to practice. And what is practice, really, except allowing this faith to grow according to its own logic?

Trust in the teacher does not belong to him, it belongs to us, it is in us and therefore it is really a faith in ourselves. The important teacher is, after all, the inner teacher. The inner teacher is always there but nevertheless, in my experience, there are the moments of darkness when one doubts one's own inner voice. In this darkness it requires faith to go on. But even in the light it requires faith to trust the inner voice. We all know the expression, "If faith then faith." That is, faith is primordial, it doesn't come out of anything else. A teacher is someone who evokes and sustains that faith in anticipation of that time when we shall repay our debt by sustaining our own faith and the faith of others. *

Ma dette spirituelle envers Albert Low

Jean-Claude Décarie

La relation entre un élève et son professeur ou maître spirituel est complexe. Elle se déroule à des niveaux divers qui débordent parfois du cadre purement spirituel.

En me limitant à la dimension plus spirituelle, et plus spécifiquement à la pratique sur les koans, je suis particulièrement reconnaissant face à un aspect de la personnalité d'Albert Low, et cet aspect est son intransigeance.

La pratique est ardue et exigeante et bien que j'aie toujours reconnu et accepté ces faits, j'ai toujours essayé de trouver la solution la plus facile dans mon travail sur les koans. Inlassablement, Albert a toujours rejeté les solutions artificielles que je lui présentais pour rediriger mon interrogation sur les points les plus profonds des koans.

Ayant déjà travaillé avec deux autres professeurs zen, j'avais développé une certaine technique dans mon travail sur les koans. Et rapidement, je m'étais enlisé dans un travail de routine et de formalité. Les koans avaient perdu leur sens profond et, ce qui est plus grave, avait perdu un contact et une pertinence avec ma vie de tous les jours.

Avec une patience immense et sans relâche, Albert est resté intolérant et intransigeant. Ce n'est certainement pas la solution de facilité. Il est beaucoup plus facile de rester sur un plan superficiel et routinier et de concéder à l'élève de petites victoires pour lui permettre de poursuivre son travail spirituel. Je me souviens clairement des propos d'un ancien membre à propos de la pratique des koans. Il trouvait que les koans étaient utilisés comme des bonbons pour maintenir l'intérêt de l'élève dans son cheminement. Un peu comme la carotte qui, placée devant l'âne, le fait avancer. Avec Albert, pas de bonbons, pas de carotte.

Le travail sur les koans avec Albert est un travail qui exige un complet engagement. Il faut tout d'abord s'ouvrir à l'ambiguïté inhérente du koan. Cette ambiguïté est initialement difficile à trouver. Une fois cernée, il faut avoir l'ouverture d'esprit et le courage de la laisser pénétrer au plus profond de notre être.

Cette étape ressemble à l'action d'un acide qui ronge tout ce qui entre en son contact. Quelle résistance j'ai pu offrir face à ce travail. Je n'avais pas (et je n'ai toujours pas) l'humilité d'admettre que ce koan me dépasse complètement et j'essayais (et j'essaie encore) de trouver une solution qui me permette de garder la face et de démontrer mes grandes capacités. Or le travail sur les koans avec Albert n'apporte pas de victoire ou de trophée et on n'apporte pas une solution à un problème. On se laisse transformer par le koan et par la vie.

Combien de fois j'ai essayé de déjouer sa vigilance, très rarement avec succès, toujours pour garder la face. Et je m'étonne encore de la petitesse de mes motivations dans ce domaine. Qu'est-ce que j'essaie de prouver ? Qu'est-ce que j'essaie de protéger à tout prix ? Lorsque j'arrive à abandonner mes mécanismes de défense, quand je cesse de jouer, le travail commence vraiment.

Et restant imperturbable devant toutes mes manœuvres, en ne répondant pas à mes feintes, Albert m'a retourné à moi-même et m'a forcé à vivre une pratique plus authentique et plus sincère. Mes exigences ont grandi et mûri. Tant mieux si le travail en a été d'autant plus ardu.

Merci Albert ❁

People Who Hunger and Thirst for Truth

G. Gurdjieff

I have already said that there are people who hunger and thirst for truth. If they examine the problems of life and are sincere with themselves, they soon become convinced that it is not possible to live as they have lived and to be what they have been until now; that a way out of this situation is essential and that a man can develop his hidden capacities and powers only by cleaning his machine of the dirt that has clogged it in the course of his life. But in order to undertake this cleaning in a rational way, he has to see what needs to be cleaned, where and how; but to see this for himself is almost impossible. In order to see anything of this one has to look from the outside; and for this mutual help is necessary.

If you remember the example I gave of identification, you will see how blind a man is when he identifies with his moods, feelings and thoughts. But is our dependence on things only limited to what can be observed at first glance? These things are so much in relief that they cannot help catching the eye. You remember how we spoke about people's characters, roughly dividing them into good and bad? As a man gets to know himself, he continually finds new areas of his mechanicalness—let us call it automatism—domains where his will, his “I wish,” has no power, areas not subject to him, so confused and subtle that it is impossible to find his way about in them without the help and the authoritative guidance of someone who knows.

This briefly is the state of things in the realm of self-knowledge: in order to do you must know; but to know you must find out how to know. We cannot find this out by ourselves.

Besides self-knowledge, there is another aspect of the search—self-development. Let us see how things stand there. It is clear that a man left to his own devices cannot wring out of his little finger the

knowledge of how to develop and, still less, exactly what to develop in himself.

Gradually, by meeting people who are searching, by talking to them and by reading relevant books, a man becomes drawn into the sphere of questions concerning self-development.

But what may he meet here? First of all an abyss of the most unpardonable charlatanism, based entirely on the greed for making money by hoaxing gullible people who are seeking a way out of their spiritual impotence. But before a man learns to divide the wheat from the tares, a long time must elapse and perhaps the urge itself to find the truth will flicker and go out in him, or will become morbidly perverted and his blunted flair may lead him into such a labyrinth that the path out of it, figuratively speaking, will lead straight to the devil. If a man succeeds in getting out of this first swamp, he may fall into a new quagmire of pseudo-knowledge...

The more a man studies the obstacles and deceptions which lie in wait for him at every step in this realm, the more convinced he becomes that it is impossible to travel the path of self-development on the chance instructions of chance people, or the kind of information culled from reading and casual talk.

At the same time he gradually sees more clearly—first a feeble glimmer, then the clear light of truth which has illumined mankind throughout the ages. The beginnings of initiation are lost in the darkness of time, where the long chain of epochs unfolds. Great cultures and civilizations loom up, dimly arising from cults and mysteries, ever changing, disappearing and reappearing.

The Great Knowledge is handed on in succession from age to age, from people to people, from race to race. The great centers of initiation in India, Assyria, Egypt, Greece, illumine the world with a bright light. The revered names of the great initiates, the living bearers of the truth, are handed on

reverently from generation to generation. Truth is fixed by means of symbolical writings and legends and is transmitted to the mass of people for preservation in the form of customs and ceremonies, in oral traditions, in memorials, in sacred art through the invisible quality in dance, music, sculpture and various rituals. It is communicated openly after a definite trial to those who seek it and is preserved by oral transmission in the chain of those who know. After a certain time has elapsed, the centers of initiation die out one after another, and the ancient knowledge departs through underground channels into the deep, hiding from the eyes of the seekers.

The bearers of this knowledge also hide, becoming unknown to those around them, but they do not cease to exist. From time to time separate streams break through to the surface, showing that somewhere deep down in the interior, even in our day, there flows the powerful ancient stream of true knowledge of being.

To break through to this stream, to find it—this is the task and the aim of the search; for, having found it, a man can entrust himself boldly to the way by which he intends to go; then there only remains “to know” in order “to be” and “to do.” On this way a man will not be entirely alone; at difficult moments he will receive support and guidance, for all who follow this way are connected by an uninterrupted chain.

Perhaps the only positive result of all wanderings in the winding paths and tracks of occult research will be that, if a man preserves the capacity for sound judgment and thought, he will evolve that special faculty of discrimination which can be called flair. He will discard the ways of psychopathy and error and will persistently search for true ways. And here, as in self-knowledge, the principle which I have already quoted holds good: “In order to do, it is necessary to know; but in order to know, it is necessary

to find out how to know.”

To a man who is searching with all his being, with all his inner self, comes the unfailing conviction that to find out how to know in order to do is possible only by finding a guide with experience and knowledge, who will take on his spiritual guidance and become his teacher.

And it is here that a man’s flair is more important than anywhere else. He chooses a guide for himself. It is of course an indispensable condition that he choose as a guide a man who knows, or else all meaning of choice is lost. Who can tell where a guide who does not know may lead a man?

Every seeker dreams of a guide who knows, dreams about him but seldom asks himself objectively and sincerely—is he worthy of being guided? Is he ready to follow the way?

Go out one clear starlit night to some open space and look up at the sky, at those millions of worlds over your head. Remember that perhaps on each of them swarm billions of beings, similar to you or perhaps superior to you in their organization. Look at the Milky Way. The earth cannot even be called a grain of sand in this infinity. It dissolves and vanishes, and with it, you. Where are you? And is what you want simply madness?

Before all these worlds ask yourself what are your aims and hopes, your intentions and means of fulfilling them, the demands that may be made upon you and your preparedness to meet them.

A long and difficult journey is before you; you are preparing for a strange and unknown land. The way is infinitely long. You do not know if rest will be possible on the way nor where it will be possible. You should be prepared for the worst. Take all the necessities for the journey with you. ❀

Albert's Queen's University Address



On May 30, 2003 Albert Low received an honorary Doctor of Laws (LLD) from Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. Three faculty members at Queen's are also members of the Montreal Zen Centre and they nominated Albert for an honorary degree based on his scholarship and extensive publications, and his teaching and community service. Many letters of support from people accomplished in the arts, medicine, social sciences, physical sciences, and business were included in the formal nomination. There was broad support from within and outside the university.

This is a significant honor from a prominent Canadian university and it demonstrates an unusual openness on the part of the university in acknowledging, in this way, both Zen and Albert's many contributions. Congratulations to Albert on this well deserved recognition.

Chancellor Baillie, Principal Leggett, Rector Kayssi, faculty members, parents and invited guests and fellow graduands. I say fellow graduands because, of course, I too am graduating today.

I must confess, when first I heard that this was to happen, I could not help wondering whether I was being honored beyond my merit. Then it occurred to me that perhaps it was not so much I, but the teaching of Zen -- that I am privileged to pass on -- that is being recognized. I do hope so; and would that not show a true breadth of vision, an openness of mind, indeed a courage, that are the hallmarks of a great university?

Zen, as you may know, is now right in the main stream of our society. You can get Zen vitamins, a Zen car (with two 'n's') Zen perfume, Zen soap. We even have a restaurant in Montréal that calls itself Zen. It serves Chinese food and Zen is a Japanese

word. But this is just another of the benefits of multiculturalism

So what is Zen? A monk asked a Zen master that question. The master asked in reply, "Who are you?" Who are you? Who am I? I wonder, have you ever asked yourself this question? I don't mean have you ever asked about yourself, about your interests, about what sort of person you are. But have you ever entered into the mystery of your own being by asking what it means to say, "I am?"

I have asked this question constantly for over forty years, but, if someone were to put the question to me right now, I should have to reply, "I don't know!" I would be in good company though because Bodhidharma, who was the first Zen Patriarch of China, as well as the first patriarch of the martial arts, was asked this same question, "Who are you?" and he too replied, "I don't know."

But then, why am I bothering you with this sort of thing on this most memorable of days?

Because, I believe that it touches on a subject most worthy of remembrance.

Our scientists assure us that everything can, in principle, be known. The socio-biologist E.O. Wilson calls this the Ionian Enchantment. The eminent physicist, Steven Hawkins, looks forward to the day when we shall carry the formula of the world on a T-shirt. Our goal he says is nothing less than a complete description of the universe we live in. Richard Dawkins, the selfish gene man, assures us that life, which once presented the greatest of mysteries, is a mystery no longer: Darwin and Watson have solved it. Nobel prize winner Francis Crick would no doubt agree with this because, according to him, "All our loves and hopes, our joys and pleasures are but the

movement of molecules." And John Horgan, the science writer, wonders in his book *The End of Science*, what shall we do when scientists have wrapped it all up.

Those whom the gods would destroy they first make proud. Or is it mad? In this case does it make any difference?

Zen teaches that we live on an island of the knowable, surrounded by a vast ocean of the unknowable. Much of the island has been discovered, surveyed, and settled. Much remains unknown and still to be explored and the voyage of discovery may well continue down the ages. Even so, however far we may advance the frontiers of the knowable, the great ocean of the unknowable will forever remain uncharted.

You may well ask, "What use has this unknowable?" No use at all. We cannot exploit it, sell it, or even use it to shock and awe our neighbors.

Why speak of it then? Human kind has spoken of it ever since we could speak at all -- in song and dance, in ritual and ceremony, in art and architecture - yes, even in our formulae and graphs. Although unknowable, we can nevertheless know its effects, and these tell us that the unknowable is not simply a blank void or an eternal absence, but a living, dynamic, and creative presence. Some have called it God or the Soul or spirit. For others it is Allah, Brahman, Tao or Buddha.

Now it is fashionable to throw out these words: 'God' or the 'Soul' or 'spirit.' They are old, tired, and decrepit, it is said. They have served their



time, and should be put out to pasture. Maybe so. Words do have a life span, and perhaps these words should be retired. In any case in Zen we hesitate to name the unknowable -- even the name 'unknowable' is suspect. But let us not then butcher them in the abattoirs of ignorance and say that "God," "the soul," "spirit" are just superstitions and that it is time for us to become adults. Tired though

they may be these words have carried us through centuries of meaning and have sustained our civilization through its many trials and triumphs.

Don't then, condemn the unknowable because it is of no use in the clash and clang of the politics of nation and commerce. Don't ignore it either because it forever hides behind the veil of appearance.

Today you receive your degree, the title deed for your stake on the island of the knowable. Congratulations to you all on your achievement, on your tenacity, intelligence and wisdom in having the farsightedness to acquire a fine education. Let me ask you though that, as you go about making your way and your mark in life, do not spurn the unknowable because it does not fit into a handy formula, or does not yield to measurement. Do not scorn it because it forever eludes your ability to grasp and conceptualize. And, above all, do not be afraid of it for its utter darkness. For, after all, the unknowable is what you are. Your are unknowable. ✱

Allocution d'Albert Low à l'Université Queen

Traduction : Michel Boyer

Le 30 mai 2003, Albert Low a reçu un doctorat honorifique de l'Université Queen à Kingston en Ontario. Cette institution compte trois professeurs qui sont aussi membres du Centre Zen de Montréal. Ce sont eux qui ont proposé à l'université de récompenser Albert par un diplôme honorifique pour son savoir, ses nombreuses publications, son enseignement et ses services à la communauté. Pour appuyer cette candidature, ils ont obtenu un grand nombre de lettres de recommandation de la part de personnes issues du milieu universitaire et d'ailleurs, et reconnues dans les domaines des arts, de la médecine, des sciences sociales, des sciences pures et du commerce.

Il s'agit d'un titre honorifique prestigieux décerné par une importante université canadienne qui fait preuve d'une ouverture peu commune par la reconnaissance qu'elle accorde ainsi à la fois au Zen et aux nombreuses réalisations d'Albert. Félicitations à Albert pour cet honneur bien mérité.



Monsieur le chancelier Baillie, monsieur le recteur Leggett, monsieur le vice-recteur Kayssi, mesdames et messieurs les professeurs, parents et invités, et collègues diplômés. Je dis collègues diplômés parce que, bien sûr, je deviens aujourd'hui, comme vous, un nouveau diplômé.

À vrai dire, quand j'ai appris la nouvelle, je n'ai pu m'empêcher de penser qu'on m'honorait bien au-delà de mes mérites. Puis il m'est venu à l'esprit que ce n'est pas tant moi que les enseignements du Zen — que j'ai le privilège de transmettre — qui sont à l'honneur aujourd'hui. J'espère bien que c'est le cas. Ne serait-ce pas là une manifestation de véritable clairvoyance, d'ouverture d'esprit, voire de courage, c'est-à-dire la marque d'une grande université?

Le Zen, vous le savez sans doute, fait maintenant partie de la vie quotidienne dans notre société.

On peut se procurer des vitamines zen, une voiture zen (avec deux n), du parfum zen, du savon zen. Il y a même un restaurant à Montréal qui s'appelle Zen. On y sert des mets chinois, même si zen est un mot japonais. Mais ce n'est là qu'un autre des avantages du multiculturalisme.

Et alors, qu'est-ce que le Zen? Un jour, un moine a posé cette question à un maître zen. En réponse, le maître lui a demandé: « Qui êtes-vous? » Qui êtes-vous? Qui suis-je? Vous êtes-vous déjà posé cette question? Je ne veux pas dire: « Vous êtes-vous interrogé sur vous-même, sur vos intérêts, sur le genre de personne que vous êtes? » Mais vous êtes-vous imprégné du mystère de votre propre être pour vous demander ce que veulent dire les mots: « Je suis »?

Je pose cette question sans cesse depuis plus de quarante ans, mais si quelqu'un devait me l'adresser à brûle-pourpoint, il faudrait que je réponde: « Je ne sais pas! » Par contre, je serais en bonne compagnie, car Bodhidharma, premier patriarche zen en Chine et premier patriarche des arts martiaux, s'est fait poser la même question, « Qui es-tu? », et lui aussi a répondu: « Je ne sais pas ».

Mais alors, pourquoi est-ce que je vous ennuie avec ces questions en cette journée si mémorable?

Parce que je crois qu'elles effleurent un sujet dont il importe au plus haut point d'entretenir le souvenir.

Les scientifiques nous assurent que toute chose peut, en principe, être connue. Le sociobiologiste E. O. Wilson appelle cela l'enchantement ionien. L'éminent physicien, Stephen Hawking, entrevoit avec impatience le jour où nous porterons la formule du monde sur nos tee-shirts. Notre but, dit-il, n'est rien de moins que la description complète de l'univers dans lequel nous vivons. Richard Dawkins, qui nous a fait connaître le gène égoïste, nous assure que la vie,

qui présentait autrefois les plus grands mystères, n'a plus de secrets aujourd'hui: Darwin et Watson les ont révélés. Le prix Nobel Francis Crick en conviendrait sans doute puisque, selon lui: « Tous nos amours et nos espoirs, nos joies et nos plaisirs ne sont que mouvements de molécules ». Et John Horgan, rédacteur scientifique, se demande dans son livre *The End of Science* ce qu'il nous restera à faire quand les savants auront tout expliqué.

À ceux qu'ils veulent détruire, les dieux commencent par donner l'orgueil. Où est-ce la folie? Dans le cas présent, quelle différence?

Le Zen nous enseigne que nous vivons sur une île, constituée de ce qui est connaissable, au milieu d'un vaste océan, qui est inconnaissable. On a découvert, arpenté et colonisé une grande partie de l'île. Toutefois, il en reste beaucoup à connaître et à explorer, et le voyage de la découverte pourrait continuer encore longtemps. Mais peu importe jusqu'où on repousse les frontières du connaissable, le grand océan de l'inconnaissable restera toujours inexploré.

Vous vous demandez peut-être: « À quoi sert cet inconnaissable? » À rien du tout! Nous ne pouvons pas l'exploiter, le vendre ou même nous en servir pour choquer et impressionner nos voisins.

Alors, pourquoi en parler? Les humains en parlent depuis le jour où ils se sont mis à parler — dans leurs chants et leurs danses, dans les rituels et les cérémonies, dans l'art et l'architecture. Oui, on le trouve même dans nos formules et nos graphiques. Bien qu'il soit inconnaissable, nous connaissons néanmoins ses effets, ce qui nous permet de dire que l'inconnaissable n'est pas simplement un vide plat ou une absence éternelle, mais qu'il s'agit bien d'une présence vivante, dynamique et créatrice. D'aucuns l'appellent Dieu ou l'âme ou l'esprit. Pour d'autres, c'est Allah, Brahman, Tao ou Bouddha.

Il est bien vu aujourd'hui de jeter au rebut les mots « Dieu », « âme » ou « esprit ». On dit qu'ils sont vieillis, usés et caducs. Ils ont fait leur temps et devraient être mis à la retraite. Peut-être bien! Il est vrai que les mots ont une durée limitée et il est peut-être temps de mettre ceux-là à l'écart. Quoi qu'il en soit, dans la tradition zen, on hésite à nommer l'inconnaissable — même le mot inconnaissable est suspect. Mais alors, n'allons pas sacrifier ces mots dans les abattoirs de l'ignorance et dire que « Dieu », « l'âme », « l'esprit » ne sont que des superstitions et qu'il est temps pour nous de devenir des adultes. Aussi fanés soient-ils, ces mots nous ont portés à travers des siècles de signification et ont soutenu notre civilisation dans ses épreuves et ses triomphes.

Par conséquent, ne condamnez pas l'inconnaissable sous prétexte qu'il n'est d'aucune utilité face au choc et au fracas des politiques nationales et commerciales. Ne lui tournez pas le dos non plus parce qu'il se cache toujours derrière le voile des apparences.

Vous recevez aujourd'hui votre diplôme, le titre qui vous donne droit à votre part sur l'île du connaissable. Mes félicitations à vous tous, pour vos réalisations, votre ténacité, votre intelligence et votre sagesse, pour avoir eu la prévoyance de vous assurer une éducation de qualité. Mais permettez-moi de vous demander ceci: Tout en vivant votre vie et en y laissant votre marque, ne rejetez pas l'inconnaissable sous prétexte qu'il ne se laisse pas contenir dans une formule commode ou qu'il ne se laisse pas mesurer. Ne le repoussez pas parce qu'il refuse de se soumettre à votre capacité de saisir et de conceptualiser. Et surtout ne vous laissez pas intimider par son obscurité totale. Car, au fond, l'inconnaissable est ce que vous êtes. Vous êtes inconnaissables. ❀

Calendrier 2004

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

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

Janvier / January

Vendredi / Friday 9-11 - - - - - Sesshin de deux jours / Two day sesshin

Dimanche / Sunday 18, 25 - - - - Avant-midi de zazen / Morning zazen

Février / February

Dimanche / Sunday 1, 15, 22 - - Avant-midi de zazen / Morning zazen

Vendredi / Friday 6-13 - - - - - Sesshin de sept jours / Seven day sesshin

Samedi / Saturday 28 - - - - - Atelier / Workshop

Dimanche / Sunday 29- - - - - Séance d'une journée / One day sitting

Mars / March

Jeudi / Thursday 4-7- - - - - Sesshin de trois jours / Three day sesshin

Jeudi / Thursday 11, 18, 25- - - - Cours pour les débutants / Beginner's course

Dimanche / Sunday 14, 21 - - - - Avant-midi de zazen / Morning zazen

Samedi / Saturday 27 - - - - - Atelier / Workshop

Dimanche / Sunday 28- - - - - Séance d'une journée / One day sitting

Avril / April

Jeudi / Thursday 1, 8, 22, 29 - - - Cours pour les débutants / Beginner's course

Dimanche / Sunday 4, 18, 25 - - Avant-midi de zazen / Morning zazen

Vendredi / Friday 9-16 - - - - - Sesshin de sept jours / Seven day sesshin

Mai / May

Samedi 1 - - - - - Journée de travail et Assemblée annuelle

Saturday 1 - - - - - Workday and annual meeting

Dimanche / Sunday 2- - - - - Séance d'une journée / One day sitting

Dimanche / Sunday 9, 23, 30 - - Avant-midi de zazen / Morning zazen

Vendredi / Friday 14-21 - - - - - Sesshin de sept jours / Seven day sesshin

Juin / June

Vendredi / Friday 4-6 - - - - - Sesshin de deux jours / Two day sesshin

Dimanche / Sunday 13, - - - - - Avant-midi de zazen / Morning zazen

Jeudi / Thursday 17-20 - - - - - Sesshin de trois jours / Three day sesshin

Septembre / September

Vendredi / Friday 3-10 - - - - - Sesshin de sept jours / Seven day sesshin

Dimanche / Sunday 12, 19 - - - - Avant-midi de zazen / Morning zazen

Samedi / Saturday 25- - - - - Atelier / Workshop

Dimanche / Sunday 26- - - - - Séance d'une journée / One day sitting

Jeudi / Thursday 30 - - - - - Cours pour les débutants / Beginner's course

Octobre / October

Dimanche / Sunday 3, 17, 24 - - Avant-midi de zazen / Morning zazen

Jeudi / Thursday 7, 21, 28- - - - Cours pour les débutants / Beginner's course

Vendredi / Friday 8-15 - - - - - Sesshin de sept jours / Seven day sesshin

Samedi / Saturday 23 - - - - - Journée de travail / Workday

Samedi / Saturday 30 - - - - - Atelier / Workshop

Dimanche / Sunday 31- - - - - Séance d'une journée / One day sitting

Novembre / November

Jeudi / Thursday 4-7- - - - - Sesshin de trois jours / Three day sesshin

Jeudi / Thursday 11, 18, 25- - - - Cours pour les débutants / Beginner's course

Dimanche / Sunday 14, 28 - - - - Avant-midi de zazen / Morning zazen

Dimanche / Sunday 21- - - - - Séance d'une journée / One day sitting

Décembre / December

Jeudi / Thursday 9 - - - - - Cours pour les débutants / Beginner's course

Vendredi / Friday 3-10 - - - - - Sesshin de sept jours / Seven day sesshin

Dimanche / Sunday 12, 19 - - - - Avant-midi de zazen / Morning zazen

Vendredi 31 (20h00 à minuit) - - Cérémonie du Nouvel An

Friday 31 (8PM to Midnight) - - New Year's Eve Ceremony

The Teacher demands one thing only: clarity and intensity of purpose, a sense of responsibility for oneself. The very reality of the world must be questioned. Who is the teacher after all? He who knows the state in which there is neither the world nor the thought of it, he is the Supreme Teacher. To find him means to reach the state in which imagination is no longer taken for reality. Please, understand that the Teacher stands for reality, for truth, for what is. He is a realist in the highest sense of the term. He cannot and shall not come to terms with the mind and its delusions. He comes to take you to the real; don't expect him to do anything else.

Nisargadatta

