

# ZEN GONGI

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*Apprendre la Voie bouddhique,  
c'est s'apprendre soi-même.  
S'apprendre soi-même,  
c'est s'oublier.  
S'oublier, c'est être attesté par  
tous les dharmas.  
Être attesté par tous  
les dharmas, c'est dépouiller  
corps et esprit, pour soi-même  
et pour les autres.  
C'est voir disparaître  
toute trace d'éveil, et faire  
apparaître constamment cet  
éveil sans trace.*

DOGEN (GENJOKOAN)

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## **Zen Gong**

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# On Pain

THE FOLLOWING is a transcription of a teisho given by Mr. Low during a sesshin, where he was commenting on some observations about pain made by Nisargadatta Maharaj.<sup>1</sup> The teisho opened saying that the same themes, and often the same manner of talking about these themes, appear in all the great traditions. It matters little whether it is a Hindu of the twentieth or of the tenth century, a Chinese of the T'ang era or an American of the 20th century, when teachers talk from their own experience and deepest realization they say things that are remarkably similar. This should give us confidence because it means that they are touching the bedrock, so to say, of human nature. What Nisargadatta has to say about pain is, as you will see, remarkably similar to what Mr. Low has said at various times in the zendo when talking about the same subject.

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Nisargadatta starts off by saying:

*"If you look at yourself in your moments of pleasure or pain, you'll invariably find that it is not the thing in itself that is pleasant or painful, but the situation of which it is a part."*

The pain that comes from a situation in which one is being imposed upon by others is far different from pain that comes from something that one does of one's own accord.

For example there are professional divers, possibly Olympic-class divers, who practice at the swimming-pool quite near the Center, at the Complexe Claude Robillard, where the swimming Olympics were held, and these people put themselves through the most arduous training. All the various kinds of dives they do, the somersaults and backsaults, all kind of spins and twists are extremely demanding and very often the divers hit the water awkwardly. One can only wonder how they can tolerate the kind of pain that must come from that crash as they hit the water. They get no recognition, no applause, no inducement to continue and yet up the stairs they go again, up to the top diving board and off they go once more. Time after time, hour after hour, these people put themselves through it. It is of course the same for

anyone who is doing this kind of Olympic training: running, jumping, gymnastics all require constant effort and to return constantly to work after, and even in the midst of pain.

Yet even so this kind of pain is quite different from the pain suffered for example, if someone were to deliberately strike one. This kind of pain can be intolerable even though it may be much less severe than that which comes during training. Thus it is not the pain itself, but the circumstances surrounding the pain which determines whether it is tolerable or not. This is what he is saying:

*"Pleasure lies in the relationship between the enjoyer and the enjoyed. The essence of it is acceptance. Whatever may be the situation, if it is acceptable, it is pleasant. If it is not acceptable, it is painful."*

This is a remarkable statement and one which we should ponder upon. The determination as to whether something is pleasant or unpleasant, pleasant or painful, lies ultimately in the capability that one has of accepting it: actually accepting, or one might want to prefer to use the expression "to be at one with it". This modification in the wording might seem to be just a question of semantics but it is not

so. When one accepts something, it very often indicates that one has no other alternative: "I don't like it but I suppose I just have to accept it, I just have to put up with it, don't I?" This kind of acceptance is at the basis of the Stoic philosophy. The Stoic philosopher said that life was suffering, but one had to accept the suffering in life, one had to put up with it. And as you probably know, this form the basis of a lot of human attitude toward life, this "I can do nothing about it and so therefore I have no alternative but to accept it."

But Nisargadatta is saying, something much more than just "I have to put up with it." It is more like the line in the Lord's prayer: "Thy will be done." We have used this line as a mantra, and later as a koan for people who are practicing Christians who wish nevertheless to benefit from Zen practice. "Thy will be done" is a very profound statement. On the face of it, it looks as though one is saying: "Well, I accept Thy will, I accept what is happening." But, when one penetrates this statement deeper and deeper, one realizes ultimately that there is no difference between "Thy will be done" and Mu: that, to be totally at one with means that there is just total openness. A bird singing is God's will being done, the wind blowing, the rain falling, the leg hurting, this is all God's will being done, it is all Mu! total openness – This total "Thy will be done" – that is what Nisargadatta is saying.

*"What makes it acceptable is not important: the cause may be physical, or psychological, or untraceable; acceptance is the decisive factor. Obversely, suffering is due to non-acceptance."*

Suffering is due to the unwillingness, or, one might say, to the inability on the part of a particular person to be at one with the situation. If you are one with the devil you can be happy in hell. If you are at odds with the angels even heaven can be painful.

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I remember once there was a father and a son who wanted to come to a seven-day sesshin and I said "No" because as the application was being made by phone I had not met them and therefore, not knowing them sufficiently well, did not know what they were capable of. I said: "I think you will have to come to a four-day sesshin". They put up a lot of protest, said that they had been sitting for a long time, that it would present no problem and so on and so forth. However I insisted and said, "You must come for four days only of the sesshin and in any case, when you come, you must sit for one day and then, at the end of that first day, come to dokusan and only then commit yourself to how much time you want to do, but this must not be for more than four days."

—"Oh, they said, all of this is so unnecessary." Anyway they came. I saw them before the sesshin started, and again said to them: "You must be able to commit yourself to the sesshin, because it can create problems for you in the future and it is not good for other people attending the sesshin, if you break away. So wait until you have done one day and then make up your mind".

—"Oh, we won't break away."

So the first dokusan arrives. First of all, the son comes in, he is in tears: "I don't know if I can go on at all" he says. "This is too much."

So we spend some time talking together and eventually he says:

"I'd like to do a two-day sesshin."

"O.K. you're going to do a two days sesshin."

Then the father comes in: he nearly blows my head off. He is shouting at me: "This is ridiculous! What you are doing to these people is brutal. I don't understand what your attitude is nor what you are doing. I am not staying for another minute."

So, sure enough, they went off. In fact they went off in such a hurry that they forgot half their belongings.

Now, here are two people ( the man was in his forties, I suppose, the son in his twenties ) and they were just unable to tolerate the pain, even for one day. They felt that this pain was beyond anything that they could bear. Furthermore, and this is important, they blamed me or the sesshin or the situation because they were unable to do this. They felt that there was something malicious going on here and that I was acting in a malicious way toward people. This is not a criticism of them, nor is it an attempt to put them down. What it means is that they had separated themselves from the sesshin.

There are other people, much older, much more frail, who come for sesshin after sesshin after sesshin. There is no difference really, you can say, between the physical pain that these two men suffered and what these others, who come back time and time again, suffer. They had no particular physical problems. On the contrary they were quite fit. But they had a wrong attitude – a kind of arrogant, brash attitude towards what was going on – and it was this that prevented them being open sufficiently and able to accept it. It was this whole resistance a total non-acceptance that made the pain intolerable, *not the pain itself*.

The questioner then says to Nisargadatta : *“But pain is not acceptable”.*

The Maharaj says:

*“Why not? Did you ever try? Do try and you will find in pain a joy which pleasure cannot yield, for the simple reason that acceptance of pain takes you much deeper than pleasure does.”*

Let us be quite clear that, as Nisargadatta points out later, we are not simply talking about physical pain. It is the whole aspect of life which we look upon as suffering. As an example we can look at a sesshin during which there is all kinds of pain. There is the pain that comes from being told what to do: there is a certain kind of pain that goes with that. There is the pain that comes from having to sleep in strange surroundings in the company of people you do not know too well. There is the pain of keeping quiet, of having to keep the eyes down, of not being able to talk. And then of course, there is the pain of sitting long periods and the pain that comes from anxiety, rage, and from – well, we can call it – dryness. In a way, this pain that comes from dryness, from the desert, from there-being-nothing-at-all-that-has-any-interest-in-the-situation – ... This pain somehow could be looked upon as the worst of all. A lot of people, when they get faced with that kind of pain, go into a panic. They just can't face it. Indeed it was almost certainly this that got to the father and son. So, when Nisargadatta is talking about pain, just make sure that you don't just consider this to mean physical pain only.

He says:

*“Did you ever try? Do try and you will find in pain a joy which pleasure cannot yield. The acceptance of pain, being one with pain, takes you much deeper than pleasure does. The personal self, by its very nature, is constantly pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain. The ending of this pattern is the ending of the self.”*

In other words, when one is totally one with the pain, then one is going quite contrary to the whole habit patterns established, not only by society but, you might say, by the biological system itself. By working with pain, by being open to pain, then like the carp, a symbol often found in the entrance to Zen monasteries, one is swimming against the stream of life and against the stream of what society accepts as normal and this too is its own kind of pain. But because one is not relying upon simple instincts or habitual reactions that arise from the personality, then one must draw upon resources at a much deeper levels, levels at which the distinctions “me and this,” “me and you,” “me and them” have not yet arisen.

One of the things that people say to me in dokusan is: “You know... if my wife, or husband, or my friend or boss could see me doing this, they would laugh at me. They would think I was silly, stupid, doing this.” In other words, for the people who say this, the pain comes not so much from the actual situation itself, but from being divided against himself or herself, she or he is seeing the situation first of all as it is, and then also through the eyes of another person. This can either be a concrete person, such as a wife or husband, friend or so on, or it can even be society in general “They.” If “they” could see me. This concrete person, or “they” moreover are always negative, cynical, ridiculing, bemused, and so very critical about what is going on. This happens very frequently, not only in connection with things that go on in the zendo but with things in life generally. When some people come up against a situation in life, they don't simply look at the situation as it is, but also see themselves in the situation as though through the eyes of another.

This is one of the things that is so destructive about some teachings of the Church. Many of us were taught that God could see whatever we did. People would actually have this sort of idea built into them, the idea of an ever-watchful and critical eye. Everything that they did would be seen through this ever-watchful eye of God or conscience or whatever they liked to call it. What an attitude like this does, whether the ever watchful eye is God's, or one's spouse's or friend's, is to create a schism, it divides oneself against oneself and this division is held perpetually in place : this means that one is always suffering, that there is a constant background of suffering. One can let go of this kind of suffering that comes from the ever watchful eye, if one can see into it, that is to say know it is there, if one can see the mechanism of it. It is not necessary to work with it, **just let it go.**

This of course is entirely possible once you have brought that eye and all that it stands for out of the closet, that hidden twilight zone in which these eyes are always hidden. Then one can banish it immediately.

He says:

*“The ending of the self with its desires and fears enables you to return to your real nature, the source of all happiness and peace. The perennial desire for pleasure is the reflection of the timeless harmony within.”*

It is so important to realize that our true nature is happiness (or perhaps serenity would be a better word

to use). It is because this is so, because our true nature is serenity that we are constantly trying to find serenity or true nature reflected in experience. In other words this is why we are looking for happiness in experience and why we feel at some deep part of our being that happiness is somehow our right. It is exactly like saint Augustine said: "If you had not already found me, you would not be seeking me". If your true nature was not already happiness or serenity, you would not be seeking serenity. So why not go straight to the source? Why go in a roundabout way? a way that requires that we have the approval of others, that we acquire a certain amount of belongings, or knowledge, or friends, or foreign postage stamps, or other kinds of "brownie marks"? "That would be breaking the rules of the game," someone might say. Somehow that would be cheating to go straight to happiness without all the circumambulation without putting up the target and getting people to accept it as a target, and then getting other people to try to reach the target and then trying to beat all of these to the target (which somehow, in some way seems to be the game). But even so, why not go straight to the source? Why not just work with happiness, with, or better still from, your true nature?

He says:

*"When pain is accepted for what it is, a lesson and a warning, and deeply looked into and heeded, the separation between pain and pleasure breaks down. Both become experience, painful when resisted, blissful when accepted."*

So, in other words, the only way to happiness is through oneness: "to be at one with". The only way to peace is to let go this separation, this division, this it-is-alright-over-there-but-it's-not-so-hot-over-here. It is precisely this that our practice is about.

In this regard people often say to me: "I don't see really quite frankly what the connection is between my following the breath and my inability to really get into life. It seems to me that I am running away from life when I am sitting facing the wall, following the breath. I have got all kind of things going on, problems, fears, difficulties, antagonisms, and I just don't get the connection between getting reconciled with all that and following the breath".

A teacher said that if one is one with a speck of dust you are one with the whole world. To be at one is therefore not a *quantitative* thing. If you are at one with an out breath at that moment you are at one with the whole world. The only way to know this is to experience it for yourself. This, incidentally, is why when you practice Zen it is probably best at first,

that means for the first ten years, not to tell too many people that you are doing it. The fewer, the better. Most people will not understand. They are looking upon it from outside, not from their own direct experience and they see it as bizarre. And naturally there is the possibility that – after having discussed it with them – you will pick up this problem that we have just referred to, of seeing things through their eyes.

To be completely at one with an outbreath, to be totally at one with pain and to look deeply into it will mean that the separation between pain and pleasure breaks down. Both become experience, not *my* experience, *my pleasure, my pain* but just...

The questioner then asks ( and this question is just another example of the tendency of human beings to go to extremes):

*"Do you advise shunning pleasure and pursuing pain?"*

Nisargadatta replies:

*"No, nor pursuing pleasure and shunning pain. Be one with both as they come, enjoy both while they last, let them go as they must."*

**Q** *"How can I possibly enjoy pain? Physical pain calls for action."*

**N** *"Of course. And so does the mental. The bliss is in the awareness of it, in not shrinking or in any way turning away from it. All happiness comes from awareness."*

The bliss is in the awareness of it

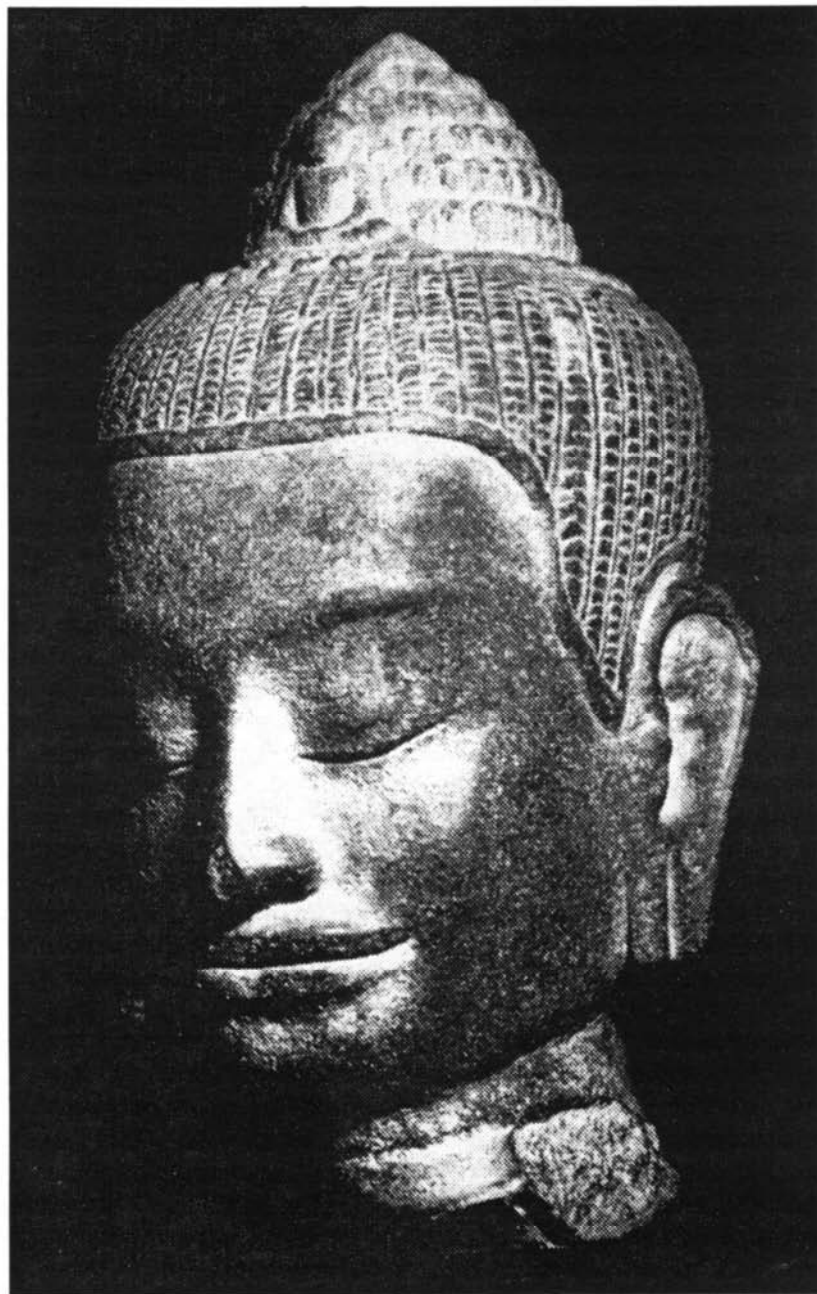
And awareness is One.

Particularly when you are facing the desert feeling, there is a strong tendency to want to stir things up, try to push this way, pull that way, try this, do that... But the thing to do is to realize that the reason that you have got into this desert, is simply because you have let go of the various ways that you have had of entertaining yourself: they have come to an end. What is pleasurable about entertainment is that you can become one with it. This is the whole trick of novelists, poets, painters, people who make films... The great artists are people who can so present a situation that we can become totally one with it: this is what we appreciate in great art or great story telling. So it is in *the being one with* it that the happiness lies, the pleasure lies. It is in the awareness that one brings to it. If you can bring your full awareness, complete happiness is possible. This means that there is not a part of one's awareness in the practice,

and another part scouting around for something more interesting.

When you are faced with this dryness, first of all do not think: "there has to be something wrong with my practice". As long as one feels there's something wrong with the practice, then there is no way that one is going to be able to bring one's full awareness to what is going on at the moment. This is why it is necessary to have great faith, a great faith not only in the teacher and the teaching, but also in yourself. This faith is the faith that *you are capable of discerning for yourself the truth*. Indeed faith is truth and its discernment. The next thing is to realize that, although you may find some way by which to divert yourself for the time being and so escape this particular desert, one day sooner or later there is going to come a desert from which you cannot escape unless you are simply going to pass your life skimming the surface, scarcely living at all. This would be like living in a twilight zone in which ghosts encounter ghosts. A twilight zone where, sadly, most people live.

So there is dryness. One is simply aware of the situation. Very often dryness is accompanied by the inability to breathe very freely: a kind of real restriction of the breath causing it to be shallow, hot and harsh. So there is this restriction also. Don't try to breathe deeply, don't try to change the breath. Be present to the restriction of the breath. Sometimes, there is a great deal of tension around the diaphragm – well, be present to that tension also. Then of course, there are these millions of thoughts flitting in and flitting out like gnats on a summers eve. Again, so there are thoughts. Recognize, without any kind of judgment, that these flitting thoughts have no connection whatsoever with one another nor with the practice at the moment. If you do this quite dispassionately you will find that there is no need to bind them together, no need to take them into account or feel they have any importance at all, no need to claim them as "mine". Above all, be present to any of these odd eyes, these odd gods that hang around in the twilight, ready to criticize.



PRAJÑA PARAMITA, *Cambodge, XI<sup>e</sup>–XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*

Nisargadatta says:

*"All happiness comes from awareness. The more we are conscious, the deeper the joy. Acceptance of pain, non-resistance, courage and endurance – these open deep and perennial sources of real happiness, true bliss."*

"All happiness comes from awareness." This goes to the heart of our practice. When one practices, there are two real directions that one is going: the one, of course, is towards seeing into the clarity, the light of life, but the other is getting to know totally the situation, the forces at work in what we call life, or

personality, or the forces at work in what we call **me**. This can only be done through acceptance of pain, non-resistance, courage and endurance.

Both of these directions make up our practice.

When he says that “acceptance of pain, non-resistance, courage and endurance – these open deep and perennial sources of real happiness, true bliss”, he is not talking here about an heroic attitude. He is not talking about heroes or heroines. This deep courage and this acceptance is non-resistance, simply being one with your practice. If one gets an image of being a hero, then of course the acceptance of pain becomes something quite different: one starts to inflict the whole situation onto oneself. One makes the situation into *something* and acquires a sense of power and superiority by being able to endure. And this is just *not* what we are talking about, just the opposite. If there is any sense of swelling, any sense of inflation that comes as a consequence of this kind of practice, then **beware**. It can lead into its own kind of terrible pain and because it is, so to say, coming up from behind you it is even more difficult to work with.

It is just that “here it is... here it is... This is what I am present to, now”. And it is exactly the same way when one gets into these high blissful states: one doesn’t take off into the never-never. This bliss of experience is not the bliss of One-mind. Being present, not claiming the practice for one’s own, not soaring away in blissful states, this of course, also takes courage, endurance, non-resistance: to be able to just breathe, in and out, not to make a big deal out of it, this is the practice. But this is bliss.

**Q** “Why should pain be more effective than pleasure?”

**N** “Pleasure is readily accepted, while all the powers of the self reject pain. As the acceptance of pain is the denial of the self, and the self stands in the way of true happiness, the wholehearted acceptance of pain releases the springs of happiness.”

This denial of the self... well you can say that there is a denial of the self but it is not really: one is not specifically denying anything. It is not that one is putting the self down, or anything like that. It is much more openness to what is, whereas the self is being closed to everything other than what “I” consider important. So denying the self is, if you like, paying attention to what is, recognizing right from the start that there is nothing in the practice for the personality, nothing the personality is going to gain in the future. It is pure attention.

The word *attention* is an interesting one in that, in French, *attendre* means *to wait*: this waiting is an openness, whereas *attention* in English means *to reach out to*. To *attend to* means to give oneself to something: it’s more active than *attendre*. When we use the word attention therefore, it is with *both* of these aspects in mind: this openness *and* this giving oneself to, both are involved. The word *suffering* has a similar ambiguity, in English it can mean *being in pain* but it can also mean *being open to*: to suffer a situation is to be open to that situation. For example Christ said, “Suffer little children to come unto me.” “Allow little children to come unto me.”

So it is this being present to and being open to at the same time, attending, suffering, that gives the real dynamic quality to our practice. It is not just enduring, it is not just attending to, it is not just grinding on, gritting-the-teeth: well-here-it-comes-again-so-heck-let’s-get-on-with-it... this kind of thing. And it is certainly not sinking in and surrendering oneself, giving up, in some kind of mystical belief that one is surrendering to God. This kind of collapse would be a violation of one’s whole dignity. It’s not that in any way. The dignity the openness, is expressed in the whole of our posture – if we sit with a straight back, a low center of gravity with the head up – this whole dignity of posture itself is a way by which one is one with whatever situation comes up, including the most difficult of pains.

**N** “As the acceptance of pain is the denial of the self, and the self stands in the way of true happiness, the wholehearted acceptance of pain ( totally becoming one with the pain ) releases the springs of happiness.”

**Q** “Does the acceptance of suffering act in the same way?”

(The questioner has been talking about physical pain, although Nisargadatta’s answers apply to suffering as well. Now the question is: “Is what you have been saying true for all kinds of pain, all kinds of suffering?”)

Nisargadatta says:

“The fact of pain is easily brought within the focus of awareness.

(In other words, if you have got a pain in your leg, it’s very easy to bring that in the focus of awareness. Indeed it sometimes hard not to!)

*With suffering, it is not that simple. To focus on suffering is not enough, for mental life – as we know it – is one continuous stream of suffering. To reach the*



*deepest layers of suffering you must go to its roots and uncover their vast underground network, where fear and desire are closely interwoven and the currents of life's energy oppose, obstruct and destroy each other."*

It is this opposition, this conflict, this contradiction that is in the deepest recesses of the personality. It is this contradiction, moreover that provides the basis for this self criticism, for the eyes in the twilight. This contradiction is really the target for the Zen practice. To work with physical pain, well this is necessary. Just in order to get through a sesshin one has to be able to sit with physical pain. But with this *suffering*, this anguish of existence, it is not so obvious that it has to be dealt with. And very often, in sesshin, people skate constantly on the surface, keeping away from the depths where it has its source. This means they are always looking for *reasons* for their suffering. And the reasons for their suffering they believe are things that happened to them in the past. This is the easiest way out, this is one of the things that psychoanalysts have done for us: they have given us this labor-saving device of the "mother" "It's all my mother's fault," or "My father's". Every-time they come up against this anguish, it's because "my mother did this or my father did that". If they are not escaping in this way, then it's... "because, well, I am not the kind of person that can do this kind of work... I am different, I have a different kind of practice to this..." And so it goes on, just skating on the surface. Although people say they desperately want to get rid of these thoughts and be able to plunge in their practice – they will deliberately hold on to them just to avoid that plunge.

This is why we have to see into these contradictions, to see that there is this contradiction inherent in our life, our practice, as well as in our koan ( there must always be a bite in the koan.) And this bite in the koan, this yes-no for example of Mu, matches this yes-no in our depths. Each one of us is good/bad, right/wrong, superior/inferior, and when one sees into this, then more and more one can see that it is pointless to continue any form of self-justification, self justification which is the original mechanism by which we hold our heads above the conflicting waters of existence.

We justify ourselves all the time: anything that is ever said, there is always a justification for it. Almost before the other person's mouth opens, we have already got a reason. The never-ending dreary inner monologue is, 90% of the time, engaged in self-justification.

Now, we are not saying that we should change our behavior, that we should suppress this or that tenden-

cy in life. We should go for its roots. One practices in that confusion, it is in that sense of "I don't know what it is all about", "I can't understand what I am supposed to be doing", "I don't understand what life is about", "my life is not going in the direction that I would want it", all of that, all of that confusion and contradiction **that is it**. People who do know where their lives are going, what they are up to precisely, what they do want out of life, and so on, are very superficial people. They have their careers goals, ambition for the future, they have it all mapped out. All of this is worth nothing. It is said that the devil laughs at the one who plans. To work with that, to enter into that, to be willing to sink right into the middle of it, and stay aware at the same time without losing that awareness, this is really the true practice. And of course, as we mentioned a little while ago, the most difficult time for this kind of practice, is just when this dryness, this sense that everything has turned to dust, scorches your heart.

The questioner asks:

*"How can I set right a tangle which is entirely below the level of my consciousness?"*

Nisargadatta says:

*"By being with yourself, the "I am"; by being present to yourself in your daily life with alert interest, with the intention to understand rather than to judge, in full acceptance of whatever may emerge, because it is there. You encourage the deep to come to the surface and enrich your life and consciousness with its captive energies."*

Just being present without this tendency to judge when one feels : "this is awful". Every now and then, certain aspects of one's life come up and one feels the ugliness of oneself, the awfulness of oneself. Let it be. Don't turn it into something ugly and awful. If you do not do this you will feel a wrenching pain. This is particularly true when one realizes the way that one has tried to force oneself onto situations – not always necessary physically forced, but the way that one has always tried to be the center. This constant demand that one is a special person, this constant demand that one is unique, this need that we have to get the acknowledgment from others of our unique condition, when one really faces up to this... And it's something that pervades the life of everyone. One sees it particularly in nationalities: the Jewish people, the chosen people, and the Americans, the number One. And the Russians, and then the Japanese descending straight from the Sun. And then the Chinese: anyone that is not a Chinese person is a barbarian, and the English, God is an Englishman. And so it goes, it goes through nations, groups and families. It is the most

destructive force that there is. And yet it is that to which we give our attention, more than anything else in the whole of our existence: it is to be unique, it is to be the one. And when we wake up to this we squirm with pain.

To face up to that, even to just acknowledge that to oneself, takes enormous courage. Because once one has opened oneself to this truth, then it means to say already one has dislodged that uniqueness. Already it has lost its potency to some extent. You sees this when people give you orders, tell you what you have to do. There is a kind of anger that comes out. "How can that person tell **me** what to do?" And again it's in all of us, this is us, this is the human being. To be able to open oneself to that, and to the pain that it inflicts on us, this takes a great deal of courage, a great deal of openness, a great deal of work. If we do this however, if we can start melting down this tendency, in Nisargadatta's words, "You encourage the deep to come to the surface and enrich your life and consciousness with its captive energies."

However we must remember that this will to uniqueness is the last thing that goes : one can come to awakening and it's still there. You cut a lot of the roots of it, but a lot of the work after awakening is working just with that. One sees it so clearly, there's so much pain that it can create, once there is clear vision. And particularly when one reviews one's life and sees it as a pervasive factor throughout the whole of life – that the whole life has been devoted to this idol, and to getting every one to pay homage to this idol.

He says:

*"This is the great work of awareness: it removes obstacles and releases energies by understanding the nature of life and mind. Intelligence is the door to freedom and alert attention is the mother of intelligence."*

This is a wonderful statement: "Intelligence is the door to freedom". This doesn't mean to say, of course, the kind of intelligence that is tested in I.Q. Intelligence: this is that light of the mind. This intelligence lights up everything. Someone said, "I am aware of something in me which sparkles in my intelligence; I clearly perceive that it is somewhat, but what I cannot grasp. Yet methinks if only I could seize it I should know all truth." This gives echoes of this intelligence, echoes that you all know so well.

When one gives one's intelligence to something, then it lights that something up. I see, I hear, I feel, but the intelligence is lost in what is seen, what is heard,

what is felt. It is but a sparkle. This is what the Hindu teachers mean when they warn about the senses leading us astray. Before this light of intelligence can light up one's life, it is first necessary to be able to pay attention, to give attention. To attend, to suffer, no longer to seize and grasp what "is important." Our practice is simply summed up in "this intelligence is the door of freedom and alert attention is the mother of intelligence."

This "alert attention"... When we are practicing, we are developing this alert attention that was described earlier when talking about what attention means: giving oneself to, and at the same time being open to. Concentration is involved but at the same time openness, "releasement into." Sometimes of course it is necessary just to concentrate, sometimes all that one can do is just give oneself over. These times, well, you just put your attention in your thumbs, or just count the breath, or bear down in hara.

But then there is this intelligence. When one is working with the koan Mu or Who, is to bring this light of intelligence to bear on Mu. There is one description that I remember being given of a person working with Mu. She said it was like having an acetylene torch. You know, these torches that use a very sharp flame which cuts through metal. It's like having one of these torches in hara, but the flame is not the flame of fire, but the flame of alert intelligence. And to see it in that living way, Harada-roshi used to say: "There is a blind Buddha in the hara: make the blind Buddha see."

These are different ways by which one can talk about this intelligence. It is not enough just to hold on to Mu and batter away, this is not enough. This will bring about a certain kind of strength of mind, it will give a strong foundation for practice but after that, there has to be this burning quality, this questioning quality, this intelligent quality. It can be summed up in "What is Mu?", or "Who am I?" But if one just stays at the words, this is not enough. ■

**"Intelligence is the door to freedom. And alert attention is the mother of intelligence."**

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<sup>1</sup> I AM THAT, Chapter 59, "Desire and fear : Self Centered States"

# L'Éveil de Maura-San O'Halloran

En 27 ans d'existence...

**C**E TEXTE est la traduction d'un article publié en février 1992 dans la revue *Commonweal* de New York. Il relate l'histoire récente d'une jeune Américaine de souche irlandaise et catholique qui a pratiqué le Zen dans un monastère japonais et y a connu un profond éveil. Elle est morte à l'âge de 27 ans. La mère de cette jeune femme signe l'article. C'est un témoignage extrêmement encourageant et réjouissant car il nous permet de voir ce qu'il est humainement possible de réaliser dans un très court laps de temps.

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Au cours des huit dernières années, un petit nombre de visiteurs se sont rendus régulièrement dans un monastère bouddhiste du Nord du Japon pour voir la statue d'une jeune Américaine de souche irlandaise qui a vécu à cet endroit au début des années 80. Durant ses trois ans de formation zen à Iwate et à Tokyo, cette jeune Américaine a été connue sous le nom de Maura-san, ou par son nom bouddhiste de Soshin-san. En 1982, elle est devenue maître zen, et six mois plus tard, elle mourait en Thaïlande. C'était ma fille.

En 1983, j'ai été invitée à me rendre au Japon pour la consécration de sa statue de Kannon, cérémonie qui indiquait qu'elle était devenue, dans l'esprit des gens de l'endroit, identifiée à Kannon, la Bodhisattva de la compassion. En puisant dans les journaux intimes qu'elle m'a fait parvenir avant d'entreprendre son dernier voyage, je vais tenter d'expliquer comment ma fille, d'origine bostonnaise et de tradition catholique, est maintenant connue au Japon comme Maura-Kannon, une Bodhisattva, une sainte bouddhiste.

La dernière photo de Maura a été prise en face d'un temple à Bangkok, juste avant qu'elle ne s'embarque dans l'autobus où elle devait trouver la mort, sur la route de Chang Mai. On voit une grande jeune femme de 27 ans, habillée d'une robe noire de moine, les yeux bleus et un sourire radieux. Comment cette fille d'une mère américaine et d'un père irlandais, qui a étudié au couvent du Sacré-Coeur et au Trinity

College de Dublin, est-elle devenue non seulement un maître zen mais une sainte bouddhiste ?

Comme je suis sa mère, je peux parler en toute confiance de la formation culturelle occidentale et catholique de ma fille, mais quand j'essaie d'analyser les changements qui se sont produits chez-elle au cours des trois dernières années de sa vie, je dois me placer d'un point de vue extérieur. Même si j'ai fait de grands efforts pour comprendre – et j'ai acquis quelques lumières – mon « illumination » personnelle est toujours incomplète.

Dans son journal, Maura ne mentionne jamais sa naissance et sa jeunesse à Boston. Pourtant, le milieu de la Nouvelle-Angleterre et particulièrement sa grand-mère dans le Maine ont autant contribué à sa formation que ses quatorze années passées en Irlande. Aînée de cinq soeurs et frères, le rôle de « second parent » qu'elle a dû assumer à la mort soudaine de son père a hâté chez elle une maturité que peu d'adolescentes expérimentent. En tant que mathématicienne et linguiste, elle s'est distinguée à l'école et au collège, mais c'est par sa sagesse et sa compassion qu'elle a révélé tôt les promesses d'une spiritualité peu commune. Rien pourtant dans son éducation conventionnelle et typiquement classe moyenne à Boston et à Dublin ne laissait présager, dans le cours normal des événements, le rôle spécial qu'elle était pour jouer dans l'histoire du bouddhisme zen japonais.

Son intérêt pour la méditation peut servir de clé, même si cet intérêt n'était pas rare parmi les jeunes de son âge dans les années 70. Dans notre maison de Dublin à cette époque, on pouvait souvent l'apercevoir assise dans la position du lotus, calmement centrée en elle-même, ne prêtant aucune attention au téléphone, à la télévision ou à la famille. Elle avait la capacité de se concentrer totalement sur ce qu'elle faisait et je ne doute pas un instant qu'elle devait cela, en partie, à ses habitudes de méditation. Le fait d'être une femme l'a probablement empêchée d'envisager sérieusement une vie de méditation dans un monastère catholique, mais je ne l'ai jamais entendue exprimer aucun regret quant à sa position en tant que femme au sein de l'Église. Elle n'avait pas d'amertume, mais elle avait un sens aigu de la justice sociale qui la rendait quelquefois impatiente devant les obstacles institutionnels au développement humain. Son besoin de justice sociale s'est concrétisé au cours de protestations étudiantes, dans du travail social bénévole à la fois à Dublin et au Pérou, dans le syndicalisme et dans ce que j'appellerais une sorte de pauvreté spontanée. Cette dernière attitude l'a amenée à un tel détachement vis-à-vis des choses matérielles, notamment vis-à-vis des vêtements à la mode, qu'elle avait souvent l'air vraiment pauvre (bien des années avant que le « look pauvre » devienne du dernier chic). Elle se limitait volontairement à un budget très serré.

Lorsqu'elle est entrée dans son monastère au Japon à l'hiver 1980, le mode de vie spartiate qui était le sien a dû l'aider à accepter sans se plaindre la nourriture étrange, le langage et les coutumes différentes, et les courtes heures de sommeil sur le plancher d'un temple glacé. Mais peut-être que sa plus grande adaptation a été simplement d'être une femme jeune et jolie dans un environnement non seulement totalement étranger au sien mais aussi si traditionnellement masculin.

Le bastion masculin du temple de Tokyo a pu apparaître comme un changement rafraîchissant pour

Maura qui a grandi au sein d'une maisonnée très féminine (une mère, quatre soeurs et un jeune frère), et il semble qu'elle soit devenue une sorte de soeur honoraire pour tous les moines. Sa relation avec le maître, qu'elle appelait Go Roshi (maître), avait de toute évidence une importance primordiale pour Maura et sans aucun doute, l'attention constante et paternelle qu'il lui portait lui a permis d'atteindre l'éveil aussi rapidement et de continuer à pratiquer le Zen dans les mois qui suivirent son éveil.

En Go Roshi, elle a trouvé l'image du père qu'elle a perdu à l'âge de quatorze ans, mais ses sentiments pour lui, tel que son journal le révèle, étaient beaucoup plus intenses que les liens habituels entre père et fille. Il était devenu pour elle un professeur/maître dans le vrai sens du terme, même si ses *teishos*, qu'elle transcrivait, montrent qu'il lui était inférieur intellectuellement. L'intense attachement qui les liait m'apparaît encore presque inexplicable étant donné leur différence d'âge, de sexe, de nationalité et de philosophie politique. En tant qu'instructeur zen il était de toute évidence près du génie et il apparaît clairement que la barrière du langage et de la culture qui les séparait a été vite surmontée par son habileté à lui et sa détermination à elle.

Lorsque je me suis rendue au Japon en 1983 pour la consécration de la statue, je n'ai pu m'empêcher de voir que, malgré nos désaccords non exprimés dus à nos visions différentes de Maura, Go Roshi et moi étions unis dans notre douleur commune de sa perte. Je me suis aussi rendue compte qu'il serait injuste de ma part de blâmer Go Roshi pour la « défection » de Maura – si on peut parler de défection dans ce cas. Son choix avait été le choix libre d'une femme mûre, et l'influence de Go Roshi sur elle n'était pas la sorte d'influence malsaine qu'exercent les « chefs de secte ». Il était et est encore un homme fort respecté dans sa profession et au sein du bouddhisme. Il n'aurait certainement pas exercé une telle influence sur

elle, si elle n'avait pas d'abord été favorable au type de formation très exigeante qu'il dispensait.

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Dans son journal intime, Maura retrace les étapes qui l'ont amenée à devenir une disciple du Zen. Son choix d'un temple petit et vieux, perdu au milieu d'un quartier surpeuplé de Tokyo, semble avoir été le résultat du hasard. Apparemment, elle croyait que le maître parlait anglais. Comme la plupart des débutants, elle a reçu le koan « Mu » à résoudre. Elle s'est si immédiatement et si totalement plongée dans son koan qu'elle est devenue presque insensible à la souffrance et aux distractions, déterminée qu'elle était à devenir une avec Mu. Plusieurs semaines après avoir vécu Mu, nuit et jour, elle croyait l'avoir résolu quand Go Roshi lui a rappelé avec rudesse qu'elle devait continuer à travailler. Sa déception, ajoutée à sa nostalgie du foyer durant le temps de Noël, fut la cause de son premier sérieux recul. Dans son journal, elle écrit :

« Les larmes me brûlent les yeux... Aujourd'hui c'est Noël, un jour comme tous les autres. Même le bureau de poste est ouvert. J'ai décidé que la vie monastique n'était pas pour moi. J'aime trop la vie pour me renfermer comme ça. Je me donne six mois, le temps de travailler sur moi-même... Je crois que je vais quitter cet été, mais je vais continuer à étudier le Zen à Paris. »

Cette idée est cependant vite oubliée quand elle prend le train pour rejoindre le nouveau temple du maître, Kannonji, au Nord, dans la préfecture de Iwate. Elle s'y rend pour le « takuhatsu » d'hiver, rituel qu'elle décrit ainsi :

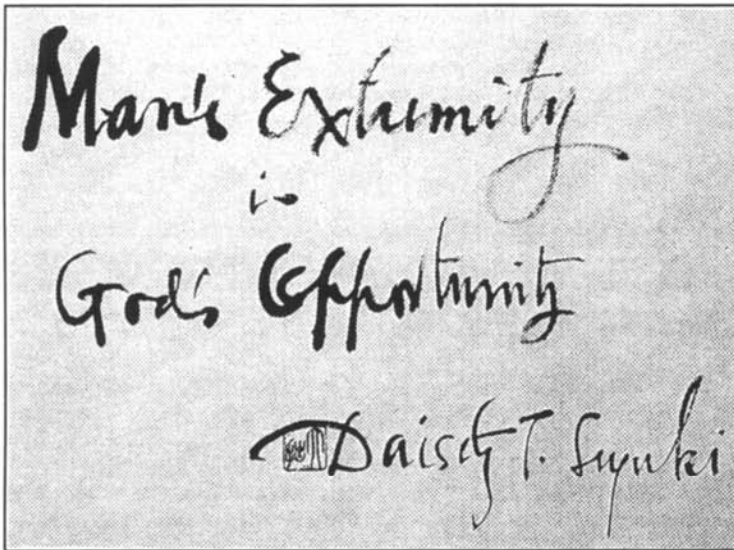
« Takuhatsu – Avec nos bols et nos clochettes de mendiants, nous marchons lentement dans les rues de Morioka, dans l'eau froide et la neige, chaussés de sandales de paille, en sonnant nos clochettes et en récitant nos chants. Les vieilles femmes font glisser les panneaux de leur porte, jettent une pièce dans un

bol et attendent, la tête courbée et vêtues d'un long tablier, la bénédiction du moine. Quelquefois elles ont le souffle coupé par la surprise en me voyant, moi, une femme, une *gaigin*. Quand je marche, que je ne fais que marcher, en récitant les chants, sans me demander quelle heure il est ou sans observer les portes, je suis très heureuse. »

À la fin de la semaine du « takuhatsu », elle retourne à Tokyo continuer sa formation sous la direction de Go Roshi, luttant toujours avec son premier koan : « Les choses sont-elles Mu ou U ? (existent-elles ou non ?) Les vagues sur l'océan sont séparées mais les mêmes. Quand les vagues descendent, elles ne disparaissent pas, elles ne cessent pas d'exister... pourtant elles le font. Elles ne sont plus les vagues mais l'océan, ce qu'elles étaient de toutes façons. N'est-ce pas la mort ? Et Mu est U et Bodhidharma peut dire que le chien n'a pas la nature du Bouddha. »

Plusieurs jours plus tard, elle travaille toujours sur son koan : « Je me lève et je me rends au zendo à 4hres. Ce n'est pas si difficile. J'essaie le nouveau Mu que Jiko-san m'a enseigné. C'est plus ouvert. Je préfère cela. Je redresse la tête en disant Mu... C'est une obscurité chaude, enveloppante comme un ventre, partagée avec je ne sais qui. C'est calme et réconfortant. Je vais m'asseoir chaque matin dans cette tranquillité. »

En mars, sur une impulsion du moment, elle décide de se faire raser les cheveux comme les autres moines, et elle constate que sa nouvelle tête chauve ne la dérange pas du tout. Au cours de ce même mois, des psychologues viennent tester la peau des moines et leur respiration durant la méditation. Ils découvrent qu'elle ne respire que trois ou quatre fois par minute durant la méditation, alors qu'on compte treize respirations à la minute normalement. Ils estiment que, pour en arriver à un tel contrôle, elle doit pratiquer le zazen depuis des années. Pourtant, elle ne pratique que depuis trois mois.



CALLIGRAPHIE, D.T. Suzuki, 1965

Le 10 mars elle écrit : « Ces jours-ci, mon mental est beaucoup plus calme. Il est loin d'être vide, mais plus tranquille... J'ai été si heureuse dernièrement, mais il y a encore de l'attachement. C'est pourquoi j'ai bien peur que si je quittais ici, la paix aussi me quitterait. Quand je cesserai de m'agripper à la paix, alors là il y aura la véritable paix. »

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Ses tâches quotidiennes de nettoyage deviennent des occasions d'appliquer les préceptes zen. « Quelqu'un a dit que l'on doit prendre soin des choses simplement parce qu'elles existent. Cette idée m'est venue tout en balayant le plancher. Dans le tas de poussière, il y avait seize grains de riz et deux petites bestioles grouillantes qui n'avaient pas à mourir. Je n'avais aucun sentiment de bien ou de mal. »

Après six mois d'entraînement intensif, en mai 1980, il se produisit un événement marquant au cours d'une sesshin. Elle était en dokusan avec Go Roshi et voici ce qui se passa :

« J'ai la tête vide et je me sens découragée... Je pratique Mu devant lui de toutes mes forces, je me redresse et j'expire Mu à fond jusqu'à ce que ma tête touche le plancher. « Encore », dit-il en anglais. (Il ne parle pas l'anglais mais je n'enregistre aucune surprise.) Je le fais. « Encore une fois, dit-il. » Ma seule pensée est qu'il pourrait continuer comme ça pendant des siècles. Soudain il saute sur moi et il me saisit. « Ce corps est *muji*, cette tête, ces yeux, ces oreilles. » Je me découvre en train de rire et de crier *muji*, et tout autour de moi... » Le coeur est *muji*, dit-il en me frappant la poitrine, et je réponds « Le coeur de Go Roshi *muji* », en le frappant moi aussi. Nous nous étreignons. « *Kensho shita* », dit-il (c'est l'éveil). Je suis étonnée. J'étais trop consciente de moi-même pour savoir que c'était un kensho. Je l'ai su seulement en sortant lorsque j'ai regardé autour de moi et que j'ai réellement vu Mu. J'ai soudain compris que l'on doit prendre soin des choses uniquement parce qu'elles existent. Nous n'avons pas une valeur plus grande ou plus petite. Au souper, j'entendais dire autour de moi : « *Maura-san go kensho itashimashita* » (Maura a atteint l'éveil).

Elle venait de vivre cet événement décisif qui pour certains peut prendre des années avant de se produire et que d'autres ne connaissent jamais.

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Même si Maura avait atteint son but, sa formation ne s'est pas arrêtée là. En fait, elle devint même plus rigoureuse. Elle fut transférée à Kannonji et connut un mode de vie rustique qu'elle adora. Son travail dans le jardin du temple lui procurait une sorte de formation supplémentaire agréable :

« Je plante des légumes, construis un réservoir à compost et prépare de nouvelles couches. Je ressens une telle paix à bricoler comme ça dans le jardin avec toutes ces petites bestioles laides et visqueuses qui se tortillent. Les créatures qui creusent et fertilisent le

jardin ne valent pas plus et pas moins que moi. Je leur porte attention maintenant, j'essaie de ne pas les déranger, et je les ramène dehors quand je les trouve à l'intérieur... Je suis très, très, très heureuse.»

À ce moment, elle commençait à être une sorte de célébrité locale et se disait un peu ennuyée par les interruptions des gens des médias :

«Le dernier jour du sesshin, les gens de la télévision sont venus me filmer. Ils étaient fascinés et déconcertés par ma chambre (que j'atteins en grimpant une échelle étroite). Je les aime bien mais je me sens un peu stupide de parler de moi-même. Après leur départ, j'ai repensé à leurs questions (« Pourquoi étudiez-vous le Zen ? »), et il m'est apparu que ce n'est pas une chose que j'ai décidé de faire de façon délibérée, mais plutôt de la même façon dont je sais que le lundi suit le dimanche. Inévitable.»

En août, elle prit congé de la vie monastique pour se rendre dans le Maine et à Dublin assister aux mariages de ses soeurs. À son retour cependant, elle constate que sa concentration a faibli et après avoir traîné au lit un matin, elle se réprimande :

«Aujourd'hui, j'étais dégoûtée de moi-même. Mon zazen n'est pas assez bon ou assez fort pour que je me permette de manquer une séance de méditation. En fait, mon zazen semble très mauvais. Je sais que ce jugement, bon zazen/mauvais zazen, est une création de mon imagination, mais cela reflète bien où j'en suis, c'est-à-dire un état pas très avancé. Alors, au travail.»

À propos du *takuhatsu* qu'elle refait une deuxième fois, elle écrit ceci :

«L'an dernier, j'ai survécu uniquement en me promettant « Jamais plus ». Maintenant, c'est aussi douloureux mais c'est comme si ça n'avait pas d'im-

portance. Je sens que je pourrais continuer et continuer. Je travaille dur. Le matin, je fais *bupan*, je travaille trois heures (*takuhatsu*), je me repose une demi-heure, ensuite *soji* (ménage)... À tous les deux jours, je fais la cuisine. Je me lève le matin à 3h30 pour faire *zazen*. Le soir aussi. »

Durant le *takuhatsu* avec les moines à travers les rues de Morioka, Maura remarque que « à plusieurs occasions, quand on fait une pause, les gens nous donnent du thé, des toasts, des gâteaux de riz ou des pâtisseries. Leur goût est tellement bon, c'est incroyable! J'aimerais pouvoir toujours savourer comme ça chaque bouchée, chaque gorgée. » Elle conclut en exprimant sa gratitude pour ces gens généreux dont les contributions soutiennent le temple et lui permettent de pratiquer. « J'ai une dette à leur endroit, je leur dois ma pratique... C'est une dette énorme que j'ai tendance à esquiver. »

Elle connaît aussi des moments plus légers, des moments d'insouciance joyeuse :

« Je suis très contente d'être jeune, pas seulement mentalement (comme je le sens quelquefois) mais aussi physiquement. Après avoir pelleté la neige au soleil, mon corps se sentait fort, droit et jeune. Je marchais dans la neige à grandes enjambées, la pelle sur l'épaule et les cheveux au vent; c'était merveilleux. »

(Incidentement, ses cheveux avaient suffisamment repoussé pour lui donner une apparence convenable aux mariages de ses soeurs, mais elle les a rasés à nouveau avant sa cérémonie de graduation.)

Au sesshin de mai, le maître offre à Maura de lui donner le temple de Kannonji si elle accepte d'y vivre et d'épouser un des moines, Tetsugen-san.

« Presque convaincue, gagnée par l'enthousiasme communicatif de Go Roshi, je me suis retrouvée en

train d'approuver de la tête – tout, n'importe quoi était OK. Je veux... Non, ce n'est pas une vie pour moi... Ses pressions se faisaient insistantes, très insistantes. J'étais déchirée d'avoir à lui refuser... »

En larmes, Maura quitte le dokusan et en retournant au zendo, elle s'effondre :

«... mes jambes m'ont lâchée. J'ai eu une faiblesse. Autour de moi, tout le monde s'agitait. Je ne comprenais pas. Tout ce que je voulais c'était une tasse de thé. J'essayais de les calmer et par deux fois j'ai essayé de me relever, mais sans succès. Ils étaient inquiets, ils me massaient les pieds et discutaient de remèdes. Quelque chose m'a lâchée, un énorme poids oppressant dont je ne savais pas l'existence jusqu'à ce qu'il me quitte. Je me sentais si légère. Je riais et je pleurais. Euphorie. Ils étaient alarmés. Je les rassurais en disant que je ne m'étais jamais sentie aussi bien de ma vie. Ma respiration s'est arrêtée. Mon esprit n'avait jamais été aussi clair et aussi lucide. J'entendais les voix de très loin. J'étais dans un paradis de cristal. Galli me criait de respirer. De quelque part, j'ai entendu ma voix répondre doucement « *Hai* ». Je devais leur montrer que j'étais bien. Je me suis tirée de cet état, je me suis assise et me sentais diablement normale. Ils étaient soulagés. La seule chose que je voulais c'était de faire zazen. C'est ce que j'ai fait, mais j'étais trop fatiguée pour que ce soit vraiment profitable. »

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Je ne m'y connais pas assez en psychologie clinique pour prétendre expliquer cet épisode dramatique qui ressemble si peu à Maura, une fille forte et sensée. Mais à mon avis, elle a dû réagir au fait que le maître exigeait trop d'elle à ce moment-là. Même si elle détestait avoir à lui opposer un refus et qu'elle s'était entraînée à dominer son ego, son ego s'est quand même affirmé dans ce choc de deux volontés, au prix d'un bref effondrement physique. À la suite de cet événement, Go Roshi a finalement accepté sa décision

de quitter le Japon à la fin de sa formation et a cessé ses tentatives pour la convaincre de se marier. Plus tard au cours de l'été, elle écrit :

« Il y a des jours où je me sens comme si j'étais près d'une sorte de réveil tant ma conscience est spontanément, réellement différente, et qu'elle se perd dans de menues tâches. D'autres jours comme aujourd'hui, des jours plus cyniques, je crois être plus près d'un sommeil... J'ai 26 ans et j'ai l'impression d'avoir vécu ma vie. Étrange sensation, presque comme si j'étais près de la mort. Tous les désirs, les ambitions, les espoirs que j'ai pu entretenir ont été accomplis ou se sont spontanément dissipés. Je suis totalement contente. Bien sûr, je veux aller plus profondément, voir encore plus clair, mais même si je ne devais connaître que cet éveil superficiel, je serais plutôt satisfaite. Je pense au long hiver froid qui s'annonce et non seulement c'est bien, mais je sais que je vais l'apprécier. Tout m'apparaît merveilleux. Même les situations indésirables et douloureuses possèdent une beauté poignante et exaltante. Alors dans un certain sens, je sens que je suis morte. Je n'ai rien de plus à obtenir pour moi-même, rien de plus pour donner un sens à ma vie ou pour la justifier. À 26 ans, un cadavre vivant et quelle vie!... S'il me reste cinquante ou soixante ans à vivre (qui sait?), je veux les vivre pour les autres. Y a-t-il autre chose à faire avec sa vie ? Non pas que je m'attende à changer le monde ou même un seul brin d'herbe, mais me donner moi-même est tout ce que je peux faire, comme les fleurs qui n'ont pas d'autre choix que de s'épanouir. Pour le moment, je n'entrevois rien de mieux à faire que de donner aux autres cette liberté, cette félicité, et y a-t-il un meilleur moyen que le zazen ? Je dois donc pénétrer de plus en plus profondément et travailler très fort, non plus pour moi, mais pour tous ceux que je peux aider. »

Maura emploie souvent l'expression « pénétrer plus profondément » pour décrire ses efforts durant le zazen. Au cours de mes lectures sur le Zen, j'ai ren-



contré des auteurs autant chrétiens que bouddhistes qui établissaient une distinction entre deux types de gens. Ceux dont la conscience est large mais superficielle (ce qui comprend la plupart d'entre nous), et ceux dont la conscience est étroite mais profonde. Ces derniers, on les appelle des mystiques parce qu'ils pénètrent profondément, acquièrent de la sagesse plutôt que de la connaissance et cherchent une réalisation personnelle à travers une forme de méditation telle que le Zen. Même si je regretterai toujours que Maura ait eu à chercher si loin à l'extérieur de sa propre tradition pour satisfaire aux exigences de son tempérament « vertical », j'accepte ce qu'elle a appelé « l'inévitabilité » de cette décision.

À l'automne de 1981, j'ai eu l'occasion de juger par moi-même, lors de mon premier voyage au Japon, de l'effet qu'avait sur Maura cette immersion dans le Zen. J'avais toujours des réserves quant à son choix (Maura le savait, mais elle disait que c'était un « choc culturel »). Par contre je pouvais constater que son bonheur était authentique et qu'elle le devait en grande partie à son abandon total à la vie monastique zen. En dépit de mon ignorance de la langue, je suis revenue de ce voyage impressionnée par la bonté manifeste de ses nombreux amis japonais et de ses compagnons moines. Dans toute ma vie, j'ai rarement rencontré autant de chaleur, de sainteté et de générosité.

Peu de temps après sa mort, j'ai reçu des lettres de condoléance des amis de Maura et de ses compagnons moines japonais, parmi lesquelles se trouvait la suivante, écrite par son maître zen : « Le 8 décembre 1979, Maura O'Halloran est entrée à Toshōji Doairyo et nous avons eu une cérémonie Tokudo (cérémonie « d'investiture ») le 10 décembre. Son nom Tokudo était Daigo Soshin Hikyuni. À partir de ce jour, elle commença un rigoureux apprentissage. Le 5 janvier 1980, à 6h30 du matin, elle quitta la gare de Ueno en direction de Kannonji, en compagnie de Sato Jiko et de Dote Tessen. Là, elle s'entraîna pendant 30 jours

dans un strict *kan-shugyo* (entraînement dans le froid glacial). Il faisait 20 degrés celsius sous zéro à Morioka lorsqu'elle suivit son entraînement. Elle est retournée à Toshōji le 6 février.

Quand j'ai eu ma cérémonie Tokudo, à l'âge de dix ans, mon maître, Fuchizawa Chaki disait : « Les moines zen doivent travailler vingt heures par jour, et dormir trois heures. » C'est exactement ce que Maura a fait.

Notre grand maître Dogen s'est rendu en Chine et au mont Tendo pour mille jours, travaillant très fort toute la journée et méditant la nuit. Il dormait de deux à trois heures dans la posture du zazen. Maura a fait la même chose. Elle était le Dogen moderne.

Maura a atteint l'éveil le premier jour du sesshin du printemps à Kannonji, le 2 mai 1980. Par la suite, elle méditait de deux à trois fois par jour, et elle a résolu tous les koans. Son Hishinsai (cérémonie de graduation) s'est tenu le 7 août 1982.

Au sesshin d'octobre, elle a demandé de travailler à la cuisine, ce qui lui fut accordé. Le sesshin terminé, elle quitta le Japon le 9 octobre. Le 25 octobre, j'ai reçu un télégramme international m'informant que Maura était morte dans un accident en Thaïlande le 24...

En 27 ans d'existence, elle a réussi ce qui a pris 80 ans à Shakuson. Elle a été capable de compléter l'entraînement de mille jours de Dogen. Elle a alors immédiatement quitté cette vie pour commencer à travailler à la libération des êtres dans une autre vie! Qui d'entre nous a connu une Bouddha aussi courageuse et aussi énergique que Maura? Il m'est impossible d'exprimer mon étonnement.» (Han Tekkyu. Lettre écrite le 27 octobre, à onze heures du soir, pendant que j'observe la lune du onzième jour). ■

## Looking Back

Frequently when driving home to Kingston from a sesshin I remember the times when I started practising.

It was 1987, I was 30 years old. I lived in Germany, my home country, in a mid-size town and worked full time as an Occupational Therapist in a hospital. Life had been "easy" in a way, but also somewhat empty and in the spring of that year suddenly chaos had begun. Both my physical and emotional life were in turmoil. There was a lot of anxiety, fears without obvious reasons. Often I hardly managed to carry out my daily routines. Nobody seemed to know why I was in such a condition. Fortunately a good friend of mine had invited me to spend a month with her and her family in Canada and I gladly accepted. The stay in the countryside north of Kingston allowed me to settle down somewhat and to find some rest. I got to know some of her friends and at the end of this month one of them, who was involved with practising Zen, showed me how to do zazen. Never before had I been interested in meditation nor had I read anything about it. My upbringing was not very religious in a genuine way. I basically did not feel connected to any religion or faith.

After my return to Germany life more or less went on the same like it had before. Yet after two weeks I remembered the meditation and in my desperation decided to give it a try. The first attempts even caused a rise in anxiety and tension. It was almost unbearable to sit for the twenty minutes. But somehow I continued to sit almost every day and very gradually the anxiety would decrease.

Back then I lived together with my brother in an old house with wood stoves. In the winter we would only heat the kitchen during the week. This meant I would roll out my blanket in front of the kitchen door, the only accessible wall-space, and do zazen in the evening before my brother would come home. The image of me sitting like this did not help to alleviate the feeling of craziness I already had from time to time. Nobody knew about my attempts. I did not have anybody to talk about all the things that started to happen while I was sitting. There was no Zen-group I knew about and probably I would not have had the courage to join at that time. The only connection I had was this friend in Canada who had in-

troduced me to the whole thing and who was already connected to Albert Low. From him I received some more instructions and reinforcements by mail, which helped me keep going.

Yet probably the most important reason to continue was that zazen to me was the thread that led me through all this turmoil that was happening in my life then. Although facing my anxiety and fears during times of sitting often increased them, it eventually also helped me to cope better with them. Like a very very small seed a thing called faith had started to grow. A thing I had never paid attention to before and had not thought of as important.

Some time after my return to Germany I had decided to move to Canada and nine months later I arrived in Kingston. I got introduced to the local Zen-group through my friends and met Albert Low who later became my teacher.

I am now married to this friend who introduced me to zazen and it is wonderful to have a home environment where we sit together in the mornings. Sitting with a group and having a teacher definitely is much easier than sitting on my own. Although these first months were very important for me, there is the danger of heading in the wrong direction or getting stuck with the practice when doing it without the guidance of a teacher. Also having the opportunity to share with people and to feel the energy that is generated when sitting in a group, especially on a sesshin, is wonderful..

Looking back, these first months seem very far away but having gone through them sometimes helps when the sitting gets difficult. It was then when the faith was planted I can now build on. ■

## Head Cook

When I first came to sesshin I was totally awed by the people who worked in the kitchen. Not only did they work long after others had retired to rest, but they worked so willingly. Indeed I observed that besides working in the kitchen they did many other jobs as well, and when the cooking was complete they were cleaning. From whence came this wonderful will and energy?

Now, many sesshins down the road I myself am in the kitchen assuming the onerous job of head cook. It is 7:45 A.M. on Day 3. There is a kind of quiet music in the kitchen. A focused concentration seems to hold the sputter of the frying onions, the clatter of the dishes, the thud of the knife chopping vegetables – stillness in motion.

It is 9:15 A.M. now. I have come down early to fold the wash. I feel my eye caught by a cord dangling from the kettle. I pull it up and wind it around the kettle handle. I remember once watching Jean do this when I first began. I was struck then by this minute attention to visual detail in the kitchen. I admired Jean, straight to the point, few words. There was 'no one' there when she told one what to do. It frightened me at first, but I grew to love the respect and peacefulness of that. Nothing jarred or distracted either in her or in the kitchen.

It is August now as I sit at the computer and prepare this long promised document for Zen Gong. A new season begins soon and most certainly I will be doing the head cook again. By now though I have learned something about the energy and willingness that I observed so long ago. Perhaps it is that the door of life has begun to open through the practice and quite of its own, a gratitude needs expression. ■

## Le Zen à Granby

En mai et juin 1989, quinze professeurs et un professionnel du Cegep de Granby suivent – la plupart avec beaucoup d'intérêt – un cours donné par Albert Low et intitulé : « Conscience de soi et développement corporel ». Ce cours, offert par l'Université de Sherbrooke, est créditable pour l'obtention d'un Certificat en enseignement collégial.

Un intérêt purement pédagogique peut sembler animer ces gens, mais beaucoup viennent y chercher autre chose qu'une nouvelle méthode d'enseignement. Ce cours au titre évocateur mais peu pertinent est en fait un « atelier d'introduction à la pratique du Zen » déguisé. Et ils le savent. C'est d'ailleurs ce qu'ils avaient demandé, sentant confusément qu'un changement à un niveau de conscience profond réglerait les problèmes pédagogiques.

Quelques semaines après la fin du cours, sept ou huit d'entre eux conviennent de jeter les bases d'une organisation destinée à leur permettre de poursuivre leur cheminement. Quelque chose avait bougé quelque part; une sorte d'évidence existentielle s'était imposée dans une certaine mesure à l'esprit de quelques-uns. Il n'était pas question d'abandonner la pratique naissante.

Durant l'été, un local est aménagé dans le sous-sol de la maison d'un des membres auquel on accède en passant par une salle de lavage et une remise, où gisent un vieux divan, divers outils, des pots de peinture à moitié vides... À partir de septembre, on se retrouve régulièrement toutes les semaines pour deux séances de zazen dans ce local sans fenêtre et au plafond bas. Toutes les semaines, de la sueur et du stress sont distillés dans cette sorte de purgatoire. À quelques reprises durant l'année, M. Low y vient pour une séance d'une journée.

Puis quelques-uns abandonnent. Celui qui fournit le local de pratique déménage à Sherbrooke pour enseigner au Cegep de cette ville. Mais d'autres personnes se joignent au groupe, à la suite notamment de deux ateliers d'introduction, l'un offert en janvier 91 et l'autre en janvier 92. Plusieurs séances d'une journée continuent d'avoir lieu chaque année.

Le groupe comprend maintenant une douzaine de membres réguliers de toutes provenances. Maintenant, « l'essentiel » nous réunit tous les mardis soirs, de 20h00 à 21h15, dans un local du Cegep de Granby. Étant donné le nombre limité de personnes que le Centre de Montréal peut recevoir pour ses sesshins, nous envisageons la possibilité d'en organiser ici, à Granby, et ce dès cet hiver. M.Low a accueilli cette idée avec bienveillance. Un autre groupe est en voie de formation à Sherbrooke et le 1<sup>er</sup> novembre dernier, une première séance d'une journée se tenait à cet endroit. ■

# Mu

A monk once asked Joshu "Does a dog have the Buddha Nature?" Joshu answered mu!

## Commentary

In order to practice Zen you must pass the barriers set up by the patriarchs. To reach subtle awakening you must cut off ordinary ways of thought. If you do not pass these barriers and do not cut off ordinary thought then you will be like a ghost clinging to the grasses and weeds. Now, what is the barrier of the patriarchs? It is simply "Mu!" "Mu!" is the front gate of Zen and this is why it is called the "Gateless Barrier of the Zen sect".

If you pass through you not only will see Joshu face to face but you will also go hand in hand with the whole line of Masters and be in intimate relation with them seeing everything with the same eyes and hearing everything with the same ears. How wonderful! Who would not want to pass this barrier.

Arouse your entire body with its three hundred and sixty bones and its eighty four thousand pores; summon up a great mass of doubt and pour it into this question day and night without ceasing. Question it day and night.

Do not take it as nothingness, nor as a relative no of "yes and no", "is and is not". It is like swallowing a red hot iron ball; you try to spit it out but cannot.

All the delusive and useless knowledge that you have collected up to the present – throw it away. After a period of time, this striving will come to fruition naturally, spontaneously giving way to a condition of internal and external unity. You will know this, but for yourself only, like a dumb person who has had a dream.

Then suddenly it will all give way in an explosion and you will astonish the heavens and shake the earth.



CALLIGRAPHIE, *Shibayama Roshi*

It will be as if you have seized the great sword of Kan-u. If you meet the Buddha you kill the Buddha; when you meet the patriarchs and masters you will kill the patriarchs and masters. On the brink of life and death you have the Great Freedom. In the four modes of existences of the six rebirths you enjoy a samadhi of innocent delight.

Once more how are you concentrate on this Mu? Every ounce of energy you have must be expended on it; and if you do not give up on the way another Lamp of the Law will be lit.

## Verse

The dog! The Buddha Nature!  
The perfect manifestation, the command of truth.  
If for a moment you fall into relativity,  
You are a dead person. ■

# Questions and Answers

**O**UR WOMAN EDITOR was dismayed when she read the questions on which this article is based. She felt they put me in the passive role that women of today are struggling so ardently against. However, these questions *were* asked, with a great deal of sincerity, and obvious excitement at the possibility of some answers. And they have been asked many times over the years, sometimes explicitly, more often implicitly. So, with thanks to our editor for her concern, I would like to give some answers.

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**Did you always agree with this choice (of life)? Did you start this work at the same time as Albert?**

From a very early age I was asking, although inarticulately, “what’s this all about?” I still have poetry written in early teens – not very good poetry, but nevertheless expressing this questioning, giving form to the “frog voice”. But there was no-one in my life who said “yes” to this questioning, no-one to make it real. It was there, but somehow in a fog.

When I was nineteen I met Albert. It was more like a recognition than a first meeting, instant familiarity; and at last someone who said a very loud YES. He was 22 and had had a little more time to formulate this question, together with which I found him from the beginning to be very articulate. He was a chain smoker at the time, and was always holding out the particular cigarette he was smoking and asking, “What is this?” We would be on our way to a dance – I could think of more romantic questions! But neverthe-

less my questioning was being given a direction. I started to hear from him the various philosophers’ responses. Up until then I hadn’t heard anything about philosophy – at seventeen I had to leave school and go to work. Albert had stayed on an extra couple of years. He had also been fortunate to encounter a medical doctor who had organized a small group of young people to help them discuss and formulate their questions and guide them towards finding some answers. Soon after we started going out together I was taken along to this group – I felt I had at last found kindred spirits.

With this group we started to explore the ideas of Gurdjieff, as put forward by Ouspensky, and to experiment with hypnosis. In regard to the first, Ouspensky’s book “In Search of the Miraculous” was the first real spiritual food I encountered. In regard to the second, during our experiments with hypnosis, I had an experience which made me realize all was not what it seemed, that I wasn’t what I had

thought I was. When it was my turn to be hypnotized, I lay there listening to a voice telling me how my body was growing heavy, heavy – and then suddenly found myself up on the ceiling. My body lay there on the couch and yet somehow I was separated from it. I was terrified and called out, “get me down, get me down.” No-one knew what I was talking about! Finally I managed to squeeze back into my body. What had happened?

Soon after that the doctor brought a book by Hubbard to the group and we started working with Dianetics and Scientology. Hubbard himself then arrived in England to give courses and we spent our honeymoon on one of these. Scientology was the first of many “ways” we were to explore through the following years, always leaving dissatisfied to try something else.

During these years our three children arrived to keep us company. Walking around with a big belly I would feel the wonder of this being inside me, ready to enter the

world. Who was it? What karma did they bring? In Dianetics and Scientology we had done regressing to childhood and birth and it gave one a new view towards these beings in baby bodies.

We were living in Chatham, Ontario, when we first read Kapleau's book "The Three Pillars of Zen." Albert used to read the book catalogues and send away for any new books that looked interesting. In this day of plenty, it is hard to believe how scarce such books were in the days when we were looking for some sort of guidance. When the Three Pillars arrived, I happened to be the one to read it first. I felt an immediate response to Yasutani, the Japanese teacher that Kapleau was introducing in the book. While I was still in the middle of the book, a friend arrived from Toronto to stay for the weekend. She was full of a Japanese teacher she had heard was due to visit the States to run something called "sesshin". As I listened to her, I felt she was talking about this same Yasutani, although she did not recognize the name. I fetched the book and the three of us agreed it did seem to be the same person. This was exciting – however, the States seemed a long way away and we had three small children. Our friend was older and her children grown – she agreed to try to go to this sesshin and find out what it was all about.

### **What about your children?**

Our friend came to visit again after having attended sesshin with Yasutani. We had to go, it was what we had been looking for for so long. But what about our children? We couldn't just leave them for the weekend. (these first sesshins were three day ones). Albert was determined to go. So it became, I couldn't just leave them for the weekend. Or could I? I very much wanted to go too. As we had no

extended family in Canada, I could not call on a mother, mother-in-law, or aunt to keep an eye on things. I would have to leave them in the hands of a paid baby-sitter. The most I had ever left them for was a couple of hours with one of the older girls who lived nearby. This would have to be somebody more responsible, an older woman. Who? Well, eventually I found someone who seemed to be reliable, and with a lot of misgiving on my part, we set off for our first sesshin. As we drove away from home it was like the umbilical cord was being stretched and stretched; it was to be like that every time we drove to sesshin over the coming years, it was never easy for me driving off and leaving them. But there was a great need to go to sesshin again and again once we had experienced it that first time.

I used to think, "supposing we have an accident on the way, supposing something happens to me during sesshin, supposing my children are left without me..." the usual thoughts of motherhood. And then one teisho there was this story about Dogen – both his mother and father died when he was very young and it was told how this early loss caused him to ask, "If it is true that we are whole and complete, why is it we have to suffer?" which brought him eventually to deep awakening. And this story sank in very deep with me and started to ease that grip, that anguish. I saw that I was taking it as a given that I was the best possible thing that could happen for my children... but what do we know? We want above all things to shelter our children from pain – and what worse pain than the loss of parents? And yet, Dogen had come to deep awakening and it seemed to be directly linked to the pain from loss of parents.

In the middle of one seven day sesshin, we received a phone call

from a neighbor back home. The woman who was baby sitting at the time had had a heart attack. Before I had a chance to say anything, Albert was dialing the phone again. He called a friend, a man who worked with him, and told him what had happened and asked if he could take our children. Although I sat through the rest of that sesshin with a very distracted mind, the story had a happy ending: it turned out to be a mild heart attack and the woman recovered; and the work – friend took the children with him to his cottage by the lake and they had a wonderful time. I must say here that over the years many Bodhisattvas sprang up to help – he was one of them.

Children love to fit in, to be one with their peers. Directly we arrived from South Africa to live in Canada, our children started working hard at changing their accents, at sounding Canadian, at being like everyone else. Steve, the youngest, was in the middle of learning to talk and had to switch in rapid succession from a South African accent, to a Cockney accent (we stayed six weeks with family in England on our way to Canada), to Canadian. It got so that only Anita and John could understand what he was saying. Albert and I were forever asking them, "What's Steve saying?" Anyway, here they were, saddled with parents who didn't eat meat, didn't drink alcohol, didn't smoke, didn't have a TV (i.e., none of the social graces), and who meditated morning and night, did something called Zen. Even when one of them got married they had to deal with in-laws, who because they couldn't remember the word "Zen", referred to us as being in some Bongo bongo something or other!

We used to get up at 4.30 each morning to do two hours of zazen while the children were still sleeping, and then we would do another

hour in the evening while they did homework. Afterwards we would sit round the fire on a winter evening when they were still young, reading aloud various children's books, Albert hooking carpets when it wasn't his turn to read, and me knitting. At the time we were both going through heavy makyo in the form of intense anxiety; the knitting and hooking were very soothing for this and the children's stories gave us as much comfort as they did our children.

### **How did you feel when Albert got Kensho?**

We had been going to sesshin for about eight years, and another one was due. Washing my legs in the bath I found a large lump in the crease behind my knee. The doctor made space to see me the next day. It turned out to be a Baker's cyst, quite harmless. But how was I going to sit sesshin? Eventually the doctor said he could drain it, which he did. Ughh! And off we went to Rochester. I spent the sesshin kneeling, using one of the small wooden benches; it was a very uncomfortable sesshin for me. For Albert it was a momentous one.

Then came the drive home, which usually took us about six hours straight driving. We had arranged with Anita that after sesshin we would pick her up in Toronto, where she was at school, and take her home for the Christmas break, which meant we had a longer drive than ever, and I didn't drive so it was all on Albert. He had worked hard the whole sesshin, sitting every break and sleeping very few hours each night. I was concerned as he looked exhausted and he seemed to be looking deep inside rather than at the road. And then we had a puncture. I felt this could be the straw that broke the camel's back, – kensho was still a very big unknown as far as I was concerned

and who knew what it had done to Albert. Was he going to be able to keep it all together and get us home? Anita discovered a new mum, as she said afterwards: I leapt out, jacked up the car, took off the wheel and put on the spare, and it all seemed to happen in five minutes flat. Then we continued our journey and arrived home safe.

For me it was the start of a difficult time. Directly we got back I had to go into hospital for an operation on my leg, and after that it was months before I could get back to sitting on a cushion – a chair was all I could manage for zazen. My sitting on a chair in our zendo, beside Albert sitting on our usual cushions, seemed to emphasize a feeling of loneliness I had: all our life together we had walked in step on the Way, so to speak. And now it seemed to me that Albert was on the other side of a fence, this fence called kensho. It caused me a lot of pain.

### **Did you experience kensho?**

And now today I am asked, which side of the fence are you on? It is like that trick question, "have you stopped beating your child yet?" You can't answer it with a yes or no; so how would you answer it? I never did beat my child?

### **What is it like to live with Albert? How do you find it with him being both a husband and a teacher?**

I have grown to be a rather private person and one of the things I am grateful for is that we now have our own apartment on the second floor. For seven years we had the room on the third floor and shared the house, cooking and eating, with six other residents. Before that we spent three years on staff in Rochester, living communally with the rest of the staff who were all of the sixties generation, much younger than we were.

We live in a media generation, expecting to ask intimate questions of all kinds of people, and receive answers. We do not recognize anymore the right of personal privacy. If I find anything difficult about being Albert's wife, it is that. People want to ask me questions about it. One of the great pleasures for me of our summer holidays, when we go biking or hiking, is that nobody knows who we are, what we do – we are just people passing through, anonymous. Really that is what we all are, people passing through, anonymous – but we stick labels on one another, and then try to find out what is behind the label. Or we think we know what the label means and try to find out whether the person lives up to it.

Albert and I live together in that space of total familiarity that we recognized on our first encounter. That space does not need labels like "Zen teacher" or even "husband", "wife". If I go into the dokusan room, I go into that space of familiarity, even though the meeting is ritualized, formalized. Of course, for convenience of communication, one has to use labels like teacher, spouse, child, mother, father – the pity is that we tend to get stuck on these labels, build them up into barriers. But to give an answer to this question, I will say that in our life together there have not been many dull moments. ■

# Flora Courtois : An Experience of Enlighthenment

**I**N 1968 FLORA COURTOIS, a member of the Los Angeles Zen Center, met with Hakuun Yasutani and told him about the following experience, which Yasutani called “having no teacher, enlightenment by oneself alone”. At Yasutani’s request, she wrote an expanded account, published in 1970 by Shunju-sha, Tokyo, under the title: *An Experience of Enlightenment*. Since this book is no longer readily available, we are providing a condensation so that members can learn from Ms. Courtois’ experience.

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Although Flora Courtois had been a sensitive child who felt at one with the animals and things around her, by fourteen she says she had become “self-centered and self-conscious.” Looking back, she feels she had “lost track of who she was.” At seventeen she began to question what she accepted as reality. Her first attempt at exploring this doubt took the form of collecting sayings from great persons. But she found the advices contradictory and unsatisfying and looked further, seeking “some single law, some one basic reality so primary it permeated all else.” Thinking that her lack of understanding of her Catholic faith could be the problem, she talked to her parish priest but found his response, much information on doctrine, unhelpful. She thought, “surely there must be *something* that applies even to the everyday task of life, even to how I wash the dishes at night. But how do I find it?”

At college, despite a busy schedule of work and classes, she was preoccupied with her doubts and explored them with “desperate intensity.” She sought the answer to her question, “What is ultimate reality?” in the work of the great philosophers, but found philosophy “theoretical and verbal,... chasing a mirage of ultimate finality.” She experienced times of despair at ever answering her question.

A teacher’s comment in Psychology class gave her her first lead. When the instructor remarked “that the

world as we see it is simply a projection of neural activity in the visual centers of the brain,” Flora was struck with a sudden insight: “All I know, the whole world, even the universe, is myself! The answer lies in myself.”

Soon after, a second incident affected her deeply. She was looking out her kitchen window at a path through maple trees. She says, “I suddenly saw the scene with a freshness and clarity that I’d never seen before. Simultaneously, as though for the first time, I fully realized I was not only on the earth but of it, an intimate part and product of it. It was as if a door had briefly opened. I stood there transfixed. I remember thinking: “Distant places on the map such as Tibet and North Africa are extensions of right here, all interrelated!”

These incidents directed her search away from books and into everyday experience. She explored the “very nature of sensation” through attention to sights, sounds, smells, feelings. Sensation was so basic, he felt, that “surely reality must somehow permeate immediate sensation. Yet each sense is so limited, so partial... How does one sense reality, whole, all at once?”

Then began a period of inward absorption. “Like a strong undertow pulling (her) down and away from the routine surface of life,” her inner exploration



led her to sit alone for long periods, observing without activity, struggling for a breakthrough. "If there is a basic reality that is common to everything, she thought, it must be *within* my experience too, as well as in everything and everybody else's. Surely I can grasp it immediately and at first hand." She was groping to reorient herself to the world. Having let go of her conceptual approach to life, she sought to experience the things and people around her as though for the first time.

Forgotten memories and feelings welled up as a consequence of this exploration, as well as insights into the nature of her perception. Sight in particular absorbed her. The key, she felt, was "*how* one saw the world around one, not *what* one saw." Having read in psychology of figure and ground perception, she began to wonder "where was the basic ground for all this perception. Was it just another but larger figure with a fixed boundary?" She found too that she thought of herself as a head with an incidental body, a conception which she felt must distort reality. Could there be "some way to realize oneself all at once, to think with one's feet as well as with one's head?"

The struggle began to consume her. The concerns of the people around her seemed remote, and she wondered if she would ever be able to communicate with others again. Simple tasks required great amount of time; she took all afternoon to do a small ironing, intent on the question "What is the ground of everyday reality?" She felt she was being pulled into a vortex, and, recalling a comment of Nietzsche's that it was too dangerous to go too far alone, she was frightened, but "felt compelled to go on no matter what the outcome."

She attempted to get help from two people, a priest at the college and a philosophy professor. After observing the priest and hearing his sermon, she decided not to speak with him. She did speak with the philosopher, whose well meant but unhelpful response was to recommend a class in Epistemology.

She began to see visions, not hallucinations but images such as those sometimes seen at the threshold of sleep. In one, she ventured with others of a cave family into a place of openness and light. The others were frightened and wanted to retreat. She sensed it was the critical next step for the human race, but knew if she continued, she would go alone. In another vision, she found herself at a desk where she spent much time "manipulating assorted colored blacks." One day

she turned to find behind her a beautiful view through a long open window. She went outside into an airy, alive landscape which filled her with joy. Returning to tell the others, she found to her sadness she was unable to communicate her experience.

These visions carried a strong conviction, and she began to explore ideas she felt inherent within them, that "men had retreated from a critical challenge to return to the living source, walling themselves off and manipulating their constricted environments until they had become effete, intellectual creatures out of communion with the rest of nature." She considered going to live a more wholesome life in the woods, and she wrote a paper in which she held that the human race "could only save itself by returning to its roots in nature." She called her philosophy professor, Dr. DeWitt Parker, and went to his house to share the paper, arriving disheveled and excited in the middle of a snow storm. Dr. Parker read the paper, commented on its connection to the ideas of Rousseau, and in a kind manner suggested a visit with the University psychiatrist.

Her despair at communicating her concern intensified. She bought a bottle of sleeping pills, fearing that her isolation might grow too deep to be borne. However two things soon happened. Sitting in a lecture hall one day, she "suddenly became aware of space in an extraordinary manner; that is,... equally aware of it behind... , underneath, above, all around and in fact...all 'through' (her)." The experience heartened her; "something extraordinary was very close."

Meanwhile, concern about her odd behavior had resulted in contact from the University Student Health Service. On their advice she checked into the infirmary for a few days and talked with a psychiatrist, Dr. Theophile Rafael. Most of their discussion bypassed her most urgent concern, but she did tell him of her vision of the open window. Dr. Rafael and his assistant concluded that she needed to eat more and work less, and provided University funds for her to move closer to campus and eat free at the cafeteria. They requested she kept in communication, and she was relieved to regain contact with people who seemed to at least partially understand her.

She continued her inner search, sometimes striving to recapture earlier experiences, but at length decided that her preconceived ideas of reality would not help her. She began "just waiting and letting be." She would sit, "saying inwardly no, not this' as if waiting for what (she) knew not."

Then one day, home for Easter vacation, she was sitting in her room looking at a small desk when “in a moment too short to measure the universe changed on its axis.” She describes what happened in this way:

The small, pale green desk at which I’d been so thoughtless gazing had totally and radically changed. It appeared now with a clarity, a depth of three-dimensionality, a freshness I had never imagined possible. At the same time, in a way that is utterly indescribable, all my questions and doubts were gone as effortlessly as chaff in the wind. I knew everything and all at once. Yet not in the sense that I had ever known anything before.

All things were the same in my little bedroom yet totally changed... The focus of my sight seemed to have changed; it had sharpened to an infinitely small point which moved ceaselessly in paths totally free of the old accustomed ones, as if flowing from a new source...

So released from the tension, so ecstatically light did I feel, I seemed to float down the hall to the bathroom to look at my face in the mottled mirror over the sink. The pupils of my eyes were dark, dilated and brimming over with mirth. With a wondrous relief, I began to laugh as I’d never laughed before, right from the soles of my feet up.

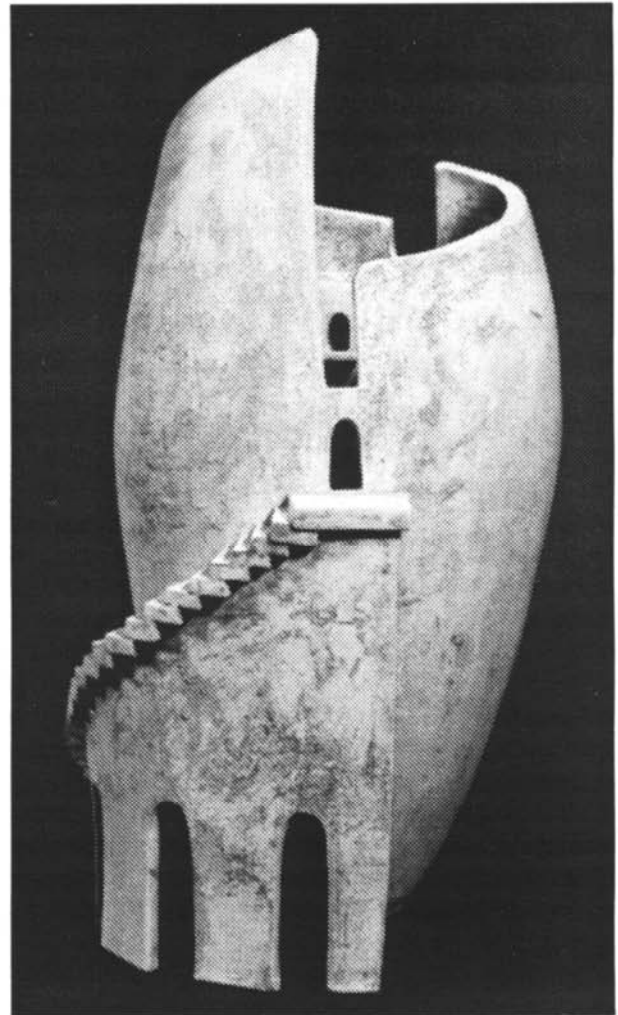
Over many months the experience ripened and unfolded. She felt wonder and gratitude at what was happening. Her world had turned upside down. She said: “I had plunged into a luminous openness which had obliterated all fixed distinctions including that of “within” and “without”. A Presence had absorbed the universe and to this I gave myself up in absolute confidence”. She found herself acting without thought, in a natural, simple way: dancing when alone, running joyously along the street. Self-control and letting go were both gone. She knew the world in a new way:

This new kind of knowing was so pure and unadorned, so delicate, that nothing in the language of my past could express it. Neither sense nor feeling nor imagination contained it yet all were contained in it. In some indefinable way I knew with absolute certainty the changeless unity and harmony in change of the universe and the inseparability of all seeming opposites.

It was as if, before all this occurred, “I” had been a fixed point inside my head looking out at a world “out there”, a separate and comparatively flat world. The

periphery of awareness had now come to light, yet neither fixed periphery nor center existed as such... Feeling myself centered as never before, at the same time I knew the whole universe to be centered at every point... Having lost all purposefulness in the old sense, I had never felt so one-pointed, so clear and decisive. Freed from separateness, feeling one with the universe, everything including myself had become at once unique and equal. If “God” was the word for this Presence in which I was absorbed then either everything was holy or nothing; no distinction was possible. All was meaningful, complete as it was, each bird, bud, midge,... crystal, of total importance in itself. As in the notes of a great symphony, nothing was large or small, nothing of more or less importance to the whole.”

She reviewed her religious education sadly. She had been thought to think of God as “up and out there” and separate from her, to hope for heaven elsewhere



INSIDE, *Hanna Back, clay, reduction fired, 1991*

in the future, to correct herself and model on others. Her education had distracted her and led her in the wrong direction. In her new understanding “nothing had been added but the delusions of this education removed.” Instead of looking elsewhere and rejecting her present reality, she found that “eternity is here always; that there is no higher, no deeper, no separate past or future time or place. How could Love be other than this all-encompassing unity to which we can do nothing but open ourselves?”

She felt no further need for seeking, nor did she need any other authority, be it religious or philosophical, than that provided by the experience that had come to her. The demands and conventions of the school meaning less to her, she found that she did better work in some areas and worse in others. She had looked for a single law that would apply to any action, no matter how ordinary. Now washing the dishes she found her experience transformed. She felt herself “completely whole and in one piece” and enjoyed the feelings of her body greatly. Her breathing had become deeper and more even, and her hands, eyes, and voice more relaxed. Her handwriting changed. Exuberant energy made work easy. She would run up the stairs, sleep catnaps and awake refreshed. She ate lightly and with pleasure whenever hungry.

Her loneliness was ended, since people were drawn to her. Strangers came up to speak to her. She was “more human, more ordinary, more friendly and at ease with all kinds of people.”

She was not afraid of dying nor worried for the future. She felt certain that if she “could continue in this state of ‘open vision’, ... whatever happened, everything would be right just as it was.” And though she felt the changes miraculous and undeserved, she felt deep gratitude for them.

The change which she felt “key” to it all was her change in vision, her “open vision”: It was as if some inner eye, some ancient center of awareness which extended equally and at once in all directions without limit and which had been there all along had been restored. This inner vision seemed to be focussed on infinity in a way that was detached from immediate sight and yet at the same time had a profound effect on sight. Walking along the street I was aware of the street flowing past and beneath me, the trees or buildings moving past all around and the sky moving above as if I were immersed in one flowing whole. The immediate world had acquired a new depth and clarity of color and form, an unalloyed freshness. Along with this there was a sharp one-pointedness

to the focus of attention... Yet paradoxically I felt “blind” ... It was as if my attention were now rooted in some deeper center so that my everyday sight, my eyes, released from their former tension to reach out and see the world outside, were now as free as if they had been blanked out, eliminated altogether... I also found other people’s eyes fascinating, as well as those of animals, looking into them as if into my own.

Researching in the University medical library she found no book or article that described her new kind of vision.

Along with changes in sight came a delight in all sensation, “the smell of smoking damp leaves,” the sound of a bird in early morning. And now she was more aware of the suffering of others. She longed to help others see in this new way, though she suspected it might be impossible. She spoke to her fellow student Suzanne about the possibility of seeing the world and herself in a new way, as an individed whole. But though they talked often, she finally realized they were not really communicating. For a General Science class she wrote a paper on what she had uncovered, attempting to describe it in scientific language, but the professor told her “he had no idea about what she was talking.” Words seemed inadequate to carry this experience to others, and she came to feel that talking about it “was to expose to shallow interpretation and disrespect what was most worthy of respect.” She resolved never to speak of it again until she was sure it could be truly heard.

Despite this lack of communication she did not worry. Lying on the grass looking up at the stars she felt at “home”. She says, “I felt the presence of others who understood and I felt confident that so long as I live with this vision, everything else would somehow be right and just as it had always been intended.”

Enlightenment has been said to “arise naturally”, and clearly for Flora Courtois it did so. She knew nothing of Zen Buddhism and had practiced no other formal spiritual discipline. Her yearning and intuitively guided, inward search carried her to this crucial turn-about. Yet she must have needed something to support her continued growth because, having made such a breakthrough, she nearly lost her way.

For a year and a half or more, Ms. Courtois lived “in joyful naturalness.” During this time she married and moved; she undertook a job. Then becoming dissatisfied with her work as a business writer and looking for a way to deepen her own experience and share it with others, she decided to become a

psychologist. She returned to college, changing her major to psychology.

A book she came across at the University, William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*, described experiences similar to her own. This discovery led to her reading the *Tao Te Ching* and her first Buddha sutra. She was moved to tears. Clearly the ancient spoke of what she had experienced, but had anyone experienced it in modern times? A move to California led to further discoveries: her first book on Zen, the works of western mystics. Around 1950 a course in Comparative Religion brought her in contact with a Buddhist scholar and also a writer of popular books on Zen. Though she was fascinated to hear these men discuss Buddhism, they never mentioned practice. That key was yet to come.

About this time she began to feel "a subtle pride" because she had experienced something these authorities seemed to know only from books. She saw herself in a new way "as someone who had had an enlightenment experience and therefore secretly special." Egotism had returned and in an intensified form.

She graduated at last, having found little opportunity to study religious experience. When she did discuss accounts such as James's with her psychology professors, they dismissed them as "psychotic episodes" or "regressions in service of the ego." Seeking some area of research to explore her experience she did investigate "changes in perception during states of deep relaxation," remembering the release from tension that accompanied her experience. Continuing on to graduate school, she found herself in a high pressure grind of doctrinaire, statistics oriented, unoriginal work. She pursued her interest in perception during relaxation on her own since it did not fit with the kind of studies being undertaken. As part of her training she also worked as a psychologist in clinics and underwent psychoanalysis.

Increasingly she was uneasy about her situation. Though intellectually stimulated and successful, she felt she "had become in a deeper sense unwise, unintelligent, unfree and unloving." Surgery and a lengthy convalescence gave her the chance to take stock: "lying quietly alone" she saw that she had "lost (her) way in the midst of all this diversity." Against the advice of her professors she left school to live "a quieter and more ordinary life."

All was not calmer interiorly, however. It was the early 60's, more than ten years since her experience,

and despair was growing in her. She grieved the loss of what she had gained at such cost. She felt that, without intending to, she had wasted her opportunity. Nor had she ever been able to communicate this thing that was so important to her. She longed for someone to talk with, for practical guidance and religious community. She spent long nights in a "profound sense of abandonment." She felt that she had failed where it really mattered because she had not lived each day "in joyful awareness," a source for those close to her.

Against her despair she brought her "confidence that what was 'lost' was here all the time and beyond time, nearer than I knew." At length she saw that this regret was an indulgence, an egoistic stance, since it manifested from "this very suffering, separate self." She returned to her early practice of sitting in quiet concentration. Her life, busy with family and other duties, presented more interruptions than before, but she continued. After some time she found a group of people who sat in meditation and joined them.

After two years she heard that a Zen Center had been established in Los Angeles and she went to them. She says, "So at last I came to Zazen and the heart of the matter. Sitting in the Zendo, listening to Maezumi Sensei read from the ancient texts, I knew my exile was over. I had returned home at last."

Flora Courtois warns that enlightenment is only a beginning; one must continually return to the practice: "To be reborn at every moment, forever, requires eternal vigilance... To continue to practice such awareness at every moment is implicit to the very nature of enlightenment. This practice is reality, reality... practice. This was the indispensable pillar that had been missing from my life." Ms. Courtois had an opportunity through practice to return to the precious opportunity she thought she had lost. Ending her account she says, "Now like a slowly rising tide, quietly,... the timeless emptiness returns, the infinite possibilities for joyful awareness opening at every moment. To this I now vow to give myself with all my strength."

Perhaps reading her account will help us maintain the vigilance necessary for our own practice. ■

# L'enseignement du Bouddha, d'après les textes les plus anciens.

Walpola Rahula,  
Éditions du Seuil,  
Paris, 1961

**A**U QUÉBEC, nous sommes encore peu familiers avec les textes des spécialistes du bouddhisme écrits ou traduits en français. Quand on a la chance de découvrir un livre comme celui de Walpola Rahula, qui présente dans un exposé remarquable de clarté et de précision les principes fondamentaux de la doctrine bouddhique, il vaut la peine de le mentionner et de le faire connaître.

Walpola Rahula a reçu la formation traditionnelle d'un moine bouddhiste du Ceylan (de la tradition du Theravada), avant d'aller étudier la philosophie à l'Université de Ceylan et de se rendre ensuite à Paris pour préparer une étude sur Asanga, l'illustre philosophe du Grand Véhicule qui vécut en Inde au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle de notre ère. Ses connaissances des deux grandes traditions bouddhiques lui permettent de traiter adéquatement de son sujet, tout en se référant à peu près exclusivement aux textes les plus anciens, ceux qu'on appelle en sanskrit « la Tradition » et en pali « le Corpus canonique ». L'autorité de ces textes est reconnue par toutes les écoles bouddhiques, et comme le dit l'auteur : « il ne serait pas possible d'écrire un livre sur l'enseignement du Bouddha sans traiter des doctrines que le Theravada et le Mahayana s'accordent à accepter comme fondamentales dans son système de pensée ».

Quelles sont donc ces doctrines ? Ce sont les Quatre Nobles Vérités, le Noble Sentier Octuple, les Cinq Agrégats, le Karma, la Production conditionnée, la doctrine du « Non-Soi » (Anatta) et celle du Sati-patthana (l'Établissement de l'Attention). Ce sont elles que Walpola Rahula a choisi de présenter et d'expliquer dans son petit livre admirable et très accessible, que les non-initiés et ceux qui ont une certaine connaissance du sujet peuvent lire avec profit. Le bouddhisme qui se dégage de son exposé est un bouddhisme « humaniste, rationnel, socratique à certains égards, évangélique à d'autres,

ou encore presque scientifique », comme l'écrit Paul Demiéville dans sa préface, un bouddhisme qui exerce un attrait de plus en plus grand auprès des Occidentaux.

« Le Bouddha fut, parmi les fondateurs de religions, (s'il nous est permis de l'appeler le fondateur d'une religion, au sens populaire du terme) le seul instructeur qui ne prétendit pas être autre chose qu'un être humain pur et simple... Il attribua sa réalisation et tout ce qu'il acquit et accomplit, au seul effort et à la seule intelligence humaine. » C'est ainsi que Walpola Rahula commence son livre, en situant d'emblée et dans sa juste perspective l'enseignement d'un homme, le Bouddha ou l'Éveillé, qui affirmait : « Vous devez faire votre travail vous-mêmes; les Tathagata enseignent la voie ». Et Walpola Rahula poursuit en disant : « La liberté de pensée permise par le Bouddha ne se rencontre nulle part ailleurs dans l'histoire des religions. Cette liberté est nécessaire, selon lui, parce que l'émancipation de l'homme dépend de sa propre compréhension de la Vérité, et non pas de la grâce bénévolement accordée par un dieu ou quelque puissance extérieure en récompense d'une conduite vertueuse et obéissante. » Non seulement la liberté de pensée, mais aussi la tolérance sont des attitudes mentales prônées par le Bouddha. « En fait, pour comprendre la Vérité, il n'est pas nécessaire de savoir si l'enseignement vient du Bouddha ou de quelqu'un d'autre. L'essentiel est de voir la chose, de la comprendre. » L'enseignement

du Bouddha est qualifié « ehi-passika », invitant à « venir voir » et non pas à venir croire.

Pour vous donner un avant-goût de la clarté avec laquelle l'auteur expose les différents points de la doctrine bouddhique, allons voir de plus près son analyse de la notion de « moi ». « Ce que nous nommons « être », « individu » ou « moi », dit-il, c'est seulement, selon la philosophie bouddhiste, une combinaison de forces ou d'énergies physiques et mentales en perpétuel changement qu'on peut diviser en cinq groupes ou agrégats. » Ces cinq agrégats, ceux de la Matière, des Sensations, des Perceptions, des Formations Mentales et de la conscience dont l'ensemble est appelé un « être », sont dukkha. « Ce que nous appelons un « être », un « individu » ou « moi », est un nom commode, une étiquette que nous attachons à la combinaison de ces cinq constituants. Ceux-ci sont tous impermanents, en perpétuel changement. Tout ce qui est impermanent est dukkha. »

Les cinq Agrégats ne restent pas les mêmes à deux instants consécutifs. « Ici, A n'est pas égal à A. C'est un flux d'apparitions et de disparitions instantanées... Il n'y a pas de substance invariable. Il n'y a rien derrière ce courant qui puisse être considéré comme un Soi permanent, une individualité, rien qui puisse être appelé réellement « moi ». Mais quand ces cinq Agrégats physiques et mentaux, qui sont interdépendants, travaillent ensemble, en association, comme une machine psycho-physiologique, nous formons l'idée d'un « Moi ». C'est une notion fautive, une « formation mentale » (quatrième Agrégat).

« Ces cinq Agrégats assemblés, que nous nommons un « être », sont dukkhas même. Il n'y a pas d'autre « être » ou de « moi » qui se tienne derrière ces cinq Agrégats, qui éprouve dukkha. Comme le dit Buddhagosa :

« Seule la souffrance existe, mais on ne trouve aucun souffrant; Les actes sont, mais on ne trouve pas d'acteur. »

« Il n'y a pas de moteur immobile derrière le mouvement. Il y a seulement le mouvement. Ce n'est pas correct de dire que c'est la vie qui se meut, ce qui est vrai, c'est que la vie est le mouvement lui-même. Vie et mouvement ne sont pas deux choses différentes. Il n'y a pas de penseur derrière la pensée. La pensée est elle-même le penseur. Nous ne pouvons pas manquer ici de remarquer combien cette idée bouddhiste s'oppose diamétralement au « cogito ergo sum » cartésien : Je pense donc je suis. »

Plus loin dans son livre, alors qu'il reprend plus en détail la doctrine bouddhique du Non-Soi (Anatta), Walpola Rahula revient sur cette idée du « JE SUIS ». « C'est la vague sensation d'un « JE SUIS » qui crée cette idée de Soi qui n'a aucune réalité correspondante, et voir cette vérité c'est réaliser le Nirvana – ce qui n'est pas facile! Il y a dans « Samyutta-nikaya » une conversation lumineuse sur ce point entre un bhikkhu nommé Khemaka et un groupe de bhikkhus. »

« Ces moines demandent à Khemaka si dans les cinq Agrégats il voit un Soi ou quelque chose appartenant à un Soi. Khemaka répond « Non ». Alors les bhikkhus disent que s'il en est ainsi, c'est qu'il doit être un Arahant libéré de toute impureté. Mais Khemaka confesse que bien qu'il ne trouve pas dans les cinq Agrégats, un Soi ou quelque chose appartenant à un Soi, « Je ne suis pas un Arahant libéré de toute impureté. Amis, en rapport avec les cinq Agrégats d'attachement, j'ai la sensation : « JE SUIS », mais je ne vois pas clairement : « ceci est JE SUIS ». Puis Khemaka explique que ce qu'il appelle « JE SUIS » n'est ni matière, ni sensation, ni perception, ni formations mentales, ni conscience, ni quelque chose en dehors d'eux. Mais il a la sensation : « JE SUIS » en rapport avec les cinq Agrégats d'attachement bien qu'il ne puisse voir clairement « ceci est JE SUIS ».

« Il dit que c'est comme l'odeur d'une fleur qui n'est ni l'odeur des pétales, ni celle de la couleur, ni celle du pollen, mais l'odeur de la fleur. »

« De plus, Khemaka explique que même une personne qui a atteint les premières étapes de réalisation conserve encore cette sensation de « JE SUIS ». Mais plus tard, quand elle a encore progressé, cette sensation de « JE SUIS » disparaît elle aussi, de même que l'odeur chimique d'une étoffe fraîchement lavée disparaît après un certain temps quand elle a été rangée dans un coffre. »

« Cette discussion fut si utile et lumineuse pour eux, qu'à la fin de celle-ci, dit le texte, tous, y compris Khemaka lui-même, devinrent des Arahant libérés de toute impureté, s'étant ainsi finalement débarrassés de « JE SUIS ». » ■

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**1993**

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**January**

Thurs 7/Sunday 10	Three day sesshin
Saturday 23	Workshop Montreal
Sunday 24	One day sitting
Wednesday 27	Beginners' Course
Sat 30	Granby Workshop
Sun 31	Granby One day

**February**

Wednesday 3, 10, 17	Beginners' Course
Friday 19/26	Seven day sesshin Montreal

**March**

Sat 6	Workshop Montreal
Sun 7	One day sitting
Fri 26/28	Two-day sesshin Granby

**April**

Saturday 3	Workshop Montreal
Sunday 4	One day sitting Montreal
Wednesday 7, 14, 21, 28	Beginners' Course
Thursday 8/Monday 12	Four day sesshin

**May**

Saturday 8	Workshop Montreal
Sunday 9	One day sitting
Wednesday 12, 19, 26	Beginners' Course Montreal
Friday 14/Friday 21	Seven day sesshin Montreal
Saturday 29	Workday
Sun 30	Annual General Meeting

**June**

Wednesday 2	Beginners' Course
Thursday 10/Sunday 13	Kingston
Thursday 17/Sunday 20	Three day sesshin

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**Suscribing to Zen Gong**

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Pour arriver là où vous êtes, pour partir d'où vous n'êtes pas,  
Vous devez passer par une voie dans laquelle il n'est pas d'extase.  
Pour arriver à ce que vous ne savez pas  
Vous devez passer par une voie qui est la voie de l'ignorance.  
Pour posséder ce que vous ne possédez pas  
Vous devez passer par la voie de la dépossession.  
Pour arriver à ce que vous n'êtes pas  
Vous devez passer par la voie dans laquelle vous n'êtes pas,  
Et ce que vous ne savez pas est la seule chose que vous sachiez  
Et ce que vous possédez est ce que vous ne possédez pas  
Et là où vous êtes est là où vous n'êtes pas.

T. S. ELIOT (QUATRE QUATUORS)

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