

# ZEN GONGI

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*“The world is shrouded by  
ignorance. On account of  
avarice and sloth it does not  
shine.”*

THE BUDDHA

*Mind is like an artist,  
depicting the worlds... If one  
knows that the action of mind  
makes all worlds, one sees  
Buddha and realizes the true  
nature of Buddha.”*

AVATAMSAKA SUTRA

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## **Zen Gong**

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## A propos du Zen Gong... et d'argent!

Nous en sommes à notre cinquième numéro et l'accueil reçu jusqu'à maintenant a été très favorable. Certains membres nous ont même avoué qu'ils ne lisaient pas la revue, mais qu'ils la "dévoraient" littéralement! Il faut dire que monsieur Low est une source inépuisable de textes "nourissants", et si le Zen Gong ne servait qu'à rendre possible une plus grande diffusion de ses textes, il aurait déjà rempli sa fonction.

Mais le Zen Gong offre aussi d'autres possibilités. En publiant des témoignages sur l'itinéraire personnel des membres, les difficultés qu'ils rencontrent dans leur pratique, leurs réflexions et leurs interrogations, il nous permet de relativiser nos propres difficultés et de briser un peu notre isolement. Le Zen, comme nous le pratiquons au Centre de Montréal, est une démarche exigeante et cette revue peut être un instrument d'encouragement.

Et c'est aussi un instrument d'information. Notre revue, dans la mesure de ses moyens limités, peut nous apporter une plus grande connaissance de la tradition du bouddhisme zen, des grands maîtres et des grands courants de pensée qui ont façonné cette tradition, en offrant des traductions, en dénichant des textes authentiques et en suscitant des recherches originales.

Bien sûr, pour cela, il faut la collaboration des membres (pour écrire, traduire ou coller des timbres...) Et bien sûr, pour cela il faut de l'argent... Pour le moment, le Zen Gong est distribué gratuitement aux membres et donc entièrement financé par le Centre. (La production de trois numéros par année nous coûte environ \$15 par membre.) Le Centre Zen n'est pas une entreprise qui ramasse des gros sous (comme vous le savez sans doute!) et la seule façon d'éviter que la revue ne devienne un fardeau est de favoriser les abonnements de non-membres et d'en appeler à la contribution volontaire des membres.

Si donc vous êtes une de ces personnes chanceuses que la récession n'atteint pas trop durement et pour qui chaque nouvelle sortie du Zen Gong est un événement attendu avec impatience, une contribution de votre part, petite ou grande, serait la bienvenue. Et pourquoi pas, en essayant de convaincre une personne de votre entourage de s'abonner, vous pourriez aider à la fois la revue et, qui sait, cette personne!

En attendant, bonne lecture! ✨

(Pour les contributions volontaires, s.v.p. envoyez votre chèque à l'ordre du Centre Zen, au soin de Janine Lévesque.)

## About Zen Gong... and Money

This is our fifth issue and the reception we have received so far has been very favorable. Some members tell us they don't just read the magazine, they literally "devour" it! Mr. Low has been an inexhaustible source of "nourishing" material, and even if Zen Gong served only as a means of disseminating his articles, it would already have served its purpose.

But Zen Gong also offers other possibilities. By allowing Centre members to tell the story of their own personal journeys, the difficulties they face in practice, their reflections and questions, the magazine puts our personal struggles into perspective and helps break our sense of isolation. Zen, as practiced at the Montreal Centre, can be quite demanding and this magazine can be a form of encouragement.

It is also a source of information. Our magazine, in its limited way, can give us a greater appreciation of the traditions of Zen Buddhism, its masters and its main schools of thought, by publishing translations, reproducing authentic works and encouraging original research.

Of course, to do all this requires the collaboration of the membership (to write, translate and help distribute the magazine). And it also requires money. For the moment, Zen Gong is distributed free-of-charge to members and is entirely financed by the Centre. To produce three issues a year, our production costs are approximately \$15 per member. The Zen Centre is not a wealthy institution, as you well know, and the only way to avoid the magazine becoming a financial burden is to sell it outside the community and to seek voluntary donations from members.

So if you are one of those fortunate people who have not been hit too hard by the recession, and for whom each new issue of Zen Gong is eagerly awaited, a contribution, large or small, would be gratefully received. And why not convince a friend to subscribe. You will help the magazine, and perhaps you will even help your friend!

In the meantime, we wish you good reading! ✨

(Voluntary contributions can be made payable to the Montreal Zen Centre and addressed care of Janine Lévesque.)

# On Practice

**T**his text is a transcription of a teisho where Mr. Low was commenting on some sayings of Nisargadatta Maharaj. In the book «I Am That», Nisargadatta answers various spiritual seekers, and in the following article Mr. Low uses these sayings to bring to light some aspects of Zen practice.

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Q: “I hear you making statements about yourself like, ‘I am timeless, immutable, beyond attributes’, etc. How do you know these things? And what makes you say them?”

N: “I am only trying to describe the state before the ‘I am’ arose, but the state itself, being beyond the mind and its language, is indescribable.”

Insofar as it is indescribable, ungraspable, one cannot grasp the state before ‘I am’ arise with the discriminating mind, with the mind that we use to make judgments, decisions, assessments; the mind we use to relate to the world in a conceptual way. Because we are unable to use this mind, we come to the conclusion that there is no such state beyond existence, beyond experience, beyond that which can be grasped. Actually, even the word “state” has already betrayed it. The word “immutable” is a wonderful word. “The ringing of stillness” is another wonderful expression. “The sound of one hand clapping”, “Mu”, “Who”, all of these are windows onto that which always is. It is not prior to the discriminating mind in terms of time; it is not that there is a condition, and then this condition ceases and the discriminating mind takes over. It is more like when one sees a mountain rising out of the earth: one doesn’t take the earth into account; all that one sees is the mountain. Take for example these magnificent carvings by Rodin. Very often he would leave quite evident the material that he had used to carve the figure from. The figure was sometimes left emerging out of the stone. In this way there was no doubt that the figure was made of stone.

Q: “The ‘I am’ is the foundation of all experience. What you are trying to describe must also be an

experience, limited and transitory.”

What is meant here is that whenever one tries to give a description for people, it seems as though, because one is using the language of experience, one is talking about an experience.

Q: “You speak of yourself as immutable. I hear the sound of the word, I remember its dictionary meaning, but the experience of being immutable I do not have. How can I break through the barrier and know personally, intimately, what it means to be immutable?”

One says that Mu is immutable, that Mu is pure awareness, that Mu is all and yet nothing. And people who are working on Mu could very likely and very rightly say, “I hear what you are saying, but what you are saying doesn’t mean anything to me.” And then, if they are truly sincere, they will go on and say, “How can I make it mean something to me?” Most often people say, “What you are saying does not make any sense to me,” and walk away as though they have got the last word of what does and doesn’t make sense. But the truly serious person, the person with any degree of humility, furthermore says, “What you are saying doesn’t make sense; how can I please make it make sense?” And Nisargadatta says:

N: “The word itself is the bridge.”

Mu itself is the bridge. The beauty about Mu is that it is the means and it is the end. It is the way. Remember, Joshu asked Nansen, “What is the way?” This word “way” is remarkable. It means “the path”; Mu is the path. But there is also the way that you

walk the way. How do you walk the way? In what way do you walk the way? Mu is the way of the way. And then there is: "What is at the end of the way?" In Chinese it is the "Tao". And the "Tao", the way, is the end of the way, the ultimate of the way; it is, if you like, the goal of the way. Mu is both the way and the end of the way. And it is the way of walking the way. It is the same with "Who". "Who" always implies or works with the other side of "I am". And to really work with "Who am I?", one must work with that which is before the question arises. What is there before the question "Mu?" or "Who?" arises? There is Mu!, there is Who!

N: *"The word itself is the bridge. Remember it, think of it, explore it, go round it, look at it from all directions."*

Remember it. If you are working on Mu, never forget Mu. Forget your own name, forget your own face, but never forget Mu. This doesn't mean that you should have it in the forefront of your consciousness when you are at work. What you should realize when you are at work is that your work is Mu! When you have time outside sesshin, apart from work on the mat, try to explore what that means. Your work is Mu, and the one that does the work is Mu. (Or Who). If you are making a separation, if Mu is this but not that, then it is simply another part of experience. But Mu is the stone out of which the carving is made; Mu is that out of which experience arises.

"Remember it, think of it". Yes, think of it! Use your ordinary intellectual mind to think about it until your intellectual mind breaks under the strain. I don't mean until the mind breaks down, but until the thought arises, "This is enough, I can't do it. There is nothing I can think of that is going to help this in any way." Prove it for yourself! It is said countless times that this is the case, but how many people have really sat down and said, "To hell with this. I'm going to work this one out for myself. I'll think it through", and really given their mind to saying, "Okay, Mu is

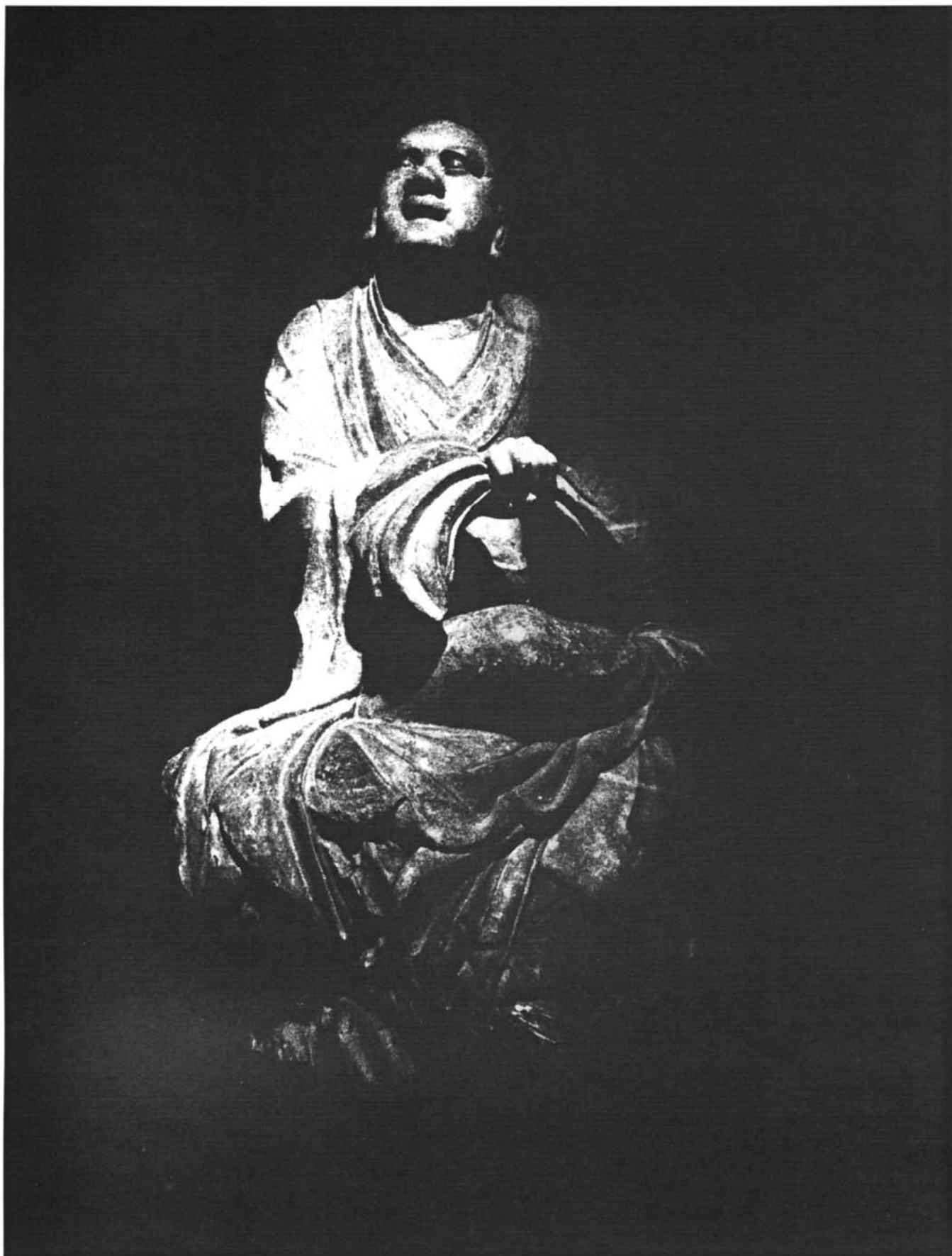
nothing; now what does that mean, 'Mu is nothing'? 'Mu is emptiness', what does that mean? 'Mu is everything', what does that mean? 'Mu is immutable', what does that mean? He asks me, 'What is the color of Mu?' what does he mean? Think about it! Of course, one doesn't know where to start thinking about it! The mind is numb in connection with this question: "What is Mu?" But please have faith. Countless people have broken through this koan. And in breaking through this koan they have demonstrated that this immutability, this peace that surpasses understanding, this love that springs out naturally and constantly, all are revealed by penetrating Mu. Mu is not some new experiment, it is not some "New Age" gimmick, and it is not a Zen system. Here we have Nisargadatta, who most likely had never heard of Zen, and yet he is talking about how to work on a koan, a breakthrough koan. "Remember it, think of it, explore it".

N: *"Go around it, look at it from all directions, dive into it with earnest perseverance."*

And this means that when one gets to that point where one says, "I don't know what to do," one realizes one has just started one's koan. It is only then that the practice really begins. Up until then, one has always had the belief that one knew what to do with this koan, which means that one was still juggling it with the discriminating mind; one was going to pin it down. You see people come into the zendo sometimes full of cunning. They've got this thing and they are going to wiggle through it with cunning. And when you say, "No, that is not it," they argue with you.

N: *"Dive into it with earnest perseverance: endure all delays and disappointments till suddenly the mind turns round, away from the word, towards the reality beyond the word."*

"Endure all delays and disappointments." That's it! Of course one is going to be disappointed. Everytime one recognizes the failure of the discriminating mind to



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THE MONK AT THE MOMENT OF AWAKENING, *Polychrome wood, 41 inches high, Yu-an Dynasty, 1279-1368.* Eugene Fuller, Memorial Collection, Seattle Art Museum.

be able to handle this, there is disappointment. This discriminating mind is a most marvelous toy. You think computers are good toys? But so is the mind: we are addicted to it, we love it. And there is no reason why we should throw it away, but we must get it into its place. It should be the servant, but it is the master.

“Endure all delays and disappointments until suddenly the mind turns around.” Such a notion is also found in the *Lankavatara Sutra*, where it is expressed by the word “*paravritti*”. This is the turnabout that we call kensho; the turnabout in the *manas*, in the heart, the very depths of the mind itself in which the fundamental contradiction is loosened. Suddenly the mind turns around, away from the word, towards the reality beyond the word.

*N: “It’s like trying to find a person, knowing their name only. A day comes when your inquiries bring you to them and the name becomes reality. Words are valuable.”*

There are a lot of people who, when they have read half a page of Zen, start talking about how wicked words are. Any kind of thought you put in, they rush up to you and say, “But you shouldn’t be thinking; if you are practicing Zen, how can you possibly think, how can you possibly use words, how can you possibly define terms?” The English philosopher Locke said, “Words are money for fools, but counters for the wise.” It is said that Buddha used words as words; that is, he used words as counters. The words “God”, “Christ”, “Buddha”, “me”, “I” and “you”; these are all words! They have got nothing beyond being words. But at the same time words are containers; they contain. And what is important is what they contain. It is like a Master said, “When you know what a word contains, you throw the word away.”

*N: “Words are valuable, for between the word and its meaning there is a link, and if one investigates the word assiduously, one crosses beyond the concept to the experience at the root of it, to that which it contains.”*

Now Mu contains everything. How is it possible that Mu can contain everything? What does that mean: “Mu contains everything”? Nothing is outside Mu. There is just Mu. Only Mu. Now what does that mean? Be puzzled, be concerned. At one level, Mu is just a nonsense syllable, and there is no reason why it should not also be a nonsense syllable as well as containing everything. Don’t get trapped into some mystical view of Mu: it isn’t mystical at all, it is right before your face. Repeated attempts to go beyond the words is what is called meditation; this is zazen.

Mu means Buddha-nature, one’s true-self, one’s own-self. What does Buddha-nature mean? What does true-self, own-self, mean? Hakuin says, “Our true-self is no-self.” When we are asking “Who?”, what does it mean? “Our true-self is no-self”? The I is No-I; *Muga* in Japanese. *Mu*, we know about, and *ga* means I: No-I. When you are asking “Who am I?” who is this no-I? “No one walks along this path this autumn evening.” Who is this no-one? It is not simply that if you say it enough times it will be enough. It needs that spark of intelligence. One penetrates it with the very intelligence that has created it. And when we talk about intelligence, it is that sparkle of the mind, it is that leaven of the mind, it is that mind which is aroused without resting it on anything. If you hear a really funny story there is a kind of light right in the heart of things, an opening in the very heart of things. It is the same when you *see into*. If you have had some particular puzzle or problem, and you have suddenly seen “Oh of course!”, this is what we are talking about: this intelligence. And that intelligence needs to be used.

Some people say it is like boring with an acetylene torch; those torches that can cut through metal. You’ve got this brilliant flame, this acetylene torch burning in hara. Of course, this invites everybody to get images, but it is just a pointer. Harada roshi used to say, “There is a blind Buddha in the hara, make him see!” And if you are working on Mu, the way to work on Mu is to make the blind Buddha see. If you are working on Who, make the blind Buddha see. This is called meditation. There are a lot of people who say, “I thought you said that you are not supposed to do anything.” There was a man at the last workshop who just wouldn’t stop arguing, because in the French edition of *The Butterfly’s Dream* the last chapter starts off by saying that Zen is realizing that there is nothing that needs to be done. He thought this meant doing nothing, that one just has to “sit and hope for the best”. But it is nothing like that: in Soto Zen, Rinzai Zen, name it what you will, there is this need for *penetration!* And this penetration is exhausting and exacting. But it is not “doing something”, strangely enough. You have to arouse the mind without resting it on anything... You can squeeze all the muscles of your body, and you can squeeze all the muscles of your mind, but the very mind that does this is the mind you have to open. How can you take a step to the place you already are? And yet if you don’t take that step, you’ll never *know* that you are where you already are.

Now here is the true test of your practice. Of course, often one just has to use muscles, one just pushes, one does anything, one does everything. One squeezes one’s hands, one clenches one’s teeth,

furrows one's eyebrows, and one does all of these things. These have to be done. These have to be passed through. Sometimes the mind is so hippity-hoppity that one looks for a pain just to sit with in order to stop this mind clippity-clipping along. This has to be done. If one is desperate enough, one will do anything. But then, as one penetrates, there is just this still burning; this still point of the turning world, this unmoving motion, this dynamism.

N: *"Practice is but a persistent attempt to cross over from the verbal to the non-verbal."*

That is right. In the beginning was the word, and everything has flowed from the word. And to get back to the beginning - and this doesn't mean to say the beginning in time, but the beginning as the source of it all - we must go beyond the word. It is as simple as that. Just go beyond the word "Mu". Just go beyond the word "I". But we have backed up "I" with so much, and Mu is so ungraspable, so impenetrable, that we can't even know how to start with Mu, let alone get before Mu. And yet this is what is required. Get home, get there, where it all started from, and where it all is at the moment anyway.

N: *"The task seems hopeless."*

When I talk like this some people throw up their hands and say, "Well, I don't know what he is talking about. This is all too much for me. Zen is very complex." And I always say, "It is not Zen that is complex, it is *you* that are complex". It is extremely simple. Just be there before complexity arises, before any kind of this and that, yes and no, up and down, me and you arises.

N: *"The task seems hopeless until suddenly all becomes clear and simple, and so wonderfully easy. But as long as you are interested in your present way of living, you will shirk from the final leap into the unknown."*

"As long as you are interested in your present way of living". This does not mean one has to give up one's marriage, one's job or what one is doing and go away to a monastery. This has nothing to do with it. This is actually the worst thing you can do. You take all your troubles with you, and you've got a whole new set that you've got to work with when you get there. No, where you are is good enough. But how can you get beyond your present way of living? Of course there is a lot in one's life that one can simplify; there is a lot that one does which is absolutely unnecessary and, certainly, looking at television comes high among them. If you waste your time looking at television, then how are you ever going to get the energy or the

effort to get beyond this barrier. This "present way of living" means all of one's satisfactions, all of the things that one is satisfied with about oneself and one's life, all one's sources of comfort. Again, it is not a question of giving them up, but seeing what use you are making of them. To see how you are using all of this in order to insure that you *do not* wake up. Paradoxical, but true. People say, "If only I could come to awakening." There is only one way to come to awakening and that is by stopping living in delusions.

N: *"You shirk from the final leap into the unknown."*

Q: *"Why should the unknown interest me? Of what use is the unknown?"*

He must have been a North American!

N: *"Of no use whatsoever."*

There is no use to awakening, there is no use whatsoever. It is useless. It has nothing for the personality at all. And all that the personality knows as useful is in some way what will make it more comfortable, enhance its power, enhance its satisfaction, and so on. This is what is useful. Of course the unknown has no use for the personality. One sometimes asks oneself, particularly when one begins, "What is the use of this sitting?" No use at all! Be quite clear to yourself about it: it is useless. You have solved that problem, you have answered that question, now let's get on with the practice.

N: *"It is the full and correct knowledge of the known that takes you to the unknown."*

What does this mean? There are two aspects to our practice. One is coming to awakening, coming home, coming to see the source out of which it all arises; to see that which is beyond form, beyond identity, beyond any kind of structure. But the other aspect of our practice is to see the machine that we are, the mechanics of that machine. Gurdjieff always used to say that the human being is a machine. There is a long book on Gurdjieff written by a Behaviorist who thought that Gurdjieff was using the term "machine" in a way similar to his. But Gurdjieff was talking of the human being as a *perpetual motion machine*. Now, in order to see into yourself as a perpetual motion machine, as the wheel of samsara that turns unendingly - something is fed in and, as a consequence, a whole set of reactions, levers, wheels, spigots, everything starts moving... and then something else comes in and all the wheels turn around in the other way and everything that went out goes in and the levers work backward and so on - we must see into the mechanicalness. And by that I don't



mean the sort of simply absent minded behavior that one has, but rather the total “interactingness” of what we do. We do what we do because we are what we are.

N: *“It is the full and correct knowledge of the known that takes you to the unknown. You cannot think of it in terms of uses and advantages; to be quiet and detached, beyond the reach of all self-concern, all selfish consideration is an inescapable condition of liberation.”*

You cannot think of it in terms of uses and advantages. We are not putting practice down when we say that it has no use, but elevating it beyond any possibility of assessing it in that way, beyond any possibility of putting a price on it. “The great pearl beyond price”: this is what we are talking about.

N: *“To be quiet and detached, beyond the reach of all self-concern, of all selfish consideration, is an inescapable condition of liberation. You may call it death; to me it is living at its most meaningful and intense, for I am one with life in its totality and fullness-intensity, meaningfulness, harmony.”*

Of course all of these words are words, but what he is describing here is the entry into the very dynamism of being. And anybody who has touched it, even vaguely, even faintly, knows what tremendous joy and power and sense of wholeness and achievement this gives.

N: *“What more do you want?”*

Q: *“Nothing more is needed, of course. But you are talking of the knowable.”*

Of course, in order to say all of this, one has to talk of the knowable. This is why it is sometimes best not to say anything. One is creating metaphors when one talks about “the sparkle of the mind”. There is a sparkle in the mind, but when one talks about it, people think in terms of sparklers that you get on fireworks day. There is a sparkle, there is an intensity, a ripple, a clarity.

N: *“Of the unknowable only silence talks.”*

But one must understand that silence does talk. People interpret this as a negative statement; “only silence talks”. But it isn’t, it is a positive thing. “The sound of one hand clapping” is silence talking. “The thundering silence” of Vilamakirti is talking about the unknowable.

N: *“The mind can talk only of what it knows. If you diligently investigate the knowable, it dissolves and only the unknowable remains.”*

And the unknowable is what we call reality. Reality cannot be known, we cannot know reality. As long as we feel that we can know reality, we are living on the brink of the chute that sends us into this world in which we are tied up in our own consciousness. And there is this dreadful sense of claustrophobia that one can get, particularly when one is beginning to awaken a bit in the depths; a sense of being bound in one’s own mind, tied up in one’s own mind. And this claustrophobia sometimes creates a lot of panic, a lot of anxiety in people. It can create a lot of nausea and tension. This claustrophobia, this solipsism, this realization arises because one had believed that one knew reality, but suddenly this certainty begins to dissolve and one doesn’t know anymore what is real. And there is panic, this sense of having nothing to hold on to, this terror in the face of the situation. But we must go on then. This is good news: in practice terror is good news.

N: *“But with the first flicker of imagination and interest, the unknowable is obscured and the known comes to the fore-front.”*

Interest! People complain, “Practice is boring”! And here Nisargadatta says, “a flicker of interest and you are already lost”. When you get bored, particularly when you are sitting with dryness, this tense arid dryness that comes, make up your mind that you are really going to investigate it. Not intellectually or conceptually so that you can describe it to somebody or analyze it or find out its source or anything like that. But you are really going to know, “What does it feel like to be bored?” You are really going to take this on and be as bored as you can. Find a way so that you can increase the sense of being bored so that you really, really know what being bored is. Get beyond this lust for interest.

N: *“The unknowable is obscured and the known comes to the forefront. The known, the changing, is what you live with - the unchangeable is of no use to you.”*

It is a bit like saying, “the sun is really of no use to us, because all that we really want are the colors and the glitter. They are what is useful, of what use is the sun?”

N: *“It is only when you are satiated with the changeable and long for the unchangeable, that you are ready for the turning round and stepping into what can be described, when seen from the level of the mind, as emptiness and darkness.”*

When you have had enough, when you are satiated - this doesn’t mean one has to start living it up and

going through all the sins of the world. What is it that you are looking for? What is it that you want? The first thing about that question is to be honest with it. Say what it is that you want. To say that you want awakening is just flapping your gums. What is it that you want? Just keep pressing home with that question: "What do I want?" And every time anything comes up, look at it and say, "What does this mean? What will this give? What will this do?" Look at it, get it, see it, and then realize, "No, it is not really what I want".

Hubert Benoit said, "What we really want is light and movement. When we can't have light and movement, we will settle for light and stillness. And if we can't have light and stillness, then we will have darkness and movement. But what we won't have is darkness and stillness". And it is this revulsion, this backing off, this wanting to stir the mind again that keeps us in this agitated state. During daily living it is extremely difficult to resist this, but during sesshin, the whole point about a sesshin - the fact that we dim the lights, that we try to keep everything as quiet as possible, that we ask people to blow their noses outside the zendo so there is not this shattering noise that goes through if a person does this sort of thing - is that there is nothing to disturb you. It gives you the opportunity to throw yourself totally into this search, beyond the titillations of existence, into this which is the source of it all, but which, when you are seeing it from the outside, is simply darkness and stillness.

N: *"For the mind craves for content and variety, while reality is, to the mind, contentless and invariable."*

This is why it can't be known: it has no content. One looks around and says, "But the room is real. Surely the content of reality is the room". No. The content of the room is what you are perceiving. And what you

perceive that with is what we call reality. It is because of *you* that the room is real, it is not because of the room's reality.

Q: *"It looks like death to me."*

He must be given full marks for honesty anyway.

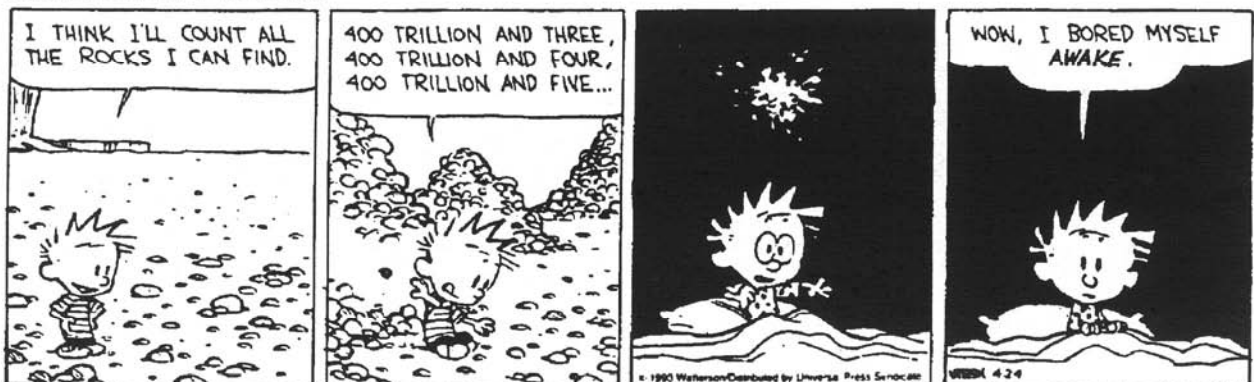
N: *"It is."*

It is death of the old person; "unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

N: *"It is [death]. It is also all-pervading, all-conquering, intense beyond words. No ordinary brain can stand it without being shattered. Hence the absolute need for sadhana [practice]."*

It is an interesting statement, that one needs practice in order to create an hermetically sealed vessel. And this is why we cannot hurry the process. This is why everything takes its time: each one of us has our own work to do. Don't ever compare yourself with another person. You are incomparable. Like someone said, "Everything is unique, there is no difference". Your work is your work. By this, we don't mean you, the personality. There is that which supports and underlies the personality, and that is working out its destiny. All that we can do is not get in the way. And by giving ourselves over to the practice, by being totally one with it - if our practice is Mu, by being totally one with Mu, or Who -, we ensure that we don't get in the way. If our practice is following the breath, then all it is is following the breath. Remember, when you are practicing, that Buddha said, "One must practice as though one's hair was on fire." But one must also practice in such a way that it is like going into a lake without making a ripple, like going into a forest without disturbing a blade of grass. \*

## Calvin and Hobbes



# Vanité des Vanités (L'Ecclésiaste)

**V**anité des vanités, tout est vanité. Quel profit trouve l'homme à toute la peine qu'il prend sous le soleil? Un âge va, un âge vient, mais la terre tient toujours. Le soleil se lève, le soleil se couche, il se hâte vers son lieu et c'est là qu'il se lève. Le vent part au midi, tourne au nord, il tourne, tourne et va, et sur son parcours retourne le vent. Tous les fleuves coulent vers la mer et la mer n'est pas remplie. Vers l'endroit où coulent les fleuves, c'est par là qu'ils continueront de couler. Toute parole est lassante! Personne ne peut dire que l'oeil n'est pas rassasié de voir, et l'oreille saturée par ce qu'elle a entendue.

Ce qui fut, cela sera,  
ce qui s'est fait se refera,  
et il n'y a rien de nouveau sous le soleil!  
Il y a un moment pour tout  
et un temps pour toute chose sous le ciel.  
Un temps pour enfanter,  
et un temps pour mourir;  
un temps pour planter,  
et un temps pour arracher le plant.  
Un temps pour tuer,  
et un temps pour guérir;  
un temps pour détruire,  
et un temps pour bâtir.  
Un temps pour pleurer,  
et un temps pour rire;

un temps pour gémir,  
et un temps pour danser.  
Un temps pour lancer des pierres,  
et un temps pour en ramasser;  
un temps pour embrasser,  
et un temps pour s'abstenir  
d'embrassements.  
Un temps pour chercher,  
et un temps pour perdre;  
un temps pour garder,  
un temps pour jeter.  
Un temps pour déchirer,  
et un temps pour coudre;  
un temps pour se taire,  
et un temps pour parler.  
Un temps pour aimer,  
et un temps pour hair;  
un temps pour la guerre,  
et un temps pour la paix.

Quel profit celui qui travaille trouve-t-il à la  
peine qu'il prend?  
Je regarde la tâche que Dieu donne aux  
enfants des hommes ; tout ce qu'il fait  
convient en son temps. Il a mis dans leur  
coeur l'ensemble du temps, mais sans que  
l'homme puisse saisir ce que Dieu fait, du  
commencement à la fin.

*La Bible de Jérusalem, Ed. Anne Sigier,  
Novalis, 1988.*

# A Journey

To some people, entering the zendo seems ostensibly a simple act which can come from word-of-mouth, a leaflet spotted somewhere, a reading of the book *An Invitation to Practice of Zen*, a few workshops and - lo and behold - a brownclad novice is meditating on the tan.

This was not the case for me. The road to the Centre was long, tortuous and unsteady. The first steps are lost somewhere in the past, but more recent and significant guide-posts are remembered. One was Paul Brunton's *A Search in Secret India* - a book given to me by my husband. This brought a call from Arunachala, a holy mountain in Southern India, where the great Ramana Maharshi lived, and died in 1950. In 1973, when we decided to go there, the memory of his earthly presence was still very much alive.

It was a most moving experience to be there. However, I was still kind of a tourist on the way to the next post. Everything was new to me and even so fascinating. I enjoyed being with local people, eating with our fingers from leaf-made plates spread on the floor before crossed-legged guests, with monkeys peeking through the windows and peacocks parading in front of the dining hall.

Maharshi's teaching with the emphasis on self-inquiry as an attempt to destroy the ego and attain self-realization through the constantly asked question "Who am I?" - these were only just words for me. However, they undoubtedly started to provoke my thinking. The seed was planted and I felt an urgent need to find a living guru. Soon it happened.

Back home, I joined a group of Sri Chimnoy's disciples. He himself lived in New York. His person was familiar to me as I met him once in Ottawa before our trip to India. Brought up in Pondichery, not very far from Arunachala, as a young boy he knew Ramana Maharshi. In Pondichery, the

abode of the great Sri Aurobindo, we encountered people who grew up with Sri Chimnoy. Everything was so nicely interrelated.

Two years followed full of interesting experiences. The Guru himself was an exceptional person of many talents, worshipped by his disciples. In their various and numerous ways they showed adoration for him. There were excursions, concerts, films and plays, circuses, exhibitions and sport competitions, meditation of course and striving for perfection. This was totally overwhelming to me. Maybe I was too old for so much of extravaganza and too much exhausting activities or simply - it was not my path. Confusion was created and personal criticism.

Parting was painful but unavoidable. For my husband it was a great relief. He kindly tolerated my apprenticeship with Guru, knowing that I had to go through it. Nevertheless, the experience has never been lost on me. I was introduced to meditation.

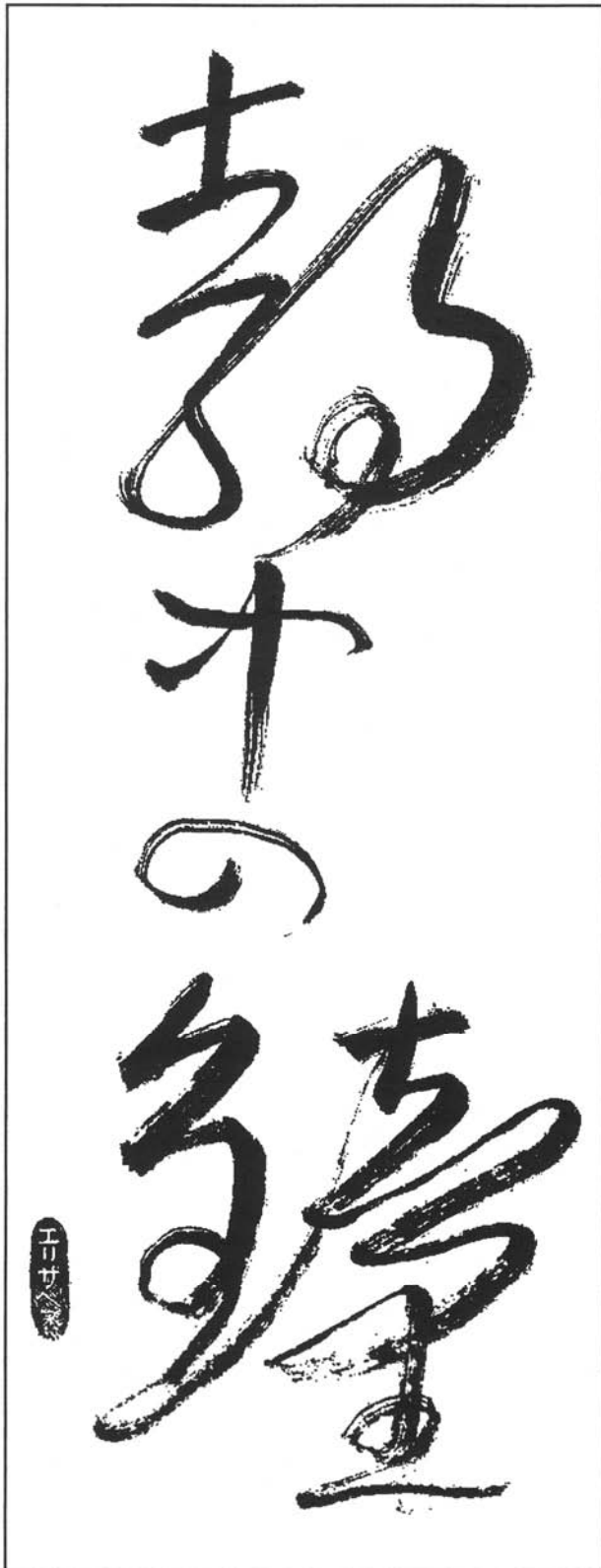
Longing, expectations and search continued.

In 1977 something happened. During my office hours, I spotted on somebody's desk a book with the title that immediately caught my attention : *I am That*. It was an eventful discovery; I am certain that going through university later in my life, getting a diploma and a job in the National Library had just one purpose: to find that book.

There were talks with Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, a Hindu from Bombay. My husband and I instantly became attracted by his Socratic reasoning, his logical conclusions and sublime wisdom and started reading the dialogues together.

As a result, I entered into a correspondence with the editor, acquired the book for ourselves and the good news that Maharaj had been receiving

visitors. There was an irrefutable desire to go to India again. The trip was planned for the fall of 1979. Shortly before we were to leave, my husband suddenly passed away and I went to Bombay alone.



RINGING SILENCE, Calligraphy, Elizabeth Namiesniowski.

On the morning of my arrival, I found my way to the modest dwelling of Nisargadatta. In a small loft reached by ladden-like steps, I experienced most memorable moments of my life. The impact of his words directed to me shall never be forgotten.

Back home, I was reading *I am That*, trying to go into the core of Maharaj's teaching but it was not easy to assimilate it. I felt lost without my husband's spiritual support.

In the meantime, something new came forward. A propitious tale brought to my attention some books on Zen. I was most impressed the more so as there was no contradiction with what had been offered to me before.

With Zen, come quite naturally the interest in China and Japan and so I decided to go to the Far East - a rather queer mode of searching for truth by way of lengthy travels. It was 1982 and the year of my retirement. The trip was fascinating and included many countries, which I well documented by hundred of slides and photos. Not at all a spiritual pilgrimage.

However, on my way home I stopped in Vancouver and there, in a secondhand bookstore, I discovered another volume of Nisargadatta talks next to Roshi Kapleau's *Zen-Dawn in the West*. I realized that I have had, in my private library, another book by the same author: *Three Pillars of Zen*. It was bought a long time ago only because I had a chance to know the wife of Mr. Kapleau when we were both members of Sri Chinmoy's group. The book was just skimmed with little interest and soon forgotten. But now, everything seemed to fit together perfectly.

As soon as I arrived home, I phoned Rochester almost ready to go there at once but the voice on the answering machine was disconcerting and cooled me down.

Eventually, I found the Toronto Zen Centre affiliated with Roshi Kapleau, where I had my first short sesshin. From there, only a few steps brought me to Montreal.

The first conversation with Albert Low assured me that I finally met the teacher. Here I found again Ramana Maharshi and Nisargadatta Maharaj.

Now my wanderings all over the world seem like a thought. Were they not a shortest way between Ottawa and Montreal? Or was there any way at all? \*

# Sur le sens général de la pensée Zen

Nous reproduisons ici le premier chapitre du livre *La Doctrine suprême selon la pensée Zen*, écrit par Hubert Benoit et réédité pour une quatrième fois par "Le Courrier Du Livre" à Paris, en 1967. L'édition est malheureusement épuisée, mais le livre est disponible dans quelques bibliothèques, à la bibliothèque municipale de Montréal notamment. Nous vous le conseillons fortement, c'est un véritable classique qui présente le Zen d'une façon originale et intelligente et dans une langue d'une clarté et d'une précision quasi chirurgicale. Pour ceux qui lisent l'anglais, le livre du docteur Benoit a été traduit sous le titre : *Zen and the Psychology of Transformation*. (Rochester, Vermont, Inner Traditions International, 1990). Une nouvelle édition française est prévue, mais la date n'est pas encore précisée.

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L'homme, depuis toujours, réfléchit sur sa condition, pense qu'il n'est pas comme il voudrait être, définit plus ou moins bien les vices de son fonctionnement, fait en somme son auto-critique. Ce travail de critique, parfois grossier, atteint d'autres fois, au contraire, dans nombre d'enseignements, un très haut degré de profondeur et de subtilité. Les modalités indésirables du fonctionnement intérieur de l'homme ordinaire sont souvent très précisément reconnues et décrites.

En regard de cette richesse dans le travail diagnostique, on est frappé par la pauvreté du travail thérapeutique. Les écoles qui ont enseigné et enseignent sur le problème de l'homme, après avoir montré ce qui ne marche pas bien dans l'homme ordinaire et comment cela marche mal, arrivent nécessairement à la question "Comment remédier à cet état de choses?" Et là commence la débandade et la pauvreté des doctrines. Arrivées en ce point, presque toutes les doctrines se fourvoient, parfois grossièrement, parfois subtilement, sauf la doctrine Zen (encore faut-il préciser "certains maîtres Zen").

Ce n'est pas à dire que, dans d'autres enseignements quelques hommes n'aient pas obtenu leur "réalisation". Mais une claire exposition de la question et une claire réfutation des fausses voies ne se trouve que dans le Zen pur.

L'erreur essentielle de toutes les fausses voies consiste en ce que le remède proposé ne porte pas sur

la cause profonde de la misère de l'homme ordinaire. L'analyse critique de l'état de l'homme ne remonte pas assez haut dans le déterminisme de ses phénomènes intérieurs; elle ne remonte pas, dans cet enchaînement, jusqu'au phénomène premier. Elle s'arrête trop vite sur des symptômes. Le chercheur qui ne voit pas plus haut que tel symptôme, dont la pensée analytique, épuisée, s'arrête là, ne peut évidemment concevoir le remède à toute la situation que comme l'élaboration concertée et artificielle d'un symptôme radicalement contraire au symptôme incriminé. Par exemple : un homme aboutit à la conclusion que sa misère réside dans ses manifestations de colère, d'amour-propre, de sensualité, etc... et il pensera que la voie consiste à s'appliquer à produire des manifestations de douceur, d'humilité, d'ascétisme, etc... Ou bien un autre homme, déjà plus intelligent, aboutira à la conclusion que sa misère réside dans son agitation mentale, et il pensera que la voie consiste à s'appliquer, par tels exercices, à tranquilliser le mental. Telle doctrine nous dira : "Votre misère vient de ce que vous désirez toujours quelque chose, de votre attachement à ce que vous possédez", et ceci aboutira, selon le degré d'intelligence du maître, au conseil de distribuer tous ses biens, ou d'apprendre à se détacher intérieurement des biens qu'on continue à posséder extérieurement. Telle doctrine verra la clef de la misère de l'homme dans sa non-maîtrise de lui-

même, et enseignera des «yogas», méthodes visant un entraînement progressif du corps, ou du sentiment, ou du comportement altruiste, ou du savoir, ou de l'attention.

Tout cela est, pour le Zen, dressage d'animal savant et mène à un asservissement ou à un autre (avec l'impression illusoire et exaltante qu'on devient libre). Au fond de tout cela, il y a le raisonnement simpliste suivant : "Cela marche mal en moi selon telle modalité; eh bien je vais, à partir de maintenant, faire tout le contraire." Cette façon de poser le problème, en partant d'une *forme* jugée mauvaise, enferme le chercheur dans les limites du domaine *formel*, et lui refuse par conséquent toute possibilité de restaurer sa conscience en amont de toute forme; quand je suis enfermé dans le plan dualiste, aucune inversion de signe ne me délivrera de l'illusion dualiste et ne me restaurera dans l'Unité. C'est tout à fait analogue au problème «d'Achille et la tortue»; la façon de poser le problème l'enferme dans les limites qu'il s'agit de franchir et le rend par conséquent insoluble.

La pénétrante pensée du Zen traverse tous nos phénomènes sans s'arrêter à considérer leurs modalités. Elle sait qu'en réalité rien ne marche mal en nous et que nous souffrons parce que nous ne comprenons pas que tout marche parfaitement, parce que nous croyons par conséquent illusoirement que cela ne va pas et qu'il faut remédier à quelque chose. Dire que tout le mal vient de ce que l'homme croit illusoirement qu'il lui manque quelque chose serait encore une phrase absurde puisque le «mal» dont elle parle est sans réalité et qu'une croyance illusoire, donc sans réalité, ne saurait être cause de quoi que ce soit. Si j'y regarde bien, d'ailleurs, je ne trouve pas en moi positivement cette croyance qu'il me manque quelque chose (comment pourrait être positivement présente la croyance illusoire en une absence?); ce que je constate, c'est que mes phénomènes intérieurs marchent *comme si* cette croyance était là; mais, si mes phénomènes marchent ainsi, ce n'est pas à cause de la présence de cette croyance, c'est parce que l'intuition intellectuelle directe qu'il ne me manque rien *dort* au fond de ma conscience, qu'elle n'y a pas encore été éveillée; elle est là, car rien ne manque et

surtout pas cela, mais elle est endormie et ne produit pas ses effets. Tout mon «mal» apparent vient du sommeil de ma *foi* en la parfaite Réalité; je n'ai, éveillées en moi, que des «croyances» en ce que me livrent mes sens et mon mental travaillant dans le plan dualiste (croyances dans l'inexistence d'une Parfaite Réalité Une); et ces croyances sont des formations illusoires, sans réalité, conséquences du sommeil de ma foi. Je suis un «homme de peu de foi», plus exactement sans foi aucune, ou mieux encore de foi endormie, qui ne croit pas à ce qu'il ne perçoit pas dans le plan de la forme. (Cette notion de la foi présente mais endormie fait comprendre le besoin que nous avons, pour nous délivrer, d'un maître «réveilleur», d'un enseignement, d'une révélation; le sommeil en effet comporte précisément la non-jouissance de ce qui peut éveiller.)

*En somme tout paraît marcher mal en moi parce que l'idée fondamentale que tout est parfaitement, éternellement et totalement positif, dort au centre de mon être, qu'elle n'y est pas éveillée, vivante et agissante.* Là enfin nous touchons le tout premier phénomène douloureux, celui dont dérive tout le reste de nos phénomènes douloureux. Le sommeil de notre foi en la Parfaite Réalité Une (hors de laquelle rien n'«est») est le phénomène primaire d'où découle toute la chaîne faussée; c'est le phénomène causal; et aucune thérapeutique de l'illusoire souffrance humaine ne peut être efficace si elle porte ailleurs que là.

A la question "Que dois-je faire pour me délivrer?", le Zen répond : "Vous n'avez rien à faire puisque vous n'avez jamais été asservi et qu'il n'y a en réalité rien dont vous ayez à vous délivrer." Cette réponse peut être mal comprise et sembler décourageante parce qu'elle renferme une équivoque portant sur le mot «faire». Chez l'homme ordinaire, «faire» se décompose, de façon dualiste, en conception et action, et c'est à l'action, à l'exécution de ce qu'il a conçu, que l'homme applique le mot «faire». En ce sens, le Zen a raison, nous n'avons rien à «faire»; tout s'arrangera spontanément et harmonieusement dans notre «faire» quand nous cesserons justement de nous appliquer à le modifier d'une façon quelconque et que nous travaillerons

uniquement à éveiller notre foi endormie, c'est-à-dire à concevoir l'idée primordiale que nous avons à concevoir. Cette idée totale, comme sphérique et immobile, ne conduit évidemment à aucune action particulière, elle n'a aucun dynamisme particulier, elle est cette pureté centrale du Non-Agir à travers laquelle passera, non troublé, le dynamisme spontané de la vie naturelle réelle. Aussi peut-on et doit-on dire qu'éveiller et nourrir cette conception n'est rien «faire» au sens que ce mot a nécessairement pour l'homme ordinaire, et même que cet éveil dans la pensée se traduit dans la vie par une diminution (tendant vers la cessation) de toutes les manipulations inutiles auxquelles l'homme se livrait sur ses phénomènes intérieurs.

Evidemment on peut dire que travailler à concevoir une idée est «faire» quelque chose. Mais, étant donné le sens que ce mot a pour l'homme ordinaire, mieux vaut, pour éviter une dangereuse méprise, parler comme le Zen et montrer que le travail qui peut abolir l'angoisse humaine est un travail de l'intellect pur qui n'implique pas qu'on «fasse» quoi que ce soit de particulier dans sa vie intérieure et qui implique au contraire qu'on cesse d'y vouloir apporter aucune modification.

Voyons la question de plus près encore. Le travail qui éveille la foi en l'unique et parfaite Réalité qui est notre «être» se décompose en deux temps. Dans un temps préliminaire, notre pensée discursive conçoit toutes les idées nécessaires pour que nous comprenions théoriquement l'existence en nous de cette foi qui dort et la possibilité de son éveil, et que cet éveil seul peut mettre fin à nos souffrances illusoire. Au cours de ce temps préliminaire, le travail effectué peut être appelé «faire» quelque chose. Mais cette compréhension théorique, supposée obtenue, ne change rien encore à notre état douloureux; il faut maintenant qu'elle se transforme en une compréhension vécue, éprouvée par tout notre organisme, compréhension théorique et pratique, à la fois abstraite et concrète; alors seulement notre foi sera réveillée. Mais cette transformation, ce passage au-delà de la forme, ne saurait être l'effet d'aucun travail direct «fait» par l'homme ordinaire entièrement aveugle à ce qui n'est

pas formel. Il n'y a aucune «voie» vers la délivrance, et cela est évident puisque nous n'avons jamais été asservis en réalité et continuons à ne pas l'être; il n'y a à «aller» nulle part, il n'y a rien à «faire». L'homme n'a rien à faire directement pour éprouver sa liberté totale et infiniment heureuse. Ce qu'il a à faire est indirect et négatif; ce qu'il a à comprendre, par un travail, c'est l'illusion décevante de toutes les «voies» qu'il peut se proposer et entreprendre. Lorsque ses efforts persévérants lui auront apporté la compréhension entièrement claire que *tout* ce qu'il peut «faire» pour se libérer est vain, lorsqu'il aura dévalorisé concrètement la notion même de toutes les «voies» imaginables, alors éclatera le «satori», vision réelle qu'il n'y a pas de «voie» parce qu'il y a à aller nulle part, parce que, de toute éternité, on était au centre unique et principal de tout.

Ainsi donc la «délivrance», ce qu'on appelle ainsi et qui est la disparition de l'illusion d'être asservi, succède, chronologiquement, à un travail intérieur, mais n'est pas en réalité causée par lui. Ce travail intérieur formel ne peut causer ce qui est en amont de toute forme et par conséquent de lui-même; il est seulement l'instrument à travers lequel agit la Cause Première.

En somme, la fameuse «porte étroite» n'existe pas en mode formel, pas plus que la «voie» sur laquelle elle s'ouvrirait; à moins qu'on ne veuille appeler ainsi la compréhension qu'il n'y a pas de voie, qu'il n'y a pas de porte, qu'il n'y a nulle part où aller. C'est là le grand secret, et en même temps la grande évidence, que nous révèlent les maîtres Zen. ✽

Autres titres de cet auteur, disponibles chez le même éditeur :

DE L'AMOUR. - Psychologie de la vie affective et sexuelle.

DE LA RÉALISATION INTÉRIEURE.

LÂCHER PRISE. - Théorie et pratique du détachement selon le Zen.



# Living with death

A funny thing happened one night on the way home from the Zendo. I decided to become a volunteer in a cancer ward for terminally ill patients at the Royal Victoria Hospital.

The urge to do so had been building for awhile. Having practiced Zen for a couple of years, I began to feel more connected to the suffering of others.

Perhaps it was the experience of sesshin, which has always been a personal struggle with suffering. Perhaps it was listening to the Fourteen Reminders, one of which tells us not to avoid suffering and to find ways to comfort others.

Undoubtedly, it was because Albert Low had mentioned the fact that both he and Jean had been volunteers at the same ward for a couple of years. Albert occasionally mentioned the experience during his teishos.

It was inspiring and it seemed like a good “Zen thing” to do.

While I’m no longer working at the ward, I’m describing the experience now because it raised some profound questions about practice that others may find worth considering. What is this urge we feel to help others? How can one maintain one’s faith when one is in the middle of such awful pain and suffering? Why did I begin to feel after a while that this kind of work was a spiritual trap because it made me feel like a saint?

First, some background. The decision to work there was a new departure for me because I had spent all my life blissfully unaware of death or its consequences. No one close to me had ever died. I’d never even been to a funeral. Before coming to Zen, I avoided reading articles about death or terminal illness. And whenever there was a television program about someone coping with a terrible disease, I always switched the channel.

Of course, this was just an attempt to shut the problem away in a box, where it couldn’t cause any trouble. I know now that we can’t afford to do that. We have to question death as much as we question life. “Great is the mystery of birth and death,” a Zen master once said, and then added rather chillingly: “Time waits for no one.”

Yet this attempt at pushing death away meant there was a lot of personal fear to overcome. Just how much fear there was became apparent when training sessions for volunteers began.

At one of the first sessions, the Royal Victoria Hospital showed a film about the ward, which is known as the palliative care unit. As one of the patients close to death was being interviewed, I felt an

incredible inner tension and then began to feel dizzy. The next thing I knew, I had passed out in a pool of sweat on the floor. They took me to the emergency room for precautions, but the only thing wrong was that my faith had been badly shaken. How can I go back again, I asked with a feeling of dread?

There didn’t seem to be any choice. This work had to be done. Besides, the palliative care unit at the Royal Victoria is a wonderful place.

A small ward with just 16 beds, it has a high ratio of care-givers per patient. It’s designed to create a home-like atmosphere for terminally patients, who can end their days with friends and family around them in an atmosphere quite unlike what you’ll find in other hospital wings.

Volunteers play an essential role in the ward. Three or four volunteers are always on the floor to help nurses change bedclothes, dress bedsores, serve meals, etc. But mostly the volunteers are there to spend time with the patients and the suffering families. Being a good listener helps a lot.

I stuck with it, yet coming back to the ward one night a week was never easy. Before our shift began, the volunteers would listen to a tape of the head nurse describing the state of each patient. It made for harrowing listening.

A typical report would go something like this: “Mrs. Smith has bone cancer which has spread to her brain. She is in a state of total physical and mental pain. She’s incontinent and has trouble recognizing people. The family is still in a state of denial. They refuse to acknowledge she will die.”

Some of the scenes on that ward were heart-rending: a 32-year-old mother with two young children knows she will die but can’t break the news to her kids; a man who spent his whole life in and out of prison looks for somebody to care about him in his last few days; a young couple, she with cancer and he with a serious lung problem share the same room and try to comfort each other with what little energy they have left.

But what about Zen, and spiritual practice. How did it come into play here?

The first thing I noticed was that many of the nurses and volunteers were people who practiced Yoga, or Tai-Chi or who were interested in some form of meditation. It seemed to come with the territory.

In my own case, just walking through the doors of that hospital ward each night plunged me to the heart of my koan. What is life? What is death? Do you “go anywhere” when you die? Working there made many of my little ego concerns evaporate.

I can’t forget the night I was asked to help wrap a dead body in a plastic bag for shipment to the morgue. The cold, clammy feeling of that skin is something I’ll never forget but I know I couldn’t have done it if I hadn’t stayed with my koan for the 20

minutes or so I was in there.

I remained for almost a year and grew stronger as a result. But nagging doubts also began to creep in. "Why do I feel so good about what I'm doing," I wondered? "This is not the path to awakening," said another voice inside. "It's fine to help others, but you also have to help yourself."

So I left, partly because my schedule was too busy to allow me to continue, but mostly because there was unfinished business in the zendo. The experience was very helpful and one day I may return. But for now, it seems that zazen is enough. ✽

## Le goût du miel

Lorsqu'on m'a demandé d'écrire mes impressions en tant que débutante dans le Zen, mon ego s'est gonflé de plaisir; enfin on allait reconnaître ma verve et mon humour. Puis mon ego a eu peur: si j'allais dire des conneries, on se moquerait de moi! Après tout, je ne connais pas grand chose au Zen et j'y suis venue presque par hasard. Je cherchais un maître qui pourrait m'aider justement à ne plus être tributaire des émotions en dents de scie que nous impose cet égo si friand d'imaginaire.

Cet ego qui est la cause chez moi d'une grande timidité et qui fait que vous me verrez rarement ouvrir la bouche dans un groupe de plus de deux ou trois personnes, surtout si quelques-unes ont la langue bien pendue. (Remarquez que dans les sesshins, on me dit qu'il est préférable justement de ne pas ouvrir la bouche, alors, j'aurai un peu d'avance sur les autres!)

Cet ego qui me refuse le droit d'être simplement ce que je suis par peur de n'être pas assez bien, de n'être pas aimée. Cet ego qui me rend incapable de m'accepter moi-même telle que je suis. C'est ce que je commence à apprendre à travers la pratique. M'accepter telle que je suis, sans chercher à m'améliorer car ce serait déjà ne plus m'accepter telle que je suis et un truc du mental pour me faire croire que si je ne suis pas parfaite aujourd'hui, ce n'est pas si grave car demain ou le mois prochain, je serai presque parfaite. Cette tactique d'acceptation donne une fameuse injection d'humilité.

Une personne en qui j'ai une très grande confiance m'a indiqué qu'au Centre Zen de Montréal je trouverais ce maître que je cherchais, qui pourrait m'aider dans ma démarche si vraiment j'avais des intentions sérieuses, tout en me mettant en garde sur

la difficulté de la pratique : "C'est très dur".

Cela se passait à l'été 92 et comme j'avais un autre projet qui me tenait à coeur et que de plus, je ne savais pas très bien comment on aborde un maître zen : "Bonjour, je voudrais atteindre l'éveil!", j'avais alors repoussé le moment jusqu'au printemps 93.

Mais la Vie en a décidé autrement. Le projet qui me tenait à coeur est tombé à l'eau. En novembre 92, j'achète pour la première fois le "Guide Ressources" et qu'est-ce que je vois dans les annonces du Bottin? L'annonce de "l'Atelier d'introduction au Zen" par Albert Low. Je ne fais ni un ni deux et je m'inscris à l'atelier sans un instant d'hésitation. Je pratique depuis avec le plus grand enthousiasme et je suis devenue membre du Centre vers la fin de janvier 93.

La première fois que j'ai vu Albert Low, je me suis dit : "Parfait! Il ne me plaît pas du tout, donc pas de danger que j'en tombe amoureuse." (C'est mon problème en général avec les hommes qui m'impressionnent.) Ça faisait déjà un problème de moins. Mais c'était compter sans l'élément imprévu de la vie. A l'intérieur des quinze premières minutes de l'atelier, j'étais conquise totalement. Peu de temps après, je me chantais pour moi-même la chanson de Marie-Madeleine dans l'opéra-rock "Jesus Super Star": -"Dites-moi ce qu'il faut faire pour l'aimer, pour lui plaire..."

Rien!

"Pour lui plaire", il n'y a rien à faire car chacun a comme moi, je pense, l'impression d'être une personne très importante à ses yeux. "Pour l'aimer" il n'y a rien à faire non plus, car comment ne pas être rempli d'amour pour quelqu'un par qui on se sent accepté totalement et inconditionnellement?

Voilà pour mon premier contact avec le Zen.

Monsieur Low se plaît souvent à dire aux débutants que les deux principaux problèmes en pratique sont premièrement, de s'asseoir sur le coussin, et deuxièmement, d'y rester. Pour moi, le premier problème n'a jamais existé car dès le début, j'ai pris goût à ce contact intime avec moi-même que nos vies modernes et trépidantes ne nous ont pas enseigné à faire. Mais je ne nie pas que le deuxième est très présent, et l'envie de faire quelque chose d'urgent ou simplement la fatigue de la posture se présentent régulièrement.

Comment parler de son expérience sans révéler des choses tellement intimes, tellement précieuses, qu'on n'a pas du tout envie de les dévoiler à des inconnus ou même à des amis proches? Comment dire quand même quelque chose qui soit d'un intérêt quelconque pour les lecteurs? Peut-on expliquer ce qu'est la couleur rouge à un aveugle? Le chant des oiseaux à un sourd de naissance ou l'odeur du lilas et du muguet au printemps à quelqu'un qui a le nez complètement bouché?

Pour connaître le Zen, il faut se mettre à la pratique; il n'y a pas d'autres moyens de savoir vraiment ce que c'est. On peut lire tous les bouquins sur la fabrication, la cueillette ou l'origine du miel et on saura tout sur le miel, sauf l'essentiel.

On ne saura pas ce qu'est le goût du miel! ✽

## Being a Zen Parent: Trying to Leave the Choice of Religion Open

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Sarah Webb is a member of the Montreal Zen Center and lives in Chickasaw, Oklahoma, U.S.A., a town which is predominantly fundamentalist. This sheds a particular light on the situation she discusses in her article: that of practicing Zen and raising a child in an environment which is of a different religious tradition.

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When we start sesshin we repeat the fourteen reminders, one of which is not to abuse our authority over others by exercising undue influence over the way they think. As a zen practitioner and a parent, I think sometimes of that reminder. In much of my child raising, I teach my daughter certain skills, reward certain behaviors and discourage others, offer opportunities. No doubt the teaching I am not aware of will be the most influential in the long run; nevertheless, I do a lot of things to shape my child toward an adult who I hope will be happy and productive.

But when it comes to Buddhism, I try to hold back from too direct an influence. I don't want Amanda choosing her religion because she was indoctrinated in it. Maybe her heart will lead her another way.

Yet she asks me questions. What happens when I die? was an early one. We discussed the Christian view of heaven, the secular scientific view that when we're dead that's it, and Buddhist ideas of rebirth and being part of God. Rebirth really took hold in her mind, perhaps because as we walked

across campus each day from her preschool, we would stop and look at a bas-relief sculpture placed out for viewing by a group of Hare Krishnas. It showed a baby growing into a boy and then a man, an older man, a dying man, and finally, through rebirth, a baby again. Amanda was fascinated and always wanted us to walk that way so we could view the display. She understood very partially and would say things like "Will you buy me this dress when I'm your little girl next time around?" But death remained a big question to her. Sometimes she would cry and say she didn't want to die or ask would I go with her when she died. And we would talk again about what different people said about death. I would have liked to have said "This is what death is, honey, and this is what happens, and this is why it's OK." But I really couldn't do that, partly because I didn't want to give her a set answer from Buddhism but partly because I really don't understand death that well myself.

Another big question for her was why does God let us suffer? She'd hurt her leg, and she'd say, why does God make it so we have to hurt? Or she'd complain why do animals have to eat each other - God didn't have to make it that way! So we'd talk about what was God and how maybe we were all part of God and also about pain being our warning system and about Job and what Christians say.

I always said I wanted Amanda to make her own choice, and I guess I do want that, because if you're going the zen route there had better be a really strong push inside to go that way. But it is hard to hold back sometimes, particularly now that we have moved to a town that is predominantly fundamentalist. She comes home from the playground knowing a lot of things about religion - that nonbelievers will go to hell, for instance, and that the sign of the Beast is 666.

I notice that she had become wary of discussing certain of her ideas with friends. One day after school she said something to the mother of a little friend and the mother responded, "Oh, that's reincarnation, isn't it? Do you believe that?" Amanda came back quickly, "Oh, maybe that's what it is. Some people believe in that," and she changed the subject abruptly.

I'm not always as open on the question as I think would be best. Many of the fundamentalist viewpoints in this area are very authoritarian and dogmatic, and I get scared she'll get drawn into that cul de sac. Nor do I want her to see fundamentalism as the only kind of Christianity. But when I get out of line, she calls me on it. She had been invited to a Christian Youth Concert, and I made a smart alert comment that that would be fine as long as they didn't all turn around and try to get her to come to Jesus. She informed me that I was very rude. Since then we've had several conversations about how you

can be a Baptist (like most of her friends) and be a very nice person.

About a year ago I came back from sesshin, and when we went in the bedroom where my Buddha is, she turned to me in tears. "I just don't know what to believe!" She told me that her beloved babysitter, Jill, had discussed our Buddha figure with her, calling it a "false Christ." The babysitter had told Amanda of her concern about my daughter's religious ideas and said that she hoped that when Amanda was old enough to make a choice that she would choose Jesus. In a region where most of the churches teach that it is a person's duty to evangelize and carry the word of Christ, our babysitter actually showed great restraint. Like me, she said the choice was Amanda's to make at a later date. Faced with this challenge, however, and a weeping child who insisted on taking the Buddha figure onto the bed and petting it and putting a cloth bracelet around its neck, I opted for security and consolation, not openness. "Think of Jill's cooking," I told Amanda (our babysitter was a highschooler who can burn cheese and macaroni); "she knows about as much about religion as she does about cooking!"

My reassurance helped, and Amanda stopped crying. But she also said some things that were worrisome: that religion was too hard to understand, it had too many rules, and probably she wouldn't have a religion at all. Later I heard her tell a friend she didn't go to church because she didn't believe in religion. That's roughly where it stood for a year. At nine she was a secular humanist.

At ten, she asked for a Bible. She announced her plan to read it all, but the begats were daunting. Now she is copying "happy texts" into her diary. I am just watching now to see what she will do next (and guarding my "rude" tongue). She continues to mull the question. "If God made everything," she said to me last week, "then who made God?" \*



MEDITATING KANNON, *Hakuin Zenji*, 1685-1769, Ink on paper, 47 1/4" x 21 1/4".

# Souffrir... Consentir

“Souffrir... Consentir”, c’est le titre du dernier chapitre de ce livre magnifique d’Albert Low, *The Iron Cow of Zen*. Nous avons décidé de publier une traduction de ce chapitre qui, bien qu’il serve de conclusion au livre, traite d’un thème essentiel qui le parcourt en filigrane du début à la fin. En introduction d’ailleurs, M.Low écrit : “S’il ne tenait pas compte de la souffrance, ce livre manquerait de cœur”. Cette traduction sera présentée en plusieurs tranches au cours des prochains numéros du Zen Gong. Voici la première.

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*Un moine demanda à Tozan : “Comment pouvons-nous éviter la chaleur et le froid lorsqu’ils nous accablent?” Tozan répondit : “Pourquoi n’allez-vous pas là où il ne fait ni chaud ni froid?” Le moine répliqua : “Où est l’endroit où il ne fait ni chaud ni froid?” Tozan dit : “Lorsqu’il fait froid, laissez le froid vous tuer; lorsqu’il fait chaud, laissez la chaleur vous tuer.”<sup>1</sup> (Il y a une autre réplique, moins extrême, où Tozan dit : “Lorsqu’il fait froid, grelottez, lorsqu’il fait chaud, suez!”)*

Où est l’endroit où il n’y a ni douleur ni chagrin? Un poète moderne a dit, dans la même veine que Tozan :

*Point d’espoir hormis d’élire  
L’un ou l’autre des bûchers  
Afin d’être du feu par le feu racheté.<sup>2</sup>*

Que la souffrance soit le fondement de la vie est la première vérité du Bouddhisme. Le premier sermon du Bouddha après son éveil portait sur la souffrance. La vie, disait-il, est fondée sur la souffrance. Tout est souffrance. Et il poursuivait en disant que la cause de cette souffrance est le désir d’être né. On pourrait dire que ce désir d’être né est le désir d’être “quelqu’un”, quelqu’un d’unique et de spécial. Le mot utilisé par le Bouddha n’était pas souffrance, mais *dukkha*, mot habituellement traduit par souffrance ou douleur.

*Dukkha* pourrait aussi se traduire par dualité. La dualité n’est pas douloureuse en elle-même, mais elle le devient parce qu’on la voit toujours en opposition, pour ainsi dire, avec l’unité à l’arrière-plan. C’est cette soif d’unité et d’intégrité au-delà de la séparation de la vie qui cause la douleur, une soif qui se durcit dans un désir d’impossible unité conçue comme une identité.

Dans le Christianisme aussi la souffrance est reconnue comme un ingrédient, non seulement

fondamental, mais aussi essentiel de la vie. Le symbole central du Christianisme est celui d’un homme souffrant sur la croix, la croix de la dualité : un mais cependant deux. Dans cette crucifixion il n’y a pas seulement souffrance et dissonance; il y a aussi harmonie et beauté surgissant de l’éternelle résurrection de l’Un. S’il n’y avait que l’Un, il n’y aurait pas de souffrance, mais où serait la vie? S’il n’y avait que le deux, il y aurait peut-être de la vie, mais où serait le sens?

Dans notre désir même d’être Un, nous nions l’Un. Inhérent à ce désir se trouve l’effort d’être ce qu’on appelle “bon”. Tout le monde s’efforce d’être bon, même les criminels les plus endurcis. Un criminel notoire a déjà dit : “Lorsqu’ils sont entre eux, les prisonniers sont humains.”<sup>3</sup> Nous nous efforçons d’être bons, non parce que l’Un est bon, mais parce que c’est bon d’être un. Notre fardeau le plus lourd, notre souffrance d’être humain, souffrance que nous nommons culpabilité, naît de cette situation. C’est de ce déni de l’Un par notre effort d’être bon que naît la culpabilité. Dans notre effort d’être bon, nous détruisons le bien.

A la fin d’une période de retraite, le maître zen Nansen demanda à l’un de ses disciples, gouverneur d’une province chinoise: “Comment allez-vous gouverner le peuple à votre retour?” “Avec sagesse et compassion”, répondit le gouverneur. “Alors tout le monde souffrira”, dit le maître.

*Si vous saviez comment souffrir  
Vous auriez le pouvoir de ne pas souffrir<sup>4</sup>*

Ces mots mystérieux de l’*Hymne de Jésus* font écho au koan. Comment dois-je supporter la chaleur et le froid, la douleur et le chagrin? Dans la douleur, gémissiez; dans le chagrin, pleurez! Jusqu’où dois-je gémir, jusqu’où dois-je pleurer? Si vous saviez comment pleurer, vous ne pleureriez pas. Est-ce qu’il

n'y a pas déjà suffisamment de souffrance pour que je doive, de plus, apprendre à souffrir? Est-ce que ce n'est pas trop, vraiment trop?

Certains se révoltent devant trop de souffrance, ils crient à la face d'un Dieu injuste ou aveugle, ou à la face du destin insouciant qui nous entraîne tous sur ce chemin cahotant de la douleur qu'on appelle la vie. Mais y a-t-il vraiment trop de souffrance, ou trop de souffrance inutile? Peut-il jamais y avoir une souffrance "utile"? Pour la majorité des Occidentaux, cette idée même apparaît absurde et masochiste. Quand la douleur ou la peine se manifeste, on doit faire quelque chose pour s'en débarrasser : prendre des analgésiques, des calmants, fumer un joint, se saouler, faire l'amour, écrire à son député, manifester, allumer le téléviseur, faire n'importe quoi, mais surtout ne pas souffrir intentionnellement. Après tout, la souffrance n'est-elle pas l'ultime intrusion, l'étrangère s'insinuant dans notre tranquillité qui devrait être dénué de tout inconfort? La souffrance doit être évitée, oui vraiment, elle peut et elle doit être évitée. Mais que fait-on lorsque c'est précisément la télévision, le sexe, l'alcool ou les pillules qui causent la souffrance? Que fait-on quand on réalise que tout est souffrance?

Le Bouddha a dit que tout était souffrance, mais quelquefois il est difficile de croire qu'il parlait de *cette* peine-ci, à *ce* moment-ci. Elle semble si contingente, si aisément évitable, si seulement... Ce sentiment de solitude, de peur, de confusion ou d'humiliation, cette tristesse, cette frustration, ce sentiment d'injustice - cela aussi est inclus dans le Tout? Et pourtant, y a-t-il une seule personne qui en ait été dispensé?

On raconte qu'une femme se présenta devant le Bouddha en tenant son enfant mort dans ses bras. Il avait été mordu par un serpent. Une folle mésaventure, une erreur - l'enfant voulait simplement jouer. Tous les enfants n'adorent-ils pas jouer, surtout avec des compagnons aussi brillants, rapides et colorés? Comment résister à cet ami tout de vert et de gris argenté? L'enfant l'approcha en gazouillant et en pointant un minuscule petit doigt. Il est mort maintenant, son corps se refroidit et se fige alors qu'il y a seulement un moment... Une fatalité, un accident de la vie. "Aidez-moi, implore la femme." "Je vous aiderai, répond le Bouddha, mais vous devez d'abord trouver une graine de moutarde et me la rapporter, et cette graine doit provenir d'une maisonnée qui n'a jamais connu la souffrance." La femme eut beau chercher, elle n'en trouva pas. Revenue devant le Bouddha, elle lui demanda où elle pourrait trouver une telle maisonnée.

*Ma soeur, dit le maître, vous avez découvert, en cherchant ce que personne ne trouve, ce baume amer que j'avais à vous donner. Hier, votre enfant chéri gisait mort sur votre poitrine; aujourd'hui, vous savez que le monde entier pleure votre douleur.* <sup>5</sup>

Qu'est-ce que cette femme a découvert? Que la souffrance est bonne pour quelqu'un? Ce ne serait que du sel sur une blessure ouverte. Que la souffrance est partout? Oui, bien sûr. Mais si ce n'était que cela, ce serait de peu de réconfort. Mais peut-être a-t-elle découvert que si le Bouddha lui ôtait sa souffrance, il lui ôterait en même temps son humanité? "Vous pouvez vous tenir à l'écart de la souffrance de ce monde, écrit Kafka. Vous êtes libre de le faire et cela est en accord avec votre nature. Mais peut-être que cet acte même est la seule souffrance que vous devriez éviter." <sup>6</sup>

"Si vous saviez comment souffrir." Y a-t-il plus d'une façon de souffrir? La roue des naissances et morts tourne et produit peines et douleurs en série. Peut-il y avoir une souffrance qui mette un terme à la souffrance?

*Voyant ce que je souffrais  
Vous n'avez vu que ma souffrance* <sup>7</sup>

On pourrait dire que la souffrance forme les rayons de cette roue des naissances et morts, rayons qui divergent à partir du "je", moyeu de la roue, centre unique qui est décentré. Le "je" ne réussit jamais tout à fait, et de cette incapacité de "réussir tout à fait", naissent six façons de faire face à cette vérité. La roue en tournant génère six façons de souffrir. La roue tourne toujours; quelquefois, c'est ce rayon-ci qui est en haut, d'autres fois, c'est celui-là. Quelquefois nous souffrons comme ceci, d'autres fois, comme cela... et quelquefois nous choisissons le feu afin d'être par le feu racheté. \*

1. Kapleau. *Hekiganroku*.

2. T.S. Eliot. "Four Quartets." Traduction Pierre Leyris, dans *T.S. Eliot, Poésie* (Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1969), p.217.

3. Jack Henry Abbott. *In the Belly of the Beast* (New York: Random House Inc. Vintage Books, 1982), p.70.

4. G.R.S. Mead. *Hymn of Jesus* (London: John Watkins, 1963).

5. Sir Edwin Arnold. *Light of Asia* (New York: Doubleday Publishing Co. Dolphin Books, 1961), p.86.

6. Quoted by R.D. Laing. *The Divided Self*, p.78.

7. G.R.S. Mead. *Hymn of Jesus*.

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**1994**

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**Janvier**

Samedi 29	Atelier
Dimanche 30	Séance d'une journée

**Février**

Mercredi 2, 9, 16, 23	Cours pour les débutants
Vendredi soir 4-11	Sesshin de sept jours
Samedi 19	Atelier Granby
Dimanche 20	Séance d'une journée Granby

**Mars**

Samedi 5	Atelier
Dimanche 6	Séance d'une journée
Mercredi 9, 16, 23, 30	Cours pour débutants
Jeudi soir 10-13	Sesshin de trois jours

**Avril**

Jeudi soir 31 mars-4 avril	Sesshin de quatre jours
Samedi 9	Atelier
Dimanche 10	Séance d'une journée
Mercredi 13, 20, 27, 4 mai	Cours pour les débutants

**Mai**

Vendredi soir 6-13	Sesshin de sept jours
Samedi 21	Atelier
Dimanche 22	Séance d'une journée et assemblée générale annuelle

**Juin**

Jeudi soir 2-5	Sesshin de trois jours
Mercredi 1, 8, 15	Cours pour les débutants
Jeudi 17-19	Kingston
Vendredi soir 24-26	Sesshin de deux jours

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Vénérables, sachez reconnaître *l'homme* en vous qui joue avec des reflets: c'est lui qui est la "*source originelle de tous les Buddha*"; c'est lui, adeptes, en qui vous trouvez refuge où que vous soyez. Ce n'est point votre corps matériel fait des quatre grands éléments, qui sait énoncer la Loi ni l'écouter; ce n'est ni votre rate ni votre estomac, ni votre foie ni votre vésicule biliaire; les cavités de votre corps non plus ne savent ni énoncer ni écouter la Loi. Qu'est-ce donc qui sait énoncer la Loi et l'écouter? C'est vous qui êtes là devant mes yeux, bien distincts un à un, lumières solitaires ne comportant aucune fragmentation physique: voilà ce qui sait énoncer la Loi et l'écouter. Quiconque sait voir les choses ainsi, s'identifie au Buddha-patriarche. Mais il faut que ce soit à chacune de vos pensées, sans discontinuité, et que tout ce qui touche vos yeux soit tel! "*C'est seulement parce que naissent les passions, que le savoir se trouve intercepté; c'est du fait des modifications de la conscience, que l'essence se différencie.*" Telle est la cause de la transmigration dans le Triple Monde, au cours de laquelle on subit toutes sortes de douleurs. Mais, à mon point de vue, (si l'on sait réaliser *l'homme vrai*) il n'est plus rien qui ne soit très profond, rien qui ne soit délivrance.

Lin-chi (Rinzai) (mort en 866)

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