

## MONTHLY MUSINGS — JANUARY 2018

### The Christos from Judy Bruce

"Sufism is the religion of the heart, the religion in which the thing of primary importance is to seek God in the heart of mankind."

"... realizing the Sufi principle is to recognize in one's own feeling the feeling of God, to realize every impulse of love that rises in one's heart as a direction from God, to realize that love is a divine spark in one's heart, to blow [on] that spark until a flame may rise to illuminate the path of one's life."

I've taken these quotes from Barry Hora's article in the November NOW. It's very significant, I think, to notice how much more physical our Western ideas and language have become in the last few centuries, from rational idealism in ancient Greece, through medieval obsession with a personal yet non-material God [contradiction in terms?], to scientific materialism.

Now, our focus is on cells, molecules, atoms, and beyond — is this the end of spirituality as people fear? ... or welcome, in some places of course, As Barry reports there's more connection between our viscera and our brain than we would ever have imagined — far more information is transmitted *from* the gut and heart *to* the brain by way of nerve cells than the other way round. We have to admit our physicality to ourselves, but does that mean that all that mystery is abolished? I think not. Probing into the origin of things at the quantum level or, if we think origin does not lie there, but into the interaction of observer and observed, far from de-mystifying it does seem to reveal that matter and its origin is magical!

There are some people, I believe, who actually feel sensations in their heart, a real dart of pain, as a result of strong emotions such as anguish or love; though I confess I've never experienced anything like that. However it does seem to me that the quotes above refer to the sense of core self, which the Chinese would call "hsin" or "heart-mind", which we experience in doing two of our Seeing experiments.

First, when we look at what we're looking out of: here, in this moment of time, we see not a solid head but emptiness filled with the view. Thus the exact words of The Heart Sutra "*Here form IS void and void IS form*" are confirmed by direct observation. Secondly, when we stretch our arms wide, reaching for the limit of this spaciousness but *not* finding it, then we both see and *feel* that we're embracing the whole world. These two experiments unified into one experience from which arises the divine spark of love *is* the "feeling of God", *is* the heart-mind or *being* of Christ

### Looking Longer from Alan Mann

These are notes for an article, a sequel to my recent NOWletter notes on Awakening in NOWletter 200, and observations on the subject of discussion at the last Greville Street meeting for 2017.

We looked at 'awakening' as presented by Sam Harris, David Loy and Thomas Traherne and included some experiments to emphasise the need to distinguish between explanations and experience. We considered whether 'Seeing differently' might be a better way of talking about 'awakeness'. I rounded off my contribution with a list of my answers to the question of what is awakeness and what are the practical effects of the revelation of the Harding experiments. I included a more

comprehensive account of our meeting in the final NOWletter, number 200. Shortly after the meeting I found this Sylvia Plath poem in a book I'm reading by Michael Mayne.

*A certain minor light may still  
Leap incandescent  
Out of kitchen table or chair  
As if a celestial burning took  
Possession of the most obtuse objects now and then—  
Thus hallowing an interval  
Otherwise inconsequent  
By bestowing largesse, honour,  
One might say love.*

Sylvia Plath

I thought this reflected the enhanced awareness we talked about and which we sometimes experience when attention, as opposed to the customary inattention, is applied to whatever occasion we find ourselves in.

I was also reminded of Rasa which came up out of our Dialogue meetings many years ago. The source is a book called "Sumarah : A Study of the Art of Living" by David Gordon Howe. Rasa is our sensing of the occasion as well as the sense of being itself: the rasa you experience is what you receive of reality. But rasa is not something you control; rasa is the shared, common sense of being, the affective sea in which we all swim.

To some extent, what you see depends on what you let in. Basically, the clearer your window, the more accurate your perspective because you can manipulate your reception, and knowingly or unknowingly distort what reaches you. Reflecting this is a receptivity continuum that stretches from spontaneity through various degrees of separation from what is here. Clear reception is termed *rasa murni* "the feeling of feeling"—the uncensored reception of what the senses report—is a clear window on now. I need hardly draw attention to the very close parallel with headlessness. I have felt for a long time that Dialogue and Headlessness were mutually supportive lines of enquiry and it is interesting to recall, in the context of this note, Bohm's suggestion of the possibility of Dialogue allowing a free flow of meaning.

One of my first contacts with Zen thought was a book called 'Let Go' by Hubert Benoit. This extract is from pages 16 & 17. It is a bit hard to untangle but well worth the trouble as it one of the best expressions of the three perspectives on our actuality that I've found.

The partial adequacy of my mental image to the reality of the Object supposes an identity of structure between the object and me. If contact with the object, through my sense-organs, awakens in my mind an adequate image, it is through a type of resonance which supposes a structural agreement between the object and me. If I produce the note 'A' near a violin, the violin string which itself gives the note 'A' start to vibrate of its own accord by resonance. That which emanates from an object and excites my sense-organs awakens in me a complex mental vibration which is in accordance with this emanation. This vibration, of which the appearance in me is released by the object, is not produced by the object; it pre-existed in me. The object did no more than awaken or actualize it.

If my perception of the object supposes an identity of structure between this object and me, I do not perceive this identity. I do not, as it were, surrender totally to the phenomenon of resonance, I do not offer my centre to it. My response to the emanation

of the object remains superficial, partial; thus I am given only partial consciousness of the object and of myself.

It could be otherwise. If I were completely open to the emanation of the object, the phenomenon of resonance would be produced in my very centre, in that centre where the same unique Reality resides which also resides at the centre of the object. The image that would then be formed in me would be totally adequate to the object and my perception of the object would be at the same time the perception of our identity. In other words, the perception would be a trinitarian perception of the totality of the object, of the totality of myself, and of the underlying essence which makes us identical beneath our differences.

My ordinary perception is not of this kind. It lacks the underlying essence, the hypostasis, which alone would be able to realize the identity beneath the differences. For lack of this essence, the identity-in-the-difference is divided into identity and difference. The discrimination between the object and myself corresponds to all that is lacking in my partially-adequate image; the object, to the degree that its totality eludes me is a stranger to me. The identity which is not perceived is replaced by a fusion of two poles, subject and object; in other words, by an identification. In ordinary perception I am identified with an object whose reality evades me, and moreover my own reality evades me also.

I said just now that I was able to offer my centre to the phenomenon of resonance, but that I do not do so. One can equally well say that the outer world offers to release in me a total resonance, but that I refuse it; and this refusal corresponds to my fundamental claim to-be-absolutely-in-so-far-as-distinct.

Hubert Benoit

*If you look long enough at anything  
It will become extremely interesting;  
It will become rich, manifold, fascinating:*

*If you can look at anything long enough,  
You will rejoice at the miracle of love.*

*You will possess and be blessed by the marvellous blinding radiance of  
love.  
You'll will be radiance.*

Delmore Schwartz

I am convinced that the foregoing all makes absolute sense if we actually engage our senses fully. The following is a forty year old example from my notebook. The wider perspective was induced by a meditative process but most of us experience spontaneous 'openings' of this kind and it could be regarded as our natural condition 'did we but rightly see'.

16 October 76. I was following a traditional meditative practice of observing an object and progressively identifying and naming its characteristics, shape, colour, size, etc., down to the smallest detail until all description is exhausted. I had started this meditation on the

green vase Arnold and Wright gave to Margot when she resigned her job with them in Christchurch, when I noticed that the carpet colour seemed unusually intense. It was a gold colour, a cheap flax or jute product called Tintawn. After about ten minutes, I had a sense of depth to the pot I hadn't noticed before and a feeling of gladness. I had a feeling of affection for the vase and a sudden awareness of this being reciprocated, or rather, common to us both. I remember thinking "what sentimental rubbish" when the words "no it is not, it is love" entered consciousness.

And a final word on 'right seeing' from Thomas:

What hinders then, but we in heav'n may be  
Even here on Earth did we but rightly see?

Traherne -Thoughts IV

### GEROTRASCENDENCE — notes on a paper by Lars Tornstam from Alan Mann

I recently came across reference to what is now called gerotranscendence. It is the name given to some of the positive effects of aging and the word was coined about 25 years ago by Lars Tornstam (1943-2016) a Swedish Professor of Sociology at Uppsala University. .

These effects, established by several surveys, reveal a number of developments in older people with an interesting correspondence with results similar to what is often regarded as the outcome of 'awakening' as defined by various spiritual disciplines.

- Redefinition of the self.
- An increased awareness of the transpersonal.
- A shift from a materialistic to a more spiritual alignment.
- The elimination of fear of death.
- Greater affinity with others.
- A sense of connection with past generations.
- Redefinition of time and space.

I find this list particularly interesting as I can vouch for some of these symptoms myself. I had assumed them to be the result of a lifelong interest in what is usually referred to as the 'perennial philosophy'. Perhaps it is simply the reward for reaching a ripe old age.

A few extracts:

1. Time. The definition of time is changed so that, for example, today and yesterday can be present at the same time. The borderline between now and then is transcended, and this may also include a return to and reconfiguration of childhood. Like the layers of an onion, all ages are available at the same time, but when returning to the inner layers, to childhood, things are observed that could not be seen then, and reinterpretations are made of events and situations from childhood or other earlier periods in life.
2. Death. Transcendence of the life-death duality is also manifested by the fact that 68 percent of respondents 74–100 years of age agreed with the statement that 'Today I feel that the border between life and death is less striking compared to when I was 50 years of age' (Tornstam, 2003).

3. Mystery. The mystery dimension of life is accepted. The intellectual restriction that everything in life must be explained within traditional scientific boundaries is transcended. ... This is reminiscent of Chinen's (1989) analysis of the changing attitudes toward science expressed by two outstanding scientists: Ludwig Wittgenstein and Alfred North Whitehead. Both of them softened their views on science from a rather rigid and self-assured stance in their younger years, to a more pragmatic attitude in mid-life, and finally to a transcendent outlook in old age. They then both evidenced a radical transcendence of the borderlines between scientific disciplines as well as an acceptance of nonscientific explanations.
4. Self. The individual experiences a new awareness of the fact that he or she is not the center of the universe. ...The individual reaches a fundamental acceptance of the life lived. In this way, the ego-integrity described by Erikson is more of a reverse integration process within the same definition of the world as before, while the process of gerotranscendence implies more of a forward or outward direction, including a redefinition of reality.

In a section entitled '*On average, gerotranscendence develops with age, and seems to be associated with increased life satisfaction*' Torstam provides the following analysis.

A factor analysis brought together the following statements in a coherent dimension that I called Cosmic Transcendence, because it was related more than anything else to the above described dimension of the same name.

- I feel connected with the entire universe
- I feel that I am a part of everything alive
- I can feel a strong presence of people who are elsewhere
- Sometimes I feel like I live in the past and present simultaneously
- I feel a strong connection with earlier generations

The foregoing notes are intended to give readers a taste of what I found to be a fascinating subject and studies of which I was completely unaware. The link to the complete article and Torstam's book below.

Alan Mann

The paper: MATURING INTO GEROTRASCENDENCE Lars Tornstam, Ph.D. Uppsala, Sweden  
<http://www.atpweb.org/jtparchive/trps-43-11-02-166.pdf>

The book: [Gerotranscendence: A Developmental Theory of Positive Aging.](#)

## Favourite Quotes

1. "To the extent that we cut ourselves off from other selves we are out of our minds and dispirited. The truth is that the illusion of a separate self and the illusion of a dead universe are halves of a whole, segments of one vicious circle. The universe seems dead because I seem out of it, and I seem out of it because the universe is dead. Till the total mind in man rejoins its own total body - the many-levelled universe - he is not himself and the universe is not itself. But when at last they coincide, this is at once his own enlightenment and the universe's enlightenment." Harding. From The Douglas Harding Essay, *'The Universe Enlightened'*.
2. He who sees that the Lord of all is ever the same in all that is, immortal in the field of mortality – he sees the truth. And when a man sees that the God in himself is the same God in all that is, he hurts not himself by hurting others: then he goes indeed to the highest Path. He who sees that all work, everywhere, is only the work of nature; and that the Spirit watches.                      Bhagavad Gita 13:27-29

## Next Greville Street Meeting

Our next meeting will be on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> February gathering as usual at 10 for the 10.30 start. The proposed subject will 'What is the Self?' Garry Booth has been doing research into Buddhist ideas and I have been similarly engaged in checking out some contemporary philosophers. I know you all have perspectives on the question so it should be an interesting meeting.