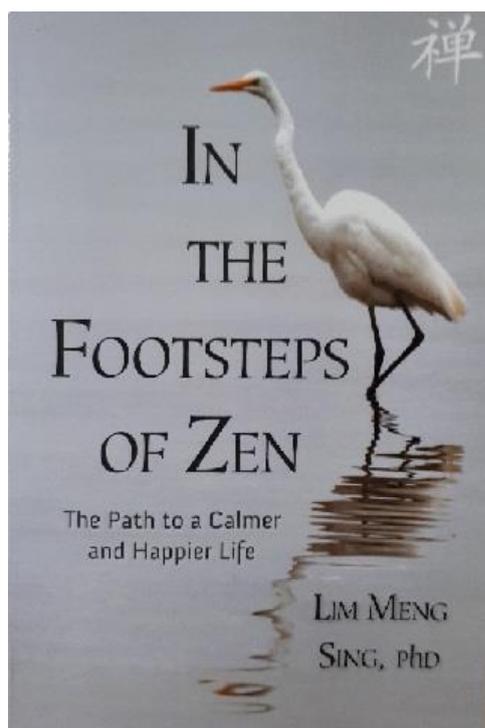


Monthly Musings — January 2019

One of our regular readers, Louise Joy, gave us a present of a book by her friend, Peter Lim, which I think will be of interest to many of you. Here is the front cover and I have put details of availability after my notes on reading the book.

Notes on: 'In the Footsteps of Zen' from Alan Mann



I thought Lim Meng Sing's book excellent for a number of reasons, it gets to the heart of the matter in every sense of that saying, by focusing on the experiencing not just the saying. I liked the way he shows that Zen throws a light on all spiritual as well as many philosophical approaches. He manages one of the most difficult angles in dealing with Western mindsets by helping us see that there is a positive aspect to 'not knowing'. In the talks and workshops I've been involved in the notion of not-knowing as a *positive* creates strong resistance. I found the personal 'Reflections' with which Lim Meng Sing concludes his book were evidence of someone actualising as opposed to conceptualising Zen. He makes clear the relevance of Zen to our everyday living.

There are 150 of his 'Reflections' and I marked nineteen as 'favourites' with the intention of popping them into future editions of the NOWletter.

Reflection 146 was interesting to me for a different reason:

By the window, sitting
it's raining
I listen to the sound
doing nothing

My earliest memory of my grandfather is an occasion when I must have been about seven years old, we were in his 'front room' —reserved for special occasions—it looked out on a tiny garden and then onto pavement and road of a village in Lancashire. It was raining. He

took me over to the window and said “Look Alan, what I like to do when its raining is to sit here and see the rain falling, water running down the window panes, rushing along the gutters, running down the street”. Grandad was a devout Baptist and wouldn’t have thought of himself in Zen terms but I think we find Zen in the New Testament as in most traditions if we clear away the accretions.

Margot’s favourite Haiku:

Sitting quietly
Doing nothing
Spring comes
And the grass grows by itself

Reflection 89 points to the ‘open window’ aspect, something I have been using myself as a way of expressing the being of it. It is fun to think of Traherne as a Zen master— wearing the robes of his time and place—as an Anglican divine.

Zen
just think of it
as an
open window

So, thank you Louise, highly recommended for Zennists old and new.

Alan Mann

“In the Footsteps of Zen The Path to a Calmer and Happier Life” by Lim Meng Sing PhD. \$15 cheque payable to Lim Meng Sing posted to: Peter Lim, Unit 2, 428 Burwood Highway Vermont South 3133 Victoria”

‘Page Turner’ a story by Margot Mann

"My daughter is a clinical psychologist," said Gloria, dabbing the corners of her mouth with a paper serviette and helping herself to another pastry. "She says there are stories you just wouldn't believe - you would have absolutely *no idea* about some of the things people obsess about. Every day she has to deal with seven or eight obsessive compulsives...it's very hard work. She looked around the table at the faces of the women turned to her, and carefully aligned her knife with the edge of her plate. There was an awkward silence.

Grace came into the room at that moment and set down a tray of china mugs and a pot of tea on the table. "So what did we think of the book?" she asked, handing out mugs and looking around at the group. "We've just been talking about obsessive/compulsive behaviour," Gloria said. "My daughter is a clinical psychologist and has to deal with it every day. It's surprisingly common."

Lara spoke. "I loved it, a real page-turner, and the ending was *perfect*. Can I read out the last paragraph, it's only short."

Mandy shrieked and put her hands over her ears. "No, no. Don't tell me, I haven't finished it." She paused. "I have to count the letters in long words when I'm reading a book to see if

there are more than 15. Surely that doesn't make me obsessive?" She stood up and reached across to the end of the table for the milk. "What if there are...more than 15?" murmured Polly. Mandy ignored her.

Tilly said, "I once had a room-mate who fiddled with her hair the whole time. She had this rather thin, long brown hair and she used to sit on the edge of the bed and take her hair in both hands, wind it into a spiral and twist it into a knot on top of her head. I usually didn't hear a thing she said because I was waiting for her to pull it out and start all over again. It drove me nuts. And that just reminds me. She used to hang her washing on the line in a special pattern according to the colour of the pegs she used. Actually, Antoinette in the book reminds me a bit of her - tall and thin and rather annoying." She laughed.

"I *loved* Antoinette," Lara said. "The way she looked after all those horses while she was waiting for her boyfriend to turn up. So devoted. Definitely not obsessive."

"She wasn't obsessive but she was pretty boring, which is probably why the boyfriend never materialised," Grace offered, smiling slightly. "Stop!" shouted Mandy, "don't tell me."

"But didn't you just love the writing, so smooth and lyrical. I couldn't put it down. My daughter and I were discussing it yesterday," said Gloria with her mouth full of cake, from the other end of the table. "We had just been to see that new Woody Allen film "Lilies by the Lake" which was terrible, by the way. Don't see it. My daughter hated it."

"I saw it yesterday too," said Grace, handing around slabs of cake. "I rather liked it. I think if you like Woody Allen you would probably like Lilies by the Lake..." She was about to say more when Gloria chimed in from the other end - "Woody Allen is obsessive if you like - all the same old songs and him telling everyone how depressed he is and running off with a bimbo half his age as usual. My daughter's a clinical psychologist and she had great fun analysing the film - we giggled all the way through it. Someone in the row in front had the nerve to tell us to shut up." She sipped her tea and, unsmiling, placed her knife precisely in line with her plate.

"Gorgeous cake Gracie," said Polly, licking her fingers. "I was a bit confused by a chapter near the beginning where I couldn't work out if the writer was talking about the heroine, what's her name? Belle, or if she was doing a flash-back to Belle's mother Beatrice. Did anyone else have a problem with the flashbacks?"

"I thought Antoinette was the heroine..." began Tilly uncertainly. "I did too," added Lara. "Good Lord no," Gloria jumped in, snatching the last piece of cake and straightening her knife. "Antoinette was just playing second fiddle to Belle as the main love interest. She was a much nicer person than Belle of course - look how she cared for all those horses during the drought when there was no one else around. And don't forget she was scared of all the big thoroughbreds. She could tell what sort of a mood they were in from the smell of their breath every morning. Amazing."

"She wasn't smelling their breath," said Lara loudly, "she was whispering them. Haven't you ever heard of horse whisperers? And then when she had their trust she would clean their teeth." She thumped her mug down on the table.

There followed an uneasy lull in the conversation until Gloria said, "I've found the most marvellous dentist. Well actually my daughter found him." She straightened her knife.

Groundlessness and Not-knowing: Joan Tollifson

--clipped from an article titled "My Path and What I Share" that can be found on the "Outpourings" page of my website: www.joantollifson.com

I've always been drawn to direct experience over metaphysical conclusions and beliefs. Listening to the rain or the traffic sounds feels alive; thinking about a philosophical question such as which comes first, the chicken or the egg, seems abstract and fundamentally unsatisfying because I notice it is unresolvable. I notice that reality can't be pinned down. I notice that belief is always shadowed by doubt. I don't know if consciousness or awareness is the sole reality or the fundamental ground of being. I know I never experience anything outside of consciousness, but I tend to feel that the apparent dichotomy between mind and matter, or consciousness and the brain, is a false conceptual divide—that reality itself is not divided up that way. As far as I can see, Here-Now (this undeniable, immediate, presence-awareness-experiencing) is infinite, inconceivable, unresolvable, ungraspable, indeterminate and impossible to capture in any formulation.

I can't deny that the brain and nervous system, and the whole body, seem to play some kind of important part in either generating, transmitting and/or shaping our conscious experience. But if we look deeply at "the brain" or "the nervous system" or "the body" with modern physics, it seems we find nothing solid, only some kind of indeterminate particle-wave fluctuation of energy that is mostly empty space, and all of it is appearing in consciousness, maybe having no more substance than a dream—how would we know?

Because experience is inconceivable and indeterminate, I find that the only bottom-line I can really arrive at is groundlessness, free fall, not landing anywhere—being open, not knowing, not holding to fixed views, not dwelling anywhere, seeing through illusion without trying to grasp Truth, for Truth cannot by its very nature ever be grasped. It simply IS. I find that many teachers seem to have a metaphysical certainty that I do not. I greatly value keeping an open mind, being willing to see things in a whole new way, and not making anyone (myself included) into an authority whose words cannot be questioned. As I see it, the living actuality is infinite and cannot be grasped. And yet, here it is—plain as day!

Joan Tollifson

The Experiments — Alan Mann

I was asked what effect does a successful application of the Harding experiments have in everyday life.

In spite of filling an A4 sheet of paper with a list of the consequences I find it rather difficult to recall them all. That is partly due to my memory and, to some extent, to the fact that by the nature of the experiments the outcome is not a matter of added knowledge but about intensified experience of the occasion in the moment of its happening.

The first lesson is that it is not about me, about a wiser, nobler, enlightened Alan. It is about making plain what I really am, or what is revealed when identification with what I've come to believe as myself is laid aside. And speaking of belief it involves the suspension of belief so the 'what is' rather than the 'what is not' can prevail.

In the end, explanation must give way to something else and that involves a shift from detached explanation to engaged participation. If this step is taken the destination is revealed as 'This' and that is ALL. The eternal is restored to awareness. That might sound fanciful but that which is common to all, at all times, is what the experiments uncover.

As Douglas encapsulated in his most quoted quotation:

“To realize this instantaneous Now, to live in the present moment, taking no thought for tomorrow or yesterday must be my first concern. And my second must be to find in this Now all my to-morrows and yesterdays”.

The commonly accepted view of the now is of a fleeting blink in an imagined ‘time’. As long as I hold to that interpretation the actuality of the present moment cannot work its restorative effect. The experiments simply open the window to the immediacy of being.

Alan Mann

Wisdom Works—Philosophy for All

This is a regular bulletin prepared and circulated by William Wray dealing with philosophical issues and rooted in Stoicism. The latest issue includes this invitation— If you know somebody you think might benefit from these emails please send them this link so that they can enrol themselves: www.wisdomworks.co.uk

Caretake this moment. Immerse yourself in its particulars. Respond to this person, this challenge, this deed. Quit evasions. It is time to really live; to fully inhabit the situation you happen to be in now. Epictetus

Greville Street Meeting Programme

Sunday 3rd Feb	Self-deception — Don Ross
Sunday 3rd March	Dialogue Plus — Christopher Ash (McLean) & Alan Mann
Sunday 7 th April	Spread Personality Theory — Dave Knowles

The April event deals with a theory at present in the early stages of development and may change its content and title as it unfolds between now and April.