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Emily Again from Alan Mann

During a recent meeting dealing with Iain McGilchrist's book 'The Master and His Emissary,' subtitled The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World, we came across this quotation by Einstein

The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift. ~ Albert Einstein.

Emily Dickinson strikes me as one of the rare examples of someone able to access both perspectives, and gifted with the ability to communicate the consequences. I have a collection of Emily poems that I think confirm this opinion. I admit I haven't read all her poems and certainly haven't included any that could contradict my interpretation.

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I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,
And Mourners to and fro
Kept treading – treading – till it seemed
That Sense was breaking through –

And when they all were seated,
A Service, like a Drum –
Kept beating – beating – till I thought
My Mind was going numb –

And then I heard them lift a Box
And creak across my Soul
With those same Boots of Lead, again,
Then Space – began to toll,

As all the Heavens were a Bell,
 And Being, but an Ear,
 And I, and Silence, some strange Race
 Wrecked, solitary, here –

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,
 And I dropped down, and down –
 And hit a World, at every plunge,
 And Finished knowing – then –

Something has come to an end in the mind, the death of something which, based on the subsequent information in this and other poems, is Emily's reality framework. The mourners are the regrets and reversions to earlier perspectives now revealed as imaginary. This is confirmed by the final line in which, under the new regime, sense replaces explanation and interpretation as the primary mode.

The next two verses strike me as traces of the old mind dealing with the death in the 'family', the demise of explanation. Then the glorious fourth verse in which the awakened mind experiences the possibility of resurrection as Being. In the last verse the transition from knowing to being is progressively experienced as a dropping of levels of entanglement in the default mindset until the last vestiges of a knowledge based mind are gone.

On the basis of evidence carefully gleaned from other poems, I can't accept the final line as an indication that she has reached a level of knowledge, inaccessible to her prior to this funeral in the brain, I think she has simply transcended knowing altogether.

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A loss of something ever felt I—
 The first that I could recollect
 Bereft I was—of what I knew not
 Too young that any should suspect

A Mourner walked among the children
 I notwithstanding went about
 As one bemoaning a Dominion
 Itself the only Prince cast out—

Elder, Today, a session wiser
 And fainter, too, as Wiseness is—
 I find myself still softly searching
 For my Delinquent Palaces—

And a Suspicion, like a Finger
 Touches my Forehead now and then
 That I am looking oppositely
 For the site of the Kingdom of Heaven—

The sense of something missing is the impetus driving all the 'mystical' traditions and is now popping up as a respectable question in contemporary science. Verses two and three reflect a life lived with this nagging sense of incompleteness. Is the 'mourner' the state of mind of someone with a perspective not commonly experienced? Verse four indicates the thinning out

of ego and a growing transparency to the dimension that provides resolution. Verse five indicates the necessary action, a version of Dogen's 'backward step', in which awareness is required to turn back and become aware of awareness. This is particularly interesting to me as Harding's pointing finger experiment ends up exactly as Emily describes in the final verse above.

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I'm Nobody! Who are you?
Are you – Nobody – too?
Then there's a pair of us!
Don't tell! they'd advertise – you know!

How dreary – to be – Somebody!
How public – like a Frog –
To tell one's name – the livelong June –
To an admiring Bog!

Those of us who've experimented with psilocybin know that it is possible to experience ego-free being and serious meditators are also aware of this as an experiential actuality. It is also possible for the everyday mind to enjoy a first nature perspective by awakening to the absence of a 'me' as entity. A view of the occasion free of the mask of personality.



This is a particularly useful image as it not only shows the mask coming off but also the indicates an openness 'behind' it, the nobody perspective.

Many moons ago when talking about Emily a friend told me to read Whitehead's lectures in Modes of Thought, on p.163 he says:

But there is an antithetical doctrine balancing this primary truth. Namely, our experience of the world involves the exhibition of the soul itself as one of the components within the world. Thus, there is a dual aspect to the relationship of an occasion of experience as one relatum and the experienced world as another relatum. The world is included within the occasion in one sense, and the occasion is included in the world in another sense. For example, I am in the room, and the room is an item in my present experience. But my present experience is what I now am.

The two perspectives are immediately available once this apparent duality is acknowledged. I think Emily was aware of this and had an unusual ability to slip from one mode to the other. I thought my friend agreed with me about this and sent me off to read Whitehead as an example expressed in a more formal way and in a context that seemed to slot in with my other interests.

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"Nature" is what we see—
The Hill—the Afternoon—
Squirrel—Eclipse— the Bumble bee—
Nay—Nature is Heaven—

Nature is what we hear—
 The Bobolink—the Sea—
 Thunder—the Cricket—
 Nay—Nature is Harmony—
 Nature is what we know—
 Yet have no art to say—
 So impotent Our Wisdom is
 To her Simplicity.

This strikes me as confirmation of the view that sensation, experiential ‘knowing’, is primary for her and this is affirmed in her reference to a knowing beyond words.

In Michelle Kohler’s paper, Dickinson’s Embodied Eyeball: Transcendentalism and the Scope of Vision — Kohler writes:

What for Emerson is a path by which “egotism vanishes” into divine identity, Dickinson figures as death; the vanishing ego faces the obliteration of selfhood because the self is mortal (finite) rather than divine. In these ways, the poet’s subjunctive destruction functions both as a figure for the inability of physical vision to do what Emerson claims it does and as a denial of the transcendental terms of kinship with nature.

I think this misses the point. The transcendence of self is not a matter of the egoic self surviving in some heightened state. It is the end of the ‘me’ but not the ending of being. Perhaps Emerson’s divine identity is simply Being. This I find reflected in Emily’s ‘...being but an ear, she could have as well have said, ‘Eye’.

In summary, I think it helps to consider what Emily presents in terms of both the individual life and in the undivided wholeness of being, what she probably means by ‘nature’. I would call the latter ‘first nature’ and the acquired individuality or personality as ‘second nature’. Second nature is mortal, it comes to an end in the death of its individual manifestations. That which continues and could therefore be considered immortal is ‘being’, the undivided wholeness, eternity. So, what is in that for me, well, ‘nothing’. And as she points out in poem 1563:

By homely gift and hindered Words
 The human heart is told
 Of Nothing —
 "Nothing" is the force
 That renovates the World —

The question that I think Emily is constantly testing is whether it is possible, in an individual existence, to apprehend self-free being—is a first nature perspective accessible?

Alan Mann

Look Out! from Dave Knowles

Our friend Dave Knowles, a regular contributor to the NOWletter, is seen here on his latest cycling device. Dave is a former international road cycling competitor and maintains his on-road prowess by hurtling around Lake Burley Griffin in his recently acquired Greenspeed GT20 recumbent trike.



Dave has another claim to fame. He convinced me of the truth of A. N. Whitehead's proposal, that the object of philosophy is to take the mystery out of mysticism, when he introduced me to phenomenology. Alan

Missing the Point?

O what a treasure is every sand when truly understood! Who can love anything that God made too much? What a world would this be, were everything beloved as it ought to be!

Thomas Traherne Centuries 2/67

What a lovely place the earth could be, for there is so much beauty, so much glory, such imperishable loveliness. We are caught in pain and don't care to get out of it, even when someone points a way out.

Excerpt from Happy is the One Who is Nothing-J. Krishnamurti

These two versions lament our inability to, in Traherne's words, 'Enjoy the world aright'. Krishnamurti wouldn't use the word God on principle but, as we have recently discovered, Traherne, and many of us, to this day, subscribe to a view of God as 'being itself' and, consequently, not a matter of belief but of experience.

January 2021 Reflections from Joan Tollifson

(Reprint of the Tollifson newsletter).

Hello Friends Around the World, It's been an intense time here in the US in the last week, and many people are feeling some mix of anxiety, anger, sorrow and deep concern about what lies ahead. Right-wing militia groups are threatening armed attacks in the coming weeks, and sadly, many Americans actually believe the president's repeated false claims that he won the election, by a landslide no less. We are a divided country, many lost in conspiracy theories.

How are we responding to this? And how do we want to respond to this? And is there a choice? In my last book, *Death: The End of Self-Improvement*, I began one chapter with a Zen koan about two monks, washing their bowls in the creek, who see two birds fighting over a frog, tearing it apart. One monk asks the other, "Why does it have to be like this?" And the other monk replies, "It's all for your benefit." I end that chapter with this:

"Perhaps, in the end, the greatest contribution any of us can make to world peace and social justice is simply to wake up. Otherwise, our actions come out of a divided mind that perpetuates conflict and division. When our actions flow from awake presence, they are more wholesome in the truest sense, more whole. But there will never be absolute peace and justice in a relative world. There will always be things falling apart and things that we regard as terrible from our human perspective. The frog will always be torn apart, the birds will always fight over it, the savior will always be crucified—somehow it all belongs. And I have the deep sense that a life of nothing but sunny days and eternal youth would not be nearly as rich as the life we have, the one where things get torn apart."

Waking up isn't a one-time thing. It's moment to moment. And sometimes it's hard work, really hard work. The waking up itself isn't hard, but getting to the willingness to let go can be very hard. The undertow of delusion and resistance is often strong, pulling us down into self-righteous rage, contempt, cynicism, victimhood, hate, anxiety, depression. We get tighter and tighter, more isolated, more defended. And yet, in every moment, right now, there is this amazing possibility to stop. To open. To let go. To simply feel the pain and the heartache. To be that aware space that has room for all of it. To be liberated on the spot, and to transmit love instead of hate. Is it a choice? We can't really say yes or no. But in every moment, we can wonder, is it possible, right now, to let go, to open?

In this openness Here-Now, there is room for everything to be just as it is—including our turbulent emotions, our failures at times, our actions and the actions of apparent others, all of it one whole seamless happening. Awareness is unconditional love. We don't really know what will happen next or how the universe "should" be. But when we turn our attention from thought to the sensory-energetic, vibrantly alive immediacy of this moment, when we open our hearts, something shifts. There is space. And stillness. And presence. And the aliveness of whatever appears: raindrops on a leaf, the sounds of traffic, a crumpled Kleenex, the song of a bird, a cup of tea. Just this, and the wonder of what is, just as it is.

Wishing all of you, and the world, and all beings, happiness in 2021...Love, Joan

Just Like Roger. A story by Margot Mann

He looks just like Roger, Edie thought. All that curly black hair, and the graceful way he moves around the kitchen, manoeuvring her new cupboards into position. He doesn't talk much but he seems to enjoy the coffee she makes him at regular intervals and occasionally he eats one of her ginger slices. Edie often thinks he is too good-looking to be a carpenter. What a waste! She wanders into her bedroom. On every level surface there were pictures of Roger Federer, stretching for a forehand, leaping for an overhead smash, or smiling as he holds high his latest trophy. There is even a newspaper cutting stuck on the wall documenting the time he cried when Raphael Nadal beat him in one of the grand slams. Edie stands still for a moment and then walks down the passage to the kitchen.

She tries not to think about how much this kitchen renovation is going to cost. Her sister Meg was surprised when Edie said she was thinking of getting the renovators in to give the kitchen a make-over. It is quite an attractive and functional space and only last year Edie had the lounge room and hallway refurbished. They often talk about money and worry at the way their respective savings seem to be leaking away, now that they have retired. The house Edie lives in had belonged to her parents until their death. Meg lived in a small semi-detached house in the next suburb. As they both live alone, the sisters saw a lot of each other.

Last year Edie had the carpets and curtains in her lounge room replaced. Meg joined her sister visiting department stores and seeking advice from interior decorators on interesting ways to redecorate Edie's lounge room. They brought back samples and swatches and spent hours discussing colour schemes, becoming more and more energized and excited as the project developed. "Where are we going today?" Meg would ask, after parking her car in Edie's driveway. "I think you should get a new hall table," she told Edie one day. "That old antique of mum's and dad's is alright but you need something nice and modern if you're having new carpet."

A few weeks later, a young man arrived to lay the carpet. He reminded Edie of a newsreader she had seen on the ABC, he had the same deep rich voice, and the same gap between his front teeth. Edie read somewhere that a gap between your front teeth meant good luck for life. He offered to help out by taking the existing carpet. "I'll get rid of it for you - all part of the friendly service," he said to Edie in that wonderfully modulated voice, displaying the gap in his teeth as he bit into a ginger slice. "I can take that old hall table too, if you want to replace it."

That was last year. She had been happy to give the carpet layer some old furniture, including the hall table, and the replaced carpet, after he explained that he and his wife could not afford to furnish their new home. He had been so grateful she had looked around for other bits and pieces to give him. He showed her a picture of his wife and baby daughter smiling at the camera. Such a lovely little family, she was so glad she could help them out in a small way, especially when the carpet layer confided that his wife had recently been diagnosed with breast cancer and he didn't know which way to turn. From then on, she took special care making his coffee, and she baked a batch of ginger slices for him to take home. He hadn't wanted to take them, but she had insisted.

The redecorating proceeded slowly, with the inevitable delays as tradesmen rang to say they had been held up by deliveries. The fabric Edie had chosen for her new curtains sat on the wharf for weeks. Finally, everything was in place and the paintwork was patched up where curtain fittings had been changed. Edie and Meg strolled around the house, their stockinged feet leaving footprints in the carpet pile. There was a new table in the hall, rather smaller than Edie would have liked. She had been shocked at the price, but at least it fitted in with the new décor. The sisters were surprised that the curtains looked disappointingly similar to the ones that had been replaced. “The material looked much lighter in the shop,” Edie said. “I should have chosen the thicker lining fabric.”

Meg had brought a pot of scarlet cyclamen to put on the new hall table. “Let’s go out and celebrate,” she said suddenly, catching Edie by the hand. “I’ve got that champagne in the fridge,” Edie countered. “No. Come on. We’re hitting the town for lunch,” Meg said, slipping on her shoes and beckoning Edie to follow. “I’ll drive,” she added.

She and Meg had driven to the next town and had an unaccustomed pub lunch, washing down their fish and chips with more than one glass of cider. Edie had talked briefly about the effect of the cost of the new-look lounge room on her savings, but after agreeing that you can’t take it with you, they wandered into the street in a tipsy haze and strolled for a couple of blocks towards the street where Meg had parked her car, enjoying the weak spring sunshine. Meg stopped suddenly and pointed, and as Edie drew close, she saw an old hall table in the window of an antique furniture shop. It was instantly recognisable as the table she had given the carpet layer. The price tag was clearly visible. After a long moment, the sisters walked on in silence and neither the hall table nor the carpet layer were ever mentioned again.

Edie gave a small involuntary shiver as she recalled the moment when she recognised the old table in the window of the antique shop and registered its price tag. The carpet layer had been so obliging. She looked at the carpenter, Roger’s twin, as he moved about her kitchen now, and smiled. Then she looked at her watch and walked to the sink to fill the kettle. Time for a coffee break.

The carpenter accepted a mug of coffee and a ginger slice and leaned against the fridge, explaining to Edie that it would only take another day or two and her kitchen would be finished. She hardly heard him, admiring the length of his eyelashes and the way a lock of black hair kept falling across his forehead until he pushed it away again. He put down his coffee mug and turning to Edie, said, “We’ve had some terrible news. My wife has just been diagnosed with breast cancer and I don’t know where to turn.” He held out his wallet. She saw a photo of a pretty young woman with a baby, both of them smiling at the camera.

Margot Mann

The Incredible String band again, from Graeme Wilkins

Thanks to Graeme for pointing out another example of the Incredible String Band's perceptive lyrics. He sent me this extract from "October Song by Songwriters: Robin Williamson / Robin D.H. Williamson.

I used to search for happiness,
And I used to follow pleasure,
But I found a door behind my mind,
And that's the greatest treasure.

We can hear the complete song at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zCnJdQ9izto>

Letter to My Self from Eddie Baigum

Eddie wrote this letter to himself some years ago, 1982 to be exact, it turned up in a recent clear out of his old records, etc. He wondered if it resonates with NOWletter readers.

Dear Me,

The important aspect, it seems to me, is that one has to work it out for oneself—there is no other way. Books, experts, and all that stuff might awaken a receptive attitude but cannot reveal what is obscured by customary consciousness. Looking out over San Francisco Bay, watching a massive stars and stripes banner curling and uncurling slowly in a strong breeze—the only problem is that the ego is dominating the aware space and squeezing out the experiencing of what is actually going on.

There is consciousness. Don't merely assume it to be so, be aware of the awareness of what is going on. They are not different. The flag, the sky and the buildings and stands or net and the consciousness of it—all one. Who is conscious? Who is all this happening to? Look at these questions and then at the person to whom they seem to occur, to you Eddie. You may well discover that is no one here, there is only what is happening and it is happening in consciousness, as consciousness, don't describe it just apprehend with all the senses.

So, there it is, after all these years, I am an assumption without substance, the physical is not denied — I am an embodied assumption.

See the difference? Usually I operate from the assumption that there is a thing called me which is looking, which is quite separate from all the things of which it claims to be conscious. But when I look for it, try to get a grip on it, it isn't here. There is only seeing, the looking, the feeling, the imagining, the thinking. Consciousness is revealed as the space in which everything happens and as everything that happens. However, this place is usually contaminated by the embodied assumption masquerading as entity.

So, the good news dear me, is that you are not what you think you are,

Yours sincerely, Eddie.

Infinite Potential website — David Bohm

Both the Observer and the Observed are merging aspects of one whole reality which is invisible and unanalysable. David Bohm.

Many years ago, sometime in the late 90's, we set up the Capacitie website and included a page which I labelled 'Dialogue'. It was and is concerned with David Bohm's work in establishing a method of interaction and establishing a means of arriving at what he referred to as 'shared meaning'.

We now have access to a far more comprehensive to the life and work of Bohm via the film, *Infinite Potential*, and a rich assembly of data including a series of blog articles at:

<https://www.infinitepotential.com/>

Recent Notice from the Buddhist Library

On March 11th this year there is an international day of action for communities of faith, organised in Australia by the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC) and internationally by Greenfaith International. I am on the board of ARRCC.

It is based around a statement and set of demands for climate action and justice. People can sign the statement as individuals, and take action as a group (a sangha, a temple, a group of friends...). This can be anything from ringing bells, sounding gongs, meditating, putting up a sign outside your home or meditation hall... Groups register their action with Greenfaith through the ARRCC website, video their action and send it in to join those from hundreds of other groups in at least 14 countries.

I like this because you can do as little or as much as you want, and whatever you do becomes part of a very visible world wide effort, supported by media, faith leaders etc.

If you are interested, you can get more information and download a kit from the ARRCC website (https://www.arrcc.org.au/global_multi_faith_day_of_climate_action). The kit is also attached.

I would love to hear if any of you decide to take this up. And please contact me if you would like to discuss this.

Finally, Gillian Reffell from the Sydney Buddhist Centre and ARRCC has an excellent mailing list for Buddhists interested in what is happening in climate action. If you'd like to be on the list, please contact Gillian at gillian.reffell@gmail.com.

There are faint signs of hope in the sky - let us help make sure it is not a false dawn.

Gawain Powell Davies