

Issue 101 –September 2004
 Meetings (10.30am - 3rd Sunday of every month)
 81 Greville Street , Chatswood
 Next Meeting – 17 October 2004
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www.capacity.org

CANCELLED – September Greville Street Meeting

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Editor’s Note, When I started the Nowletter in 1992 I promised myself that I would not publish anything about unidentified flying objects and crop-circles. A few months ago I said to a friend who has been reading the Nowletter for a couple of years that it was time he wrote something himself. He said the only subject he would like to write about was his experience of some strange objects he and his family had seen in the sky in the mid-sixties. A few days later I was explaining my predicament to another long-time reader and contributor when, to my astonishment, he said he had had a similar experience. So here are both accounts. I held them back for a couple of months until I was free to use a review by John Wren-Lewis of a recent book covering paranormal experiences.

Thanks to all this month’s contributors and a reminder that I rely for content, as far as possible, on material written by readers about their own experiences and thoughts. So, please consider letting me have your thoughts, experiences about life and your reactions to what appears here.

The recent re-introduction of Harding related meetings has met with a good response and encouraged me to keep the first Saturday of the month meetings going. More details on page 13.

Michael Cook advises that Andrew Cohen will be in Sydney on the 12th, 13th and 14th of November, 2004. Andrew will give two evening talks and a one day retreat at the Isabel Menton Theatre, 11 Mount Street, North Sydney. Information about Andrew’s appearances in Australia and an introduction to his teachings can be found on the web sites www.andrewcohen.org and www.wie.org. Please call Michael on 02 4268 1746, Jane on 041 571 3567 or Alex on 041 864 6159 for information about the Sydney events or (about the Perth events) Andra on 08 9335 9705 or Imants on 0438 359 705.

The Nowletter appears between 10 and 12 times every year and is a vehicle for news and views about awakening to what is really going on. Contributions from readers are considered the most valuable content so please think about letting me have your thoughts, experiences, discoveries and any responses to what you read here.

Subscriptions: Postal \$15 per annum, Email – Free

A review by John Wren-Lewis of the recently published:

Varieties of Anomalous Experience: Examining the Scientific Evidence. Edited by Etzel Cardena, Steven Jay Gould and Stanley Krippner. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2001. 476pp. US\$39.95. ISBN: 1-55798-625-8 This review first appeared in the latest edition of the Australian Journal of Parapsychology.

I doubt very much if even the most ardent publicist of this substantial volume would have considered it "ideal holiday reading," but for me it has been just that. The book was handed to me by an overloaded mailman on New Year's Eve, just as I was leaving for my favourite country retreat at the mouth of the Shoalhaven River to have a respite from Sydney's hurly-burly - and my holiday reading-time was devoted to it for the whole month of January, sometimes actually on the beach, and always with pleasure as well as intellectual satisfaction. When I eventually reached the book's end on the day before return to the City, it was with a missionary urge to recommend it to anyone seriously interested in parapsychology, so at the first opportunity I asked to review it for this journal.

The three editors created the book for the American Psychological Association by persuading eighteen other international scholars of repute to join them in making open-minded critical surveys of the huge amount of scientific research reports published worldwide during the last hundred or so years on ten different kinds of out-of-the-ordinary experience. A whole substantial chapter, with its own comprehensive list of literature-references, is allocated to each kind of experience, and concludes with recommendations about clinical issues that may be raised when the experience causes distress, and suggestions for further research. After two general introductory chapters criticizing the common tendency to dismiss unusual experiences out of hand as either pure fabrications or evidence of psychopathology, the specific experiences reviewed are:

Hallucinations, their many possible causes and the most appropriate responses, and the risks involved in both over-hasty psychiatric treatments on the one hand and total refusal of serious attention on the other.

Synesthesia, wherein sensory experiences of different kinds are involuntarily combined – for example, when the experiencer doesn't hear music just as sound, but simultaneously experiences it as having colour or taste, or when each letter of the alphabet is experienced as having its own distinctive musical tone, colour, taste or touch-feeling. After reviewing research on the brain-processes involved, the authors emphasize the special problems experienced by synesthetic children.

Lucid Dreaming, the experience of becoming aware while dreaming that "this is a dream," which can also include ability to take conscious control of the dreaming process.

Out-of-body experiences (OREs) wherein the centre of consciousness, or "self," is experienced as outside the body, and can sometimes have veridical perceptions of distant events. The reviewers find that such experiences sometimes cause distress to the experiencer which calls for therapeutic help. On other occasions, however, they are reported to bring highly positive results, giving new meaning and energy to life – so research on how to induce such experiences in waking life is recommended.

Psi-related experiences, such as telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition of future events, and "psychokinesis" (the ability to move objects by willing them to move). This chapter frequently cites studies carried out in Australia, including the work of this journal's editor Michael Thalbourne, and Associate Editor Harvey Irwin.

Alien abduction experiences (AAEs), reports of which have become so common that this chapter cites no less than thirteen serious scientifically-oriented books and eighty papers in respected learned journals, published in the closing decades of the twentieth century. The chapter's authors conclude that since "no investigators have yet come up with complete prosaic explanations of these phenomena more esoteric explanations may be required. ".Wisdom, they suggest, would indicate openness to the possibility that the universe is a stranger place than is commonly recognized.

Past life experiences, wherein individuals have what seem like memories from an earlier incarnation on this planet, some of which turn out to contain correct information. The reviewers argue that such experiences are by no means confined to cultures which take belief in reincarnation for granted, and cannot be written off as always just fraudulent attention-seeking inventions. So they suggest that future research should include control-studies in which non-experiencers are asked to deliberately *invent* descriptions of "previous lives," to see how the historical accuracy of their details compares with that of reported "past life memories."

Near-Death Experiences (NDEs), the strange and life-changing experiences often reported by people who are resuscitated from the very brink of death – a subject on which I have firsthand experience, having been narrowly saved from dying by poisoning in Thailand in 1983. Dr. Bruce Greyson from the Division of Personality Studies at the University of Virginia, himself a pioneer in putting NDE studies firmly on the scientific psychological map,

gives the best review I've yet seen of worldwide research in the field. And from my own experience I can wholeheartedly confirm his conclusion that while journalistic interest in NDEs has concentrated on whether or not they offer evidence of life after death, the real importance of the phenomenon probably lies in opening up the survivors to a new dimension of consciousness in this world. It's a dimension probably best described as mystical, which for me has continued for over two decades so far, and has been life-enhancing beyond anything I could ever have imagined.

Anomalous Healing. The fact that NDEs usually happen to sick or injured people brings the book naturally to what are probably the most talked-about cases of all anomalous experience – healing-experiences which transcend the rules and assumptions, of regular medicine. The chapter begins by pointing out that here (as with psi-related experiences), the language often used in discussing the subject can easily be taken to imply dismissal, with terms like "voodoo treatment and "magical thinking." The authors recommend differentiating anomalous healing *events* which are objectively verifiable in terms of medical evidence, from the subjective feelings accompanying them, which almost always involve attributing "meaning" to them. For example, the experiencer might assume a specific paranormal agency at work, as in tribal shamanic healing-rites, in intercessory prayers (often for a sick person not actually present with the pray-er), or in the simple laying-on-of-hands practised by many Westerners under rubrics like "psychic" or "spiritual" healing.

Studies are quoted indicating that such non-medical treatments "often bring substantial health benefits" and can sometimes involve "seemingly miraculous cures," but the authors also recognize the work of skeptical doubters, notably of conjurer James Randi in exposing downright frauds. The chapter concludes by quoting Harvey Irwin of Australia's University of New England, urging the need for more thorough research on the entire subject, which would surely be very much in the general public interest.

Mystical Experiences. Finally, it seems highly appropriate to me as a born-again mystic (since my NDE) that the book's concluding chapter is devoted to Mystical Experiences. It naturally draws heavily on the classic study by William James at the beginning of the twentieth century, the title of which ("The Varieties of Religious Experience") clearly played a part in inspiring this book as a whole. It then goes on to review nearly a hundred significant research studies that have been published since, from the classic works of Freud and Jung to many well-known contemporary American researchers – including four good friends of our AIPR Charles Tart, Jean Houston, Roger Walsh and Frances Vaughan. Michael Thalbourne's work is also cited, most notably his (in my view) classic 1999 paper on "Transliminality" in the *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*.

So do put this book at the top of your priority list for reading, and if the price exceeds the current capacity of your budget, I'm assured that there are several copies available in the NSW library system, as well as in major libraries of other States. If your local libraries, public or academic, don't already have it, you'll be doing a public service if you put in a request for them to acquire it.

John Wren-Lewis

I've no need for religion,
And little for philosophy,
When everywhere I look I see
Eternal numinosity.

Jim Clatfelter

Tourists of a Different Kind from Ian Jones

In the river itself and situated a few sweeping bends inland from where the Glenelg River spills into Discovery Bay, Western District of Victoria, is the Isle of Bags. Major Thomas Mitchell, that rather stuffy Victorian-era surveyor/explorer, in an act of gross stupidity, was naïve enough to store some bags of flour on this postage stamp sized islet and fully expected them to be there on the return trip. The local Aboriginals, of a warrior-like disposition would most certainly have been following Mitchell's every move – and naturally, the bags quickly disappeared into the dense rainforest, just as soon as his back was turned. As to whether or not the “locals” worked out some useful purpose for this strange whitish powder we may never know.

Years later after Mitchell had passed away and when you could safely store a truck-load of flour on the islet, now that the Aboriginals had been ‘genocided’ in a few short brutal decades, the settlers erected a commemorative obelisk as a permanent record of, presumably Mitchell's crassness on what had become known as the Isle of Bags. It is rarely visited by tourists who merely speed past in high-powered speedboats, as if they are on some sort of watery transit lane. The story, you are about to read speculates that the Isle of Bags may very well have been visited by tourists of a different kind in the 1960s. What I am about to relate did actually happen for I saw it with my own eyes, which by the way, were in far better shape then than their present myopic condition.

It was just on dusk one summer evening, in the mid-sixties, it is geographically far South where the twilight lingers well into TV-watching prime time. So, there I was, glued to that flickering monochrome eye; TV in that neck of the woods was still something of a novelty which had yet to wear off. I had not reached my teens and my brother, barely a year younger than me, having had a full day, wandered off to an annexe which served as our bedroom, ready to call it a day.

Now, younger brothers are prone to exaggeration; this can be taken as a given. It just so happens that the short route from the homestead to the annexe offers a sweeping view of the actual location of the Isle of Bags, although the islet itself is obscured by dense rainforest, still there to this day. Suddenly, my brother dashed back into the lounge where the rest of the family were gathered round the TV. He appeared to be in a rather excited state and urged us to come outside, pronto. This I did in rather leisurely fashion knowing full-well certain tendencies of younger brothers, already mentioned. Hot on my heels followed the whole gang: my mother, stepfather, brother, sister and the teacher from the local school who was boarding with us the time.

Even if I live to be a hundred what I saw next will still be with me for it was the weirdest sight I have ever seen. Hovering in the tricky light was a handful of what are generally known, since '47 to be precise, as ‘flying saucers’. They were not flying in any particular aerial formation. According to my calculations, they were directly above the Isle of Bags and their general appearance was comparable to the dusty, blackish colour of aluminium which has been exposed to the elements. On reflection, I concluded they had done a sortie too many through the universe and were now due for an overhaul service – pure speculation of course.

But to say that these strange craft were ‘hovering’ over the obelisk is misleading. In actual fact they were going up and down in an apparently uncoordinated manner. It was as if something below had caught their attention and they were trying to get a closer look but again, there was no particular formation or pattern as they went about this exercise. For example, whilst one craft was descending it would temporarily obscure another ascending and vice-versa; or a pair or more would descend or ascend together.

The most remarkable feature of these unearthly craft, apart from the fact that they had the amazing ability to defy gravity with no visible means of propulsion was the different shades of luminous light emanating from the concave bases of the saucers. No colour coordination either, the colours changed at random and you would not necessarily see the same shade emitted by any one craft in concert with the others. The light itself was comparable to sheet lightning. However, unlike this natural phenomenon, the different shades of colour encompassed every colour of the rainbow. It is the visual spectacle of these brilliant colours that is so firmly etched in my memory.

Fortunately, one of us was still thinking rationally and fetched a pair of high-powered binoculars so we could get a closer look but unfortunately he became mesmerized by the strange spectacle. I am convinced, such was the strength of the spell he was under, that wild horses wouldn't have dragged them off him.

All too soon, at least as far as I was concerned, these tourists of a different kind started heading North-West in rough formation, rapidly gained speed and at once became invisible. It was now much too late for me to get a closer look with the binoculars even if I could have gotten hold of them.

So who were they? Or, more to the point ‘what’ were they? None of the witnesses nor any person I've told this story has been able to provide me with a satisfactory answer. Consequently, I have permitted myself to speculate that they were not of this earth. Whatever type of craft they were their pilots hi-jacked Mitchell's obelisk as a fixed navigation

point, the pyramids of Giza may be similarly used, and they are in an entirely different 'time dimension' to us here on earth.

Trying to recall an event that happened over forty years ago memory can play tricks but what you have just read is not a work of fiction!

Ian Jones

(I later asked Ian a few questions about the experience. Ed.)

Q: How big were they?

A: About the size of a large automobile. Not massive, obviously not mother ships.

Q: Did you all see exactly the same?

A: Speaking to my sister 15 years after the event she replied "Oh, you mean those lights we saw". She may have been frightened but I know it was more than just 'lights' because I well remember a plan that I developed at the time. I decided that, if they got any closer I would run and hide under the big Cypress at the back of our house. I had nightmares into the nineties so my sister might well have blotted out the inexplicable aspects. They were definitely craft but they were certainly emitting light, it was like sheet-lightning but continuous and changing colours.

Q: You call them craft – could they as well have been weird organisms.

A: No, I couldn't put them down as anything biological. They had been built in a factory or workshop.

Q: Could it have been a collective illusion?

A: Definitely not. All those people. The problem is, and it took me a long time to put it in a nutshell and I don't go around telling everyone because you get too much disbelief. People think you're a nut-case. So, I'm selective who I tell but even when I'm selective it's exactly the same as trying to tell someone you saw a fairy at the bottom of the garden. You get the same response.

Q: How did it feel.

A: You mean the immediate reaction don't you?

Q Yes. What were the reactions, was there speculation about what you were witnessing?

A. It seemed that no-one wanted to talk about it at the time but later there was quite a lot of talk about it. The most memorable recollection was that of my mother's response. I was in my early teens at the time and had the view that my parent knew just about everything. My mother certainly had an answer for everything. It was later I realized that if she didn't have an answer she would make one up. In this case it was the first time I'd seen her stumped about anything. After it was over she said "it must have been the Russians". I can't accept her explanation of course but it shows her need to find a rational response.

Q: Was there any religious or spiritual aspect or response. You didn't see it as some sort of visitation?

A: The only way religion came into it (my mother was an Anglican and there was no local Anglican church so she sent us off to the local Presbyterian church on Sundays) afterwards, I wondered if there was anything in the bible comparable to what we'd seen. This was before Von Daniken's Chariots of the Gods, but I eventually read that book and the reference to Ezekiel gave me the idea of a possible religious link.

Dooralong Fireball from Ingram Smith

One afternoon I was sitting with my aunt on the verandah of her Dooralong Valley home which adjoins the border of the Olney State Forest at about 4.30 pm, suddenly she called "Look at that! What is it?" And there sailing Northwards was a flaming red object – no, not an object but a substance aflame, as though totally on fire. It was not a ball of flame but an oval disc of glowing embers about the size of a double-decker bus when seen from the distance of a hundred metres.

From quite close it traveled serenely, quite quickly a hundred metres above the ground, low enough for us to both to see it sweep on and upward over the nearby, forested mountain range. It was in our sight for three minutes or so. I had no idea what it was having never seen anything like it before, or since.

It appeared to be a glowing disc shaped fireball. Something was actually happening and we both saw it. It was wondrous and real yet unbelievable, an impossible event actually happening and as though quite natural, a simple factual reality. I have no explanation, only wonder.

But then, unique as the experience was, things do occur that are beyond my common understanding. But then I also know that my image-making mind naturally fills in (with what I already know) and sequentially makes a sane, coherent picture of what I am witnessing. Thus, it may be that having a close relationship with a favourite aunt I heard and saw her vision. In the same way as when I willingly am open to a friend's wayward perception of an event or when I hear or read a totally new and different idea through the words of another I then take as my own.

Ingram Smith

An Afterword to "The Night My Head Disappeared"

I feel the need to write a rejoinder to my own article in Nowletter 98. Some have asked and may still ask upon reading it how I could have "slipped back" into my "normal," so-called "unenlightened," state of consciousness after such an "extraordinary" experience of awakening, and why I would not have kept trying to induce the same experience again through the method I described, or others such as Harding's. While I understand why these things would be so confusing to many, they have not been as urgent questions to me as they would seem, for reasons I will explain in this article. The problems that have instead most concerned me since my "experience" have been different ones, such as why I am "me" and not someone else (the problem of perspective and self-reference), and that of free will and whether it exists or not (i.e., if there is no "me" and all is karmic play, how is it that I am here making choices right now?). These so far I have no answer to, and perhaps others can shed some light on them for me.

In addition to the desire to answer these questions posed by others as best I can and to begin to look into my own, I have the fear that the reading of my article by others could become a hindrance to their own direct experience, in that it describes an event which does not exist for them in any way other than as a representation of someone else's experience. Even for me it doesn't exist, since it occurred in the past and is now gone. In this sense, it might as well have happened to a different person if, by idolizing it, I let it keep me from paying attention to my present experience. Any idea taking the place of direct experience can be a hindrance, but especially those we "worship" – whether memories of our own moments of awakening or those ideas we have of the dramatic enlightenment experiences of people (not gods, by the way) we revere as great religious teachers, supposedly so distant from our own experience and which we take to be "Reality" in place of what is immediately available to us.

It is also important to remember (and there are many sad examples of this) that the universal human tendency toward hierarchy promotes both a blind, complete trust in the experience and authority of one's religious teachers as well as the danger of ego aggrandizement in those leaders, no matter how valid their original experience may have been (hence the importance of ethical guidelines and precepts which apply to everyone). It is not that these teachers have annihilated their ego and are therefore somehow superior to us, meaning they can ignore rules meant only for the "unenlightened" – there never was an ego in existence to begin with. However, the imaginary self and its strong karmic tendencies still "exist" in the mind even after one's initial insight into this truth. Only if, due to this insight, no new karmic tendencies are created, will those tendencies already in "existence" gradually consume themselves, like flames running out of fuel. Until that happens, though, one is constantly subject to, and must be on guard against the creation of more karma, due to the persistence of this delusion of "self." I, again, am certainly no Zen master – but even if I were I would be no exception to this. Although I may have relapsed into my "normal" mental patterns, however, I am constantly reminded of my initial insight, and this has left me with a deep need to resolve unanswered questions – some of which I have already mentioned.

For such reasons as these, I take exception to the idea that readers of my article aren't privy to my understanding – in fact, whatever insight I had/have is no different from their own most basic experience. This is the only way that one person, such as a teacher for example, may be able to evaluate the validity of another's understanding, such as their student's (or vice-versa, for that matter). Hence the significance of Hsiang-yen's burning of his sutras -- those records of other people's enlightenment experiences which he came to worship, and therefore became obstacles to the recognition of his own innate understanding. As he once said, "painted cakes do not satisfy hunger." I love the story of his enlightenment – read it if you haven't yet (but don't worship it, of course – and certainly don't expect it to satisfy your own spiritual hunger!).

To answer the question of what happened after my own experience, first of all, it seems to me that the experience I described was almost too much for my rational mind to handle, and the strength of its habitual tendencies to set limits on and differentiate experiences soon took over and wanted to "sort things out" (see below). Implicit in the need to record what was happening was the sense that it could not "last," and where that came from I did not know. It would seem now to have something to do with the strong grasping tendencies of the human mind wanting things to stay the same, yet being in conflict with the wholly evident truth of impermanence and insubstantiality. I also had read some accounts of "enlightenment experiences" in books on Zen, and so had perhaps had too many preconceptions which needed confirmation. Somehow I couldn't believe that this was happening to

me, so the grasping came from a sense of needing to "preserve" my lucky insight! It only occurred to me much later how silly this was.

The experience I "attained" that night was not a "state" at all – rather, the absence of any idea of attainment or states or any other representation of "reality" or basis for a self through which it would be perceived. This was the reason for my sense of joy – it was not something like a state or change of consciousness into which I had to come in order to be able to perceive the Truth – I was there all along and it would always be with me! This is not to say that "afterward" I did not experience a wish to "experience" again what I did that night – I did feel this, as I related in my article. Only that I knew this was no "experience," but rather the lack of any idea of a self which could be having one, so any effort to return to that "experience" was futile and delusional since it would be based on an erroneous idea. There was nothing really new or unusual about this "experience" at all – and yet the essence of it was that everything was new, without any preconceptions getting in the way. It was and is simply the act of experiencing.

It is indeed curious, however, that one could know this for a fact and yet find oneself "back" again in the normal "state" we like to think of as "unenlightened." This is the basic question as to how us sentient beings can be both enlightened and deluded at the same time – both bodhisattvas actively working for the salvation of all beings and yet one of those beings in need of salvation. A partial answer to this is that this is the nature of delusion – it doesn't really exist, so we can't be "in" it, really, as opposed to "out" of it through "enlightenment." There is a story (I think I read it in Philip Kapleau's "The Three Pillars of Zen," a book to read cautiously for fear of idolizing the "experiences of enlightenment" related therein – by the way, there is another curious reference to head-lessness in the Parable of Enyadatta, also in this book) about an old man who was walking in his garden at dusk when he saw a huge, venomous snake right where he was about to take a step! For a moment he was completely terrified, almost to the point of having a heart attack – which perhaps would have killed him even faster than the snake's poisonous bite. But then, he suddenly realized that it was just his garden hose half-concealed in the grass which he had seen in the darkening twilight, and he started laughing hysterically, fully recovering himself.

This is exactly the human condition. The suffering we feel as a result of delusion is real, but what it is caused by, the delusion itself, is not. We are not really deluded, in the sense that we don't really live in the world of our dreams and imagination – we only think we are, and this unfortunately seems to affect our reality. But despite the suffering, we are not essentially affected or changed in any way by the "delusion" – we only need to become fully aware of its true lack of substance, and we are free "again" (as we've really been all along). We only have fallen from Eden in that we are convinced of it. How did we become convinced? I don't know (it seems in any case that the same thing that got us into this "mess" in the first place must be strong enough to pull us back into it again – even after we realize we weren't in a mess to begin with!). But I do know that our curiosity concerning these matters, which was clearly evident in the e-mails readers sent to me, is our own treasure-house of knowledge and also the key to unlocking it. I'll let old Ma-tzu explicate on this (from Stephen Mitchell's anthology, "The Enlightened Mind," p. 209):

"When Hui-hai first came to Ma-tzu, the Master asked him, 'What have you come here for?' Hui-hai said, 'I have come seeking the Buddha's teaching.' 'What a fool you are!' Ma-tzu said. 'You have the greatest treasure in the world inside you, and yet you go around asking other people for help. What good is this? I have nothing to give you.' Hui-hai bowed and said, 'Please, Master, tell me what this treasure is.' Ma-tzu said, 'Where is your question coming from? This is your treasure!'"

Along the same lines, one day Ma-tzu, when he himself was a disciple of Huai-jang, was sitting in meditation and upon being asked what he was doing, told Huai-jang that he was "trying to become a Buddha" – all with the most serious and determined look on his face that would have made many a lesser master proud. But old Huai-jang, after hearing this, immediately went over in front of Ma-tzu, picked up a tile that had been laying on the ground, and started to polish it vigorously. This went on for quite some time until Ma-tzu couldn't take it any longer and said, "Master, please, may I ask what it is you are trying do?" to which Huai-jang replied, "Well, I'm polishing this tile to make it into a mirror, of course!" Confused, Ma-tzu asked, "But, Master, how can you expect to make that tile into a mirror by polishing it?" "Well, how can you expect to make yourself into a Buddha by sitting in meditation?," retorted Huai-jang, which prompted his earnest disciple to ask, "Then, Master, what is it that I should be doing?" "If you are driving a cart and it stops, which is it that you should hit – the cart or the horse?," was his answer. In other words, sitting in meditation or doing any other practice in order to become a Buddha is like a seal barking and clapping his fins together while balancing a ball on his nose in order to become a seal. Actually, he is able to do these things precisely because he is a seal.

"Methods" seem to work, if at all, only when they are not thought to be leading to an "experience," or when what they are "leading to" is not what one is expecting. In any case, they are not a "cause" leading to the "effect" of liberation – at most they can accidentally bring about awareness, through calming of the mind and loosening of its

grip on experience, of what has always been there from the beginning. "It," meaning liberation or enlightenment, is not anything unusual – "it" is not a thing – but rather the most intimate and ordinary *lack* of things or mental constructions holding any solidity of "being" this or that. The story of Huai-jang polishing a tile does not have some mysterious, esoteric meaning – it is direct and to the point.

So, while interested in Harding's and other similar exercises, I didn't feel an urgency to perform them because I felt I already knew what they would "reveal." I did try the "corpse position" exercise several times again, for old times' sake, but soon recognized a seemingly insurmountable obstacle in the strong tendency to look back on my previous "experience" and try to duplicate it. This also is what makes me somewhat reticent about my sharing of the "experience," since it virtually guarantees that the attempts of readers to duplicate this would sabotage any spontaneous awakening process that might otherwise occur. But, perhaps I am overemphasizing the difficulty of not looking back, and I could probably use a refresher-course in my own non-existence! We grow jaded whenever we feel we know something and lose some of our curiosity about that which awaits discovery – the very thing that got us to discover in the first place. The world is infinitely new, and we can grow stagnant when caught in our "certainties," preventing us from grabbing the opportunities continually presented to us. In this sense, "enlightenment" can be seen as a never-ending "process," leading us deeper and deeper, higher and higher in joyous exploration, or an "unending glimpsing," as Harding would say.

The experience of "headlessness," so deftly and accurately related to us by Harding, is nevertheless something which to most people is a completely strange and counterintuitive idea. Really, it should not be, for what it refers to is not the absence of a physical head as opposed to the existence of the rest of the body, but the unreality of that network of conceptions which make up what we experience as our "head" – all the interactions of memories, ideas, thoughts, emotions, perceptions, etc. from which we form our reality. It all does not really exist, yet it is what we have made into the very basis of who we think we are, the very seat of our consciousness. Ask someone which part of their body contains their "self", and they are most likely to point to their head, or possibly their heart. We really seem to believe that there is a little being which inhabits this space and peers out through these eyes – but if one were to try to visualize this, its absurdity would become immediately apparent.

If, on the other hand, our self is thought to inhabit the whole of our body rather than a specific place, what could explain the fact that if our limbs or any other part were to become separated from the rest of our body we would not feel that our self in any existential sense had become divided? The sole exception to this, of course, seems to be the head. But is it really that different from any other part of the body? It is, after all, made up of millions of individual cells functioning together. Our white blood cells are amoeba-like creatures which "eat" pathogens in our bodies – does this mean that they are separate organisms? We could be seen as really being colonies of cells, each performing its function without any one controlling the actions of all the others. This is also true of our brain cells. So, if we are in our brains, are we colonies of brain cells? If so, this would mean we are not, nor do we possess, one self. Are we the electrical impulses that are transferred between brain cells? Yet again, this would be hard to imagine.

The standard retort to this inquiry is that we are neither any part nor the whole of the body – we are souls. It is interesting, though, that we commonly speak of having souls – who is it then who "has" the soul? We speak of others as being "good souls," "poor souls," even "old souls" – but we do not refer to ourselves as "souls," it's always "my soul," as if it were some foreign entity residing in or in possession of our body. The soul in this case is really just another object, and what we are looking for is a subject. The problem is that when we refer to a "subject" or "self," we are using provisional terms. In the bare act of experiencing, if we are to look at it deeply and honestly, there is no trace of anything that can be pointed to as a "soul" or even a "self." Also, all accounts seem to point to the fact that in the "experience" itself, there is not a trace of any one religious tradition or philosophical idea (or any other idea, for that matter). There is nowhere it is to be found in the body, despite the bizarre claims of some schools of Hinduism (bizarre, that is, as with many otherwise useful religious ideas, if interpreted literally rather than metaphorically) that it is something the size of our thumb which resides in our chest!

The truth is that we don't really exist as "our" selves, neither as "souls" nor as any other objects -- yet here we are experiencing life as subjects, moment after moment! This is indeed the mysterious secret we all must discover first-hand. But provisionally we can say it makes perfect sense, because it is evident in everyone's basic, everyday experience – even though it may not seem so apparent to us when we are used to accepting as "fact" something completely contrary to our own direct perception. Our minds, just from the basic drive to survive, tend to take our experience and attempt to "sort it out" for us, thus relieving (temporarily, at least) our existential fear of emptiness and the unknown and our evolutionarily necessary need for security by objectifying it in the idea of a self or soul. This is all rather like the old story of God saying to Satan, "Behold, the Truth is here in My hand!" to which Satan replies, "Give me that! I'll organize it for you..."

These ideas of selves are just that – ideas, without any substance. Yet we assign them more reality than we do even our direct, moment-to-moment experience. In fact, over our lifetime we have built as a “home” an intricate structure of thoughts that walls us in from our true home. This can be understood simply in the fact that we also build physical homes for us to inhabit, and then have a much more difficult time thinking of the out-of-doors as our “home” than the interior of our houses. Pertinent to this is Plato's famous Analogy of the Cave, or even more poetically, Rumi's story of his imaginary dialogue with a fetus, in which Rumi describes to it all of the wonders of the world, after which the fetus says he must be dreaming and denies the reality of any world outside the womb.

Even the clothes we wear can be seen as analogous to our mentally constructed identity. If someone were to walk around naked, people would be shocked, and he or she might even be brought to a mental hospital! From a certain perspective, this entire thing seems utterly ridiculous. Why would our most natural state of being – our nakedness, in this example – be something to cause such an unusual reaction in people? I say this not as an argument for nudism, but as a metaphor for our situation as human beings. We go around thinking we are dressed when we are really naked. We wrap ourselves in this unsubstantial thought-clothing, which we and others “see” and think is us. Because of this, we are able to say to ourselves in all seriousness, yet really as if we were children playing, “I’ll be the doctor and you be the patient,” or, “I’m an Officer of the Law and you’re just a miserable thief,” or “all you are is a teacher, and all I am is a student,” or, unfortunately, “I’m a good Hutu and you’re a dirty Tutsi” – we really believe this stuff! But we are most obviously not our clothing, and we certainly don’t need to strip them off to be naked – underneath them, we are and have been naked all the time! Yet we tend to want to not only keep believing that we are clothed, but that we are the costume we have put on. How much unnecessary suffering has been caused by clinging to this masquerade – but we continue to cling to it, as if it were all that we have in this life.

To return to the previous metaphor, the same thing can be seen in our tendency to think of our rooms (when we were children) and our houses (when we became adults) as representing who we are. We become trapped in them – they are more accurately described as our self-made prisons – yet we don’t want to leave them. We are all spiritually agoraphobic. Yet when the suffocation and stale air get too great, we will go outside, often to our great relief. But how many of us recognize the out-of-doors as our true home? Eventually we go back inside, thinking this limited and limiting space is somehow worth more to us than the limitless vastness outside. Only when we realize that our “home” doesn’t really exist and we are always in the midst of that vastness and the freedom that comes with it will we be able laugh joyously at the ridiculousness of the situation we thought we were stuck in.

It’s as if we were a poor homeless beggar always thinking we were destitute, when suddenly one day we find a key in our pocket. Did we pick it up somewhere and forget about it? How long have we had it? Curious as to which house this could possibly be a key to, we search endlessly and try it in innumerable keyholes, until finally we find it is the key to the house we grew up in, thought we’d been evicted from years ago, and have been begging in front of ever since! So, at night we sneak up to the door, peek around to make sure no-one’s looking, and open it, our heart beating wildly. In the basement, we discover a secret door we only knew existed because we had opened it once before as a little child. Going through it, we find ourselves in the midst of a treasury filled with gold as far as the eye can see, which you parents and grandparents must have saved up for us – meaning it is all ours to draw upon as we like. What incredible luck we must have! How could we have not remembered this before? As a child, we had thought the gold coins were just pretty, shiny things, but now we know their “real” value. Gleeefully taking a random piece of gold, we admire it’s beauty and take it with us back outside. Days on end we spend staring at it, disbelieving our luck. We’re like Gollum in his cave – “Precious, my Preciousss...” Only, somehow we forget about the key in our pocket again. One day, like Gollum, we lose our Precious – it falls into the sewer. Utterly distraught, we spend who knows how long trying to fish it out of there, getting ourselves filthy in the process – all along with that key in our pocket. Anyway, I could go on with this story, but I think you get the idea.

If we were to see this guy on the street and hear about what happened to him, we would undoubtedly think he was crazy – and we might even feel sorry for him and give him a few cents, despite the forgotten key in his pocket. When will we realize that he is us and we are him? Don’t let it be too late! Each of us and every moment in our lives is infinitely more precious than gold, and the capacity to truly recognize each other and use each moment to the full extent of its value is always within us – so why do we waste time so needlessly?

Thomas Bird
tomabird@yahoo.com

Reading from Headlessness - Wei Wu Wei selection – from Shane Keher

"Wei Wu Wei writes: *every sentient being, speaking as I, may say to his phenomenal self - Be still! and know that I am God.* When we are really still, we shall not merely know Who we are. We shall see it, more clearly than anything we have ever seen before.....You are invited to reverse the arrow of your attention and look not only at what you are looking at but also at What you are looking out of. Wei Wu Wei and I promise you it's marvellous!"

Douglas Harding

"Wei Wu Wei goes right for the root. He takes away everything, and leaves nothing. Then he takes that away."

Joan Tollifson

Years ago I was struck by how much more immediate some nondual writings are when read from Headlessness, from our ever present Open Capacity. The meaning of what's read is more self-evident. For example, the Zen koan, "show me your face before you were born", is pretty opaque when I read from my headed self, within the confines of this verbal mind. Read from Headlessness - Eureka! Here it is! This faceless face!

It recently occurred to me to put together a little collection of short aphorisms and pieces by Wei Wu Wei, and to invite readers of the Nowletter to experiment with reading them from Headlessness. It was also stimulated by discovering that Wei Wu Wei was instrumental in the publishing of the original edition of Douglas's "On Having No Head" - he provided much of the funding.

Wei Wu Wei is the pen name of Terrence Gray, an Irish scholar of Taoism, Mahayana Buddhism and early Ch'an, devoted to Ramana Maharshi. He wrote a number of books from the late 1950's to early 1970's, and died in 1987 (or thereabouts). He's less than well known, but I think very influential on many writers, teachers and students of nondual philosophy, including Ramesh Balsekar, whose particular expression of Advaita is hugely influenced by WWW. Most of his books have been out of print for many years, but they've been republished over the last year or so. You can also find nearly the entire text of books on the Wei Wu Wei Archives website: www.weiwuwei.8k.com.

Why do I like him? My curiosity was triggered by Ramesh Balsekar's many references to him. My relationship with his books was "difficult" for ages - frustrated by what felt like an impenetrable wall of strange, densely expressed, often paradoxical and seemingly contradictory concepts. It took a long time to have some glimmering of what he meant in a passage like: "the superimposition of conceptual opposites is phenomenal absence or voidness which is noumenal presence". Huh? He's like a homeopathic medicine to me: he uses the conceptual mind to eventually defeat itself- although not into a disshevelled heap, more a steady taking away of assumed supports. After a while, I had vivid and unexpected flashes of the non-conceptual, wordless "I" he points to, when reading or mulling over his words. He helped me enormously to see that what "I" really am can never, never be any object at all - I *thought* I knew that previously, but reading WWW has helped expose many notions I didn't realise I held. A sort of cerebral psychotherapy.

I'm deeply grateful to him for showing me that the simple and obvious Is-ness of anything and everything is only "I".

The following is a random selection of pieces I find particularly vivid . So, I invite you to read them contemplatively from Capacity, this Frameless Open Window.....

Few people are likely to read these lines who are not seeking fulfilment, but fulfilment needs no seeking, *and seeking will always maintain the apparent absence of fulfilment.* If the imaginary forest has been cleared we have only to look in order to apperceive what, when, and where we are, that it is not what we *know*, but what 'I AM', and that unborn, unliving, undying, it is here and now and forever.

*

Who are you? You don't shave your self, do you? You shave what you see in the mirror! Noticing that is the 'Negative Way'.

*

Negation is Acceptance. Negation implies acceptance, because it is the self-nature or autonomous existence of phenomenal objects that is being denied, and this comports acceptance of these same phenomenal objects, as appearances, *so that resistance to them disappears, and they are accepted as manifesting what we are.*

*

There is no becoming. ALL IS.

*

Are *you* still thinking, looking, living, as from an imaginary phenomenal centre?
As long as you do that you can never recognise your freedom.

*

We are required to cease looking at objects as events apart from ourselves,
And to know them at their source - which is our perceiving of them.

*

It is only with total humility, and in absolute stillness of mind
that we can know what indeed we are. Humility, metaphysically, implies the absence of any entity to be either
'proud' or 'humble'.

Everything cognised is just what is called 'mind',
And what is called 'mind' is just the cognising of everything.

*

A self that prays, humbly, to God, and a self that, being no longer personal, *is* God, are basically the same, so that
praying humbly to God, and being, impersonally, God, are not fundamentally different.

*

(on the phenomenal ego's notion that it has free will) The purest doctrines, such as those of Ramana Maharshi,
Padma Sambhava, Huang Po and Shen Hui, just teach that it is sufficient by analysis to comprehend that there is no
entity which could have effective volition, that an apparent act of volition when in accord with the inevitable can
only be a vain gesture and, when in discord, the fluttering of a caged bird against the bars of his cage. When he
knows that, then at last he has peace and is glad. *Non-volitional living is glad living.*

*

This 'real' nature with whose revelation the Chan Masters are primarily concerned, or the Atman-'I' of the
Vedantists, is not the far-off, unreachable will-o'-the-wisp we are apt to imagine, but just the within of which we
know the without. It is just the other side of the medal, and it lies wherever our senses and our intellect cease to
function.

*

The Void is not of the nature of a black abyss or a bottomless pit.
Rather is its nature 'vast and expansive like space itself'.
It is apprehended as 'serene, marvellous, all-pure, brilliant and all-inclusive'.
Above all does it partake of the nature of light.
And it is not anything.
For Void is Mind Itself, and Mind Itself is Void.

*

Destroy 'the ego', hound it, beat it, snub it, tell it where it gets off?
Great fun, no doubt, but where is it? Must you not find it first?
Isn't there a word about catching your goose before you can cook it?
The great difficulty here is that there isn't one.

*

Why are you unhappy?
Because 99.9 per cent
Of everything you think,
And of everything you do,
Is for yourself -
And there isn't one.

*

(this, for me, is one of most extraordinary things I've ever read...)

**The implied Unicity, the totality of undivided mind, is itself a concept of its own division or duality, for
relatively - relativity being relative to what itself is - it cannot be conceived or known at all. All that could
ever be known about it is simply that, being Absolute, it must necessarily be devoid of any kind of objective
existence whatever, other than that of the totality of all possible phenomena which constitute its relative
appearance.**

*

Only by 'failure' can I succeed

*

Nearer my tail to thee', the kitten remarked -
as with a final desperate leap she overreached herself
and fell head-over-heels into the pond.

Chris Cheney (Kwan Haeng) is the guiding light of the LookforYourself email conference and from time to time I lift one of his messages for reprinting here. The piece below followed an enquiry into a Bankei question "remain Buddha or become Buddha, what's the difference?"

Remain Buddha or become Buddha – from Chris Cheney

I am remembering a scene that unfolded before my eyes in a laundromat, that made me laugh very hard and feel a lot of love for people. This happened a long time ago. A little black kid, maybe 7 or 8 years old, came over to his mom in a laundromat where i was washing my clothes, and slouching like a hoodlum, 'keeping it real', he said to his mother, "Yo, what tahn id id?" POW! She slapped him right across the face, and said very crisply, "WHAT... TIME... IS... IT!!!" " (He took the rebuke with a reasonable mixture of attention, contrition, reassurance, and nonchalance.)

So, what tahn id id? 12:57 AM. Also, a very interesting time in history when all of humanity's past seems present and accounted for somehow, and what's worse, capable of universal communication and mutual misunderstanding in the present.

This is all Jelke's fault for sending me that Bankei book. Bankei was also a huge influence on D.T. Suzuki, which is Douglas's primary Zen reference of record.

At various times in history, and no doubt for very good reasons, "Zen" took very different forms with respect to the relative ascendancy of one school (teaching style) or another. So sometimes, it was "Remain Buddha". Sometimes, it was "Become Buddha."

Reading Bankei, there is both the central message, undeniable in my view, and a sociopolitical message, which must have been what seemed most appropriate by Bankei's lights, for the circumstances among the common people in Japan at that time, which was at a certain stage of feudalism.

So, Bankei, when talking to the populace, would caution them as to the bad karma that they "picked up from others when they were just little", (but never from their own parents from whom they received only their pure Buddha nature). And explain how these 'reflections in the pure mind' would take them over, resulting in self centeredness, greed, anger, selfish actions, lust, covetousness, and so forth.

And then, when he went to visit palaces, he saw criminals being horribly tortured and beheaded, dismembered alive, and so forth, and he marveled that they blamed the 'innocent public servants' that tortured them, rather than themselves for failing to distinguish the causes of their situation in their own behavior. (Sound familiar?) All of this, while rebuking those who would disturb a sleeping monk in the meditation hall.

Here in the States, it is called "tough love", and has its adherents like "Dr. Laura", although i prefer the terms, "hypocrisy" and "gratuitous abuse" or "anathema" as more accurate, (i don't have emperors and warlords to contend with, at least not daily, and most of the civilians in NYC are pretty good at looking out for themselves, so i don't need to lecture them on extreme civility in the face of power that they may keep their physical heads on their shoulders.) As for the sleeping monks, i agree with Bankei, it is better to let sleeping dogs lie.

Well, so that is Japanese, and the eventual juxtaposition of the same social philosophy that is expressed by Bankei, almost killed Zen altogether in Japan, and also played quite a large role in the excesses of the Japanese army in the Pacific theatre in WW2.

That all expresses from a long standing human conflict between beings of different spiritual generations who are present on the earth at the same time. It is a war that has persisted throughout history between what first arises as stillness and motion, and eventually manifests through attachment, observation, insight, and correction, or relative lack thereof, as the forces of regression and progress.

"Remain Buddha" or "Become Buddha". Once the mistake (wrong turn) is made by humanity, it is too late to "Remain Buddha". One must again "Become Buddha" (in function). Fortunately, both the past, and the future, are contained in the present moment, (view out), and 'all periods of time are empty'. (View in).

So, that is "Remaining Buddha" *and* "Becoming Buddha." And so, it is also necessary to become Buddha while remaining Buddha. Fortunately, remaining Buddha can't be helped, prevented, forbidden, or taxed, or the gummuh would find a way to screw that up too.

Maybe somebody had better send me a book with some of Hakuin's lectures in it. Japan was still feudal at the time of Hakuin, but the situation was different, so the teaching was different. I like Bankei very much. I kind of identify with his life in parts. 'Remaining Buddha', is a great way of putting it in. Yet, it leaves something out also. Not in the condition, but in the dynamic. (Probably the book will get to it in later chapters.)

How did Buddha start to teach? He perceived people's minds by virtue of his being relatively 'empty'. (Empty of thinking, and not identified with anything except perhaps to a degree, nature.) So he could perceive very easily, motives, attachments, and so forth. And used the circumstances, whatever they were, to set up a teaching situation. It would just appear. This didn't require an identity as 'an analyst', it would just appear in a mind that is like running water. That can be with or without words, action, etc.

So, "always use mistake, make correct" is "become Buddha". That is part of Buddha function. So, remain Buddha is also become Buddha. Either way, the mind is "like running water", or the wind. Bankei used his mistake of excessive meditation and attachment to 'great doubt' which almost killed his body, to 'save others the trouble' by showing them another way. (Very similar to Seeing, almost the same, but Bankei used Hearing more to point). That is also "use mistake make correct". But Bankei largely taught people who had very simple minds, and not too much education.

The schools which came into prominence elsewhere were for people with more complex minds, more devices, more cleverness, so they used koans to break the tendency to cleverness and pride by putting it at an impasse.

Become Buddha is also remain Buddha. That is what happens when proud and clever minds encounter an impasse that thinking cannot resolve. At a certain point, the Buddha is all that remains. Everything else is blown away in the resolving of phenomena into the noumenon.

So, all these different teachers have their own teaching styles which arise from different circumstances, situations, and conditions, which result in different teaching specifics and dynamics. Some schools stayed very pristine, and never got into words too much at all. So it is with Douglas, Richard, everyone else, me, and all of you. One pure clear no thing illuminates all of this. We are this One Pure Clear No Thing.

Remarkable, isn't it? Love, Chris

A note from Dave Zerbst

(I extracted this paragraph from a recent reader message which I reprint with Dave's permission. Ed.)

Maintaining ones presence to the living mystery of our being requires a localized focusing that discloses ones continuity with boundless life. This continuity is Love. This disclosure is pure miracle or grace. It's all there for you and I as soon as we bring the intentional hutzpa to bear upon the project of maintaining a steady focusing on the experiential center of the self. This is an essential learning of our lives. I'm trying to really learn it. Thanks for your help. God Bless You.

Dave Zerbst

Greville Street – Look for Yourself Meetings

The programme of six meetings we started in April is now complete. Attendances have ranged from 8 to 16 and there is interest in carrying on. So carry on we will. The aim of these meetings is to provide an environment for the exploration of what follows from the experiments and the work of Douglas Harding in general. We select a different experiment to look at in depth and to start with and then hand the meeting over to whoever has volunteered to tell us about their particular interests and the relationship between whatever that is, and the Harding story.

Academy of the Word Seminar Programme

Dr Alex Reichel (02) 9310 4504 – 2nd & 4th Tuesdays– Under St Peter’s Church, Devonshire St., Surry Hills.
Second Tuesday 6.15pm - Healing & Well-being - **Fourth** Tuesday 6pm - State of the World

Blavatsky Lodge of The Theosophical Society

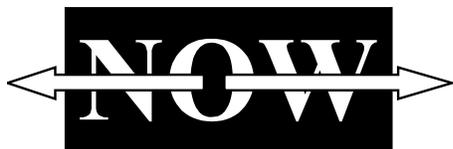
Level 2, 484 Kent St., Sydney (near Town Hall Station) Talks Programme Every Wednesday at 2.30pm and 7pm
 – Printed programme available 02 9267 6955 and at – <http://www.matra.com.au/~hpb/index.html>

Melbourne – Evening Satsang/Dialogue with Penny Fenner

23a Britten Street Glen Iris - Monday evenings 7.30-9.30pm - To confirm attendance and for further information
 please call 03 - 9885 0119 T: + 61 3 9885 0119// 0411 554 007
 E: penny@fenner.org - www.skilfulaction.org

Look for Yourself Meetings

First Saturday of the month at 10-30am, 81Greville street, Chatswood (off Fullers Road) Alan Mann 02 9419 7394



**If unable to deliver please return to:
 81 Greville Street, Chatswood 2067**

Regular Dialogue Meetings				
<i>LOCATION</i>	<i>DAY</i>	<i>MEETING PLACE</i>	<i>TIME & ONTACT</i>	<i>Phone Nos.</i>
Sydney City	Third Saturday	Blavatsky Lodge of the Theosophical Society Level 2, 484 Kent St., City	2.30pm Terry O'Brien	02 9949 8379
Chatswood	Third Sunday	81 Greville St. (off Fullers Rd)Chatswood	10.30 am Alan & Margot Mann	02 9419 7394
Nowra	First Saturday	The Tea Club, Berry Street, Opposite Roxy Cinema	4-6pm –Riche du Plessis	4423 4774
Nowra	Third Sunday	3/117 Berry Street, Nowra	10.30 am Riche du Plessis	4423 4774