

Issue 98 –May 2004

Meetings (10.30am - 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of every month)

81 Greville Street , Chatswood

Next Meeting –20 June 2004

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#### Editor's Note

The highlight for May was Chris McLean's workshop, on which I report in this issue. Apart from the revelations of the process itself, Chris's session underlined the importance of bringing together various strands of the enquiry and how a particular approach can be completely mystifying to someone who finds another angle on the enquiry absolutely clear. What enquiry? Well, there will be different answers I suppose but mine is – into what is involved in 'enjoying the world aright'?

I enrolled for the Sea of Faith in Australia Conference in Perth WA, 17-19 September. The keynote speaker is the founder Don Cuppit. Other speakers: Rachael Kohn and David Boulton. At one of the Sydney SOF meetings I discovered that the movement was inspired by the work of the then Bishop of Woolwich, John Robinson's 1963 book, *Honest to God*. This, in turn, being inspired to a great extent by John Wren-Lewis who among his many achievements is a co-founder of and contributor to this newsletter.

This description is taken from the sea of Faith website. *SoFiA is a network of Australians who are seeking a radical reappraisal of past religious traditions in order to meet today's spiritual challenges. The network affirms the continuing importance of religious thought and practice, but sees religion as a field of creative human endeavour which must be ever-changing to remain relevant. Sea of Faith feels free to draw on the rich spiritual heritage of the past (including the Christian tradition) but is not bound by it. It provides stimulation and fellowship in the common quest for meaning and fulfilment.*

Australia [www.sof-in-australia.org](http://www.sof-in-australia.org) UK <http://www.sofn.org.uk>

**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.**

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### **Openness Mind with Chris McLean**

On 1<sup>st</sup> May we held the third meeting in a programme of six which are designed to provide an introduction to Headlessness and to consider what follows from successful application of the experiments.

On this occasion sixteen of us crammed into our lounge-room at Greville Street for Chris MacLean to introduce us to the process he calls Openness Mind. I stress that this is my personal response to the meeting. It is not an attempt to provide an instant and detailed analysis of the process.

Chris's introduction first appeared as an announcement in the April Nowletter in which he described the process he has been exploring in day-long workshops recently - a process of using Voice Dialogue to disengage from our habitual blocks to Spirit and to then introduce transpersonal states. He explained that the approach was developed by Genpo Merzel Roshi, in the USA. Merzel says that people who engage in his 'Big Mind' process move through stages of spiritual development more quickly than people who only do meditation. (See below for web address). In a discussion (which can be downloaded from Integral Naked on the web) Ken Wilber pointed out to Merzel that by addressing various 'sub-personalities' of the psyche before addressing Big Mind, a fundamental tenet of western psychotherapy is applied, that is: "analysing the resistance before the content." Doing this accelerates the path of meditative development and evolution.

I approached Chris's shortened seminar (he usually allows a full day or week-end rather than our three-hour timeslot) with great interest as it promised to dovetail with Headlessness and provide the answer to the problem of why the clarity, accessibility and obviousness of what is revealed by the Harding-inspired experiments seems to remain a mystery to many if not most of those prepared to try them out.

The Openness Mind process involves adopting various personality roles such as controller, fixer, seeker, damaged-self, doubter, etc., and then responding to the leader's questions using the voice of the adopted role. When changing roles we also moved to the next chair. Chris explained that the reason we move is to break the state that we've just been in, to clear the body for the next state.

Most traditional methods and paths mount a frontal attack on the ego, aiming at ego-death. This generates enormous resistance from the wily ego which develops subtle defences 'invisible' to our everyday consciousness. The Openness Mind procedure allows the ego to remain intact, not threatened, so that it stands aside allowing wider consciousness to be revealed.

Chris spoke to the various voices of the roles we adopted at his request, by asking questions. In answering these questions the nature of the adopted role was revealed. The process clearly demonstrated that whilst all roles have a positive aspect, they operate in a way that sustains the situation they are ostensibly aiming to end or modify. As an example, in my role as Seeker, what happens to me when I find? If I, as Seeker, find what is sought, then my Seeker role is no longer required. So the Seeker part of my personality strives to prevent this from happening by continuous seeking.

Since the meeting, I have practised a little and seen how the roles overlap and how they will use one another to their own ends. For example, my Fixer, needing to make me feel happy, will use my Seeker to look for a happiness formula, when none exists.

As we worked through our various roles it became clear that they were not aspects of some permanent central, entity, the 'me', but temporary orientations arising in response to past and present conditioning. It is a very effective method of undermining the assumption about a permanent me at centre. I think it is important that we don't get too bogged down in memorising the full menu of roles and in trying to recall the effects of each one. If I do this it tends to turn the process into an academic rather than experiential matter. The important thing is to grasp the principle and then observe it at work.

Once the functioning of the roles was clear Chris asked us to adopt another positive role - which is called the "Aware Ego," by Hal and Sidra Stone, who developed Voice Dialogue. From this reasoning role, the Aware Ego, we could assess the effectiveness of our 'happiness strategies', and see that they don't penetrate deeply into freedom. This understanding tends to support the disenchantment with our subpersonalities. Then we were easily able to invite "Non-Seeking" mind, which is itself free and to consider how that felt. From that perspective, observing this flow of changing psychological orientations, the question becomes "is there anything which could be described as unchanging?" We then see that awareness is unchanging and at that point Openness Mind is revealed as the aware space where these internal changes are taking place and in which everything arises and falls away.

After spending some time as Openness Mind we were asked to re-establish our ego-awareness role to consider how we could describe Openness Mind. I can only describe it as 'whatever is arising'.

In reply to questions, and speaking from Big Mind, we considered: our size and shape, how big we were, whether there were limits, what we could make of such notions as inside/outside, what to make of birth-death, whether there were any preferences or no preferences. Further questions awakened us to Big Heart which complements Big Mind, adding feeling and empathy. In my case, the appearance of what is described as Big Heart seemed to be a natural consequence of staying with Big Mind. That is, it arose spontaneously as opposed to the deliberate adoption of roles which we did in the earlier part of the process. It wasn't something I did, it was a discovery rather than a doing.

To arrive at this free awareness is to experience the arising and disappearing content and the ending of separation from it – as love. At this point I became overwhelmed by the intensity of the experience with the result that I missed out on the final lap which involved Chris telling us about two further steps namely the Noble Self and the Integrative Self.

After the meeting I followed up with a bit of homework and this provided the following conclusion. The Noble Self is, I think, the name given to the complementary aspects of Openness Mind (Big Mind and Big Heart). Integrated free-functioning mind is the wholeness of operating from Openness Mind with the various aspects of our everyday ego acknowledged, but free from the customary identification.

#### Post Scripts

I sent Chris a copy of the above to check on how far I'd misquoted him and he pointed out a few improvements which I've now included. We had a very positive response from many who attended and I asked Chris to let me have details of the next full weekend retreat. He replied, *Thanks for sending your response. I'm glad you enjoyed the day. The good news is that I've arranged for a two-day Openness Mind retreat at Wat Buddha Dhamma, near Wiseman's Ferry, 23/24 October (United Nations Day). Over two days, we'll be able to go carefully, lovingly, into observing the whole process in fine detail, and to sink deeply into the Open Heart.*

My attempt to describe our meeting makes it all sound rather clinical which is quite the opposite of what we experienced. To counter this I insert a quotation I stumbled on in a book I'm reading. The part most relevant to my summary is the reference to 'been' in the final sentence.

*For Bion, and James Grotstein who has creatively developed some of Bion's ideas, the ground of psychoanalysis is "O", an unsaturated sign he uses to refer to truth, ultimate reality. "O" encompasses but is not identical with the Unconscious, the ground of psychic reality according to Freud and others. Also referred to as emotional truth, psychic truth, and the psychoanalytic object, "O" cannot be known or understood directly; it must be "been." Joseph Bobrow*

The following introduction was lifted from the BigMind website at [www.bigmind.org](http://www.bigmind.org)

*"My friend Genpo Roshi has developed a series of "pointing-out" instructions that are as effective as anything I know at giving a person a direct glimpse of Big Mind. I recommend his workshops unconditionally.*

*Needless to say, any opening needs to be followed by practice, but as for this initial opening, this process is as effective as they come. Please take advantage of it, you won't be disappointed." Ken Wilber.*

As far as solving my problem about many people not getting the point of the headless experiments, it is too early to say. I haven't had enough time to carry out the necessary tests. However, the possibility of identifying which role is doing the blocking offers an angle. The adoption of the Non Seeking perspective is another promising approach for those for whom talk of head removal is anathema. Needless to say, I consider the whole approach of Openness Mind a really helpful and complementary extension of my interest in the headless story.

*Alan Mann*

*"Try looking at activity without presuming a split between inside/outside, creating/seeing, appearance/reality -- the questions and ponderings and mystery will peacefully dissolve...."*

*Greg Goode*

*Thanks to Michael Adamson for this quote.*

## John Cooper

***'It may go back to this feeling that you have to doubt everything, you have to question everything, and to avoid patterns.'***

*(The following autobiographical article by John Cooper, who died in 1998, was sent to me by Andrew Hilton and is reprinted here from Living Spirituality Greenhouse Publications, 1989 pp.87-100, with permission of the book's editor, Christine McColl. John was well known to some Nowletter readers and known to many others. I recall an occasion when, on concluding a short Q & A session after a talk I'd just given on 'Openness', John asked whether there was such a thing as 'closedness'. We'd run out of time. All the best questions and issues seem to come up when we are running out of time! Ed.)*

Born in 1930, John Cooper tells a story which sheds light on several generations of spiritual history in Australia: from the fifties, when the Theosophical Society and various occult and psychic groups were the main alternative spiritual options, through the sixties, when John was present at one of the first Buddhist meditation courses, in Australia, to the seventies, when he helped establish Sydney's first Zen Buddhist meditation centre and finally to the eighties when, like so many others, he left the city for a quieter life in the country, Buddhism and the teachings of the Indian sage, Krishnamurti, have profoundly influenced John, and the combination has given him an eclectic spirituality a style which reflects his belief that each must find his own rhythm, 'and just go along from there and see how it all moves in you, John sees attachments to gurus, beliefs and rituals as less important than finding spirituality, in the here and now of everyday life, with an awareness deepened by the practice of meditation.

Zen Buddhism arose in China in the sixth and seventh centuries, and spread to Japan in the twelfth century. Its style is more direct and less symbol laden than that of other schools of Buddhism, and it values the expression ' of Buddhist insight, in secular terms, in the arts, manual labour and appreciation of the natural world.

Fundamental to Zen practice is zazen<sup>1</sup> (meditation), aimed at the meditator's realising his/her true nature. Koans teaching formulations baffling to the logical mind, which point to a truth beyond intellect, are a unique and important aspect of Zen Buddhism.

I was brought up in a very strict Irish Catholic environment in Sydney. I went to Mass almost daily, learned the old Catholic rituals and the Latin Mass almost off by heart, and was very strongly caught up in Catholic sensibilities and culture. When I was still in primary school, I had this great question in my mind: - why is it just for us to receive salvation because Christ died for our sins? Why is it just for us to have benefit without working for it? I was interested in justice and suffering - why are people born ill, and into unpleasant environments? I was almost obsessed with this problem. I could not find the answer. While I was at Christian Brothers College, I was sent into Sydney to buy some art work for one of the teachers. I came across what I would now consider a rather trashy occult magazine. It spoke about reincarnation, and the Indian concept of karma. It made sense to me and I immediately had the feeling that I actually believed it. Nowadays, I am far more agnostic, but at the time - I was about fourteen - I thought it was absolutely true. My thought then was, but this is not Catholicism, I must be a heretic. I accepted this and, to the sadness and horror of my parents, I announced that I was no longer a Catholic.

When I left school, I started to work, trying to find some sort of path in life. My ideals took me in the direction of commercial art and photography until I realised I lacked talent. I spent my time wandering around Sydney looking in secondhand bookshops and going to lectures. I went through a full cycle from Catholicism to total atheism. I was a superior atheist who knew that everything was untrue - there was no God, there was no religion. But then I wasn't very satisfied with that position. It was one of denial and didn't seem to have any logical structure. I was trying to find logical answers in those days. So I became what you could almost call a mellow condescending agnostic saying - well, nobody knows - you have your opinion, but nobody knows. But that was not a very comfortable position for me either. Then I started to look into the strange world of spiritualism. I went to trance and flower mediums and people who picked up vibrations. I was totally unimpressed by this. I felt the phenomena were shaky, that 'supernatural' sources were rather cheap, but I became interested in the psychological phenomena of people who were moving into other states of consciousness. I also did some work in the occult world, with various Golden Dawn<sup>2</sup> organisations. The rituals were quite powerful, but I always thought it was just a form of theatre. We were building up our imagination and our excitement, and what came out of that we were calling spiritual, or higher phenomena. I had a long relationship, without ever becoming a member, with the Theosophical Society<sup>3</sup>. In the fifties and early sixties,

they were the main centres for non-establishment ways of thinking. There was not a great range being offered in those days.

Then I married, and got caught up in a career. I was working in arts administration. I started off working in an art gallery, and I moved from there to the Arts Council of NSW, where I worked my way up to the position of federal administrator. From there I moved to the Australia Council where I was director of its big international and entrepreneurial programmes. I was still asking questions, and I felt that I didn't have a very good academic base for any of this. So I decided to enrol in the University of New England to do a Bachelor of Arts degree over about fourteen years, taking it slowly. Towards the end I majored in Indian history and religious studies at the University of Sydney. I found that I did fairly well and that I derived great enjoyment from trying to work out what the religious consciousness of mankind had been. After I got my BA, I tutored in the Department of Religious Studies in Sydney, and decided to do my MA. I had originally hoped to work on a comparative study of certain medieval Sanskrit texts, to show how yoga had changed over a thousand years. But the professor, Eric Sharpe, indicated that it would be better to work on a topic closer to home. I remembered that in Sydney in the twenties there had been a huge split in the Theosophical Society - they had lost six hundred of their nine hundred members. The story had always been hushed up so I decided that an interesting piece of detective work and research would be to try to work out what had happened. I spent about six years working part time on my MA thesis. I interviewed people who remembered the period and their children, I discovered diaries and went through letters and journals.

The split was over two issues. Firstly, whether the most famous Theosophist in Australia, a man called Charles Webster Leadbeater, was - to quote from their doctrine - a man on the threshold of divinity, an 'Arhat'<sup>4</sup> in Buddhist terms, or whether he was a depraved sexual freak who chased little boys. These two opinions are wide apart. The faithful said that 'this man was too pure to be impure', the argument being of course he's pure, he's an Arhat, and if he's an Arhat he can't be impure. How do you know he's an Arhat? He said he was, and an Arhat can never lie. Circular argument, you see. The evidence was never conclusive, but it did imply that he had some strange theories of how the sexual impulse can be handled. Secondly, others were concerned that the theosophy he taught was different from the theosophy of the prime founder of the movement, Madame Blavatsky. Now this is most certainly so. Both in philosophical and psychological terms, it was almost a complete about-face. But, unfortunately many theosophists had not realised that. They saw the two as being one with differences of interpretation. But one said there is no God and the other said there is a God, because I've spoken to him. Out of that came the very sad saga which led to the formation of an independent body, the independent Theosophical Society which lasted for thirty years. So in a city the size of Sydney, there were suddenly two societies. Later on, there were three, even four.

So, I did that research, and got an MA out of it. It showed me how much ratbaggery goes on in virtually all religions. One can look at Christianity at Buddhism, at Theosophy, and talk about what's gone wrong, and the nuts that are in each of them. One of the sad realities is that the Theosophical Society and other theosophical groups that were really progressive in the nineteenth century have become fairly unimportant in the twentieth. One of the reasons for this has been the members themselves. In the last century, the society attracted people who were really looking for answers, whereas in this century it has 'become more a group of devotees. Nevertheless, I have the highest admiration for some theosophists, generally the maverick ones. And, in that world there are a great number of people who are dedicating their lives to spiritual values. Another change is that while early theosophy was quite radical - Blavatsky's ideas are very close to those of Buddhism - later theosophists created a Christianised form, with gods and devas and god forms and links to churches and ceremonials, and all the occult stuff that Blavatsky rather criticised.

Much of my Buddhism came out of an initial contact with theosophy, although I do believe that I have avoided the horrors of some of the occult approaches which you find, particularly in America. For example Buddhist monks giving Christianised sermons, with hymns like 'Nearer my Buddha to thee'. The name of Christ has simply been changed to Buddha, and there has been no understanding of the difference between the two teachings. A lot of people have asked me if I am a theosophist. I've always had a problem saying I'm anything, because I have been so strongly influenced by the Hindu and Buddhist understanding that there is no self. But if you pushed me into a corner I would say I was a Buddhist.

About the time I finished my MA, I decided that I'd had enough of working in theatre. I was getting tired of working with the Australia Council. So I decided, at the end of eighty-six, to leave Sydney and become a farmer. I felt that living on a farm would be a much more natural and 'spiritual.' way of living I left the Council at the end of March eighty-seven, and within a month I was offered a job lecturing on Buddhism at Sydney University. I've been teaching there for the last twelve months. That will finish soon and we will then be moving to Bega where we are building a farm. house.

A lot of my adult life was spent in the theatre, working day and night seven days a week, with no time at all for anything that you could call spiritual. I was frustrated that I had no time to read the books that were coming out. At one stage I was working from eight in the morning until two the next morning, six days a week and on the seventh day doing all the other work I hadn't done. There was no time at all even to sleep. I was also working in the yoga field. I have been teaching yoga in Sydney for some twenty-five years, often, several times a week. I find that yoga is a great advantage in terms of clearing out the body and the emotional nature, although I don't think the techniques taught by the various yoga schools lead to enlightenment. They may lead to deep stages of meditation, they may lead to psychic experiences, they do lead to some form of kundalini<sup>4</sup> arousal, but I'm a bit like Krishnamurti – I don't think you can use a mantra or a meditation technique to go beyond the mind. You are locked in your history, your background, your memories and you can't get beyond them. In yoga I had experiences of what could be called kundalini<sup>5</sup>, when suddenly I felt that an electric light had lit up every cell in my body, and a blazing lot of energy came out. But I've always felt that kundalini is quite different to the consciousness turnabout that occurs in Vipassana<sup>6</sup> meditation. One is, in a sense, psychological, and the other is biological. It is physical, that feeling of great energy. You may be the biggest nut in the world, and yet fanaticism or falling in love may bring it up for you, this great sense of enthusiasm. I think this is in some way linked into the kundalini experience. I was fortunate once to meet one of the great teachers of kundalini in India, Gopi Krishna. He's a remarkable man, a man of great luminosity. He shone, as they say in India. I asked him what brings kundalini on. He laughed, and said that it's a bit like getting pregnant – you know how it starts and after that it's all mysterious. A lot of people believe kundalini is the be all and end all – that the arousal of kundalini is the equivalent of enlightenment. I think they are quite different things.

Possibly the first well known spiritual teacher with whom I made contact with was the Theravadin Buddhist monk, U Thillila<sup>7</sup>, who gave one of the first Vipassana courses here, around 1960. I felt that I must try this and went to sit with him in Leo Berkeley's house where the retreat was being held. The meditation was a very simple technique of just watching the breath move in and out. I found it very deep, although in the beginning it was very painful to sit without any movement, particularly for the two-hour stretches they had in those days. I once experienced the feeling that my whole ego was gone, the whole of the mind and the feelings were gone, and there was complete emptiness. It lasted a long time and I was brought out of it by an Alsatian dog licking my face. I was sitting outside and I realised that the sun had moved by several hours.

I have never meditated before in any long deep sense. In yoga, you may sit and meditate for half an hour at a time, but that was nothing like the fifteen hours of the Vipassana technique. So that was the first time in formal meditation that something like that had happened to me. I was only there for two days, because of my work, and it happened on the second day. For months afterwards, my mind felt totally open. Things would come in and go out with no opposition; life was very clear and easy and beautiful.

One of the teachers whose influence on me has been deepest has been Krishnamurti. He denies that he is a teacher, or that he has a teaching. But, most certainly, he does lead you back into your own mind, and into the exploration of consciousness. I read Krishnamurti, and listened to tapes of his. I had the opportunity of meeting him in India, and hearing him lecture, and sitting in small groups with him. I found, from that, at times the mind would stop, and I could go for one or two days with hardly a thought. I've always regarded his outlook as essential for everybody who is on a spiritual path. It gets you away from so many of the hang-ups - the guru devotion, the cultism that comes up so readily in people who go East, or go into a new religious movement.

Buddhism is the school that interests me most of all the religions. I like the fact that it was started by a man, and not a god, that it's a fairly rational school of thought, that it believes in self-effort, that there is not much emphasis placed on belief, more on practice. One of the areas that interested me most for many years was Zen Buddhism. The problem here was that you could read about Zen, there were lots of books – books by psychoanalysts, books by D. T. Suzuki<sup>8</sup>, and lots of wonderfully enigmatic and humorous little Zen tales. I felt this is really it but what does it mean, how do I practise it? I tried to work it out for myself, but I had great trouble understanding how to meditate in Zen, maybe because I made it too magical.

I helped start the Sydney Zen group. Lee Davidson, who had worked with me in the yoga field, had spent some time in India and had learned Zen from a Japanese Zen monk in Bodhi Gaya, where the Buddha achieved enlightenment. He came back and started to enthuse about it. We used to have monthly sittings with about thirty people. We taught them how to do Zen. I'd give them a bit of yoga to get the body limbered up, and others would talk about meditation. Then we would sit and do it. This became better and better - we were almost a self-organised group. We decided to try and have a sesshin, an intensive meditation session by ourselves, without a roshi.<sup>9</sup> We had the wonderful idea of doing manual labour and sitting at the same time. We would get

up at four in the morning and do two hours of sitting, have breakfast, another couple of hours sitting and then go out and dig a creek. You got great physical energy from the sitting and I really like that combination of heavy manual labour and meditation. It lasted for about five days.

We used to play tapes of Robert Aitkin and other roshis from America. There was quite a lot of discussion as to whether we should link up with a roshi. In the end, the group agreed to link with Robert Aitkin, who was the roshi of the Diamond Sangha in Hawaii. He was an extremely fine teacher, a man with a profound knowledge of Zen, and a very fine writer too. We invited him here, and it was agreed that he stay at our house for about a month on his first visit. I didn't have much to do with organising the sesshin; my wife and I were simply his hosts. I went to the first two or three sesshins. and lectured on Zen Buddhism with my wife Lee who demonstrated posture. The Sydney Zen group now has a place at Annandale, where they have regular sittings, and they have a place for country sittings too. Robert comes out every year as a roshi.

Robert Aitkin is my meditation master, but it is fairly informal. He has been out here recently four or five times, and I have not done a meditation with him. I've been too busy, I've been too lazy, I've just not had the inclination to do it. I don't know. It may go back to this feeling I've got that you have to question everything and to avoid patterns, He has guided me into the depths of Zen Buddhism where the only way to go was into and beyond the mind, which is what Zen is all about. He has always been a friend, a good and deep friend, and I think there is love between us in the real sense of the word. To me, that is more important than a formalised relationship. I wanted the group to be independent so that students who wanted to work with Robert, including myself, could work with him separately.

Others wanted to have the group linked officially to him, and the Diamond Sangha. That's the way it went. I suspect that Zen will take several hundred years to get established in America and Australia. If it maintains its energy, it may start to transform the forms around it. It changed in going to China, it changed in going to Japan, it must change in coming to other countries. It may become less doctrinaire, it may develop forms of ritual that are more in keeping with Western thought in fact cut ritual back to a minimum. There are so many choices for people who are going into Buddhism: Tibetan, Theravadin, Zen, Mahayana. Of all of these, I think Zen is probably the one which will become most popular in the West partly because it places a lot less emphasis on ritual.

There are two schools of thought on the question of politics and spirituality in Buddhism. One says that the outside world is unreal – just get on with your practice and forget about it. The other says that we are interpenetrating the whole universe and what we do affects the plants and the stars and the trees, and what the trees do affects us. So we have to be active in politics. I myself tend to favour the latter viewpoint that we need to be active and try to improve the environment, get involved with ecological and anti-nuclear movements. Robert Aitkin has been very active in ecological green peace groups, and picketing nuclear centres in Hawaii and on the mainland of America. That old Indian belief that life is just an illusion and doesn't matter at all doesn't appeal to me. This is very real, this is the only world we have, and we need to work as much as we can to keep it clean.

As you deepen in meditation, you start to realise that the mind is very large. Krishnamurti says that the mind is infinite, and I suspect that most of us just live on its surface. It's not a matter of going down, but of realising that the depth has been there all the time. Also there seems to be a picking up externally, when you start to have a greater sense of the 'nidanas' of Buddhism, the spokes of the wheel: the way in which one thing flows into another, what we can call interdependency, or coincidence carried to an amazing level. This is the important thing in Buddhism, this sense of interdependency. The individual is no longer a thing, but a process, an inter-relationship with the internal and external worlds. As the ego becomes less, as you become more aware of this, you start to see what are apparently coincidences happening all the time around you.

Mahayana must be based on compassion, on the realisation that interpenetration is a reality. Whatever we do is affecting ourselves, that everybody is myself ... there is no difference. In Theravadin Buddhism, there is a disjunction between Nirvana<sup>10</sup>, up there, and the world of samsara down here. You try to get from samsara to Nirvana, the Arhat ideal. In Mahayana, the two are one there is no difference between form and space. They are exactly the same, so until everything is freed nothing is freed. The Bodhisattva vow is that, 'I will always work for the salvation of all sentient beings until they precede me into Nirvana'. Actually all beings already are Nirvana, not in Nirvana, they are Nirvana.

In Buddhism, any belief structure is regarded as a skilful means to get you to Nirvana, where it can be dropped. So there is not that sense of the dogmatic. I suspect that a lot of the Buddhist statements are true, but I

would rather see them in terms of my own understanding. I would not want to have any belief that was there just because I was a member of a certain school. It's all too easy naively to accept religious beliefs. Why do we need to have beliefs? For example, in Zen, essentially it is your own mind, your own meditation problem, and your relationship with a teacher. I'm ignoring the fact that Zen is part of the Buddhist religion in various countries, and they have ritual, and monasteries and all that paraphernalia. That is all there, but I think it is ancillary to the essential meditation, experience of zazen.

I try to be as aware as I can of what is happening in and around me all the time. Zen says it, Krishnamurti says it, theosophy says it, Buddhism says it, Hinduism says it. All we have is the present moment. Time is non-existent, it's a concept in our own minds. We have to actually sense the moment, now. It's spiritual because what is spiritual is not what we construct, not what we put up on high levels up there, but what is. Everything which is, is spiritual. Many of us tend to live in what is not – memories, ambitions for the future, day dreams, fantasies, fanaticisms. I find when I meditate my mind is much clearer, the pressures of society are more easily handled. The problems of life are not solved by meditation, but it reduces the pressure and allows you to handle them more adequately. The Zen tradition lets you drop quite a lot of the rubbish of society. The Buddha said that the great problems are desire, craving, ambition – trying to hang on to things, trying to make them better.

Our move to Bega is an attempt to simplify living. I see myself spending half the day working on writing and research, doing my doctoral thesis on Madame Blavatsky, and the other half of the day out in the fields developing the farm. Some time in meditation and yoga, and some time in swimming and skiing up in the mountains – a pleasant bush life. There is a danger in becoming too fanatical, trying to save and change things. Although I applaud the spirit of reformation, it must be done with awareness, humour and balance, or it may make things worse. You have to find your own rhythm, and take it from there. Next year, I'm going to lecture overseas which will be a very intensive time, but that's all right I'm hoping that, with the farm, I'll have more time for meditation, just sitting and watching the clouds go over, seeing the water rise in the dam.

*John Cooper*

<sup>1</sup> Zazen: Zen sitting/Zen meditation

<sup>2</sup> Golden Dawn: occult society established in England in the nineteenth century.

<sup>3</sup> The Theosophical Society was established in the late nineteenth century under the leadership of Madame Blavatsky to synthesise Eastern and Western spirituality into new teachings appropriate for the era.

<sup>4</sup> Arhat: a saint, one who has attained enlightenment.

<sup>5</sup> Kundalini: energy dormant at the base of the spine. When awakened by spiritual practices, it rises through the nervous system to the top of the head, releasing blocks on the way in a process which may lead to experiences of intense pain or bliss.

<sup>6</sup> Vipassana: literally (in Pali) insight, intuitive knowledge. A Buddhist meditation technique for developing right mindfulness

<sup>7</sup> The two main traditions in Buddhism are the Theravadin and the Mahayana. Theravadin Buddhism works principally from the original Pali texts, and is the Buddhism of Thailand, Sri Lanka, Burma and Kampuchea. Mahayana Buddhism is the Buddhism of Tibet and China, and has strongly influenced the Buddhism of Japan. One of the main differences between the two is that, in the Mahayana School, the enlightened one compassionately vows not to leave this realm of existence until s/he has attained the enlightenment of all sentient beings.

<sup>8</sup> D. T. Suzuki, twentieth-century Japanese philosopher and writer, whose works helped to popularise Zen in the West

<sup>9</sup> Roshi: 'old teacher' - name given to a Zen master who gives personal instruction to lay and monastic students.

<sup>10</sup> Nirvana: state of supreme enlightenment, beyond intellectual conception, in which ego discriminations are dissolved in union with ultimate reality.

<sup>11</sup> Samsara: the cycle of birth and death.

## The Night My Head Disappeared from Thomas Bird

I encountered Douglas Harding's "On Having No Head" by chance in a university library a few years ago, and was amazed to have found someone whose experience had so closely paralleled my own -- perhaps the way Harding himself felt on encountering the writings of the Zen masters. I make no claim to be "enlightened" (except as all of us are already); I only wish to report briefly my own experience to anyone who may be interested, in hopes that it may be of some benefit.

About 10 years ago, I had been investigating the practice of "mindfulness" after my interest had been sparked by a reading of Thich Nhat Hanh's "The Miracle of Mindfulness." Some superficial attempts at Zen meditation had at least succeeded in calming my mind somewhat, and this may have been essential for the experience that came later. In Thomas Merton's "Seven Storey Mountain" (pp. 184-5) I happened to have read about something he discovered while otherwise fruitlessly browsing through various unnamed books on Oriental mysticism in a university library as a college student himself:

"The only practical thing I got out of it was a system for going to sleep, at night, when you couldn't sleep. You lay flat in bed, without a pillow, your arms at your sides and your legs straight out, and relaxed all your muscles, and you said to yourself: 'Now I have no feet, now I have no feet...no feet...no legs...no knees.' Sometimes it really worked: you did manage to make it feel as if your feet and legs and the rest of your body had changed into air and vanished away. The only section with which it almost never worked was my head: and if I had not fallen asleep before I got that far, when I tried to wipe out my head, instantly chest and stomach and legs and feet all came back to life with a most exasperating reality and I did not get to sleep for hours. Usually, however, I managed to get to sleep quite quickly by this trick. I suppose it was a variety of auto-suggestion, a kind of hypnotism, or else simply muscular relaxation, with the help of a little work on the part of an active fancy."

Although Merton failed to remember the source of this practice or its intended purpose, in yoga it is called the "corpse position," which was practiced by Ramana Maharshi at the point of his enlightenment experience, along with visualization of his own death. This was also a practice advocated by Nhat Hanh in the aforementioned book by him, in which he recommends detailed visualization of what happens to one's body after death. I did not realize these connections until later.

Out of curiosity, I decided to try Merton's trick and found it to be very effective, at first, in inducing sleep. Once I was in a calm, aware state through mindfulness of my soft, natural breathing in the rising and falling of the abdomen (as Nhat Hanh advises), I went through the slow process of visualizing, starting from the bottom of my feet, the disappearance of my own body. Gradually, the more I did it and the calmer my mind became, I was able to work my way further and further up my body before falling asleep -- from my knees, to my belly, to my torso, etc. The trick was not to do it superficially and impatiently, but rather slowly enough and with enough concentration to actually convince myself that my body, below a certain point, didn't exist -- that any sensations coming from those parts of the body were delusions.

One night, I surprised myself in being able to work my way all the way up to the arms, so that my entire body below my armpits was a void. It was easier than it sounds, and mainly resulted in (or resulted from) a total calmness there. The idea of a self inhabiting my body was shrinking and slipping away (although I didn't know it yet). Then, as I got up to my neck, I arrived at a curious dilemma. I was at that point a head without a body, and if I went any further with this meditation, what would happen? Surely it would not be possible for my head, the "seat of my consciousness," to disappear?

I was wrong -- but as my head "disappeared," the experience was totally different than it was for the other parts of my body. I was no longer visualizing my body disappearing from a kind of outside point of view, as I had been before. Rather, I was totally inside -- but inside what? Not a head! My perception instantly changed from a claustrophobic, concave one -- like looking through the wrong end of a pair of binoculars (this was the "normal" way I looked at the world, I now realized) -- to a "convex" one in which there were no borders to my vision at all. This was the opposite of my "normal" perspective, in which there was an imaginary border (ego?) at the limits of my sight. My "new" perspective had always been there; it only seemed limited before.

I turned my head to the side, glimpsing on my bedside table the glass of water I had been drinking from earlier. What exquisite wonder I saw in that simple glass of water, reflecting and refracting endlessly the moonlight shining in from the window! I could have gazed at it for hours. And the songs of the crickets -- they were coming from my own heart! I had an overwhelming sense of joy, everything I saw dazzled with an intense beauty, and there were no thoughts echoing in my "head" -- because I had no head! I was experiencing everything for the first time, with no musty preconceptions distorting the crisp brilliance I was taking in. I got up and went to the sink. Looking in the mirror I saw an amazing and mysterious being staring at what used to be my head -- I couldn't help laughing.

I turned on the faucet and ran me-water into the hands I saw, splashing it onto "my face." AHHHH! I ran outside, becoming the moon and the sweet smell of the night air. I felt infinite gratitude to all beings, all unwitting bodhisattvas.

I immediately felt the need to record what I was experiencing (why, I don't know), but in trying to write it down or draw it I was having new experiences. After erasing, I had to draw the eraser bits that were left on the paper, not to mention the pencil and hand doing the drawing. How could I write the writing or draw the drawing (for that's all there really was at each moment)? Everything was filled with meaning -- not as representing something else, but in and of itself. Sadly, in grasping to hold onto this experience, I gradually returned to my "normal" state. I knew this grasping was the reason I couldn't hold onto it and that I could never relive it, that I could only live in this moment. But I couldn't help trying, impossibly, to "return" to that state -- which was no state at all, but rather my true experience, bare and complete in itself at all times. I have been trying, ever since, to come more and more into this realization.

I was reminded once again of this experience and the feeling of recognition I felt upon reading Harding when I encountered Suzanne Segal's book, "Collision with the Infinite." However, I feel that her experience seems "different" from mine in several important ways: its un-induced spontaneity (it happened to her, out of the blue, while stepping onto a bus), its lasting completeness (she immediately could tell there was no "self" and remained in this state without fully understanding it for 12 years), and her emotional reaction to it (she was terrified that she no longer had a point of self-reference and thought it must be pathological -- until, that is, she found someone who not only understood what she was experiencing, but said people spent years meditating in caves trying to attain just that state). Ultimately, she only recognized it as a "spiritual" phenomenon after giving up on psychotherapy and talking to a follower of Ramana Maharshi (there he is again!) who helped her recognize her fear as just another mental occurrence. Upon stopping her constant fearful remembering of the "change" that seemed to take place on the bus, she began to be, and remained from then on, aware of that same bliss that I experienced as a seemingly fleeting one the night my head disappeared.

I am no meditation master, but perhaps this "disappearance visualization and self-convincement" method may work for you (although for it to work one can only be calmly experiencing the moment, not anticipating or remembering any experience) -- if nothing else, momentarily changing your perspective back to what it has always really been. Try it!

May all beings be truly aware of their freedom from delusion!

*Thomas Bird* [tomabird@hotmail.com](mailto:tomabird@hotmail.com)

### **Boundless**

Like the wind searching,  
 lifting feathers round  
 the sparrow's neck,  
 lifting leaves in a wave across the bean field,  
 I find no place where I can say,  
 here my being ends.

*Colin Oliver*  
 From 'Stepping into Brilliant Air'

**'The Art of Seeing' from The Awakening of Intelligence – Krishnamurti**

*(The following comes out of one of my ongoing dialogues with a friend with whom I share an interest in Krishnamurti. The article from which I extracted these quotations summarizes the essence of what I understand Krishnamurti to be on about. I made these notes in an attempt to explain why I think the primary issue is one of addressing the disease rather than becoming completely involved in remedying the symptoms. That is not to say nothing must or can be done about the symptoms but, in the longer term, I think all is in vain if the fundamental problem is left unattended. I think the word 'seeing' is used here with a broader meaning than just vision, it implies apprehending with all the senses – body, heart and mind. It is interesting to find how closely the following accords with what Chris McLean was pointing to and, in fact, how it all comes together. Ed.)*

*To see, not partially but totally. "The act of seeing is the only truth." Of the vast mind only a fragment is used. The fragmentation of influence of culture, tradition. "Living in a little corner of a distorted field." "You cannot understand through a fragment. "Freedom from "the little corner". The beauty of seeing.*

P 187. We were saying the other day how very important it is to observe. It is quite an art to which one must give a great deal of attention. We only see very partially, we never see anything completely, with the totality of our mind, or with the fullness of our heart. And unless we learn this extraordinary art, it seems to me that we shall be functioning, living, through a very small part of our mind, through a small segment of the brain. We never see anything completely, for various reasons, because we are so concerned with our own problems, or we are so conditioned, so heavily burdened with belief, with tradition, with the past, that this actually prevents us from seeing or listening. We never see a tree, we see the tree through the image that we have of it, the concept of that tree; but the concept, the knowledge, the experience, is entirely different from the actual tree. Here one is surrounded by a great many trees, fortunately, and if you look around you, as the speaker is going on with the subject of seeing, if you actually look at it, you will find how extraordinary difficult it is to see it all, so that no image, no screen, comes between the seeing and the actual fact. Please do this, don't watch me – look at the tree, find out whether you can see it completely. By completely I mean with the totality of your mind and heart, not a fragment of it, because what we are going to go into this evening demands such observation, such seeing. Unless you actually do this (not theorise, intellectualise or bring up various issues which are irrelevant) I am afraid you will not be able to follow closely what we are going to go over together.

We never see, or actually hear, what another is saying; we are either emotional, sentimental or very intellectual which obviously prevents us from actually seeing the colour, the beauty of the light, the trees, the birds, and from listening to those crows; we never are in direct relationship with any of this. And I doubt very much if we are in relationship with any thing, even with our own ideas, thoughts, motives, impressions; there is always the image which is observing, even when we observe ourselves.

So it is very important to understand that the act of seeing is the only truth; there is nothing else. If I know how to see a tree, or a bird, or a lovely face, or the smile of a child there it is, I don't have to do anything more. But that seeing of the bird, of the leaf, listening to the noise of birds, becomes almost impossible because of the image that one has built, not only about nature but also about others. And these images actually prevent us from seeing and feeling; feeling being entirely different from sentimentality and emotion.

P 189. Look what is happening in the world—we are being conditioned by society, by the culture in which we live, and that culture is the product of man—there is nothing holy or divine, or eternal about culture. Culture, society, books, radios, all that we listen to and see, the many influences of which we are either conscious or unconscious, all these encourage us to live within a very small fragment of the vast field of the mind. You go through school, college, and learn a technique to earn a living; for the next forty or fifty years you spend life, your time, your energy, your thought in that specialised little field. And there is the vast field of the mind. Unless we bring about a radical change in this fragmentation there can be no revolution at all; there will be modifications, economic, social and so-called cultural but man will go on suffering, will go on in conflict, in war, in misery, in sorrow and in despair.

P 193 .....Seeing destroys all barriers. Look, Sirs, as long as there is separation between you and the tree, between you and me, and between you and your neighbour (that "neighbour" being a thousand miles away or next door), there must be conflict. Separation means conflict, that is very simple. And we have lived in conflict, we are used to conflict and to separation. You see India as a unit – geographical, political, economical, social, cultural, and the same goes for Europe, and America and Russia: separate units, each against the other, and all this separation is bound to breed war. This doesn't mean that we must all agree, or if we disagree that I am doing battle with you; there is no disagreement whatsoever, or agreement, when you see something as it is. It is only when you have opinions about what you see, that there is disagreement and that there is separation. When you and I see that it is the moon, then there is no disagreement, it is the moon. But if you think it is something, and I think it is something else, then—there must be division and hence conflict. So in seeing a tree, when you actually see it, there is no division between you and the tree, there is no observer seeing the tree.

We were talking one day to a very learned doctor, who had taken a drug called L.S.D., a minute dosage, and there were two doctors beside him with a tape recorder registering what he was saying. After a few seconds he saw the flowers on the table in front of him, and between those flowers and himself there was no space. It doesn't mean he identified himself with those flowers, but there was no space, which means that there was no observer. We are not advocating that you should take L.S.D., because it has its own deleterious effects; and also when you take such things you become a slave to them. But there is a much simpler, more direct, more natural way, which is to observe for yourself a tree, a flower, the face of a person; to look at any one of them, and so look that the space between you and them is non-existent. And you can only look that way when there is love – that word which has been so misused.

We will not go into the question of love for the time being, but when you have this sense of real observation, real seeing, then that seeing brings with it this extraordinary elimination of time and space which comes about when there is love. And you cannot have love without recognising beauty. You may talk about beauty, write, design, but if you have no love nothing is beautiful. Being without love means that you are not totally sensitive. And because you are not totally sensitive you are degenerating. This country is degenerating. Don't say, "Aren't other countries degenerating too?"- of course they are, but you are degenerating, though technically you may be an extraordinarily good engineer, a marvellous lawyer, technician, know how to run computers; but you are degenerating because you are not sensitive to the whole process of living.

Our fundamental problem then is not how to stop wars, not which god is better than another god, not which political system or economic system is better, not which party is worth voting for (they are all crooked anyhow), but the most fundamental problem for the human being, whether he is in America, India, Russia, or anywhere else, is this question of freedom from "the little corner". And that little corner is ourselves, that little corner is your shoddy little mind. We have made that little corner, because our own little minds are fragmented and therefore incapable of being sensitive to the whole; we want that little part to be safe peaceful, quiet, satisfying, pleasurable, thereby avoiding all pain, because, fundamentally, we are seeking pleasure. And if you have examined pleasure, your own pleasure, have observed it, watched it, gone into it, you will see that where there is pleasure, there is pain. You cannot have one without the other; and we are always demanding more pleasure and therefore inviting more pain. And on that we have built this part, which we call human life. Seeing is to be intimately in contact with it and you cannot be intimately, actually in contact with it if you have concepts, beliefs, dogmas, or opinions.

So what is important is not to learn but to see and to listen. Listen to the birds, listen to your wife's voice, however irritating, beautiful or ugly, listen to it and listen to your own voice however beautiful, ugly, or impatient it may be. Then out of this listening you will find that all separation between the observer and the observed comes to an end. Therefore no conflict exists and you observe so carefully that the very observation is discipline; you don't have to impose discipline. And that is the beauty, Sirs (if you only realise it), that is the beauty of seeing. If you can see, you have nothing else to do, because in that seeing there is all discipline, all virtue, which is attention. And in that seeing there is all beauty, and with beauty there is love. Then when there is love you have nothing more to do. Then where you are, you have heaven; then all seeking comes to an end.

*J. Krishnamurti*

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### **Sydney Look for Yourself Meetings**

Saturday 3 April .....Douglas Harding - Melbourne Talk - Video

Saturday 1 May..... Chris McLean workshop

**Saturday 5 June.....Richard Lang interviews Douglas - Video 1**

**Saturday 3 July.....Richard Lang interviews Douglas - Video 2**

**Saturday 7 August.....Bob Hughes workshop**

**Saturday 4 September..... Frequently asked questions - DEH Video and Dialogue**

### Hunts and Searches by Margot Mann

The treasure hunt wound up the steep  
Glen Davis hillside, threading through trees,  
towards the plateau.  
Coloured balloons and luminous  
stickers showed the way.  
Sabrina and Lewis leapt from rock to rock,  
sometimes skidding on small stones and leaves.  
None of the balloons popped  
in the hot sun –  
their bright colours bobbed about  
uneasily against the monochrome bush landscape.

The treasure was finally discovered,  
amongst wombat poo, in one of the caves.  
Excited whoops and yells were followed by silence.  
“I want a good prize, not juggling balls and a book.”  
Sabrina, disgusted, tossed the treasure aside.

Later, back at the hut, she read to us  
from the despised prize book  
and when Lewis got on her nerves  
she shouted at him “you are so dumb Lewis,  
you can’t even spell IN.”

“We went on treger hunts and looked  
for prickly pear,” she wrote in the hut diary.  
Under “what was special”, she wrote  
“the choclet and prises.”  
It was Easter, after all.

We burned the prickly pear  
in the outdoor fireplace, using a lot of matches  
and dry gum leaves. The succulent pear  
leaves boiled and spat while the gum leaves crackled  
in sheets of flame.  
It takes a hot fire to burn  
prickly pear which sends its roots  
far and wide and survives where others don’t.  
The plant’s pea-green rabbit’s ears attract  
the eye in the subdued palette  
of the bush.

Searching for prickly pear and  
hunting for treasure both have their  
painful moments.

### New Every Morning by Susan Coolidge US born 1833

Everyday is a fresh beginning.  
Listen my soul to the glad refrain  
and spite of old sorrows  
and older sinning,  
troubles forecasted  
and possible pain  
take heart with the day and begin again.

### Accidents of Birth by William Meredith US b. 1919

Spared by a car or airplane crash or  
cured of malignancy, people look  
around with new eyes at a newly praiseworthy  
world,  
blinking eyes like these.

For I’ve been brought back again  
from the fine silt,  
the mud where our atoms lie down  
for long naps. And I’ve also been  
pardoned miraculously for years  
by the lava of chance which runs down  
the world’s gullies, silting us back.

Here I am, brought back, set up,  
not yet happened away.

But it’s not this random life only,  
throwing its sensual astonishments  
upside down on the bloody membrane behind  
my eyeballs,  
not just me being here again,  
old needer, looking for someone to need,  
but you, up from the clay yourself  
as luck would have it, and inching  
over the same old segment of earth ball,  
in the same little eon,  
to meet in a room,  
alive in our skins,  
and the whole Galaxy gaping there  
and the centuries whirling like gnats.  
You. To teach me to see it,  
To see it with you,  
and to offer somebody, uncomprehending  
impudent thanks.

**The poem in the left hand column is the latest of Margot’s ‘In the Moment’ series. Paul Tulip brought and read the poems in the right hand column to our May dialogue meeting at Greville Street .**

**Academy of the Word Seminar Programme**

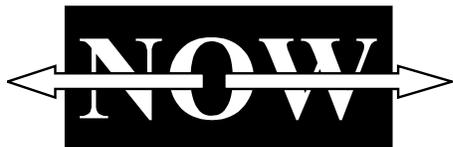
Dr Alex Reichel (02) 9310 4504 – 2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesdays– Under St Peter’s Church, Devonshire St., Surry Hills.  
**Second** Tuesday 6.15pm - Healing & Well-being - **Fourth** Tuesday 6pm - State of the World

**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](mailto:penny@fenner.org) - [www.skilfulaction.org](http://www.skilfulaction.org)



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

<b>Regular Dialogue Meetings</b>				
<i>LOCATION</i>	<i>DAY</i>	<i>MEETING PLACE</i>	<i>TIME &amp; CONTACT</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