

Issue 112 –November 2005

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Next Meetings –20 November 2005

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**The next Harding meeting is on a Sunday not Saturday as usual – Sunday 27 November**

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Editor's Note,

Thanks to this month's contributors. I was very pleased to receive the piece from Joan Relke following her visit to Thailand. It prompts me to suggest all readers consider sending something to me after they've had a travel-induced shake-up. I also strongly recommend a visit to Joan's website at:

<http://sculptors.net.au>

It provides a shift from all these words – into some restful seeing.

Gerry Lee's appeal to drop the Watts quotes in Nowletter 109 led to a number of responses and a personal journey on my part to find out what's Watts.

**Dialogue Meetings – Third Sunday of every month**

**Harding Meetings – Usually first Saturday of every second month but...**

**NEXT HARDING MEETING – Saturday 27th November**

**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**

### Waking up in Thailand from Joan Relke

Shortly after I finished my contract to teach first year Studies in Religion for semester one this year, my partner and I left for a seven week tour of S.E. Asia – specifically Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand. Finding it increasingly difficult to defend and explain in the classroom the three western religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, I was looking forward with relief to being in Buddhist countries. I was also becoming increasingly attracted to Buddhism as a philosophy, religion, way of life, and psychological practice. Buddhism has no heretics, infidels, blasphemers, idolaters, apostates, or heathens, and no partisan, capricious god, making it difficult, in the name of Buddhism, to kill, hate, reject, or convert anyone on the basis of religious belief or doing god's work. I was also finding it more difficult to connect with a spiritual source in my own private life. Hence, before leaving, I had decided to open myself to Buddhism as a source of spiritual inspiration and maybe even transformation.

I found the possibilities most apparent in Thailand. Vietnamese Buddhism seems to be a thin veneer over the top of a vast and ancient practice of ancestor veneration. The pagodas surprised me with their Chinese inspired guardian, sage, and ancestor figures, which made the Buddhas recede into the gloom of the dark altars. So deep is the ancestor tradition, that even Ho Chi Minh is worshipped in the pagodas, having his own shrine, complete with candles, incense, food, flower, and drink offerings, and Chinese banners. He is worshipped not only as the nation's communal ancestor, but also as a form of the Buddha. I don't know what he would say about this, being a good communist, but such veneration might be the saving factor for Buddhism in Vietnam, for under Communism, religion suffered neglect, if not persecution, leading to the deterioration of most of the pagodas. Now they are being lavishly restored for tourists, who bring much coveted western currency into the country. Those pagodas not on the tourist track are shabby, overgrown, and benefit only from the most desultory restoration. Sometimes, however, these tattered pagodas are the most spiritual, as they serve and are kept alive by the ordinary people and a few resident monks and nuns.

Cambodia is struggling with vast social problems, generated by the American bombing and the depredations of Pol Pot's regime. While Buddhism is stronger than in Vietnam, the political and social degradation creates an atmosphere of spiritual malaise, which Buddhism is striving to heal. The inspiration I was seeking was not there.

Thailand is the land of the Buddha. You can barely walk a block in any town or city without finding a large, well-tended Wat, each proud of its large golden Buddha and myriad minor Buddhas surrounding the principal image. Why have only one Buddha if you can have one hundred?

Even the most tourist oriented Wat still administers to the laypeople, housing resident monks, sometimes nuns, who offer counsel, conduct ceremonies, and teach in the schools within the Wat compounds. I began by opening myself up to the spirituality within the temples at the heart of every Wat. Fortunately, we had a Thai friend who agreed to show us how to conduct ourselves in the temples. She took us to her local temple, far off the tourist track, and guided us through the procedure of kneeling before the altar, offering lotuses and incense to the Buddha image, and bowing correctly three times before it. She had arranged for the head monk to receive us. Kneeling before him (which felt uncomfortable for us westerners unused to kneeling before any living human being), we jointly offered him a gift of essentials (bought as a package in any corner store). Then he and our friend performed the chant and reply ritual seen in every temple, we bowed before him as we had to the Buddha image, and he received us by presenting us with a small amulet to hang around our necks.

While the experience was somewhat foreign, with the bowing and kneeling, I felt much more comfortable in the temples after that, even if we didn't get down on our knees very often. In every temple, I opened myself to inspiration or whatever experience might be possible for me in a spiritual environment. No great enlightenment hit me in the temples, and I was beginning to feel a little disappointed, not in the temples, but in my own capacity and sensitivity. I began to think that I was destined to leave Thailand as a tourist, with my tourist Buddha images, my amulet, and numerous gifts for friends back home, having been on an exotic shopping trip rather than the pilgrimage I had fantasised about.

Perhaps it was the realisation that I would always be a foreigner in the temples that made me shift my focus, or at least loosen it. Soon after this disappointment and subsequent return to the more secular business of being a tourist, I became more aware of the ordinary street life and scenes around me. Soon, to my surprise, I began to open to the awareness that what I was looking for was all around me, on the streets, in the way the people walked, the way they behaved and smiled. The whole feel of the place was spiritual. Despite the notorious traffic, even in Bangkok the feeling was there: no hurry, be in the moment, take time to relax, to smile and to enjoy.

Thailand is a very spiritual country; the people have a different way of being in the world. It really is a very Tantric way of being, as it enjoys life and the beautiful things in the natural world as well as those made by human beings. Despite the omnipresence of Buddhism and its world-rejecting philosophy (all is suffering caused by desire), Thais embrace life and its pleasures. I didn't sense any guilt about it. Even the monks seemed to enjoy being in the world. Just the way they walked demonstrated an ease and a pleasure in being in their bodies.

The Thais take their time. They don't rush about trying to squeeze a check list of tasks into their days. Many of them work long hours in their own businesses, but as one said to me, "We work for 10 minutes, then relax." You see people in shops, napping in the corner during the day, chatting with fellow workers or ones from the shop next door, when there are no customers. They don't "make busy" or invent work when there is none to do. We went to a Buddha-casting foundry in Phistanulok. Lots of women work there (and in "male" jobs in general all throughout Thailand), and one had her baby on a raised bed with her while she worked, and from time to time, she and others, entertained the baby. I found myself becoming increasingly relaxed, despite the trauma and terrors of travelling and dragging heavy luggage in the excessive heat, trying to find the right bus, a hotel, or restaurant in a non-English speaking country with an indecipherable script. I found myself taking the time to "wai" to people older than myself - a short bow of the head with raised hands, palms together, tips touching the nose. You don't wai younger people, as that will steal some of their life. You wait until a younger person wais you, which they all do, and then you return it. If you catch a Thai's eyes, which happens many times a day, they will smile back at you with the warmest, sweetest smile, even if you are on a bus and they are walking by on the street or passing on a motorcycle. They are looking at you all the time because you are farang (foreigners), and they have a cheerful, open, accepting curiosity about you and your strange ways.

I began to see how anxious and neurotic western culture can seem. I can't change it, and now that I'm back, I find myself getting sucked back into it. But at least I can remind myself that there is a different way of being in the world which is far more satisfying and graceful. When a friend commented that he wondered if I'd get home in one piece, I replied that I felt much more in one piece in Thailand than I do in Australia. And that "one piece" wasn't just my isolated ego, striving for its own spirituality apart from the world, in the seclusion of the temple. The spirituality became apparent through the softening of the ego's boundaries, until the ego blended and merged with the wider world, where the distinction between the temple and the busy street became harder to make. Of course, that "wider world" was conducive to such opening, as it was infused with Buddhist tolerance, openness, cheerfulness, and moment by moment awareness.

*Joan Relke*

<http://sculptors.net.au>

### **Grasping, Avoiding, and Surrender from Shane Keher**

*(This is Shane's summary of his presentation to our October Harding meeting.)*

In my case, an insight that's been as important as discovering "who I really, really am" as Douglas puts it, has to do with seeing the ego's ongoing action of grasping and avoidance. My ego moves away from or avoids states it perceives as lacking, deficient, uncomfortable - such as anxiety, sadness, contraction, boredom, or spiritually "incorrect" states - and grasps for what it thinks will bring relief, or what is in accord with some spiritual notion. For example, there may be some mild anxiety, and I suddenly find myself reaching for a book, or turning on the TV, or pouring a glass of wine, or involved in a stream of thought. Through insight into this activity, there is an allowing of these states for them to be fully experienced as pure sensation (gradually dropping the label of the state, such as "anxiety") - and what *actually* occurs is not what my ego *thinks* will occur, ie: the ego thinks there will be increased discomfort or some state of overwhelm. It is true that a feeling such as sadness may intensify, but discomfort lessens as resistance lessens - and I've found that at some point what *always* happens, in immediate, direct experience, is that the feeling or perception gradually dissolves into a rich sense of Presence. In Presence, the distinction between subject and object fades. This Presence is deeply anchored in the body. Often, spontaneous, fresh insights occur.

Avoidance and grasping is the activity which gives momentum and apparent continuity to my ego. I think it *is* the ego. The ego doesn't seem like a *thing* or object to me - but rather this activity, the activity which gives the ego its apparent solidity. When I see through this activity at depth - there's a natural "stopping". This stopping is a surrender that *happens* - not something I can do. What is surrendered is the following of my ego's idea of what may or should happen (all the "known", all the concepts I hold from the past), and then an opening may occur to "not knowing", the "unknown" which is Being. The sense of identification continues, but as a reflection in Being, rather

than as somehow separate, cut off from Being.

What follows is a selection from modern writers, sages and teachers from several traditions or viewpoints, on this topic. They are people I've found helpful, in either confirming an understanding, or pointing to a fresh perspective. (*my emphases*)

### Tony Parsons

**In allowing presence, we embrace a kind of death. What dies is all expectation, judgement and effort to become.** What dies is the stuff of separation, the sense of self-identity, which can only function in the illusory world of past and future, memory and expectation..... if we let go into simply "what is", we will be in a place of unknowing. What dies is the dream of individuality

### Krishnamurti:

Now why is there the desire to fulfill oneself? **Obviously, the desire to fulfill, to become something, arises when there is awareness of being nothing..... now if one does not make an effort to run away, what happens?** One lives with that loneliness, that emptiness; and in accepting that emptiness one will find that there comes a creative state which has nothing to do with strife, with effort. Effort exists only as long as we are trying to avoid that inward loneliness, emptiness, but when we accept what is without avoidance we will find there comes a state of being in which all strife ceases.

### Eckhart Tolle:

When each thought absorbs your attention completely, it means you identify with the voice in your head. Thought then becomes invested with a sense of self. This is the ego, a mind-made "me." **That mentally constructed self feels incomplete and precarious. That's why fearing and wanting are its predominant emotions and motivating forces.**

### Pema Chodron:

**We're always chasing after something, trying to avoid the difficult places.....** Rather than asking "how can I get out of this?"-ask "how can I stay in this moment of discomfort and begin to soften?" It is in that moment of softening that you will find your open heart - Everyone has the longing to feel the open heart, because it is a deep happiness that can never be taken away.

### Gangaji

**The mind's activity is always based on rejecting something or grasping at something.** Whatever the mind is rejecting or clinging to is impermanent. When your mind surrenders to the truth of impermanence, this activity has nowhere to go, and the mind is still.

The challenge is total trust because the entrancement is that you are not That. You believe you are some image of yourself, or some physical representation or some sensation, and with this belief comes fear. **With fear, mental scurrying and searching begin for what is perceived to be lost.** At some moment of grace, there is the revelation of trust. Relax into that trust, and let it be done.

If some previously suppressed or indulged tendency arises after this miraculous experience of boundlessness, how will it be met? In what context will it be viewed? **The usual relationship with the arising or past tendencies is a scrambling of mental activity to either get something back or keep something away.** For example - frustration has arisen. Fine. Now frustration is the fire. Don't try to fix the frustration. Don't try to ignore it, overcome it, control it, or act it out. Directly experience frustration. Directly discover *who* is really frustrated. If you are willing to experience anything directly and immediately, whether good or bad, joyous or hateful, you will recognise that **what you are running from does not exist, and what you are running toward is already here.**

### Toni Packer

Stay with what is here, discomfort without calling it discomfort. Staying here with what's indefinable. **Not resisting, not fighting, not looking for anything else.** Just letting what is here be here in its entirety, physically, mentally, totally. Letting it be without knowing. Not becoming the doer for or against it. Just this quiet presence in the midst of chaos. In this there is an unfolding transparency. It happens when one sits patiently, silently, unconditionally. By "sitting" I simply mean being totally with what is here. **Not moving away or toward something else, just remaining with the whole thing** - an intense presence that includes all the bodily sensations, breathing, wind-storming, raining, coughing.....

**Steven Harrison**

To "do nothing" (about pain, boredom, thought, sadness, etc) is to decline the action that avoids.

When we embrace our pain we embrace nothing.

**Jean Klein**

Q. I'm not sure what you mean exactly by distinguishing "psychological" from "functional" acceptance.

A. In psychological acceptance there is still somebody who accepts. There is a point of view, a choice, or a motive and goal. So there is still complicity, an invested interest in what you supposedly accept. This interest binds you to the object, the anger, anxiety, jealousy, and so on. You say "I am this" and try to welcome it. Functional acceptance is a completely non-affective position because it is from the beginning ego-free, that is free from all mental interference. It is primarily active. By this, I mean there is a complete alertness in taking note. There is no submission to the object. **There is only welcoming it without analysis of any kind.** In other words - you step directly out of the becoming process into openness itself.

Q. What is boredom and how can I become free from it?

A. If we live superficially and take note that we do, we may become aware of a deep lack or discomfort, a dis-ease, which we call boredom. Rather than face these moments of boredom, we go from one compensation to another to fill in the lack. But if we really face these moments, really perceive them without justifying, conceptualising or analysing them, a transformation takes place. **The boredom must be allowed to remain as pure perception, as feeling, sensation. The perception is real and if it is allowed to unfold, it will blossom in stillness and point to awareness.**

In accepting a situation, we are completely free. Accepting unfolds in beingness. In accepting a situation we accept the situation in our completeness. Accepting is not in the mind; I would say it is beyond the mind, because the mind can never accept.

**Joan Tollifson**

Suffering is the illusion that something needs to be different. Awareness is all-inclusive. Nothing is left out. Paradoxically, it is this very quality of total acceptance that has the power to dissolve all suffering. It's a great joke, a great mystery that the key to transformation is the complete acceptance of what is.

**Douglas Harding**

Q. And how did you come out of it (referring to a period of deep depression)?

A. I just gradually got better. **I accepted it. I was not rebelling against it as an experience so much. The way through it, I'm sure, is the constantly renewed surrender of one's superficial personal will,** which is, after all, the Agony in the Garden. There's the paradigm, the model of it.

All this seeing business is a wonderful gate, but for me, what the gate opens on, the meaning of the story, **the heart of the matter, in a certain sense, is not the seeing; it is the surrender.**

**There is a difference between suffering that is resisted and suffering that is taken on board. It is in the acceptance of it that the peace comes.** Eckhart says that you have to get to the absolute end of all your resources, and then the divine power suddenly breaks through. But we're so apt to stay a little bit short, aren't we, resisting to the last, fighting. For me, it's a physical thing. It's as though you say when you're breathing out, with St John of the Cross, I know nothing, I have nothing, I am nothing. Your shoulders and arms flop.....I think surrender is partly physical. It is something which happens to your body.

*Shane Keher*

## Alan Watts – correspondence and comment

### Alan Watts Correspondence

I asked Gerry Lee if he could pinpoint the source of the statements by Watts which he told us about in his letter in the last Nowletter (No. 111) He replied as follows:

#### 1 Follow-up letter from Gerry Lee

I heard the segment on the ABC radio sometime ago that Alan Watts confessed, before his death, in 197, that he had made up all the claims that he had had enlightening experiences. The things he talked about and wrote about, where he had enlightenment, he said, were false. They did not occur. On the strength of that I remember getting rid of my copy of his book, hard cover, bought at great cost, in the early 1960s. I think I liked the cover. Had a look at Google yesterday and there are now more than 1.2 million sites for Alan Watts!!!

*Gerry*

#### 2 Models for life from Paul Tulip.

The article re Alan Watts by Willem B. Roos in the last NOW issue raises some interesting points.

Alan (Watts) presents us with a set of ideas for life. Such a set of related ideas is called a 'model' in computer land.

Alan was an extremely gifted, charismatic writer and speaker. What was his model? First he criticised the modern materialist obsession using wonderful analogies. I have a tape where he eloquently explains that many of us, from our early school training, see life as a race to achieve the next exam, the next house, the better job, the 'successful' family, the promotion, the next X, the Y...always running towards some future goal. Life is not a race, it's a dance. In a dance the objective is not to reach a point on the floor or get to the end – the objective is simply to dance... Beautiful.

In another analogy he says that Life is if at birth we were kicked off the edge of a cliff on a long fall to our death. We see a big rock falling next to us, a rock of worldly distraction. We cling on to it and say 'Now I'm OK'. Clinging to the rock is doing nothing. Why not let go? Alan advises letting go of everything.

In the last issue Roos says the principal features of Watts' model for living are –

- 'A subtle hostility towards asceticism and even towards general moral laws'
- 'Rejection of, and animosity towards scholarship'
- 'Change of the word 'Right' to 'Complete' in the Eightfold path because Right implies a moral value.' Watts wants to escape morals for they imply an external judging force commonly called God.
- 'A state of profound peace'

'In sum, everything must yield to his single formula: Not to seek for it – not to make an effort.'

Is this a fair picture of Watts' model? Having read and listened to (Watts had the most beautiful voice) much of what Watts has to say then Roos sums it up for me.

Watts follows the One Mind Southern school of Zen which taught that mind and substance are void and the chain of causality is motionless.

OK, so there's One Mind, It is IT and all is IT. Many religions agree on the futility of human effort. I like Sir Walter Raleigh's version written in 1614,

'It is Death alone that can suddenly make man know himself. He tells the proud and insolent that they are but abject and humbles them in an instant; makes them cry, complain and repent, yea, even to hate their forepassed happiness. He takes the account of the rich and proves him to be a beggar, a naked beggar, which hath interest in nothing but the gravel that fills his mouth. He holds a glass before the eyes of the most beautiful and makes them see therein their deformity and rottenness, and they acknowledge it.

Oh, eloquent, just and mighty Death!

The question is – what does this model say about how you live? Watts' philosophy points nowhere as far as I can see, except maybe the contradictory - don't seek, but at the same time do what you like.

On the bus this morning I read the life of a Japanese woman who was in a TB hospital in Japan in the 1950s and had a boyfriend who was Christian. As Christmas approached a few decorations were put up in the ward. She thought – ‘maybe we could invite a Christian minister to talk to us, but it would be very impolite to make such a suggestion to the rest of the ward.’

Eventually she suggested it and everyone thought it was a great idea, which amazed her. She asked why people approved and found that her boyfriend was the reason. He frequently came and talked to her and others in the ward. Other men either came to have sex with their women in the ward or stopped visiting. If wives were ill for long periods the husbands frequently divorced them. Why did the boyfriend do this?

In Matt 22.24 Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment and replied “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind’. This is the greatest and first commandment. The second is like it. ‘You must love your neighbour as yourself’. On these two commandments hang the whole law and the prophets.”

When asked to define ‘neighbour’ he replied with the parable of the Good Samaritan.

So that’s another approach to life. Recently I was talking to someone who said the whole concept of God was unscientific rubbish which could not be proved. I said it could not be disproved either. Later he said that he had been recently appointed to a high management position. The staff were useless so he wanted to get rid of most of them. ‘Oh’ I thought ‘he just works from a different model of the world to me’.

Which model do you choose?

*Paul Tulip*

### **3 Responses to the Watts debate from Beryl Starke**

7 November. Hi Alan and Margot, I’m am just reading Alan Watts autobiography *In My Own Way* and have come across a delightful snippet about the now, that I thought I would send although you may already have come across it but just in case here goes...

Alan watts says... “At this time I discovered an extraordinary little book by a seventeenth century Jesuit, Jean-Pierre de Caussade’s *Abandonment to the Divine Providence*, in which he insisted that the presence of the moment.... the eternal now.... should be regarded as the presence of God.

"If we knew how to greet each moment as the manifestation of the divine will, we would find in it all the heart could desire... The present moment is always filled with infinite treasures: it contains more than you are capable of receiving.... The divine will is an abyss, of which the present moment is the entrance: plunge fearlessly therein and you will find it more boundless than your desire."

“This was exactly what I had discovered in Buddhist meditation years before, and have described in a previous chapter. But now I had the authority of a most orthodox Catholic for saying it out loud, and making excellent sense of the place in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus speaks of taking no thought for the morrow *no thought* being the literal equivalent of wu-nien in Zen Buddhism, and of what I have called mystical silence in which one is simply aware of what is here and now, without verbal or ideational comment.” \*

9 November. On reading some early work of Alan Watts have just had a major shock to find that I have been guilty of two major errors that I had not been aware of.

Firstly "above all let us not mistake the written word for the object of our search – it is only a finger pointing the Way: let us not mistake the finger for the way" Alan Watts.

Thought that I had understood the finger pointing but object of written word search really hit home that years have been wasted searching for the written word confirmations. Wow, Wow and Wow!

Secondly "Ideas alone are profitless. they must be tried in the fire of every day realities, thus it has been said that he who talks much about the Law and makes no effort to put it into practice is no better than the cowherd who counts only the cows of others" Alan Watts. Guilt – Guilty, Guilty!

Apart from not cow counting will have to wait till shock wears off to see what happens next.

*Beryl Starke*

- In *My Own Way* was written in 1972 and the quotes in the second email were published in London 1932 in *An Outline of Zen Buddhism*. The source of quotes is *The Early Writings of Alan Watts* edited by John Snelling with Mark Watts & Dennis Sibley 1987 on page 42.

#### **4 Wandering with Watts, a bit of research from Alan Mann**

*The sound of rain needs no translation.*

I was intrigued by Gerry's claim that Watts was a self-confessed fake. I don't recall reading the Watts books but I knew of him as a very high profile figure in the perennial philosophy business. I decided to do some probing. I found a copy of Monica Furlong's biography *Genuine Fake* in the local library as well as his autobiography *In My Own Way* I also skimmed through his *The Spirit of Zen*, first published in 1936. I wasn't expecting much but found myself deeply impressed by Watts' comments on a number of subjects which have been aired in the Nowletter and discussed at our regular meetings. The following is a selection of Watts quotes which made an impression on me and the whole exercise turned out, to my surprise, to be a sort of tribute to him.

Gerry pointed out that Watts confessed that he was a fake and that he had not, in fact, experienced the transformation of consciousness which he had claimed in one of his books. I responded briefly to the fake issue in the last issue and I later extracted the following from a Watts article *The Nature of Consciousness*:

.....So in this idea, then, everybody is fundamentally the ultimate reality. Not God in a politically kingly sense, but God in the sense of being the self, the deep-down basic whatever there is. And you're all that, only you're pretending you're not. And it's perfectly OK to pretend you're not, to be perfectly convinced, because this is the whole notion of drama. When you come into the theater, there is an arch, and a stage, and down there is the audience. Everybody assumes their seats in the theater, gone to see a comedy, a tragedy, a thriller, whatever it is, and they all know as they come in and pay their admissions, that what is going to happen on the stage is not for real. But the actors have a conspiracy against this, because they're going to try and persuade the audience that what is happening on the stage IS for real. They want to get everybody sitting on the edge of their chairs, they want you terrified, or crying, or laughing. Absolutely captivated by the drama. And if a skillful human actor can take in an audience and make people cry, think what the cosmic actor can do. Why he can take himself in completely. He can play so much for real that he thinks he really is. Like you sitting in this room, you think you're really here. Well, you've persuaded yourself that way. You've acted it so damn well that you KNOW that this is the real world. But you're playing it. As well, the audience and the actor as one. Because behind the stage is the green room, offscene, where the actors take off their masks. Do you know that the word 'person' means 'mask'? The 'persona' which is the mask worn by actors in Greco-Roman drama, because it has a megaphone-type mouth which throws the sound out in an open-air theater. So the 'per'--through--'sona'--what the sound comes through--that's the mask. How to be a real person. How to be a genuine fake. So the 'dramatis personae' at the beginning of a play is the list of masks that the actors will wear. And so in the course of forgetting that this world is a drama, the word for the role, the word for the mask has come to mean who you are genuinely. The person. The proper person. Incidentally, the word 'parson' is derived from the word 'person.' The 'person' of the village. The 'person' around town, the parson.

I think this exonerates Watts as far as the charge of faking is concerned. He is admitting to being a fake in the sense that we are all fakes if we identify exclusively with our personae. He is also pointing to the possibility of authenticity in our roles, once we see that we are play-acting, hence the 'Genuine Fake'. He seems to have adopted the roles of court jester, mad monk, wise guide and guru and played them all to the full.

As I explored his career, courtesy his biographer and his own version of events, I found a number of aspects of his life which matched my own take on things. His interest in Buddhism led him back to a renewed interest in

Christianity and what seems to have been a vain hope that the revival of the mystical tradition would restore the lost vitality which gives Christianity its real meaning. I remember, in my first flush of enthusiasm for the headless experiments, saying to Douglas that they would be a valuable addition to church services throughout the land and his response that the clergy would, in general, be the least likely of any random sample to get the point of them. At some stage Watts became fascinated by *The Cloud of Unknowing*. This is another connection as far as I'm concerned and it would be interesting to compare the message of the *Cloud* with that of Krishnamurti. I might do it one day!

My interest in Krishnamurti led me to Zen which seemed to cut to the chase in a way that offered a counterpoint to the Krishnamurti approach in that it by-passed the thicket of words in which Krishnamurti enfolded his teachings. Zen led me back into my own tradition via Traherne and Harding. I thought that a rather Wattslike wander. Another neat connection resulted from the discovery that his Kyoto experiences seemed to follow much the same trail as Margot and I traced in 2001. He entitles the final chapter of the autobiography *The Sound of Rain* as this epitomises his relationship with Japan and with Zen. I recall sitting in John Toler's meditation hall at Ouda listening to the rain pounding on the roof and wondering whether it would be possible to listen without the associated images of slashing rain, flowing water, teeming gutters and so on. That rain sound became for me a symbol of my Japanese experience so I thought this a quite remarkable coincidence of responses.

As to his mystical experiences, I don't know. How can we say anything about any experiencing of this kind beyond our own. I think to question whether someone is enlightened is the wrong question. The right one is whether enlightenment is expressed or made plain in a person's life and work. I found Watts' writing more than passes such a test. He mentions LSD induced shifts but, as I felt at the time I tried mushrooms, it was not that the 'hallucinogen' generated the expanded consciousness but that it removed a blockage which had established itself in everyday consciousness. I had no urge to continue to take drugs but I became determined to get to the bottom of why this aspect of consciousness had become inaccessible to me. Watts seems to have a similar view.

His writing tends to acknowledge the valley as opposed to the peak experiencing of realisation, as demonstrated by this quotation he uses in his book *The Spirit of Zen* (p.72):

Thus Chaolpim writes of it as

*A sudden clash of thunder, the mind-doors burst open. And lo, there sitteth the old man (the Buddha-nature) in all homeliness.*

And thereafter they refer to their realization in terms of the most ordinary affairs, for their object is to show Zen a something perfectly natural, as intimately related to everyday life, while the Buddha is just the old man in all his homeliness; he has been there all the time, for his home is ordinary life, but nobody recognizes him!

I came upon a very revealing passage in his autobiography when he describes a discussion with his future wife, Eleanor Everett, on their way home from a Buddhist meeting in London (p. 132):

One evening, when Eleanor and I were walking home from a meditation session, I began to discuss the method of concentration on the eternal present. Whereupon she said, "Why try to concentrate on it? What else is there to be aware of? Your memories are all in the present, just as much as the trees over there. Your thoughts about the future are also in the present, and anyhow I just love to think about the future. The present is just a constant flow, like the Tao, and there's simply no way of getting out of it." With that remark my whole sense of weight vanished. You could have knocked me down with a feather. I realized that when the Hindus said Tat tvam asi, "YOU ARE That,- they meant just what they said. For a whole week thereafter I simply floated, remembering Spiegelberg's telling me of the Six Precepts of Tilopa:

No thought, no reflection, no analysis, No cultivation, no intention, Let it settle itself.

This was doubtless a premature satori for I was unable to resist the temptation to write, think, and intellectualize about it. Yet when I am in my right mind I still know that this is the true way of life, at least for me. Conscious thought, reflection, analysis, cultivation, and intention are simply using the mind's radar or scanning beam for purposes which the mind as a whole can do of itself, and on its own. with far more intelligence and less.....

.....I am perpetually grateful to Eleanor for that chance remark, even though we have gone our separate ways since 1949.

There are a number of references to clarity and transparency in the final chapter of the autobiography and pages 366–367 and 378-379 and 381 could almost be read as minutes of recent Harding meetings at Greville Street.

I spent time in recent months trying to get to grips with the thought of Don Cupitt and other Sea of Faith folk. They represent a wide range of opinion and most of my time was spent trying to work out whether they have a common theme. I suppose a large proportion would opt for the label Christian Humanist if they were compelled to wear any label at all. There is a scientific element in the SoFiA ranks which endorses the scientism of the Dawkins 'Brights', which I find very hard to reconcile with spiritual enquiry. In Watt's terms "...are we dealing with a mechanical process or a living intelligence?" That explains why I found the following extract from a his address to The American Psychiatric Association in 1959, so interesting:

"Gentlemen, this is not going to be a scientific paper because I am a simple philosopher, not a psychiatrist, and you are hungry for lunch. We philosophers are very grateful to you for showing us the unconscious emotional bases of some of our ideas, but the time is coming for us to show you the unconscious intellectual assumptions behind some of yours. Psychiatric literature is full of unexamined metaphysics. Even Jung, who is so readily repudiated for his 'mysticism,' bends over backward to avoid metaphysical considerations on the pretext that he is strictly a physician and a scientist. This is impossible. Every human being is a metaphysician just as every philosopher has appetites and emotions – and by this I mean that we all have certain basic assumptions about the good life and the nature of reality. Even the typical businessman who asserts, that he is a practical fellow unconcerned with higher things declares thereby that he is a pragmatist or a positivist, and not a very thoughtful one at that.

"I wonder, then, how much consideration you give to the fact that most of your own assumptions about the good life and reality come directly from the scientific naturalism of the nineteenth century, from the strictly metaphysical hypothesis that the universe is a mechanism obeying Newtonian laws, and that there is no other god beside it. Psychoanalysis, which is actually psychohydraulics following Newton's mechanics, begins from the mystical assertion that the psychosexual energy of the unconscious is a blind and stupid outrush of pure lust, following Haeckel's notion that the universe at large is a manifestation of primordially oafish and indiscriminating energy. It should be obvious to you that this is an opinion for which there has never been the least evidence, and which, furthermore, ignores the evidence that we ourselves, supposedly making intelligent remarks, are manifestations of that same energy.

"On the basis of this unexamined, derogatory, and shaky opinion as to the nature of biological and physical energy, some of your psychoanalytic members have this morning dubbed all the so-called mystical states of consciousness as 'regressive,' as leading one back to a dissolution of the individual intelligence in an acid bath of amniotic fluid, reducing it to featureless identity with this – your First-Cause-mess of blindly libidinous energy. Now, until you have found some substantial evidence for your metaphysics you will have to admit that you have no way of knowing which end of your universe is up, so that in the meantime you should abstain from easy conclusions as to which directions are progressive and which regressive. [Laughter]"

I equate the Bright's notion, that whatever we don't know is a temporary state of affairs and will be rectified by the 'knowledge to come', with the millenarian views of the religious fundamentalists they deride. I was about to close off at that point but then I came upon yet another memorable passage which includes a Watts thought experiment which offers a valuable addition to our enquiries about *sunyata* as well as the recent debate about death:

Perhaps I can express this Buddhist fascination for the mystery of nothingness in another way. If we get rid of all wishful thinking and dubious metaphysical speculations, we can hardly doubt that – at a time not too distant – each one of us will simply cease to be. It won't be like going into darkness forever, for there will be neither darkness, nor time, nor sense of futility, nor anyone to feel anything about it. Try as best you can to imagine this, and keep at it. The universe will, supposedly, be going on as usual, but for each individual it will be as if it had never happened at all; and even that is saying too much, because there won't be anyone for whom it never happened. Make this prospect as real as

possible: the one total certainty. You will be as if you had never existed, which was, however, the way you were before you did exist – and not only you but everything else. Nevertheless, with such an improbable past, here we are. We begin from nothing and end in nothing. You can say that again. Think it over and over, trying to conceive the fact of coming to never having existed. After a while you will begin to feel rather weird, as if this very apparent something that you are is at the same time nothing at all. Indeed, you seem to be rather firmly and certainly grounded in nothingness, much as your sight seems to emerge from that total blankness behind your eyes. The weird feeling goes with the fact that you are being introduced to a new common sense, a new logic, in which you are beginning to realize the identity of ku and shiki, void and form. All of a sudden it will strike you that this nothingness is the most potent, magical, basic, and reliable thing you ever thought of, and that the reason you can't form the slightest idea of it is that it's yourself. But not the self you thought you were.

He led a colourful and uninhibited life and this led him, in his final years, into personal difficulties arising from his insistence on fulfilling obligations arising from his various marriages. That seemed to be the root of the stress and alcohol addiction leading to an early death. I like his determination to accept things as they are and himself as he turned out, warts and all. I am always overwhelmed with admiration for the skill that enables some rare writers like Watts to describe issues about which I feel so strongly to be true but which reduce me to incoherence. I think he definitely made a major contribution to a wider understanding of Eastern thought and its correspondences with and value for Western spiritual life. Discovering so-called mystical experience in the everyday life we seek to transcend seems to be his recommended action and I go along with that. So, thank you for sending me off on the quest Gerry, I found it very rewarding.

*Alan Mann*

### **Nobody Here**

In the striving  
to grow into non-existence  
there come  
the seasons of perfection:

moments when the already present,  
absolute in its clearness,  
consumes  
any hint of human presence:

there is nobody here at all.

When seeing becomes perfect being  
what occurs is not  
all that I see I am,  
but everything is eyeing its own appearance –

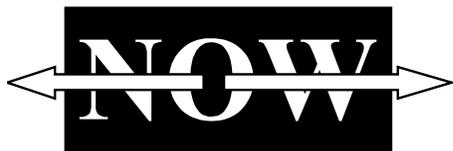
and the pebble in the air  
is one  
with the hand that has thrown it,

for all things are being themselves in me.

*Colin Oliver*

*From Stepping into Brilliant Air*

<b>Regular Dialogue Meetings</b>				
<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>DAY</b>	<b>MEETING PLACE</b>	<b>TIME &amp; CONTACT</b>	<b>Phone Nos.</b>
Sydney City	Third Saturday	Blavatsky Lodge of the Theosophical Society - Level 2, 484 Kent St., City	2.30pm Terry O'Brien	0431605374
Chatswood	Third Sunday	81 Greville St. (off Fullers Rd) Chatswood	10.30 am Alan & Margot Mann	02 9419 7394
Nowra	First Saturday	Bridge Tavern	4-6pm –Riche du Plessis	4423 4774



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

**Academy of the Word Seminar Programme** Dr Alex Reichel (02) 9310 4504 – 2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesdays– Polding Centre, Level UB, 133 Liverpool St., SYDNEY. 2000 - The New Phone Number is (02) 9268 0635. 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>

**Mountain Heart Retreat** – Meditation retreats of two or four days offered in a peaceful bush valley in the southern tablelands close to Braidwood, NSW. Phone Maria Bakas on 02 4842 8122 or 0421 5476 65

**Look for Yourself (Harding) Meetings** - Approximately bi-monthly, by email notification of date and programme.

**Krishnamurti Fellowship** – Every Monday 6.30pm at Blavatsky Lodge see address above.