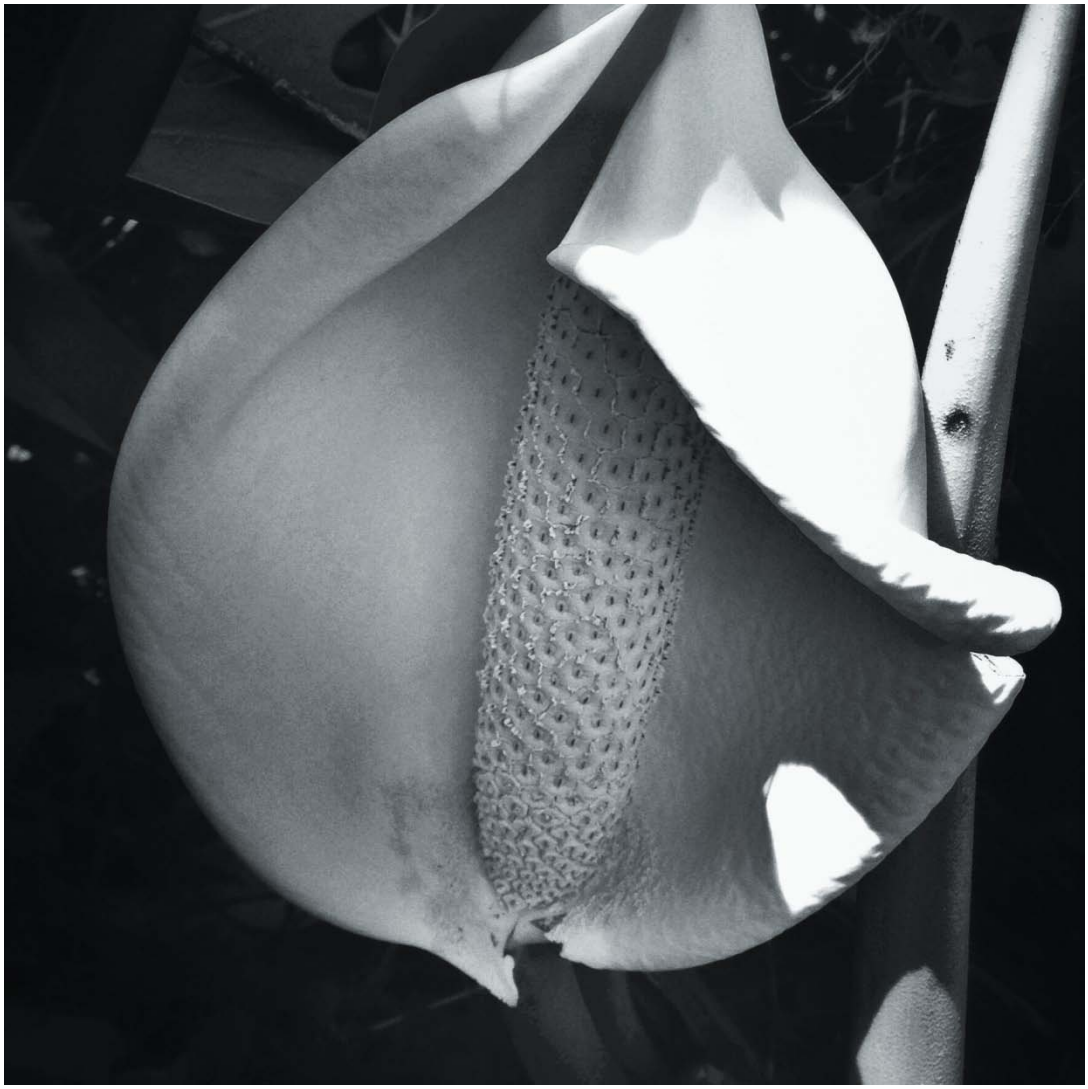
Mind Moon Circle

A Journal of the Sydney Zen Centre

Autumn 2014



On Desire

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All photos in this issue are by Glenys Jackson unless specified in a footnote.

Edited by Max Baker

Next Issue:

What does Zen Mean to You?

Please send submissions to Stuart Solzberg – ssolzberg@gmail.com

by 7/07/14

Mind Moon Circle is published quarterly by the Sydney Zen Centre,

251 Young Street, Annandale, NSW 2038, Australia. www.szc.org.au

Annual subscription A$28. Printed on recycled paper.

Introducing the issue: Desire

By Max Baker

How many times have I glanced across the way and connected with another pair of beautiful eyes and then smiled and kept on walking (while sucking in my gut). What could have been? I catch myself gnawing and gnashing my teeth over those eyes... those lips. My heart out for a walk on a tightrope to nowhere - longing for the unknown other, wanting not just the forbidden but the foreclosed. In desire the impossible lingers with possibility.

Another part of me just thinks that desire is a type of metta, a genuine loving kindness, which is just unevenly spread. In desire we look away from the centre towards the surface- away from the kidneys and towards the skin. There is a temporal unevenness to desire as well. Whenever I travel with my wife I look a lot at a nook in her arms. There is a point where the tricep connects to the ulna – it fits perfectly in my hand like a lever. Plump, but firm and thin enough to bite. At other times, in the evenings for instance, when she is slumped on the couch it's the little bump in her mid section that I go for. Zhaozhou is right yet again when he says it is all just a simple matter of not picking and choosing. Do the blood, bones, and bile which lie under the surface not deserve the same attention as our lover's hips, neck and hair. They all serve a vital function. They *all* make up a person. Although mentioning such things in love sonnets may still seem odd: "*If only I could write the beauty of your blood cell's myelodysplastic normality, but never will I knoweth your heavenly bile so efficient in the digestion of lipids.*"

Our desires may also mask a deeper yearning. The psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan said the object of desire (objet petit a) is a place holder which we use to interpret a more fundamental lack. In other words, as the experience of self is inherently lacking we search (in vain) for objects which we can project our lack onto and thus understand it. Desire in this light is a fantasy – a fantasy that our experience of lack can be objectified and then consumed as an antidote. Yet, at the same time we secretly hope it will not quite quench our thirst. My desire for food arises because it offers objectivity and certainty to the experience of lack: smelling the food in preparation, the colours and textures of the food, the agony of the raised fork and the vanquishing of lack with sensation. If you asked me: "Would you rather be full or hungry with the promise of food?" - I would choose the later. Desire is after all the core experience which defines us as separate subjects – 'I' would literally not exist without it.

About the issue

Glenys' cover photo came with the caption "Monstera fruit. too rude?" - well it wasn't until I read the caption – I figured Freud would be happy with monstera on the cover if no-one else is. I have done my best to punctuate the issue with many of Glenys' other ripe and juicy photos. The issue begins with Allan Marett's elegant and insightful essay which brings together the earnest yet mysterious poetry of Bashô, the 60's love god Fudo Myô-ô, desirous ladies of the night and foxes. While I am told it is not officially a teisho it still sings to me like one. Diana Levy's poem "The Doorframe" follows. I could hear Diana's heart beats in its meter. The poem's uncomfortable realness reminded me of a haiku by Hakyo Ishida, "the film / ends with a kiss- / coughs everywhere". We then have the first of two collaborations. Glenys Jackson and Yvonne Hales provide a truly romantic conversation between poetry and pictures. Next, Barry Farrin's piece "From Ma-tsu's Koans to 21st Century Koans" forms a perfect bridge with our last edition on "life and death" where we see a deep desire to live in those brave souls facing death. "Who wants that anyhow?" by Brendon is part poem part treatise which yokes the words of philosophers with singers and a social media tycoon beautifully. Nicola's poem "Zen Retreat" on Zen habitués in their dwelling place has an ethnographic quality. Her intimate account captures both the experience of sesshin as well as the 'querulous scratching of everyday life' one experiences after a retreat. In the second collaboration piece, Yvonne Hales' poetry lends a sensual quality to Janet Selby's ceramics turning them into contorted Berini torsos. Sally Hopkins in "The endless gift" shows us the oddness of youth frolicking in the fires of passion. Lastly Phil Long's "Faith and Reason: The heart of the God Debate" is a polemic on new atheism and the work of Harris, Hitchens and Dawkins. Phil does well navigating a difficult space and has conceived of an argument that even Terry Eagleton would be proud of. Needless to say all the contributions for the Autumn issue have been excellent and I hope you enjoy the intellectual and creative fruit of the Sydney Zen Centre.

The Editor's Companion

(Lil' Seven)

“Under one roof, Prostitutes too were sleeping.”

By Allan Marett

Introduction

Desire is so double-edged. On the one hand, according to the Buddha, craving (tanhā in Pali) is the root of suffering. The Four Noble Truths, which are contained in the Buddha’s first teaching,[1] are very clear about this. On the other hand, the Bodhisattva path of the Mahayana embraces everything. When we vow to save all beings, we undertake to exclude nothing. As Bashô so eloquently put it: Under one roof/prostitutes, too, were sleeping/the bush-clover flowers and the moon. How can we reconcile ourselves to this apparent contradiction?

This issue is particularly thorny for lay Buddhists such as us, and so it may be helpful to remember that the Buddha made a distinction between the ordained *sangha* of *bikkus* and *bikhinis* and householders. While the *vinaya*, the rules that regulate the conduct of monks and nuns, discourage the pursuit of desire in any form, the Buddha made it clear on a number of occasions that he did not expect householders to forgo their pleasures—food, drink, and even sex. The different expectation for ordained monks and nuns on the one hand, and lay Buddhists on the other, is still prevalent in Buddhist countries today. A few years ago, when I was in China, I was roundly berated by a Chinese businessman for refusing meat and alcohol. Because I was not a monk, it was regarded as inconsiderate of me to inconvenience people by asking for vegetarian dishes or to avoid the many alcoholic toasts. As lay people, living in a modern Western society, we have to negotiate these matters afresh for ourselves. Vegetarian or not? Teetotal or not? And just how do we understand ‘no misuse of sex?’

For me, no figure in the Buddhist pantheon better encapsulates our dilemmas about desire than that of Fudo Myô-ô (Achala in Sanskrit), one of the four Wisdom Kings, who, not surprisingly, wields a double-edged sword.

[1] Discourse on Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dharma (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta).

Fudo Myô-ô

I first encountered Fudo Myô-ô in Japan in the 1970s, and since that time he has been my constant companion. Fudo is the Wisdom King who dwells unmoving in the midst of fire, ensnaring delusive thoughts with his sling and cutting them off with his sword. He is fierce of face, often (but not always) portrayed with one eye closed, a single fang protruding and a head topped by a crown of severed heads (see photo[2]). Strangely, perhaps, Fudo became somewhat of a cult figure in the freewheeling 1960s, when the ideology of the hippy movement was manifesting itself in anti-war marches, music festivals, new freedoms with regard to sex and drugs and a new engagement with Eastern religions. You can imagine how Fudo might have appealed to this generation: Fudo seemed to show us how to reconcile our spiritual aspirations with the prevailing mores of sex, drugs and rock and roll. There he is! Right there in the middle of passion, snaring delusive thoughts and cutting them off. How wonderful to be able to pursue the path of Wisdom while off your head on drugs and fucking yourself silly at the same time! And yet how dangerous, as those of us who pursued this path of misapprehension eventually discovered.

A more genuine portrayal of Fudo—in terms of keeping faith with his traditional role in Buddhism—is to be found in the early poetry of Gary Snyder, one of the so-called 'beat poets' who acted as a sort of midwife to elements of the new hippy order. Snyder's fascination with Fudo actually began before the emergence of the hippy movement, when he undertook the ancient pilgrimage from Yoshino to Kumano with *yamabushi* ascetics in the 1950s, and this fascination was conveyed to other 'beat poets' such as Allen Ginsberg and Phillip Walen. Yet for Snyder, Fudo—who appears in the form of Smokey the Bear—was a wrathful figure, bent on justice and insight—not some deluded hippy off his head with sex and drugs: 'And he will protect those who love the woods and rivers, Gods and animals,

[2] A folk-image of Fudo on the Shikoku *henro* pilgrimage (photo Allan Marett)

hobos and madmen, prisoners and sick people, musicians, playful women, and hopeful children … And SMOKEY THE BEAR will surely appear to put the enemy out with his vajra-shovel. [3]

For me personally, Fudo is now a far more subtle and nuanced figure than the seductive figure beloved of the hippies. To cast his flames simply as the flames of passion is to miss their deeper significance. For Shingon Buddhists—for whom Fudo is a central figure—these flames represent the innumerable impediments to realisation—the *bonno mujin*— that we vow to abandon in the second of the Great Vows for All.[4] Fudo does the work of ensnaring and cutting off these many impediments. More broadly, the extinguishment of fire is an image that the Buddha frequently used for Nirvana itself. In his teachings, fire epitomises the hot, rapacious and ever-shifting activity of craving and desire, which obscures our view of things as they truly are.

In recent times, Fudo has become my intimate companion as I walk the *henro* pilgrimage on the island of Shikoku in Japan. I've written about this in some detail in past issues of *Mind, Moon, Circle*, so won't repeat myself here. Fudo has also become a major figure in a new English-language Noh play that I have written about Robert Oppenheimer, who at the end of the play resolves into Fudo.

I wield the noose to ensnare all your delusions.
I wield the sword of freedom. I liberate all being.
Unmoving midst the flames I dance to save you all.

The Noh play Eguchi: prostitute as Samatabadhra

If Fudo symbolises something rather more than acting freely in the midst of sexual passion, there is nonetheless a figure in Japanese theatre that truly does live freely within the fires of sexual passion. We find her in the Japanese Noh play, *Eguchi*, written in 1424 by the great Noh playwright and theorist, Zeami Motokiyo (c. 1363 – c. 1443). Noh drama is a form of theatre that emerged under the influence of Zen, which is manifested in almost all its dimension: text, staging, movement, music and dance. Noh plays are almost always

[3] Snyder, Gary, The Fudo Trilogy: Spell against Demons, Smokey the Bear Sutra, The California Water Plan, illustrated by Michael Corr, Shaman Drum (Berkeley, CA), 1973

[4] *Bonno mujin seigan dan*: 'Greed, Hatred and Ignorance rise endlessly, I vow to abandon them.' A more accurate translation would be 'The innumerable impediments to realisation: I vow to cut them off.'

concerned with liberation (in the Buddhist sense), or tragic impediments to liberation; every aspect of Noh is regulated by a simplicity and severity of form that has defined, and become synonymous with, a Zen aesthetic. In *Eguchi*, a prostitute known as 'the harlot of Eguchi' offers a teaching about the dangers of desire to a monk, and then points the way to liberation before revealing herself as the bodhisattva Fugen [Samantabadhra] and rising into the sky astride her white elephant[5] (see photo[6]). At the heart of the play lies an exchange of poems that is said to have occurred more than three hundred years earlier between the monk-poet, Saigyô (1118-1190) and the harlot. As he passed through the town of Eguchi, rain forced the monk to seek refuge in the house of the prostitute—that is, in a brothel. But she would not let him in, and so he reproached her with this poem:

To scorn the world
And all its ways:
That is hard—but you,
The last moment's refuge
You cling to as your own.[7]

[5] *Japanese Nô Dramas*, edited and translated by Royall Tyler. Penguin Books, London: 1992 (2004).
[6] A late nineteenth century depiction of the Noh play Eguchi. Here the prostitute of Eguchi is in her boat, attended by two singing girls, just prior to her transforming into the bodhisattva, Samantabhadra. http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Matsuke_Heikichi_-_Nogaku_zue_-_Walters_95269.jpg
[7] Ibid.

At face value, the monk's poem is a simple rebuke: 'my life of renunciation is hard enough as it is. Why do you selfishly refuse to give me shelter from the rain?' Her reply sweeps this accusation away and reveals that her concern runs deeper: 'are you so attached to your bodily comfort that you would seek shelter in a whore house?' Or to put it more bluntly: you seem to have a problem with aversion (fleeing the rain) and desire (taking shelter in a whore-house).[8]

You are the one, I hear,
And my sole care
Is to say: Set not your heart
Upon a moment's refuge.[9]

Royall Tyler, whose translation I am using here, comments:

In phrasing her message, the harlot played on the higher meanings of the "moment's refuge" Saigyô desired. This refuge is less an anecdotal shelter from the rain than the body, that temporal lodging with which the spirit so mistakenly identifies its interests; and less the body than whatever object of desire arrests the mind and blinds it to the truth that all things pass. In the play, the harlot speaks clearly of desire. What she does not say as clearly, but what her own person declares, is that the model of desire is erotic love, and, of each "moment's refuge," the other for whom one burns.[10]

Later in the play, it is the ghost of the prostitute herself that appears to assure us, more

[8] It's perhaps worth noting, with regard to the *vinaya*—the rules of conduct for monastics—that the monk-poet, Saigyô, was famous for his ambiguous attitude to these rules of conduct.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid

directly and with even greater clarity, that she herself clings to nothing. Although she was a 'known woman of pleasure' she herself had long since 'scorned the moment's refuge' of the body, and all that this would have entailed for her. She sings: 'I cling to no refuge as my own.'

At the end of Act 1, the ghost disappears, and reappears in Act 2 first as the Lady of Eguchi in a boat full of singing girls. But the prostitute and the singing girls miraculously transforms into bodhisattva Samantabhadra ('Fugen' in Japanese) and the boat transforms into the white elephant on which Samantabhadra rides. [Photo 3] It is probably worth quoting the last lines in full:

(Lady) Yes, all things are a moment's refuge
(Chorus) Yes, all things are a moment's refuge
Never set your heart upon them:
That was my own warning to him.
I will leave you now, she cries,
Revealed as the bodhisattva
Fugen, the All-Wise.
Her boat is a white elephant
In glory she mounts dazzling clouds
And sails off westward through the skies
Leaving behind her gratitude and joy
Leaving behind her gratitude and joy.[11]

I can't resist one last observation about Samantabhadra, lest we associated her too closely with notions of purity. In the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism, the bodhisattva takes the form both of a male, Samantabhara, and a female, Samantabhari, and they are sexually co-joined in the form of a yab-yum figure. I can't help wondering whether Zeami knew something about this side of Samatabhadra.

[11] Ibid.

Under one roof, prostitutes too were sleeping

When Bashô was travelling on the 'Narrow Road of Oku,' he met two prostitutes who were on pilgrimage to the Ise Shrine and they all stayed in the same inn. After listening to their wretched accounts of their miserable lives, Bashô made this *haiku*.

Hitotsu yani	Under one roof
Yûjo mo netari	Prostitutes, too, were sleeping
Hagi to tsuki	The bush-clover flowers and the moon.

Here Bashô shows his great humanity, placing the socially compromised prostitutes, himself, and the beautiful bush-clover flowers under the same roof. And there is yet one more element, the moon: the perennial symbol of enlightenment. By invoking the moon (in whose light the bush-clover flowers are at their most beautiful), Bashô moves from a simple gesture of compassion and openness to all being, to something much deeper: all beings—prostitutes, poets and flowers—by nature are Buddha. As D.T. Suzuki says,

The prostitutes are no more fallen specimens of humanity, they are raised to the transcendentally poetic level with the *lespedeza* [bush-clover] flowers in their unpretentious beauty while the moon impartially illuminates good and bad, comely and ugly. There is no conceptualization here, and yet the *haiku* reveals the mystery of being-becoming.[12]

Suzuki also points out that the *haiku* represents a resolution of Bashô's confusion: 'the poet is in full sympathy with [the prostitutes] but does not know what to do in the condition in which all are situated; human iniquities, moral indignation, individual helplessness.'[13] And Bashô is not alone in his confusion. How do we accommodate 'human iniquities, moral indignation, and individual helplessness' 'under the one roof,' or to put in a more conventional Buddhist way, how do we truly accommodate such things within our understanding that from the beginning, all beings by nature are Buddha?

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[12] *Zen in Japanese Culture*. Suzuki, D.T., Princeton (Princeton University Press): 1959 (1993), 229-30
[13] Ibid

Fudo (again) and Foxes

Some years ago I came across a statue of Fudo riding on a fox at the Yakuo-in temple on Mt Takao, west of Tokyo (see photo[14]). This form of Fudo is known as the *Izuma-daigongen*, and he is the main image of the Yakuo-in temple: a much older statue is contained in the inner sanctum of the temple. In Japanese culture, foxes can be either good or bad. *Zenko* (善狐, literally 'good foxes') are benevolent foxes associated with the god of the rice harvest, Inari; they are sometimes simply called 'Inari foxes'. On the other hand, *yako* or *nogitune* (野狐, literally, 'field-foxes) are mischievous or even malicious, and it is clearly this type of fox that *Izuma-daigongen* is riding.

When, in Case 2 of the Wumenguan, the old man is turned into a fox for denying the laws of cause and effect, the type of fox he becomes is the bad field-fox: the precise word used in the original text is *yako*. The association of carelessness about the laws of cause and effect with field-foxes has layers of signification that might not be apparent to people living outside Japan.

Throughout East Asia, field-foxes (sometimes also translated as 'wild foxes') are associated with possession, transformation (including reincarnation) and sexual misconduct. They often turn themselves into beautiful women in order to seduce men. There are stories of men who discover on their wedding night that they have married a fox, and in some stories these fox-women even bear children. Young women may be possessed by foxes, who enter them through their fingernails or breasts. The symptoms of possession include developing a

[14] Fudo as Izuma-daigongen riding on a fox (photo Allan Marett)

fine down on the body, a narrow face with high cheekbones (which is regarded as particularly seductive and beautiful) and craving the food loved by foxes: sweet red bean paste and tofu. The only way that these fox women can become human is by either stealing someone's soul, or being reincarnated as a human being. In the Korean *anime* 'Yubi, the Five Tailed Fox' Yubi sacrifices herself for the boy she loves, and whose soul she could steal, and as a result is reborn as a young human girl.

Most powerful among these malicious foxes is the Nine-Tailed Fox who can transform into a beautiful woman and seduce boys and who has a particular liking for eating the internal organs of humans. Fox transformations, and in particular the Nine Tailed Fox, form the basis of many a *manga* and *anime* story (note particularly the Nine Tailed Fox called 'Naruto'), and they even form the basis of modern TV dramas such as the Korean comedy series, *My Girlfriend Is a Nine-Tailed Fox* or the Korean drama series *Nine Tailed Fox: Impossible Love*.

In *Wumenguan* Case 2, 'Baizhang and the Fox,' the transformation of the old man into a fox, and his rebirth 500 times in this form, is generally regarded as a metaphor for the terrible consequences that ignorance (which is closely associated with desire) can cause:[15] we might call this 'the misery that you bring on yourself through ignorance about desire.' The association of foxes with sexual misconduct should not be ignored when we consider the story of Baizhang and the Fox. Even though it is not explicitly stated in the story as it has come down to us in the *Wumenguan*, the association of foxes with sexual misconduct would have been so universally known to its Chinese and Japanese audiences, that unspoken implications would have hung around the story like a bad smell. And thinking about this in terms of our own experience, there is, without doubt, something very powerful about sexuality that can lead us, in the moment of passion, to ignore the consequences of our actions: unwanted pregnancies, broken hearts, broken marriages, self-loathing. This is the problem with the hippy image of Fudo. There is a stink about it, not unlike the stink that attends people who are intoxicated with emptiness, and don't properly understand its relationship to the karmic world of form.

Bashô celebrates the inclusion of all beings within the *dharmakaya*, but he doesn't warn us about attachment or karmic consequences. But surely he can be forgiven for this. After all, it's a very short poem that celebrates one thing: inclusion! Zeami's Noh play, on the

[15] Dôgen writes eloquently about this in the chapter of the *Shôbôgenzô* entitled, 'Deep Belief in Cause and Effect (*Shinjin-inga*).

other hand, deals with a considerable degree of subtlety with the moral side of things (he after all has the more expansive form of Noh play to work within). While his transformation of the harlot into Samantabhadra carries a similar message of inclusion to that of Bashô, he also warns us, by way of the prostitute's poem and her later ghostly utterances, that desire can have its consequences.

We can, if we like, persist, along with the charismatic but errant poet-monk in Eguchi, in the error that liberation is about doing whatever we like; but if we do, we should be aware that there will be no escaping the consequences of our actions. The compassion and insight displayed in Bashô's poem is delightful. It is masterful how, in so few words, he draws on a casual encounter to articulate the all-embracing sentiment that we're *all*—now matter how flawed, no matter how socially compromised—under the same roof. But Zeami reminds us that at the same time, we need to be careful about desire in our everyday life. Samantabhadra (and perhaps even Fudo) might have the skill to act wisely in the middle of passion, but as the story of Baizhang and the fox hints, if you can't bring it off, you may have quite a few fox-lives to contend with.

THE DOORFRAME

By Diana Levy

Leaning into the doorframe
is not like leaning into you.
Last week I nearly
fell into your chest
and the warmth smell hands
of you. So tired.
You sat me down.
I drank your peppermint tea.

You tall, ginger lashes, flesh and blood.
hands that held pliers to clip my wires,
that brushed away my straying hair…..once.
Last year. Briefly.

This evening we linger,
me on my verandah smouldering,
you on the path talking of tomorrow
your eyes full as blue moons.
I waited by my half-open door
while you started your car,
just in case. You forgot something.

You drove away, as visitors do.
I leaned then, giddy, after I closed the door,
burst into flames against
the hard, blonde, tall doorframe,
it didn't even budge.

13/12/02

Photography and Tanka[16] – A Collaboration

Poetry by Yvonne Hales and Photography by Glenys Jackson

in bloom
along the front fence
I blush
as you walk past
too wired up to notice

this moment
swollen with perfume
leaning over
I whisper
secrets in your ear

[16] Tanka is a classical genre of Japanese poetry originating as early as the late eighth century AD.

petals curl
around a raindrop
my tears
on your shoulder
nothing more to say

petals
open in the sun
unlike you
who keeps things
close to heart

From Ma-tsu's Koans to 21st Century Koans: Koans in Psychotherapy

By Barry Farrin

Introduction

Zen Master Ma-tsu (709-788) was at the forefront of koan development in Zen. He was instrumental in forging a revolution in the teaching of Chan, as Zen is known in China. He comes from the lineage of Bodhidharma and Hui-Neng that produced a new Buddhist school. Ma-tsu, his students and those who followed them developed many intellectual conundrums (koans) that changed the way Zen would be practiced in China and throughout the Buddhist world. I trace the use of koans in early China and define their purpose and their place in Zen. I will look at the contemporary use of modern koans in psychotherapy. Over the years of my Zen study, I noticed that my palliative and cancer clients began to bring "koan like" questions to therapy. I began to integrate these koan like questions into my practice of psychotherapy and I began to use them with my palliative and cancer care clients. These existential conundrums are client designed koans. I began to use these processes in my work unconsciously at first but eventually I started to reflect on this aspect, particularly in my work with people with life threatening illness.

Discussion

My clients brought these koans to therapy to help them explore their life and death issues. They came to explore the reasons they could not make sense out of these issues. Many palliative and cancer patients gave up finding intellectual answers and they were forced to move into a way of knowing that is beyond the intellect that is realized and not solved. This was for them, a kind of 'waking up' of their intuition.

When I began to practice meditation I read about koans and I became very interested in Zen and koan practice. I read about "Mu" and started to sit with this koan but I could not fathom what the koan Mu meant to me. Eventually I contacted the Sydney Zen Group and went to my first meeting at Killara in Sydney. I remember meeting a senior student and getting my first lesson in Zen Meditation. He taught me to count my breath and showed me how to sit properly. I was then instructed to go into the next room and find a cushion to sit on. During my sittings that night I found that I began to remember reading about "Mu" and I

began to sit with it. I was fascinated by this Koan. I thought I had the answer for this Koan Mu but of course I had only part of it but I knew I had found my true Buddhist home. I began to understand koans and I found they helped me disentangle my life and deconstruct my conditioning. I passed through "Mu" quickly and then I was a total convert to koans.

During my current study and reading of "Sun Face Buddha" by Cheng Chien Bhikshu[17], I began to reconnect with Ma-tsu who I first met as Baso many years ago while listening to a "teisho" (direct presentation of the Dharma) on "Master Ma Is Unwell". I found this book had reignited my interest in "Zen Koans". Ma-Tsu came alive for me and I was meeting him mind to mind, eyebrow to eyebrow and this was very exciting. I found him in the Wu-men Kuan, in Cases 30 and 33 and in the "Blue Cliff Record"[18] in Case 3, "Master Ma Is Unwell". I began to appreciate his style of teaching and the way Zen/Chan was changed under his teaching. We see Ma-tsu give an excellent response to a question about his health by saying, "Sun Face Buddha, Moon Face Buddha." This koan had helped me understand life and death. This helped me work with my own sense of aging and mortality recently.

Koans had helped loosen death's hold on me and I began to reflect on my work as a psychotherapist working in palliative care for many years. I also began to reflect on the changes in my approach to counselling during my study of Zen and how I began to innovate in my clinical practice. I found that koans could be very useful when working with people who were working on their own koans of life and death. I will come back to this aspect of koan practice later in this paper but I now will discuss the development of koans under Ma-tsu and his students. This discussion will highlight how koans have been developed in Chan

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[17] Chien, Cheng. Bhikshu. Sun Face Buddha. Fremont: Jain Publishing, 1992

[18] Cleary, T. & J.C. The Blue Cliff Record. Boston: Shambhala, 1992.

and Zen practice over the years. The development of koans by the early Patriarchs of Chan was useful in bringing many Chan students to liberation.

Ma-tsu's life and teaching was influenced by many Buddhist teachers of the time and one of his teachers was Huai-jang who had practiced with Hui-Neng. Hui- Neng was responsible for the development of a school of Chan known as the Sudden Enlightenment School. Ma-tsu was also a student of a Korean monk known as Wu-hsiang (684-762) and a monk Chu-chi. Ma-tsu died in 788 but his movement of koan practice began to take root and was to become known as the Hung-chou school and his teachings spread during the ninth century.

The philosophical structure of Ma-tsu's school is based on the "Thatagatagarbha Doctrine" which is often described as the "womb of Buddahhood". This is the indestructible essence present in all sentient beings and refers to the seed that is neither existence nor non-existence. This doctrine spells out that all living beings are endowed by the true mind which is pure by nature. This is very liberating when this is realized personally. I found this aspect of koan training helped me to continue to work with people who were working with a life threatening illness. This realization unpacked my inherent suffering that I experienced during life before Zen practice. The koan below is useful in helping Zen students see into their own nature. This is the case when a genuine Zen student has discovered their Bodhichitta or the drive for liberation. This is about putting down our search for Buddhahood and recognizing our inherent "essential nature". The koan that follows is a dialogue between Pai-chang and Ma-tsu that highlights the need of "letting go". Cheng Chien on page 69 in his book "Sun Face Buddha' writes:

Pai-chang asked, 'What is the direction of the Buddha?''

'It is the very place where you let go of your body and mind' replied the Patriarch.

This is the place that my clients began to see their need to let go of the unsolvable life and death issue. This koan would not be useful for them in this form in most cases, but they would go on to find their own koan with my help. The paradox of the unsolvable. I would never mention koans in this context as it was not appropriate. In another koan dialogue:

A monk asked, “Why does the venerable say that mind is Buddha?”
The Patriarch said, “To stop small children crying.”
The monk asked, “What do you say when they have stopped crying?
The Patriarch said. “It is neither mind nor Buddha.”
The monk asked. ‘And when you have someone who does not belong to either of these two, how do you instruct him?
The Patriarch said, “I tell him that it is not a thing.”
The monk asked, “And how about when you suddenly meet some one who is there?”
The patriarch said, “I teach him to directly realize the Great Way.”

This koan begins to get to the heart of what it is to be human. We see the need of people to stop their suffering. Ma-tsu’s response to the monk shows his great compassion by responding “mind is Buddha”. This is a wonderful answer to an existential issue of life. We see Ma-tsu’s response and answer as a deep understanding of the suffering of all people. People who are caught in delusions of the relative life. The crying of the children are the very crying of all people about the unanswered question of life and death. “Mind is Buddha” is pointing directly at the fact that we are indeed buddha our self. Wu-men’s verse reveals this process beautifully by Aitken Roshi[19] in the Gateless Barrier on page 189 who writes:

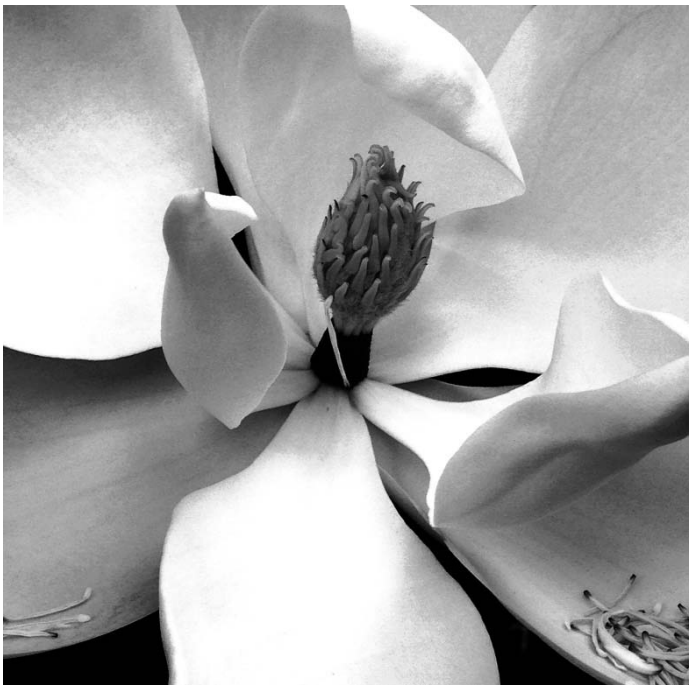
The Blue Sky and bright day –
no more searching around.
“What is Buddha?” you ask.
Hiding loot, you declare your innocence.

Ma-tsu begins to help the monk see that he should not reify this idea of Buddhahood. This koan now begins to lead him to awakening about his own intrinsic nature which is beyond “a thing”. Beyond concepts and this is realizing the great way. Zen koans are upaya (skillful means) to help people find peace and understanding of the paradox in their own life. Mat-tsu and those who followed him began to use these cryptic devices to free people from

[19] Aitken, Robert. The Gateless Barrier. San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990.

delusions and suffering. They could help people break down their fear of impermanence, and death. I began to understand that koan practice could be used in psychotherapy when working with people who are dying.

When I worked in palliative and cancer care this issue of facing death naturally became a “KOAN”, a personal koan that many of my clients could not understand. Some people found that they had no ability to work with death in any way at all. Many found that they had anxiety attacks and stress issues that they believed they could never work through. I found they had very little ability to deal with the emotions that came up for them. The more anxious people were the more difficult they found their journey and they only came to see me when their anxiety had reached a high level. I began to introduce mindfulness meditation into my counselling sessions with these people and I noticed that meditation helped many of them to find some peace and calm. I introduced a mindfulness meditation program which was well attended.



Some of my cancer clients who began to hear of my Zen practice also came to see me to talk about the “meaning of life”. I found that I approached each one of these people with no fixed process in mind as I knew that people often needed time to say the unsayable: “I am going to die” and “I am very frightened”, or that they had begun to work with, “What is the Meaning of Life and I don’t know”. I found that I began to work with what I had decided were “person specific koans”. These were koans that my clients made up and they could be rather crude and rough sounding; “What The fuck is this life all about”, designed by a number of people including a tough working man, “Why am I here”, “What am I”, “Where will I go”, “Why me” and “What is the meaning of my life”.

My aim in therapy was not to find a solution for these people but for them to ask a question that could lead to their own insight. We both worked on this question. Their fears

lessened, and they found some calm and peace. Simpkins, C.A. & Simpkins, A.M.[20] on page 91 of "Zen Meditation in Psychotherapy" suggest that when we let go of logical thinking and move into the paradox of our life we move into a process of transformation. We can't solve the problem of death but the confusion and not knowing allows us to move into a higher synthesis of clarity. This seems to give a new perspective on life and dying. These are crude examples of koans compared with these wonderful koans by Ma-tsu and his students, but they serve the purpose of allowing these clients to move into a place of "resolving" this issue. This is often about "letting go" 'and has helped many of my clients tremendously.

I found it OK to stay in this place of not knowing and they found peace in that place. They found a place to be with their fear and not be carried away by it. They could face their own impermanence. They could surrender to life. I found my time with clients very interesting and rewarding as I too began to feel the peace they brought with them into the counselling room. Somov P.G.[21] in "Koans: Uncertainty Training", talks about knowing you are working with the unknowable which allows you to accept the limitations and to stop trying to solve the unsolvable. I think my clients began to realize that their quest for answers were futile and there were no solutions but only "letting go".

Conclusion

Ma-tsu was one of the Patriarchs of Chan who began this process of koan practice and I feel that he and the others are my close relatives. I love the way koans allow me to suspend my ordinary thinking and how I am forced to let go of all my conditioning. I often find that students and clients bring their own koans to interviews. The question "Who am I ", and "What am I" comes up often. This becomes the place I begin to work on koans for many of my students and clients. I know the koans today have the same strength as they did in Ma-tsu's time. Koans used in modern Zen, work with the same issues. The issue of life and death, suffering and freedom and realization. The Buddha was the great physician and Zen koans still work in exposing our Buddha nature.

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[20] Simpkins, C.A. & Simpkins, A. M. Zen Meditation in Psychotherapy: Techniques for Clinical Practice. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons Inc, 2012.

[21] Somov, P.G. "Koans: Uncertainty Training Therapy." 360 degrees of Mindful Living in Psych Central. (2011).

Who wants that anyhow?

By Brendon Stewart

Free from desire, you realize the mystery, caught in desire you see only the manifestations. Yet mystery and manisfestations arise from the same source. This source is called Darkness. Darkness within darkness, the gateway to all understanding.

Dao De Jing

Songyuan asks us, ‘Why can’t clear-eyed Bodhisattvas sever the red thread?

Let me guess: because it is our blood and flesh bodies that organise how we are in the world; our bodies form the very basis from which we relate with ourselves, with others and with the spiritual dimension of being. The Self, even the Self that may somehow be associated with one’s face before our parents were born is married to the body and this union is at the very centre of experience.

But, what does Dao De Jing mean by darkness? Is he saying that darkness and desire are somewhat similar?

Always without desire we must be found,
If its deep mystery we would sound;
But if desire always within us be,
Its outer fringe is all that we shall see.
Tao Te Ching

I don’t get the darkness metaphor; is it to suggest that we are blind to all but the outer fringe of the deep mystery? What is the nature of the mystery we are being urged to try and see more fully?

On his own facebook page, Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook ‘inventor’) lists, among his interests, minimalism, revolutions, and ‘eliminating desire’. If he succeeds will he somehow not fall prey to …

The desire of love-power
Raised him high, very high.
The desire of indifference-power
Dragged him down
Beyond his imagination.
The desire of thought-power
Killed his inner silence.
The desire of money-power
Fooled him, his life, his all.
Sri Chinmoy

Somewhere recently I read that this living business could be thought of a little like an experiment, with a shifting research methodology and always an unknown outcome. In this way the human experience of existence is radically unpredictable, puzzling even to itself. But human experience and the work we engage with in order to make some sense of this puzzle, involves in effect manipulating our mysterious nature. This is how we conjure up in 'our imagination' desires and then demand their satisfaction by way of completion.

This work, this freedom to manipulate brings with it understanding, essentially about the world allowing us in many ways to enjoy our desiring. There is an invitation here to go on inventing the future. Spinoza speak about this invitation to go on inventing our future as our desire to strive. Striving is always a desire to persevere with one's own being in all of its peculiarity. For Spinoza the work is to desire one's own desire, to know oneself as desiring.

Immanuel Kant was convinced that we humans have a natural desire to be reminded of the fact that we are in possession of the capacity to Reason. And for Kant, to reason, that is I suppose the logic of the rational is the desire to realize the good.

There is a story of Moses descending Mount Sinai with the tablets of the law under his arms. *I've got them down to ten* he shouts to the assembled Israelites, *but adultery's still in*.

And here of course we come to the real interest: the carnal, that sense of desire with all the overtones of lust, force and tension injected into the sexual instincts and directed towards an object. Yes it is easy to travel with Leonard Cohen as **Suzanne takes us all down**

…to her place near the river
You can hear the boats go by
You can spend the night beside her

And you know that she's half crazy
But that's why you want to be there
And she feeds you tea and oranges
That come all the way from China
And just when you mean to tell her
That you have no love to give her
Then she gets you on her wavelength
And she lets the river answer
That you've always been her lover
And you want to travel with her
And you want to travel blind
And you know that she will trust you
For you've touched her perfect body with your mind
And Jesus was a sailor
When he walked upon the water
And he spent a long time watching
From his lonely wooden tower
And when he knew for certain
Only drowning men could see him
He said "All men will be sailors then
Until the sea shall free them”
But he himself was broken
Long before the sky would open
Forsaken, almost human
He sank beneath your wisdom like a stone
And you want to travel with him
And you want to travel blind
And you think maybe you'll trust him
For he's touched your perfect body with his mind

Now Suzanne takes your hand
And she leads you to the river
She is wearing rags and feathers
From Salvation Army counters

And the sun pours down like honey
On our lady of the harbour
And she shows you where to look
Among the garbage and the flowers
There are heroes in the seaweed
There are children in the morning
They are leaning out for love
And they will lean that way forever
While Suzanne holds the mirror
And you want to travel with her
And you want to travel blind
And you know that you can trust her
For she's touched your perfect body with her mind.

Freud does not identify need with desire. Needs can be satisfied easily enough with the right object, food for example. But to wish for, to lean out for love and to lean that way forever is governed by a desire to be creative with that excitement.

Yet while we may hope for excitement, this word desire comes to us with an etymology borne of turning away from the starry heavens with regret and into a night time of darkness.

Zen Retreat

By Nicola Bowery

That flush of joy this is the right place
as we enter the zendo that first night
greeted by the precise geometry of cushions and mats
all of us wearing black,
the habitués in their flouncing gowns
the beginners inevitably unsure –
is this for real? let me out of here!

Even as the questions mount,
and over seven days questions will keep rising
and falling amidst the fastidious ritual
the tussling with the mind's tethers,
I know *this is the right place.*

If I could see a scatter of gold dust
I would say it was here, in the air
flickering around our black shoulders
as we position ourselves in the crucible.

How clear and sharp each person's shape is.
The way that man bows slumping his elbows
the way that one cocks his elbows with military intent
the woman who skitters and titters
seems to absent herself in her bowing

the girl who slides her feet as if langlaufing on a snowfield
not in this humble scout hall
with its motley masonite ceiling, scuffed chipboard floor
the walls besmirched with masking tape gashes.

Each morning long before the first bird call
the bell tugs us here to our square black mats,
we coax our legs into knots or prop on cushions, chairs
first facing each other then facing the wall.
Gone are the days of the bravely burning 4am fire
that companionship of flames in the icy pre-dawning
the uplift of their enthused roaring.

Now just the intermittent whirring of the new gas heaters
and I'm in a plane with the vacillating engines
sometimes panting sometimes pulling back the throttle
hardly breathing
and I ride the same panicky spiral as when I'm flying
is my engine dying?
and then the heater puffs on again and purrs soothingly.

Always an extra-holy nun-like person stirs my girlhood ghosts
this time a young guy like a seminarian
with a peaked chin hollow eye and ultra earnest questions.
His fussy attentions to his blanket and his pallor
rouse my irritation

and now forget that.
It's time to creep on our feet in black caterpillar motion
stillness and movement creeping and creeping.
Within all this order we carry our jumbled minds with vast aplomb

hustling the traffic within our skulls
our spines supremely upright
but give us words and later we'll tell how our pride collapsed
and the oldtimers will say they still wonder how to breathe…

In our black robes our bustles the skirts flaring out
we're like a gaggle of choughs, unusually silenced

wings slightly fanned behind.

A conglomerate of bodies
but our flesh is forgotten in this black garb
except for the colours that the blackness highlights
and that includes the flesh of cheeks, arms, necks.

How this morning that girl looks unearthly pale
and that one's skin is too yellow for comfort and that one's mauve
and that man's ruddiness has settled by the fourth day
into a less angry flush.
How startling this woman's hennaed hair, perhaps her head is burning.
Sometimes a fart escapes and it has no owner
this is all flesh.
How intimate we are in this capsule
this crucible of the scout hall
the stealthy breathing of its too-efficient heaters.

Gold dust certainly
being in the light and fall of it
knowing too that it is so fine a gold
it will leave no trace on the clothes
no indentation on the cheek
and yet what is happening?

The air expands
and the mirrors of faces and bodies
and the particular shine of the teacher
reflect the four dimensions
the peculiar freedom for one's own body to move in the expanded air
there are fewer collisions with edges.

By the fourth day I detect a subtle change in my resistance to detail
accept the punctuations that detail pinpoints

how long it has taken

and after the final bell seven days on
when we have climbed back into our coloured clothes
a certain stillness is remembered
and carried like a bridal train.

So says the formal photo, you were there
a spaciousness has been bequeathed
something was imprinted, perhaps nothing.

We drive two hundred kilometres away from the capsule
and ever so distinctly
you and I resume the behaviour of choughs trawling the ground
with their querulous scratching at each other
buzzing the same grub
flurrying our wings with some urgency
quick quick time is fluttering *quick quick*

what was spacious? what was imprinted?
perhaps nothing.

Ceramics and Tanka – A Collaboration

Poetry by Yvonne Hales and Ceramics[22] and Photography by Janet Selby

hands shape clay
for the wood fire
where were you
when I needed
someone to hold me

all fired up
in Black Wattle ash
your hand
around my cheek
hoping to smooth things over

[22] Janet Selby, Spiral vessel, 2013, mixed stoneware clays, Shino glaze inside, wood fired on its side, h 20cm x d 11cm.

in the kiln
the Shino[23] glaze
drips inside
still hot
our first night together

wood ash settles
as glaze melts
all night
how I wish
you would just let go

[23] *traditional Japanese glaze*

The Collaborative Tradition
– Chinese Painting and Ekphrastic Tanka

By Yvonne Hales

Traditional Chinese painting combines poetry, calligraphy, painting and seal-cutting to compose a stylized form of art. With all these elements a traditional Chinese painting can fully display the artistic character of the painter and provide greater aesthetic value.[24] Before the Song Dynasty (960 - 1279) Chinese painters rarely made any inscriptions on their works although sometimes they signed their names in a corner. In the Song Period some painters, who were also poets and calligraphers, wrote an inscription or a poem on their work to explain the theme or express their emotions. During the Yuan Dynasty (1271 - 1368) seals were stamped on paintings and so all four artistic elements were combined in the one form.

A visual work of art is direct and concrete but confined to a certain time and space. In contrast, unlimited by such constraints, a poem can describe things in different times and places and contain much greater content than the visual work. By combining a poem with a painting the static painting becomes dynamic and more inclusive and the poem becomes more vivid. They complement each other.

The Work of Rengetsu (1791 – 1875)

Rengetsu became a nun of the Pure Land sect of Buddhism at the age of 33. She was also a poet, calligrapher, potter and painter. She was an accomplished *waka* (now called tanka) poet and is now regarded as one of the greatest Japanese poets of the 19th century. She

[24] Chinese Painting: Unity of Poetry, Calligraphy, Painting at Confucius Institute Online http://culture.chinese.cn/en/article/2009-09/27/content_28087.htm accessed 27 March 2014

inscribed *waka* in elegant rounded calligraphy on her painting and frequently engraved or brushed it on her pottery. It conveyed her emotions and observations. Rengetsu's words grace virtually every object she created bringing an intimate presence to her works in clay and on paper[25].

Ekphrastic Tanka

Ekphrasis is the art of describing works of art, the verbal representation of visual representation. The word "ekphrasis" comes from the Greek *ek* and *phrasis*, 'out' and 'speak' respectively. An early example in western literature is the description of Achilles'shield in Homer's *Iliad*. Poets such as Chaucer, Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Auden have also used it in their work[26]. Ekphrasis is a conversation between two pieces of art. The writer interprets a work of visual art and creates a narrative form that represents his or her reaction to a painting or sculpture. Keats' *Ode on a Grecian urn* is one such conversation.

The collaborative works in this issue of *Mind Moon Circle* (photograph and tanka; pottery and tanka) draw out an intimacy between the poet, the subject matter and its creator. Glenys' images of roses and my tanka responses reflect desire, beauty, disappointment, uncertainty in love and much more. My tanka responses to Janet's wood fired pot call to mind: holding, touching, the sensuality of hands, the careful placement of the pot in the kiln, and smelling the Black Wattle as it burns in the kiln.

Each collaborative work stands alone and speaks for itself.

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[25] Eastburn M, Folan L, Maxwell R "Black Robe White Mist – art of the Japanese Buddhist nun Rengetsu" National Gallery of Australia, Canberra 2007

[26] Prime P *Ekphrastic Tanka – Special Feature* in Atlas Poetica, A Journal of Poetry of Place in Contemporary Tanka http://atlaspoetica.org/?page_id=624 accessed 15 March 2014

Desire and Tanka at the Heian Court

by Yvonne Hales

The Heian period (794 – 1185) was the high point of cultural life at the Japanese imperial court. It was a time when the aristocracy engaged in the pursuit of aesthetic refinement leading to new developments in art and literature. Lady Murasaki Shikibu's *The Tale of Genji* appeared in the early 11th century. Her contemporary, Sei Shonagon, revealed her observations and musings as an attendant in the Empress' court in *The Pillow Book* in 1002. As discussed below, two of Japan's greatest poets produced some remarkable work during this time: Ono no Komachi (834? - ?) served at the imperial court. Her poetry is deeply passionate, subjective and complex. Izumi Shikibu (974? – 1034?) served a former empress and committed herself to a life of religious consciousness and erotic intensity[27].

Life at the Heian court was particularly favourable for women mainly because of the importance of the arts in daily life. For a woman to be noticed she had to demonstrate a high degree of aesthetic appreciation among both men and women of the court[28]. The "skills, subtle judgment and taste in the mixing of incense, the layering of patterned silk kimonos, musical performance, painting, dance and above all the writing and recitation of poetry" all added to a woman's allure as a potential romantic partner and her ability to rise up through the aristocratic ranks[29]. The desire to afford an experience expression in poetry indicated the presence of deep emotion for an educated person.

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[27] Hirshfield J & Aratani M (trans.) "The Ink Dark Moon – Love Poems by Ono no Komachi and Izumi Shikibu: Women of the Ancient Court of Japan", Vintage, New York 1990

[28] Wilson R *The Ink Dark Moon – Love Poems by Ono no Komachi and Izumi Shikibu (Translated by Jane Hirshfield and Mariko Aratani) – A review*, Simply Haiku: Journal of Japanese Short Form Poetry Winter 2006, vol 4 no. 4

[29] Hirshfield and Aratani ibid

Tanka Poetry

Tanka ('short song') is a genre of short form Japanese poetry. It has five lines and does not rhyme. It originated more than 1,300 years ago when it was known as *waka* ('Japanese song') and was usually sung or chanted. It was written mainly by women of the imperial court.

The oldest major anthology of Japanese poetry, the *Man'yōshū*, or "Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves" was compiled around 785. It assembled some 4,500 poems of which 4,173 are in *waka* form. They reflect the beauty of the natural world, its coming and going, love and daily life.

The *Kokinwakashu* or "Collection of Ancient and Modern Poems" appeared around 905. It was followed by around twenty one imperial anthologies created over the centuries each containing a thousand or more poems. Needless to say the immensity of this tradition can be intimidating yet tanka remains accessible for both readers and writers by focusing on nature and human emotions[30].

The poetry of Ono no Komachi and Izumi Shikibu

Both poets became pivotal figures during the Heian period. They were deeply passionate and religious women. An enquiry into the deeper questions of life runs through the core of their work. Shikibu often left the court for small Buddhist mountain monasteries where guests would live with the monks for short periods of contemplation and retreat. Similarly, Komachi's poems reflect a deeply Buddhist view of existence as ceaseless change and return again and again. Their poetry demonstrates how the tumultuous course of the heart in love confirms a single truth, the impermanence of being. They used the tanka form as a medium of reflection and introspection. In the culture of the Heian court the ability to write poems of great beauty would in itself have been a major cause for being thought both personally attractive and desirable[31].

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[30] Fielden A *About Tanka and Its History* at Tanka Online http://www.tankaonline.com/About%20Tanka%20and%20Its%20History.htm accessed 15 March 2014

[31] Hirshfield & Aratani ibid

Waka and Desire

Waka (now called tanka) were often love poems. A new romance for a woman of the Heian court was signaled by the arrival at her door of a messenger bearing a five line poem in strange handwriting. If the woman was sufficiently curious about the poem she would reply by poem and a secret late night visit would be arranged with her admirer. According to the rules of etiquette the first night together was sleepless. Lovemaking and talk were expected to continue without pause until the man departed at the first light of dawn. The "morning after poem" had to be dispatched via messenger who would return with the woman's reply. Whether or not the night was successful was judged on the how passionate the accomplished poems were.

Once she had given her heart a woman awaited her lover's letters and appearances at her door. Failure to arrive led to sleepless nights in hope and speculation which she recorded in poetry. During a relationship the exchange of poems served to reassure, rekindle or cool interest and remind the other person of a lover's state of mind. The poems were written with intimacy and sparseness of language. Hirshfield notes that these poems provide "… small but utterly clear windows into those concerns of the heart and mind that persist unchanged from culture to culture and from millennium to millennium."[32]

We can read their work today as accurate and moving descriptions of our most common and central experiences: love and loss, their reflection in the loveliness and evanescence of the natural world, and the effort to understand better the nature of being[33].

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[32] Hirshfield & Aratani ibid
[33] Hirshfield & Aratani ibid

The endless gift

By Sally Hopkins

Surprising our shared life,
not at all as I'd imagined.
Now when old, sexless, unable to run,
"desire" seems such an odd word,
such a strange condition, to contemplate-
those wild waves that roared up,
sweeping all before them.
So many years of wishing to be where I was not ,
to have what I had not, be what I was not.
The short lived joys. The endless tears.

Now occasional ripples, the water clearer,
needs and desires no longer churned
together in muddy confusion.
Clouds of 'my children, my independence"
float by, but certainties have evaporated.
Driving thoughts, so ignorant
of how things truly are, are falling more silent,
unsure of the next step.
The body now learning relinquishment,
as the heart, questioning, listening,
is changing it's tune from " I want! I want!" ,
to a melody that floats on and on,
endlessly singing of this life we all share,
this wonder filled life of everything!
No end to surprises.

Faith and Reason: The Heart of the God Debate (Part 1)[34]

By Philip Long

Bad Faith

Another problem with the definition in my previous article on God Debate[35] concerns the matter of "faith". As indicated in my previous article[36] the whole debate tends to hang on the New Atheists' definitions of "God" and "religion". This is particularly true with the matter of "faith". As mentioned also in that article, Richard Dawkins attempts to confine the terms of the debate by actually coining the term "the God Hypothesis" which he says claims that "there exists a superhuman, supernatural intelligence who deliberately designed and created the universe and everything in it including us" and which he says is the central tenet of the three Abrahamic religions.[37] Religious "faith" is seen as belief in the propositions of religious doctrine, in particular the "God Hypothesis", without the requirement for evidence of their truth. This belief is seen as *propositional, intellectual, literal, absolute, ideological, unscientific, irrational, non-evidentiary, unquestioning and untestable*.

Propositional, intellectual, literal

The New Atheists see religious doctrine as *propositional* truth, regarding the world, about which we may argue and for which we may adduce evidence. Thus "God exists" would constitute a proposition the truth or falsity of which can be argued about and tested in the same way as any scientific hypothesis. They seek to draw religious doctrine into the realm of scientific and rationally acquired knowledge based on realities perceived through our senses and interpreted by our intellect. Faith is thus an absolutist, intellectual commitment. In this

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[34] Part 2 of this article will appear in the next issue of Mind Moon Circle. It will contain the second part of my response to the New Atheists' position on faith and reason under the headings "Doctrines and propositions", "Absolute faith", "Doubt" and "Freedom".

[35] See the question of the definition of God and religion in my article "Does God Exist? – Reflections of the God Debate" in *Mind Moon Circle Summer 2014*, p. 18.

[36] Ibid, p. 19.

[37] Dawkins, Richard. *The God Delusion.* Black Swan, 2006, p. 52.

process they wish to prioritise language, thinking and reason, to look at the matter *from the point of view of* the intellect (but also prioritising in a lesser role the sense of sight).

The truth of religious doctrinal propositions is seen by the New Atheists (as well as their fundamentalist religionist opponents!) as literal. Religionists are obliged to believe "God exists" in the same way one would believe "Mary has arrived from Japan" or not to believe at all. Either she has arrived or she has not; either God exists or he-she-or-it does not. God is an entity of which we must find evidence in the world or refuse to believe.

Sam Harris claims that literal adherence to different or opposing propositional truths by the followers of different religions leads to inevitable and unsolvable conflict between those groups. This is because "… the central tenet of every religious tradition is that all others are mere repositories of error or, at best, dangerously incomplete. Intolerance is thus intrinsic to every creed."[38] Referring to the partitioning of India and Pakistan and the violence between Hindus and Moslems that surrounded it, Harris says that "the entire conflict is born of an irrational embrace of myth" and that the "only real difference between these groups consists in what they believe about God."[39]

Absolute, ideological

Religious faith is sometimes referred to by the New Atheists as "blind faith" presumably to indicate that the religionist's belief is blind to any evidence which might

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[38] Harris, Sam. *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason.* W. W. Norton & Company, 2004, p. 13.

[39] Ibid, p. 27.

suggest contradiction or even qualifications of that belief. Or it is termed absolute, that is, again, not bearing contradiction or qualification, or ideological, that is, taken as true a priori or without the need for evidence. It is seen as a clinging to certainty at the expense of truth. Even if one fails to find evidence of the doctrine the believer will continue to believe. Even if there is plenty of evidence that the doctrine is unlikely to be true, this matters not a jot to the believer. As Dawkins puts it, the person continues to believe even "in the teeth of the evidence."[40] Religious truth is seen as absolute, eternal and unchanging. If science, rationality or empirical observation contradicts religious doctrine, so much the worse for them. They must be disregarded.

Religious people are seen as arrogant, professing a truth, their personal subjective truth, which trumps all other truths no matter how sincerely those other truths are held and no matter how open-ended or subject to questioning those other truths may be. "I'm completely right and you're completely wrong." As Lawrence Krauss puts it we are all subject to self-delusion and we must always be ready to question our beliefs especially when the evidence contradicts them. Science values such questioning; religion does not and is therefore self-deceiving: -

> "Well, I think it's wrong to say that science has no ethical boundaries. ***Science is based on telling the truth***, which is a really important ethical boundary. It's one that I don't think religion shares, in fact. The point is that ***telling the truth and full disclosure and also doubting yourself, being sceptical – because the easiest person to fool is yourself – and I think all those values are, in fact, the very values we need for a better society***… and so I think that science can offer a better world and, in fact, a world that's more ethical" [41]

Unscientific, irrational, non-evidentiary,

The New Atheists claim that the only real truths are those discovered by science. Sometimes they appear to be claiming that ascertaining the truth is confined to an approach

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[40] Dawkins, Richard. *The Selfish Gene*, 2nd edn. Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 198.

[41] See Australian Broadcasting Commission's television programme, *"Q and A"* broadcast on 18th February, 2013 (My emphasis).

based strictly on the scientific method; sometimes this is broadened to a more general use of reason and observation (based nonetheless on the scientific paradigm), for example in our everyday going-about-life. Religious doctrine does not come up to this test and therefore is purely subjective and comes under the heading of superstition. Because of its rejection of rationality, religion leads to a way of thinking in which anything, however outrageous, can be believed; there are no standards against to which to test its truth. The New Atheists suggest that the only alternative to their brand of rationalism is an anything goes abandonment of all reasonableness, typified by their reference to belief in "fairies at the bottom of the garden".[42]

The New Atheists contrast faith with reason. These two are seen as opposite to each other and mutually exclusive. In reason we use rationality and observation through our senses to ascertain the truth of a matter. We base our truth "on the evidence". Faith, by contrast eschews and even fears reason as liable to undermine one's a priori and unquestionable belief in the truth of religious doctrine based on revelation rather than personal evaluation of the evidence; faith is by definition irrational. As A C Grayling puts it: -

> … ***faith is at its most distinctive when it is opposed to facts and reason***; the point of the Doubting Thomas story in the New Testament is that it is more blessed to believe without evidence than with it, and the philosopher Soren Kierkegaard was one of many who embraced the very absurdity of what faith

[42] Dawkins, Richard. *The God Delusion*, p. 74.

requires as a leap of will. … Science is always open to challenge and refutation, faith is not". (My emphasis).[43]

A non-believer cannot enter into a rational debate with a religionist who holds a belief based on faith, since the believer cannot brook any rational contradiction of the belief. When cornered religionists will retreat to such a position as: "I just *know* it's true." This kind of blinkered certainty enrages the New Atheist who retorts with: "*How* do you know? Where's the *evidence*?"

Unquestioning and untestable

Religionists are seen as not being allowed to doubt their beliefs; they are obliged to trust in a tradition, in truth as revealed to them by religious authorities or sacred text (the Bible). They have no autonomy in this and are not permitted to find out for themselves or exercise their own inherent sense of the truth or morality, their conscience.

Further, religious doctrine is of such a nature that it cannot be tested. God is transcendent and therefore we cannot look for proof or disproof of his existence in nature as it is conceived of by science, the only reality available to our perception. When we look for evidence of God in nature we are told we are looking in the wrong place.

We are even told that God is a mystery that can never be known. Now there's a conversation stopper. How can you have a rational debate with someone who when cornered says: "It's a mystery"? This really gives you a licence to believe in anything, even those fairies at the bottom of the garden.

Good Faith

Faith is at the heart of the religious life. It is also a concept familiar to us in our everyday experience and reflection. Each of us in our daily lives operates in accordance with a set of "truths" for which we have no scientific analysis or proof. Life would grind to a halt if this were not so. For example, each of us believes that there is an external world which is to a certain degree known, or can be known, by us and is to some extent predictable.

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[43] Grayling, A. C. *The God Argument: The Case against Religion and for Humanism.* Bloomsbury, 2013, p. 149.

In this everyday sense faith means taking something on *trust* without having absolute proof that this is warranted in the circumstances. This kind of faith is not a complete stab in the dark without any guiding principles or certainty of any kind. It is usually part and parcel of the risks we take everyday in life with greater or lesser justification. Our lives are often a mixture of certainty and uncertainty about where we are going or what we should do. To the extent that things are uncertain, we exercise faith in a course of action or its outcome. How much risk we take varies considerably, depending on the individual and the situation. Chronically fearful people will take less risk and people with no real sense of danger may, with bravado, take unnecessary or foolish risks. I may be prepared to go on a hike in the Himalayas but not to go base jumping. This kind of faith is not an unquestioning belief in the truth or otherwise of absolute propositions about the way reality is, such as "God exists" or "There is a supernatural realm". It is rather a matter of trust. It may well concern an implied or explicit proposition such as "The pilot of this aeroplane I am about to board is competent". Rather than concerning itself directly with such theoretical statements about the nature of reality, however, everyday faith is more akin to a practical skill based on experience of similar situations in the past.

Religious faith is a specialised example of everyday faith. It is not *primarily* adherence to a set of metaphysical propositions, though this may be one aspect of it. It has more to do with acceptance of the fact that life is uncertain and that the level of control we have over the way things are is limited (often severely limited, as in the case of our own death). Can we accept this aspect of life with equanimity and courage or do we cringe and refuse to join in the fray? For a religionist there is a deeper ground for answering this question than reliance on my own unaided ego and the egos of those I know, namely the feeling that I will be supported in a deep existential way as I work my way through life. I will be supported by an infinitely vast and transcendent reality of which I "form part". I base this feeling on the advice, testimony and example of others (including religious teaching), it is true, but most importantly on my experience of such a reality in previous situations. I judge that in those circumstances it is reasonable to do so. This transcendent reality is not "the best

and deepest part" of me, as A. C. Grayling would have it.[44] It is not a part of me; nor is it apart from me. It supports me and at the same time it *is* me.

Faith and Reason

As to the New Atheists' opposing of faith and reason, this purported opposition has a long history. In this view reason means rational thinking based on observation and faith means belief without evidence or in contradiction of the evidence. In fact, reason and faith are complementary; reason can take us only so far and for the rest we must rely on faith. Reason informs faith and faith informs reason. Faith is an openness which keeps reason open to correction by further reasoning or by experience. Reason keeps our faith from gliding off into far-fetched realms of unguided imagination and fantasy or, as the New Atheists would say superstition. Reason and faith penetrate each other non-dually without remainder. In this regard, the noted Catholic theologian, John Haught gives the following definition of religious faith: -

> Faith, as theology uses the term, is neither an irrational leap nor "belief without evidence." It is an adventurous movement of trust that ***opens up reason to its appropriate living space, namely, the inexhaustibly deep dimension of Being, Meaning, Truth, and Goodness.*** Faith is not the enemy of reason but its cutting edge. ***Faith is what keeps reason from turning in on itself and suffocating in its own self-enclosure.*** Faith is what opens our minds to the infinite horizon in which alone reason can breath freely and in which action can gain direction. Reason requires a world much larger than the one that mere rationalism or scientific naturalism is able to provide. Without the clearing made by faith, reason withers, and conduct has no calling. Faith is what gives reason a future, and morality a meaning. (My emphasis)[45]

The only quibble I have with this definition is the reference to "Being, Meaning, Truth, and Goodness". From a non-dualist point of view the inexhaustibly deep dimension is

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[44] Ibid, p. 8.

[45] Haught, John F. *God and the New Atheism: A Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris and Hitchens.* Westminster John Knox Press, 2008, p. 75.

at its heart indeed inexhaustible, that is, it is infinite and unknowable, without being confined to definitive qualities, no matter how admirable they seem. It is *ultimately* neutral, equanimous and "unnameable". It is what we Buddhists call "tathata" or "thusness". But, it must be stressed here, it is the thusness of just this, here and now (including just this "Being, Meaning, Truth, and Goodness").

Faith is essentially a kind of openness to the infinite, ultimate unknowability of our world and our lives. It is the refusal to settle on anything as a final truth which will remain unaltered for all time. It is the capacity to say, when put on the spot: "I don't know. I don't know. I don't know …". Again Haught says:

> … the new atheists think of faith as an intellectually erroneous attempt at something like scientific understanding, whereas theology thinks of faith as a state of surrender in which one's whole being, and not just the intellect, is experienced as being carried away into a dimension of reality that is much deeper and more real than anything that could be grasped by science and reason.[46]

Thus what is known by everyday reason is opened up to the test of unknowing, to reliance on the ultimately ungraspable nature and ground of reality. Since this ground is infinitely open, without any a priori assumptions, it is the test of all truth and reality, the deep existential perfect mirror of all that we are, all that the world is. It is the true ground of reason, a ground far more accurate and inclusive than that relied on by science, but not excluding scientific understanding. Religious faith is not against reason; it just insists on true, deep, inclusive reason.

When we are faced with having to take a step into the unknown and we go ahead trusting that the outcome will be all right, are we relying on faith or reason? Faith urges to take the risk and reason sets aside our irrational fears to make a realistic assessment of the outcome. The two work hand in hand.

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[46] Ibid, p. 13.

Mind Moon Circle, Journal
of the **Sydney Zen Centre**
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