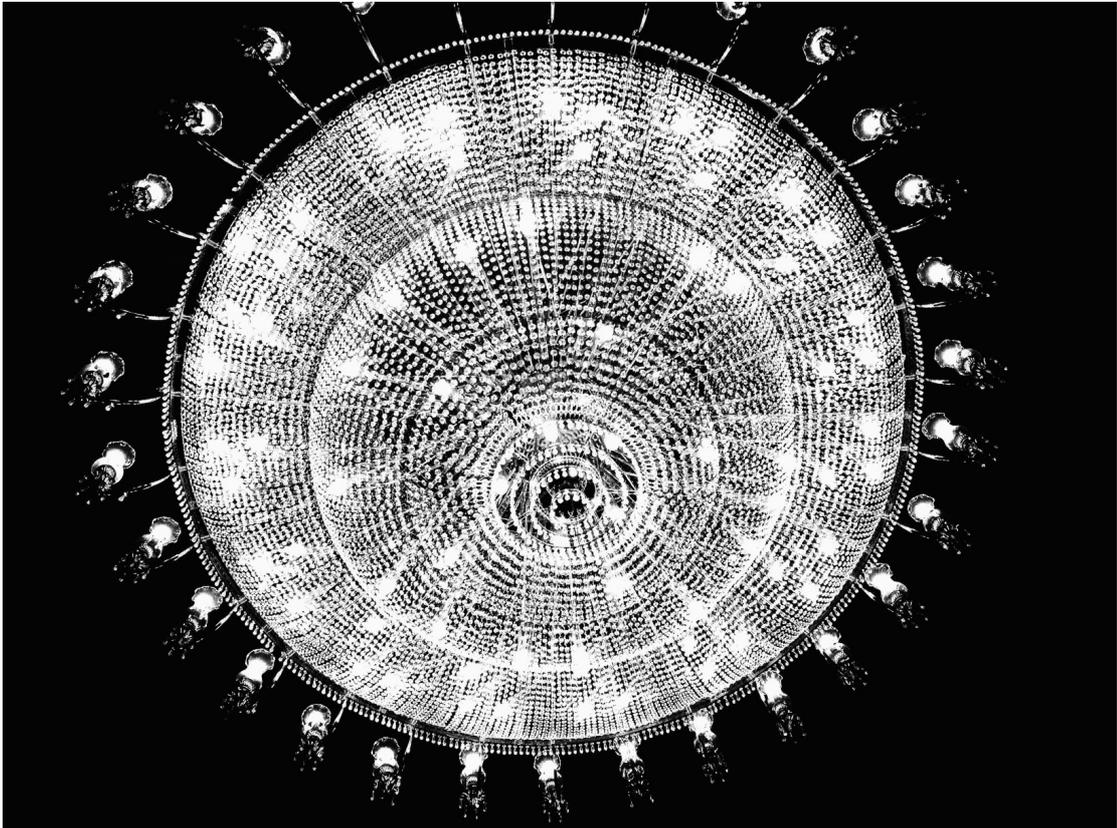


Mind Moon Circle

A journal of the Sydney Zen Centre



Zen and the Story

- Spring / Summer 2014 -

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About the issue: *Zen and the Story*

At 10:25pm on a balmy Saturday evening, I perch at my desk amongst the week's scattered papers and the swooshing sounds of traffic and think: What's this all about? *What's the story?* The last fragments of the edition have clunked neatly into place, just as if they have always been there, and made the inevitable frantic scurrying, late nights, perturbation and procrastination of editing, fade into the background. *Ahh. It's done.*

So, what's the story?

For **Allan Marett**, it's the process of slowly and carefully unravelling 'The Mystery of the Hannya Mask', giving us a fascinating insight into Noh theatre. For **Subhana Barzagli Roshi**, a favourite story and koan 'Which is the True Chi'en?' provides nourishment for enquiry and practice, and ultimately for realisation. **Caroline Josephs** investigates the complexity of interrelated experiences that is storytelling, in 'The Way of the S/Word: Storytelling as Emerging Liminal'. Blending personal, theoretical and performative aspects of her tale, the swordplay in this piece will have you on the edge of your seat.

So much for the armchair-in-the-evening-sized stories. But you will also find storytellers in these pages who deliver their tales in the space of a moment. **Janet Selby** entertains us with her 'Tale of the Exploding Jizo' and illustrates the mysterious 'Gurawill (whale) dreaming'. **Glenys Jackson's** stunning photographs tell a wordless story of attentiveness and unexpected beauty, as well as the presence of the past in the temples of Angkor. With characteristic generosity of spirit, **Sally Hopkins** shares some 'Fragments' on the "incomprehensible and delightful" zen stories she has encountered at different times. And **Stuart Solzberg** takes us along for a rude awakening in 'The Demon Along the Ancient Way'.

For those who have been following **Philip Long's** ongoing series on the New Atheists, the latest instalment investigates 'The Hidden Side of the God Debate'. Also within, some fine poetry from **Jillian Ball** and **Drew Bourgeois**, an impression in prose-poetry from **Suneeta Peres de Costa**; and I couldn't resist re-purposing one of my favourite fairytales.

These pages provide a wonderful array of stories. They are inspirational and oddball; they are scholarly and sweet; they are thoughtful and entertaining; they provoke and nourish and teach. This issue can be enjoyed as a bedtime story – a wake-up story – or just a really good yarn.

Enjoy it. Then read it to somebody else.

Sarah Sherringham, November 2014.

The mystery of the Hannya mask

Allan Marett

A few weeks ago I found myself standing before a *hannya* mask that was displayed in the exhibition, *Theatre of dreams, theatre of play: nō and kyōgen in Japan* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. I've known this form of mask for many years—since I first saw it in 1977, in the play *Aoi no Ue*, when it was worn by the legendary Noh actor Kanze Hisao—a performance that has stayed with me down through the years. *Aoi no Ue* is one of three Noh plays that use the *hannya* mask¹, and in all three, the mask is used to represent women consumed by the most violent and destructive jealousy. I'll be discussing two of these plays, *Aoi no Ue* and *Dôdôji*, here.



Hannya Mask. By Saiko (Own work) [CC-BY-3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>)], via Wikimedia Commons

As I stood in front of the mask, I noticed for the first time that the characters for *hannya*, 般若, were the same as the characters for *hannya* in the *Maha hannya haramita shingyô*, The Great Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra, which we regularly chant in our sutra services. This raised the question: how could the word, *hannya*, (Pali, *panya*; Sanskrit, *prajna*), literally 'wisdom,' be applied to a mask that represents jealous rage?

From a lecture on Noh masks, given in association with the exhibition, I learned that the *hannya* mask derives from an earlier mask, called a *ja* (snake) mask. It is said that a monk from Nara, called Hannya Byô, created the mask in the seventeenth century expressly to replace the *ja* mask in the play *Aoi no*

¹ The other two plays are *Dôdôji* and *Adachigahara*, also known as *Kurazuka*. Monica Bethe, *The Play in Context, Aoi no Ue*, Noh Performance Guides 7, National Noh Theatre, Tokyo, 1997, p.68.

Ue.² The *ja* mask, we were told, is associated with the snakes (*nagas*) that protect the Buddha. According to one tradition, it was these snakes that also found the *Maha hannya haramita shingyô* in a deep cave and delivered it to humans.³ There is also a strong association of snakes with the *Lotus Sutra*, and in particular the story of the Naga King's daughter, who despite being a half snake/half woman, and only eight years old to boot, achieved Buddhahood with remarkable speed.⁴ The Naga King's daughter is invoked in a number of Noh plays, especially in instances where women attain Buddhahood.⁵ So perhaps this association of its prototype with the *naga*, and thereby with the Buddha, is one reason why the *hannya* mask is associated with *prajna*. The association of snakes with wisdom would have been well known to educated people in medieval Japan and it is not impossible to imagine that this association continued when the *ja* snake mask was transformed into the *hannya* mask.

But there are other reasons why the mask might be associated with wisdom, and for these we need to look to the plays themselves. Let's begin with *Aoi no Ue*. This play was originally developed from an episode in the great Heian period novel, *The Tale of Genji*, where Lady Aoi, who is pregnant with the child of the hero, Prince Genji, is attacked by spirits that her healers cannot contain. One of these spirits reveals that she is the spirit of Lady Rokujô, a former lover of Prince Genji, which as a result of the distress caused by jealousy and public humiliation, has left her body to attack Lady Aoi.⁶

In the Noh play, Lady Aoi is represented simply by a *kimono* folded and placed at the front of the stage. In the first of two acts, a shaman chants incantations and plucks the string of his catalpa bow to bring forth the spirit that is causing Aoi's illness. Lady Rokujô appears, wearing a *deigan* mask, whose refined features indicate that she is a noble woman, but whose golden eyes indicate that she is not in human, but in spirit, form. As she expresses her jealousy and resentment at Aoi, the spirit of Lady Rokujô becomes increasingly agitated, culminating in her advancing on the *kimono* that represents the stricken Aoi and striking it. Surely one of the most dramatic of all moments in Noh!

Lady Rokujô then retires, only to return in Act 2 wearing the *hannya* mask, which unambiguously reveals her violently jealous nature. Act 2 consists almost entirely of a battle between Lady Rokujô, now in her demonic form, and a priest, who chants sutras and rubs his beads together to exorcise the spirit. The energy of this battle, as the priest and demon repeatedly rush at each other, up and down the stage, along the walkway, now failing, now gaining strength, is extraordinary. But in the end, the priest prevails. By the end, the demon herself is chanting the words of the exorcising priest, indicating that she is already in their power:

In the north Kongô
Yasha Myô-ô
In the centre, the Great Holy Fudô Myô-ô
To the universal diamond I give myself
May the indignant wrath be destroyed

² Sharon Takeda, *Miracles and Mischief: Noh and Kyogen Theater in Japan*, Los Angeles County Museum, 2002.

While it has been suggested that the mask simply took the name of its maker, it is just as possible that the maker might have become known by the name of his famous mask.

³ Stephen Batchelor, *Verses from the Centre*, New York: Riverhead Books, 2000, p. 3. Allan Marett, 'Nagarjuna and the Rainbow Serpent: Zen, Magic and Aboriginal Ceremony' *Mind, Moon, Circle*, Winter 2010.

⁴ Susan B Klein, 'Woman as Serpent: The Demonic Feminine in the Noh Play, *Dôjôji*,' in Jane Marie Law (ed) *Religious Reflections on the Human Body*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, p.115.

⁵ Susan B Klein, *op.cit.*, pp.115-116. These include the plays *Genzai Shichimen*, *Miidera* and *Ama*. For a more detailed account of the positive portrayals of the role of women in Buddhism in the Japanese medieval period that resist the conventionally misogynistic biases of classical Buddhism, please see Susan Klein's chapter.

⁶ Monica Bethe, *op.cit.*, p.67.

*Untaratakanman*⁷

He who heeds my sermon gains great wisdom
He who knows my mind at once attains Buddhahood.

Lady Rokujô then delivers her words of liberation:

Ahh. The fearful Wisdom Chant! (*hannya-goe*)
No more! Never again will I return with evil intent.

And as she performs her final dance the chorus tells us

In the form of mercy and forbearance
The host of bodhisattvas descend
And bear her to Buddhahood freed of delusion.

And so, in the end, even this violently demonic being, totally consumed as it is by jealousy and rage, is liberated through the power of the dharma.

The second play that uses the *hannya* mask is *Dôjôji*, but here the protagonist does not attain liberation—something that is extremely unusual in the world of Noh. What we need to understand about *Dôjôji* is, however, that it is a relatively late (late fifteenth/early sixteenth century) addition to the repertory and as such reflects both the diminishing power that women had in Japanese society and the rising power of Confucianism, with its unequivocally negative attitudes to women. *Dôjôji* is, however, a make-over of an earlier play, *Kanemaki*, in which the jealous female protagonist does, like the protagonist in *Aoi no Ue*, finally attain realisation and liberation.

The *Dôjôji* story first appeared in two collections of Buddhist didactic stories (*setsuwa*) of the Heian period.⁸ Two monks, who are on pilgrimage to the Kumano shrine, put up in an inn. The daughter of the innkeeper attempts to seduce one of the monks, but he escapes her advances by promising to return to the inn following his pilgrimage. In fact he is lying, and instead returns by another route avoiding the inn. When she realises that she has been deceived, the innkeeper's daughter is transformed into a forty-foot snake, which sets out in pursuit of the monk. The terrified monk takes refuge in the Dôjôji temple, where the monks hide him inside the temple bell. The snake, having discovered the monk's whereabouts, wraps herself around the bell, heating it to melting point and incinerating the monk. Some time later, the ghost of the monk appears to the abbot of the temple in a dream, explaining that after death, he too had been transformed into a snake and forced to marry the very innkeeper's-daughter-snake who had killed him. By reciting the *Lotus Sutra* the abbot is able to free both the monk and the innkeeper's daughter from their torment, and they are each reborn in separate Buddhist paradises. As is usually the case in the Heian and medieval periods, the tale ends with a form of Buddhist fulfilment.

Both *Dôjôji* and *Kanemaki* build on this story. In both cases, the play begins on the day that a new bell is to be dedicated at the Dôjôji temple to replace the one destroyed by the snake-woman.

⁷ A mantra of a type commonly encountered in esoteric Buddhism. Indeed, much of the other imagery—the references to the Heavenly Kings (*myô-ô*), to temple guardians (*niô*) and to the universal diamond—is also commonly found in the Tendai and Shingon Sects. The exorcising priest, Kohijiro of Yokawa is an ascetic priest from the Tendai temple on Mt. Hiei.

⁸ These are the *Dai Nihonkoku Hokekyôkenki* (1040-43) and the *Konjakumonogatarishu* (1120). See Klein, *op.cit.*, p.102.

The history of the earlier destruction is, however, known only by the abbot of the temple and is concealed from both the audience and the other protagonists in the play. For reasons known only to him, the abbot decrees that no women are to be admitted to the ceremony. Nevertheless, a female *shirabyōshi* dancer appears and persuades the temple attendants to admit her to the temple on the grounds that she dances not as a woman, but as a man, and is therefore not subject to the prohibition on women entering temple grounds. As she begins to perform a dance of purification, the *shirabyōshi* dancer is gradually possessed by the spirit of the snake-woman who destroyed the original bell. At the height of the dance, she approaches the new temple bell as if to strike it, but then, at the last moment jumps into the bell, which falls to the ground with a loud crash. The remainder of the play consists of the abbot and two attendant monks attempting to exorcise the spirit of the snake-woman, who reappears from inside the bell, now wearing the *hannya* mask. As in *Aoi no Ue*, the battle between the priests and the *hannya*-mask-wearing demon rages back and forth across the stage. *Dōjōji* ends with the snake-woman being simply driven away and leaping dramatically into a river—there is no redemption here. In the earlier form of the play (*Kanemaki*), however, the woman does attain realisation. At the point where she is about to throw herself into the river, she turns back and returns to the stage to strike the bell repeatedly—a gesture which, within the context and symbolism of the play, symbolises her enlightenment. Moreover, throughout *Kanemaki* it is made repeatedly clear that the reason that the snake-woman has returned to the temple is to seek redemption for her actions in destroying the original bell and killing the monk hidden inside, just as the demonic form of Lady Rokujō in *Aoi no Ue* is seeking liberation from her demonic state. All such references to liberation, or a desire for liberation, are deleted in *Dōjōji*.

So, as in *Aoi no Ue*, the *hannya* mask projects, on the one hand, an image of demonic female jealousy, but on the other, a quest for the Buddhist wisdom that ultimately releases the demon from its torment. In performance, the move from demonic jealousy to wisdom is brought about by a slight downward inclination of the mask, whose expression alters from one of utter fury to one of profound sadness.

I was reminded, in discussions with friends in the Noh world about the contradictions of the *hannya* mask, that Noh frequently works by presenting things from their opposite side. When beauty and goodness is to be presented, it is often first approached from the dark side—from a position of ugliness and evil. And when there is darkness and fury, liberation is, to use the words of Aitken Roshi, only a quarter turn away. In Japanese, this aesthetic of approaching things via the back door is known as *gyakuen* (逆縁). Both *Aoi no Ue* and *Kanemaki* offer good examples of this. While, in terms of the surface narrative of these two plays, it is demonic fury that is the focus, the reason for presenting demonic fury is, ultimately, to reveal that even aberrations can be transformed into realisation through the power of the dharma. And the stronger the presentation of demonic fury, the stronger the message of liberation.

In the final analysis, then, it is this quality of *gyakuen* that underlies the mystery of the *hannya* mask. The attachment of the term ‘wisdom’ (*hannya*) to a mask that expresses the torments of jealous rage became for me, in a way, a natural *kōan*, which I’ve attempted to respond to in this essay. But what has all this to say to us, living now in the twentieth century? Well, I think it reminds us that no matter how dire things are in our lives, realisation is only that quarter turn away. All you have to do is to truly wake up and fully embrace whatever is there, right now. If you can do this, you will surely realise that even a dried up old shit stick (a stick with which you wipe your arse) is the Buddha.⁹

⁹ *Wumenguan* Case 21. A monk asked Yunmen, “What is Buddha?” Yunmen said, “Dried shit stick.”

Tale of the Exploding Jizo*

Janet Selby

I made my first Jizo statue many years ago, before I began sculpture classes at Tom Bass's sculpture school, and before I knew anything about Buddhist iconography, symbols or characters. Yet I had encountered Jizos before when I visited Japan and loved the statues I had seen there in the street – an everyday part of the landscape.

I had just begun regular sitting at the Sydney Zen Centre, which clarified and aligned my ideals and lifestyle with Zen Buddhism, so making the Jizo was a natural expression of my mood at the time.

I wanted it to be strong and enduring, so I made the model out of clay intending it to be fired. The face emerged gently smiling, with kind eyes and long ears. I made it hollow and not too thick, or it might explode in the kiln. Then I took it to the local hobby ceramics factory to get it fired, as I had done in the past with other projects. Yet when I returned a few days later to pick it up, the kiln person handed me a shoe box and said "There's been an accident". Inside the box was the fired Jizo – in pieces!

It had exploded in the kiln due to an air bubble, or varying thickness, or any number of reasons. The kiln person was so sad. It was nobody's fault. But as I consequently found out, nothing is irreparable.



Luckily, the head was whole and the hands were still in gassho, but the shoulder was splayed and the body scattered in myriad slivers of robe.

When I got home. I laid out the pieces. This was a 3-D jigsaw puzzle that nobody had ever solved before! Using a strong adhesive I patiently worked piece by piece. Finally the Jizo emerged once again whole and complete.

Cracks of experience now show throughout the figure, yet he holds his hands in gassho, expressing gratitude for this life.

*This life,
Just now,
Smiling.*

* **Jizo Bodhisattva.** *Jizo* is the guardian of children — unborn, aborted, miscarried and stillborn. He is the overseer of transformations. His likeness makes the ideal gift for anyone experiencing upheavals and big changes in their lives.

In some translations, Jizo is known as "Womb of the Earth". He is usually portrayed as a monk, often carrying a pilgrim's staff with six rings that jingle to warn animals of his approach and prevent mutual harm. When he shakes the staff, he awakens us from our delusions. Jizo statues can be found everywhere in Japan, most especially in graveyards. Sometimes you may find little heaps of stones around Jizo statues, as many believe that a stone offered in faith will shorten the time their child suffers in the underworld. Jizo statues are often clothed in tiny garments adorned by sorrowing mothers in the hope the kindly bodhisattva will specially protect their child. A little hat or bib is a gift of a rejoicing parent whose child has been cured of sickness thanks to Jizo's intervention.

Janet Selby has been a member of Sydney Zen Centre since 1995 and has held numerous workshops with Clay and Meditation, and Zen & Art retreats. She has exhibited her sculptures and drawings in various locations, and currently makes bonsai pots.

www.janetselby.com.au



Images: Jizos made in Jizo Workshops held by Janet Selby.

A Love Story

Jillian Ball

Openness to
wholehearted dialogue
vulnerability
transparency
dropping our guard,
sharing,
deep caring
humour
and warming love.

Merging of energy
emptying of self,
union of
neither mind nor body,
formless awareness of
tantric exaltation,
eternity looking out of our eyes
embracing light and life
with exquisite love.

Photo: *The Story. The Journey.* By Glenys Jackson.

Fragments

Sally Hopkins

Recently I again read Aitken Roshi's book "The Original Dwelling Place" (1996). It had my name on it, though it was in the library, and the librarians were not sure if it was meant to be there or not. It was. But I was grateful to be given the occasion to re-read it.

Aitken Roshi sprang vividly from its pages. Speaking of one of his first teachers, Nyogen Senzaki, who set up a "floating" zendo in Los Angeles in 1925 (Robert Aitken met him in 1947) he wrote:

In the meetings his talks were full of Zen stories, incomprehensible but delightful.

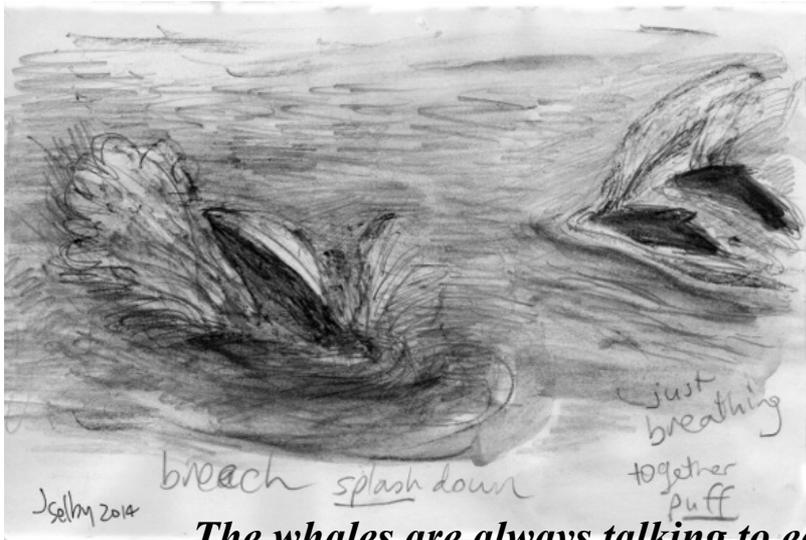
I was transported back to my first sesshin with John Tarrant at Gorricks Run: 40 of us sitting up and downstairs in the cottage, everyone in tents, the kitchen tiny, cooking done with everyone just through the kitchen door. "Incomprehensible but delightful" is exactly how the stories seemed: the heart recognizing something, but goodness knows what. It was that mystery that drew me.

Aitken Roshi also wrote, "Koans are tiny doors that open to great vistas, inviting us to wander through endless gardens... like folk stories, their expression is presentational, rather than discursive". This immediately took me back; sitting beside Roshi. He was never my teacher, but he came out two or three times from Hawaii: for Subhana's Transmission, for the Opening of the Eyes of the temple Kodoji, and to give public talks at the Glee Bookshop or the Buddhist Library. At a time when Colin and I were caring for his parents and my father and aunt were failing, he gave a talk at the Buddhist Library, and afterwards sat against the wall as people went up and spoke to him. Feeling burdened, I said to him, "I am finding it very hard caring for my father-in-law". He immediately said, in the kindest, most loving voice, "Let me help you up", and this old man rose and helped me to rise. That was it! He had shown me how to take the next step. I have remained very grateful.

I am grateful too for Sexton Bourke's presentation and words. It followed the Diamond Sangha Teachers Meeting here in 2006, when there was a Q&A with maybe six of the teachers at Zen Open Circle. Towards the end of the evening the questions coming forward were few. A questioner asked, "Why do you think people are hesitant to ask questions?" Like a flash, Sexton, who had struggled so long with cancer, sprang out and said with great vigour, "Because they think there is SOMEONE who can die." Bowing deeply, Sexton.

Then there was the very hot sesshin when kinhin was in the creek's cool waters, our feet on the cool bottom, over stones and sand, and on we went, the water getting deeper and deeper, knee deep, hip deep, the waters reflecting the gum trees over head. One person who scrambled out from the line said, "And I thought I had at last found a sane practice group!" Ah, but so beautiful, so cool, so watery. The sun so hot.

Gurawill Dreaming
Janet Selby



Janet Selby 2014

breach splash down

just breathing together Puff

The whales are always talking to each other...

What stories have they to offer?



slapping

↑ loud noise
 Janet Selby 2014

puff!

Gurawill action

20/6/14 water-solstice Sydney

tail underside is white



headstand spin shaving off Swish
 tail up

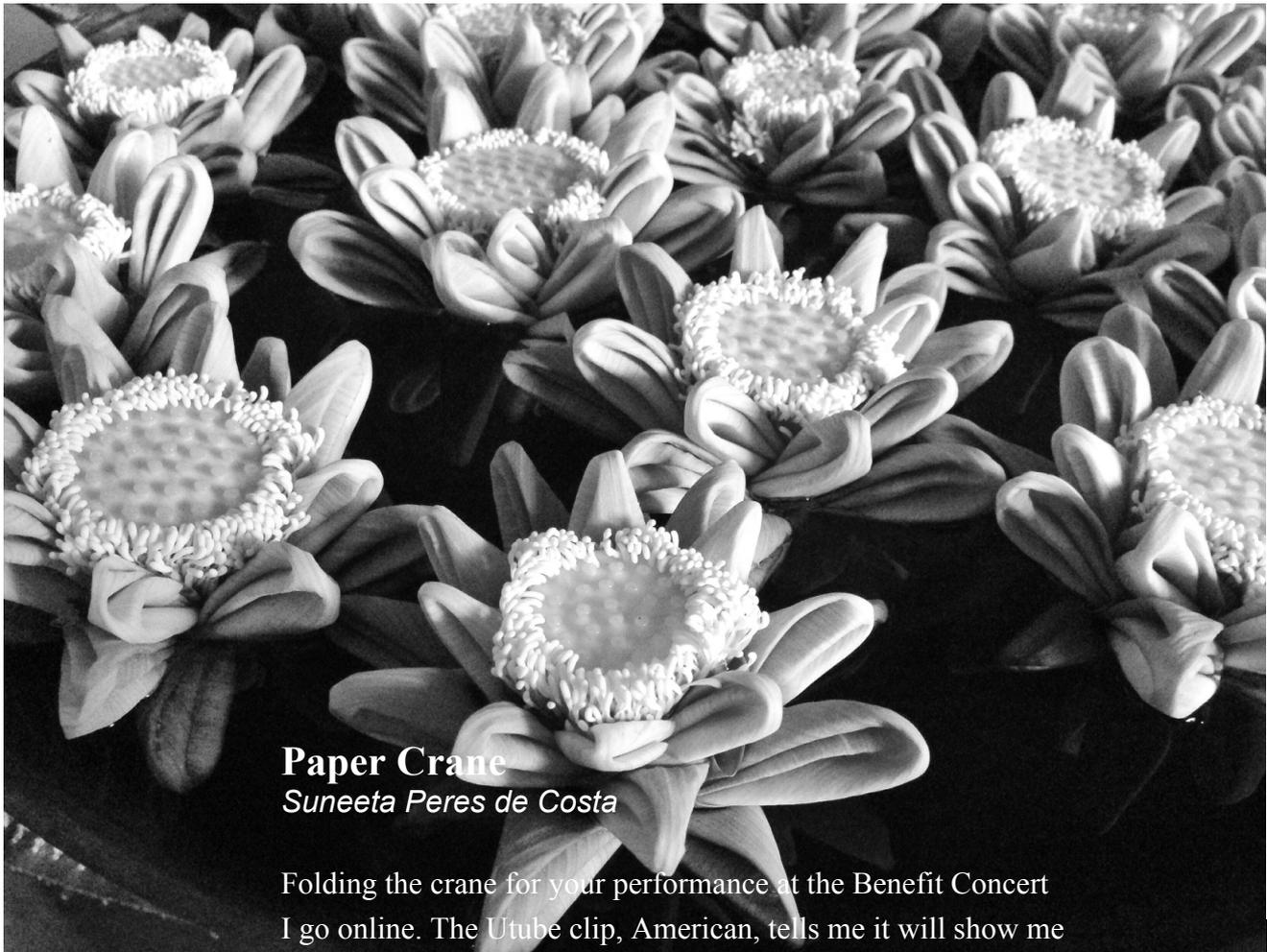
'Gurawill' is the name for Whale as told to me by Uncle Max Dulumunmun Harrison, Yuin Elder.



Janet Selby 2014

sideways finwhacking showing off

chant: gurawill binji mumbup



Paper Crane
Suneeta Peres de Costa

Folding the crane for your performance at the Benefit Concert I go online. The Youtube clip, American, tells me it will show me how to make both an origami crane and rocket ship! But I can't do two things at once, can't think of this and that, and my fingers are all thumbs in the folding. I rewind the clip and see how the crane requires a folding back and into, each new crease and movement revealing a tiny envelope of space, marking the place of what will happen next. "Fold it into itself now...", this anonymous guide tells me. And I think I've got the gist of it, the segues of beak, body and wings - distinctly bird not rocket ship - but who can really say - the form of anything's becoming, the destiny of poems, cranes, music filling a university hall on a Saturday evening in Spring, jacaranda spilling its petals into the middle of the sportsground, notes and dust motes, civilisation's susurrations. There's lamplight, moonlight and the shadow of an actress' face wrapped about a B-29, the skin of being, torn, and the sky fractured with desire. It's the spectre of life: contradictory, harrowing, beautiful. Ten thousand or one thousand things, time our own and not our own - a countdown. Earthly beings, blasted out of some ancient star, all living and dying at the same moment and fumbling for hope.

The Way of the S/Word: Storytelling as Emerging Liminal¹⁰

Caroline Josephs

*Death is the sanction of everything the storyteller can tell.
He has borrowed his authority from death.¹¹*

Death strides beside me as I tell stories. Death's other face -- a sense of being alive! may glimmer or erupt unexpectedly.

Let me illustrate how a storytelling event offers a complexity of inter-related experiences. This particular story has strong parallels with koan work in Zen practice, coming out of the samurai tradition in Japan.

I tell the story of the *emergent*....With storytelling and listening we make meaning by taking one step after another, moment by moment, emerging from one kind of reality we might call 'mundane reality' into another more dreamlike Reality within the universe of the story. These realities are not separate. Our experience tells us that R/reality lives in this dreamlike liminal (or 'between') space. Here is the story. It ought to be told orally, with the body inhabiting each character and movement, as in a dance.

The Teaching¹²

The Kyoto market is crowded. A poor farmer happens to bump against a samurai. The samurai is affronted. He says in a loud voice so that numbers of nearby onlookers can hear: "I must avenge my honor against your grave affront. I challenge you to a duel by sword. Meet me in the market courtyard at noon tomorrow. And be sure if you do not turn up, I will find you".

The poor farmer knows nothing of the sword. But he has heard about a retired sword-master and teacher out of the city. He goes to the teacher, and asks, "What can I do?"

The teacher says, "First you must put out of your mind any notion of winning. The best you can hope for is to kill your opponent at the same time as he kills you. To do this you must fight with all your heart even though you know you will die. Go home and meditate on this before you give me your decision on proceeding."

The farmer goes home and meditates for two hours. He returns to the teacher. "There is no escape. I will fight my best. I am resolved to fight with all my heart to preserve my honor knowing I cannot hope to live".

The teacher goes with the farmer to the market courtyard. First he finds a reddish patch of grass. Then he says to the farmer, "Tomorrow arrive early. Position your left foot on the red patch. I have no time to show you how to hold the sword. Just hold it any way. I can only show you how to move. Imitate my movements exactly".

¹⁰ This is a short excerpt from an article originally published in *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, Vol 21, Number 3, May-June 2008, pp251-267

¹¹ Benjamin, 1968, 94

¹² In my doctoral thesis on sacred oral storytelling in 4 cultures -- how we get to know through oral storytelling (2005), this story is on CD as an oral presentation, embodied, allowing listeners to enter a liminal space of storytelling to experience potential of transformation.

Now there is a stroke in Japanese fencing which involves two very large strides very quickly without hesitation. It is aimed at getting right underneath your opponent's thrust to make your strike.

Even masters of the sword sometimes hesitate out of fear of the oncoming blade. Their muscles contract, their steps shorten and the stroke is ruined. Not because the stroke itself is difficult -- what is difficult is making it without any hesitation with the heart undistracted by any hope of surviving.

The farmer learns the moves. He lengthens his steps. Practice goes on, for hours. At a certain point the teacher excuses himself, goes around the corner, falls to his knees, and picks up two pebbles from the mud, dusts off the dirt, puts them in his pocket and returns. He then tells the farmer to stand aside and watch him closely.

He positions himself with his left foot on the reddish patch of grass, takes two giant strides at lightning speed and gives a great shout as he makes the thrust with his sword. "See where my feet trod?" he says. "I am embedding each of these spots with a magic pebble and the places will be charged with a magic power. Leap upon them and you will feel the powerful magic and make the same deadly cut I did." And he bends down and embeds a pebble in each of the places where he has trod.

The farmer practices leaping on those spots, feeling the power and making the strike.

The next day the farmer arrives early in the market courtyard and positions himself with his left foot on the reddish patch of grass. The samurai arrives and takes up his position at the prescribed distance. The referee gives the signal to begin. The farmer has no hope of living -- his whole heart is engaged and he leaps forward, hits the two pebbles, gives a great shout and pierces the samurai's heart even before the samurai has moved his sword into position.

Imagine the farmer's wonder and joy!

Now, if you believe that the pebbles in this story are magic, you are wrong...However if you believe the pebbles in this story are not magic, you are also wrong.

Adapted from Maguire, Jack,¹³

There is limitation in the text version of a storytelling. Only a telling of a story with a live audience can constellate the possible complexity of meanings. In the presence of audience a storytelling is a more charged, and at the same time, a more ephemeral experience for the listener (and teller).

For the reader, the "listening" to the storytelling is somewhat removed from the atmosphere that is engendered with a living pulsating audience. An audience utters sounds, laughs, says "aah!" or murmurs. Audience members may wriggle in their seats, punctuating the presentation and altering what the storyteller can bring forth as a consequence. The storyteller's gestures, pauses, responses to the audience as it lives and breathes -- all make for an entirely different experience from text, read from the page (as here). I can only hope to evoke that experience through writing.

¹³ 1998, pp. 225-227.

How was I positioned in my life in relation to the storytelling as well as in the experience in my friend's large and friendly kitchen-living room?

A poor farmer happens to bump up against a samurai.

The "bump" in the story reflected a number of unexpected changes that occurred in my life just prior to beginning the research. A "bump" may be large, like a birth or a death in the family, or it can be a momentary startling and sudden insight. It changes the direction of travelling. A trajectory is altered, interrupted.

Six months previously I had resigned a big job -- the "bump in my life" a sudden change in the trajectory of my life at that time. I had taken time out to consider.

It took six months to recover from exhaustion. I was doing yoga, walking, meditating, arranging an art exhibition at the zendo, making things, musing on my life, accompanying an old and close friend on his decline in illness, towards death.

Where did I want my work to go? What was I going to do? How would I support myself?

In Perth in the fourth month of 1997 it came to me. I would cast a net around all the things I most loved -- the arts, storytelling, studying and learning, my spiritual practice of Zen, and the challenges I wanted -- to find out more about my Judaic ancestral roots, to write.

The University accepted my topic. I was awarded a postgraduate scholarship. The work had found some legitimacy, if only for its beginning. These were decisive bumps along the way.

I was committed.

The poor farmer knows nothing of the sword. But he has heard about a retired swords-master and teacher out of the city. He goes to him and asks, "What can I do?"

"What can I do?" I asked myself. As a novice storyteller, I had to find expert guides, the storytellers who had been working with story and storytelling for a long time and knew its twists and turns, its patterns and rhythms, had vast repertoires of stories to tell, and a bag of lore on what storytelling was all about.

I had to make some kind of responsive action. I found I wanted to tell stories. Storytelling is an organic creature, changing and moving, living and breathing – like Einstein's reality, it is "a pattern of relationships between possibilities"¹⁴. Only in openness to possibility can new associations and connections arise, creating new patternings. It is *particular*. Theory is generalized, abstract. The two may inform and relate to each other – a particular-micro, and a universal-macro. To find the liminal language for a weaving of the particular and the universal-general was to be an emerging and consistent tension in the research process. I had to act in the particular situation in order to gain understanding of the theory.

I followed and listened to, sometimes in person, sometimes on tape, many storytellers -- Jewish, Celtic, Christian, Indigenous Aboriginal, Zen. I heard stories told from other cultures, other times. The ones that accreted themselves to me remained. In these were reverberations for me I could not

¹⁴ cited in Neville, B., October 2001, p. 2

ignore, something not understood, intriguing, moving, something which resonated long after the telling had ended.

In choosing between action possibilities I was making conscious an emerging methodology -- finding a way that was *alive!* which *sang* for me, which was *resonant*, the way of finding a possible way through a multitude of possible methods. Taking action as in telling the story, and reviewing it (as in reflecting on the action of telling-listening), taking a new action (perhaps writing, perhaps drawing) and reviewing it. The resonant moment was a guide. I would work from the body and move into reflection. Theorists spurred the reflective process.

I had to listen, too, to the *places* that 'spoke' to me. In the course of the study I visited Arnhemland three times, Hawai'i twice (to sit zazen with old Roshi), Israel (to visit Safed, town of storytelling), and Crete (especially Knossos).

Neville¹⁵ characterizes the action research method more precisely as a three stage process. First, starting from the physical pole of being, experienced in action and feeling, moving to the mental pole, experienced in concepts and image, and thirdly, moving back to the physical pole, experienced in new action and new feeling.

This was to be how the soirée telling later in Chardi's kitchen was to unfold. I was to inhabit the body of the samurai, then the peasant, the teacher, again the peasant. I was feeling with each, I was imagining what it was to be, especially the peasant, at each point in the story. I was making a drawing of the most potent moment for me, drawing out ideas and feelings. Finally I was inhabiting the whole in a flow of storytelling.

The audiences, those who were *listeners* to my storytellings became important further guides in the storytelling learning and process.

The teacher says, "First you must put out of your mind any notion of winning. The best you can hope for is to kill your opponent at the same time as he kills you. To do this you must fight with all your heart even though you know you will die. Go home and meditate on this before you give me your decision on proceeding."

The way of meditation was my companion throughout. I had been a consistent student of Zen since 1990. To be with whatever arose in the mind, to focus on the breath, on mindfulness, or on a *koan* was familiar to me. To sit with the restless body, the mind unsettled was familiar. I deepened my practice through the duration of the study. I knew the breath itself as a movement connecting me to life force, to inspiration on each incoming breath, to the pause that happened between that and the expiring, the dying, and that connected me invisibly with each and every living being. Zen teachers encouraged, supported and guided me to take on the challenges, sometimes to be "in the fire", to be with the pain, be with the current difficulty. I had to breathe into the *hara*, the belly, to centre myself in anticipation of being in front of an audience, telling.

The farmer goes home and meditates for two hours. He returns to the teacher. "There is no escape. I will fight my best. I am resolved to fight with all my heart to preserve my honor -- knowing I cannot hope to live".

It seemed in time that the storytelling process was a mutual dying for both the storyteller and the listener, no matter which role I inhabited.

¹⁵ 2001, p.8.

By the quality of listening, the storyteller comes into (B)being; by the quality of telling, the listener comes into (B)being. Out of meditation and contemplation -- came clarity for the next action. I was warming up to being in the story.

Stepping forth in complete conviction was important.

I am invited to tell at a gathering, a soirée of storytellers and friends at Chardi's house. I feel full of fear but determine to do it.

The teacher goes with the farmer to the market courtyard. First he finds a reddish patch of grass. Then he says to the farmer, "Tomorrow arrive early. Position your left foot on the red patch. I have no time to show you how to hold the sword. Just hold it any way. I can only show you how to move. Imitate my movements exactly".

Chardi's soirée was to be a first public presentation of my still novice storytelling skills. I had told before - other stories - in settings of friends, but I had not had a larger audience with many unknown people in the audience, and especially many professional storytellers. And I had never told this story previously. At first I was thinking I would tell a personal story of fear...since I knew that fear was evoked for me in anticipation.

When I realised what was happening, this story came to me as the appropriate one for the evening. In telling it I would 'call up' my own courage, I would have to focus on the task, be prepared to 'die', be undistracted by the outcome, being totally in the moment of the telling.

Now there is a stroke in Japanese fencing which involves taking two very large strides very quickly without hesitation. It is aimed at getting right underneath your opponent's thrust to make your strike. Even masters of the sword sometimes hesitate out of fear of the oncoming blade. Their muscles contract, their steps shorten and the stroke is ruined. Not because the stroke itself is difficult -- what is difficult is making it without any hesitation -- with the heart undistracted by any hope of surviving.

I began to learn something of the art of not hesitating, of how fear could distract, make me contract, creating stumbles. I began to learn the art of letting go.

I practised and practised, telling myself the story out loud, telling an imaginary audience, sometimes I told in front of a mirror.

The farmer learns the moves. He lengthens his steps. Practice goes on, for hours. At a certain point the teacher excuses himself, goes around the corner, falls to his knees, and picks up two pebbles from the mud, dusts off the dirt, puts them in his pocket and returns. He then tells the farmer to stand aside and watch him closely.

I prepared for the evening. I brought to mind the fine storytellers whose feet I had sat at, enthralled.

I donned my costume for the 'duel' -- a short black silk kimono, with the emblems of the warrior clans on it. It is a man's kimono and one I knew to be worn for funerals. It seemed eminently suitable for the occasion.

I could not eat. I mingled desolately with the crowd that gathered. The kitchen and living rooms were almost packed when Chardi called for silence and introduced the evening. I had seated myself on the kitchen step close to the small open space that had been cleared for presentation.

The peasant positions himself with his left foot on the reddish patch of grass, takes two giant strides at lightning speed and gives a great shout as he makes the thrust with his sword. "See where my feet trod?" he says. "I am embedding each of these spots with a magic pebble and the places will be charged with a magic power. Leap upon them and you will feel the powerful magic and make the same deadly cut I did." And he bends down and embeds a pebble in each of the places where he has trod.

"And who is going to be first?" Chardi threw out the challenge to the assembly. I leapt instantly to my feet. "I will!" I declared with complete conviction, not hesitating for an instant. No one was to see any quiver of terror. Great fear can evoke great courage. (Soldiers facing battle know this; mothers facing childbirth know it). All eyes turned on the one who dared... To be the first with such a story... that seemed essentially right to me.

The farmer practises, leaping on those spots where the stones lie, feeling the power and making the strike.

I had followed the handful of inspiring storytellers around to wherever they were telling, picking up their bits of magic, ingesting something else with the words that I heard, something beyond words.

I had done all I could to prepare.

The next day the farmer arrives early in the market courtyard and positions himself with his left foot on the reddish patch of grass. The samurai arrives and takes up his position at the prescribed distance. The referee gives the signal to begin.

I was on my feet in Chardi's kitchen facing the eager expectant faces looking in from the living room, crowding into the kitchen.

The kitchen fell away. In its place -- the market place of old Kyoto, the courtyard, the grass, the reddish patch, the pebbles, and the protagonists, the master swordsman, the samurai, the farmer. I was in the story, aware of the audience, directing my energies toward them, but imaginatively dwelling in the setting of old Japan and the movements and feelings of the poor farmer and the master swordsman.

As I was telling the story, I could feel the tension in the room building, with increasing devotion of the audience -- the complete attention to the fate of the farmer. We were all there together with him in his mortal combat. With the storytelling and the teller, the audience entered into the farmer's trial by sword.

I had enough space to leap across the room, landing my feet on the imaginary white pebbles. All eyes followed.

The farmer has no hope of living -- his whole heart is engaged and he leaps forward, hits the two pebbles, gives a great shout and pierces the samurai's heart -- even before the samurai has moved his sword into position.

The telling ended. An explosion of applause burst out. I was shaking -- with the thrill of having faced my own fear and told the tale, faced my own 'death', (ridicule, foolishness, failure?), by simple presence and focus, concentration in each moment of the story, and by telling from my own heart.

Imagine the farmer's wonder and joy!

Tedlock¹⁶ writes, that a storytelling is a genre like no other genre of verbal art. It is he says, “a complex ceremony in miniature, encompassing aphorisms, public announcements, speeches, prayers, songs and even other narratives”.

Tedlock omits however, to mention the *listener* in the storytelling.

"Brilliant," whispered one of the listeners in my ear (a History professor and Zen practitioner I much respected) as he passed by my shoulder shortly later, in the lounge-room. I was still shaking, on a high of adrenalin. I smiled a wisp, looked down, flushed. I could not pretend that it was not important to hear this, at that moment. Ego feathers flurried and settled again into place. I sighed, and began to relax. I had lived. I was alive. I could tell again.

It is a shift in the quality of the experience which is significant in learning. If there is not a change in the *quality* of the experience, no learning can be said to have occurred. After my soirée telling of “The Teaching”, I had grown in confidence to tell stories again. The experience was transforming. Whitehead¹⁷ highlights “learning as a succession of transforming events”.

Now, if you believe that the pebbles in this story are magic, you are wrong...

However if you believe the pebbles in this story are not magic, you are also wrong...

Later, I drew the peasant at the moment of utter uncertainty of life or death -- as he is in the air moving towards the samurai -- sword outstretched.

Has the peasant become samurai at this moment? When I saw I had drawn someone “on fire” in the intensity of the moment I could see the samurai “spirit” infusing the peasant.

Eisner¹⁸ writes,

Representation, as I use the term, is the process of transforming the contents of consciousness into a public form so that they can be stabilised, inspected, edited, and shared with others.

Representation is what confers a publicly social dimension to cognition. Since forms of representation differ, the kinds of experiences they make possible also differ. Different kinds of experience lead to different meanings, which in turn, make different forms of understanding possible.

As visual artist, I know that putting my artwork ‘out there’ for others to converse with, is as much a part of a learning process as making the work. As storyteller, I inhabit and embody the storytelling, share it with others. As writer I share it with others. I hope this telling has been salutary -- for you.

Gassho.

¹⁶ 1983, p. 3

¹⁷ quoted in Neville, 2001, p. 9.

¹⁸ 1993, p. 6.

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Photo: *Evening Shadows*. Glenys Jackson.

Untitled

Drew Bourgeois

What can I do
With this feeling in my chest
That consumes me
that fills me

Do I run to it?
Do I pray for it to take me,
to use me
to bring
that.

How do I help?
What am I doing with these words I'm writing
This music I'm playing
This Bob Dylan I hear
And feel
How do I deal
When I know who I am
And I know who Dylan is.

His words are my own
He speaks only to me
And I only to him

Searching the words keep pouring
Do I need the pace to get quicker
As I lift the heartbeat
Feel the rush
Of trying
And caring
And running
With my heart bleeding in my chest
Like a Christ-type saviour
Offering himself in words
For the salvation of nothing but Himself.
For you,
For this.
For the everything that is
These words
These tears
This fucking apple computer.

It's love plain and simple
So simple we miss it
And lament its loss
That which never left

True love is so close
And yet I'm running towards the sun
And I'm writing these words.

How do I deal with these feelings I'm feeling?
How do I show you that everything is ok.
That no sound is dissonant which speaks of life.
That you are perfect and whole and you create suffering for yourself.

Listen to your words,
Young poet.
There is healing in your own passion.
Heed your own advice
And take refuge in this

Meet this painful compassion
This Selfless sadness
The words that make you wanna cry
and vomit
until there is nothing of you
and all beings are free.



Photo: *Cloud Mountains*. Glenys Jackson.

The Demon Along the Ancient Way

Stuart Solzberg

I, Layman True Heart, was walking the path of the Great Way with steadfast footsteps, through mountains, rivers, rainforests, cities and towns, valleys of mist, drenched in morning dew and birdsong. Walking the path, through grasses, weeds, and wildflower; upon dirt, sand, rock and concrete; amongst trees, clouds, tall buildings, small hidden temples, birds and beasts. As I journeyed this path, my whole being resonating oneness, my eyebrows entangled with all; I was alive not dead, awake not asleep, renewed not stagnant. And in my heart was realizing the following verse:

Wake up!
Don't be a fool!
It is only the beginning!
Everything prior is gone,
Let it go.
There is just this.
Just breathe.
Just Mu,
Like your life depends on it.
Mmmuuuuuuuuuuuuuu!

When something unusual happened...

A grizzly looking demon appeared blocking the Way. He had a grey unkempt beard, tattered black clothing, he smelt of urine, faeces and semen, bulging blood shot eyes, flaring nostrils, sharp yellow teeth, breathing heavily. He looked like a bull preparing to charge or a volcano about to erupt. The demon stood face to face with me, so close I could see my reflection in the shine of his eyes; I could smell his sour breath and feel his breath on my face.

Staring intensely at me, he was swaying on his feet from side to side while he groaned and moaned and howled like a coyote at the moon. He told me I was worthless, called me a piece of dried shit, told me I couldn't appreciate my life if it hit me in the face! He said he would skin me and eat me alive and decorate his cave with my bones. He said, "Does a dog have Buddhature?" As he took off all his clothes, got down on all fours, growling and barking like a rabid dog, showing me his gnarly sharp yellow teeth, frothing at the mouth.

I didn't know what else to do...I took off all my clothes, got down on all fours, eye to eye with this demon along the Ancient Way. I showed the demon my teeth, and growled and barked and howled like the meanest creature I could embody. I roared like a lion protecting its young, "Rrrrrroooooaaaaaarrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr!!!" The demon looked me dead in the eyes and laughed a belly laugh, and roared right back.

Bearing witness; intimately and intensely experiencing life and the human condition, our condition on this planet, I couldn't stop myself from saying aloud in a firm voice, "Where is the Buddha now? Where the fuck is the Buddha now! Is it I? Is it you, Demon? Is it both of us or neither of us? Is it elusive or right in front of me? What on earth is this thing called 'The Great Way?' Everything as it is, is the Enlightened Way, says Dogen. Oh where, oh where is the Buddha now!?" And in response, the demon then threatened to rip off my head and shit down my throat.

Then, without warning, the demon vanished. I couldn't help myself from wondering, what on earth had just happened? I could not fathom what had become of me as I lay in the fetal position, in the dirt, on the path of the Great Way. Covered in filth, sweat, bleeding from wounds on my

hands and knees, trying to catch my breath, I cried, I wept uncontrollably, for myself, for the demon, and for everything in between.

Then, as I calmed, I realized there was only one thing to do, get up and keep walking the path. As the old Japanese proverb says, ‘You fall down seven times you get up eight’, or as I like to say, “I vow to fall down and I vow to get back up.” And that’s what I did. The air was still; I could hear the sounds of leaves and twigs crunching underfoot. The sun beamed through the trees, glowing and warming my face; the smell of earth lingering in the air. I took a deep breath and let out a great sigh that at once made me smile and nearly cry. It was beautiful.

Feeling in harmony with the ten thousand things, when the demon appeared again, angrier and meaner than before. He didn’t say anything. I put my bare fists up to him and said, “C’mon, you want to take me? Go for it!” He still didn’t say anything. The demon just stood there staring at me for a while. I stared back. He then lunged like a leopard towards me, tackling me to the ground. I tried to fight him off, but my efforts were useless. I was spent and I was beaten. I had no energy left to fight him off. The demon grabbed me by the wrist and dragged me away along the path to his hidden cave. Once there, with little to no warning, he ripped off my arm and said, “Dinner.”

Laying on the ground by the entrance to his cave, I was cold, tired, scared, confused and blood drenched; in and out of consciousness I could see his cave was decorated with feathers, crystals, animal furs, flowers, and human remains. I watched as he prepared a fire and cooked my arm on a spit; the smells of my burning flesh wafting in the air. He cooked my arm to a blackened burnt crisp and then sat down by the fire to eat. Like a starved animal he ate every last little bit of meat, gristle and cartilage; sucking the marrow and the bones dry. All the demon said the entire time was, “Mmm, nice.”

After he finished eating, he had an ice pop for dessert. He offered me one. He had lime and I had raspberry. He propped me up leaning against the side of the cave, where we both sat enjoying our ice pops. We sat there silently by the fire for what felt like an incredibly long time. The sky grew dark, the stars shined, crackling of wood on fire, an orange glow; frogs chirping, owls cooing, bats flying, it was a magnificent night.

I have no idea how much time passed, but I was more than ready to welcome an end; I no longer could tell inside from out, birth from death, wisdom from ignorance, resting in the web of the many things, oddly appreciating my life. When the demon quietly and politely looked at me, smiled, lay me down and covered me with a warm animal skin and said, “Goodnight. See you in the morning.” And we both quickly fell into a deep, restful, peaceful sleep by the warmth and glow of the dying fire.



Kyosai Kawanabe, 1864 depiction of an oni chanting a Buddhist prayer. The oni (ogre or demon) is dressed in the robes of a wandering Buddhist priest. He carries a gong, a striker, and a *hogacho* (Buddhist subscription list). Via Wikimedia Commons [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kyosai_Oni_in_priest%27s_robos.jpg]



Photo: *Banana Leaf Shadows*. Glenys Jackson.

Atheist Spirituality: The Hidden Side of the God Debate

Philip Long

Religion and Spirituality

A distinction is commonly made in the discussion of religion nowadays between “religion” and “spirituality”. In this approach, “religion” is seen as “organized religion” with its attendant notions of structure, clericalism, hierarchy, doctrinal orthodoxy, tradition and community. In such organisations the individual cedes a certain degree of authority regarding religious thought and practice to the clerical hierarchy. In some of these organisations, such as Catholicism, the clergy are seen as interceding with God on behalf of the laity; direct access to the deity by unaided individual effort is in this view seen as fraught with danger and the possibility of error and is discouraged.

“Spirituality” in this analysis refers to personal, individual experience of the divine whether within or without organized religion, and includes responses to natural phenomena such as a beautiful sunset and the wonders of nature generally and also the practice of deep prayer and meditation in which the seeker looks within for a direct, personal connection to the divine. The individual may look to a spiritual guide or to a religious organisation for guidance but to a greater or lesser extent expects such guidance to refer to, and be borne out by, the individual’s direct experience. In some cases “spirituality” is used to mean specifically “non religious”, that is distinct from, and perhaps opposed to, religion. In this meaning the beliefs and experiences of the person are seen as purely private, individual and personal and as not having anything to do with any external, objective reality or being, natural or supernatural.

Thus “spirituality” covers a multitude of different experiences from a kind of scientifically based poetic-like insight into the wonders of nature at one end of the spectrum to the most mystical or apophatic experiences of the divine at the other. Although implacably opposed to “religion”, the New Atheists are not without their version of spirituality, although they differ widely amongst themselves on what exactly this is and what it signifies.

In this article I shall offer a survey of the wide range of atheistic spiritualities described by some of the New Atheists and try to get a feel for how these spiritualities relate to one another and to traditional mystic spirituality.

A Scientific Spirituality – Awe and Wonder

One sort of New Atheist spirituality is a kind of poetic awe and wonder based on the nature of the universe as discovered by science. In his book *The God Delusion* (1) Richard Dawkins refers to a response to nature as revealed by science which involves feelings of reverence, awe and wonder and which is characterised as quasi-mystical. (2) Dawkins refers to the claim that Einstein was religious and says that Einstein was in fact a pantheist; he says that pantheists “don’t believe in a supernatural God at all, but use the word God as a non-supernatural synonym for Nature, or for the Universe, or for the lawfulness that governs its workings.” (3) He distinguishes Einsteinian pantheism from theism and deism both of which he says posit a supernatural God. He states that he is only calling supernatural gods delusional. (4) He quotes Einstein as saying that what he sees in Nature is “a magnificent structure that we can comprehend only very imperfectly, and that must fill a thinking person with a feeling of humility. This is a genuinely religious feeling that has nothing to do with mysticism.” (5) He further quotes Einstein as referring to the “beauty and simplicity” of “something that our mind cannot grasp” that lies “behind anything that can be experienced” (6) and must “fill a thinking person with humility”. (7) Einstein says that in this sense he is religious and

Dawkins agrees that he too is religious in this sense so long as “cannot grasp” does not mean “forever ungraspable”. (8) Dawkins insists that this has nothing to do with the supernatural as referred to by conventional religion. (9) He finishes by saying: “I wish that physicists would refrain from using the word God in their special metaphorical sense.” (10)

As mentioned in an earlier article in this series, Dawkins in the Preface to the latest edition of his book *The God Delusion* answering his critics on the first edition, says specifically that he is not talking about “such subtle, nuanced religion” as that of sophisticated theologians like Tillich or Bonhoeffer. If this kind of religion predominated, he says, the world would be a better place and he would have written a different book. (11)

On the American TVO programme *The Agenda* published on YouTube on 3rd September, 2013, (12) Steve Paikan, the show’s host, interviewed Richard Dawkins and Lawrence Krauss on their new film *The Unbelievers* and at one point asked them about spirituality. Dawkins says that he considers himself:

...deeply spiritual in one sense, in the same sense that, perhaps, that Carl Sagan would have done, where I feel deeply moved in a poetic way by the sight of the Milky Way, by contemplation of the size of the universe, by contemplation of the immense span of geological time, by looking down a microscope at a single cell and seeing the intricate structure of a single cell and then reflecting that that cell is multiplied up trillions of times in my own body.

Krauss says that this is a better spirituality than religious spirituality. He objects to claims that science takes away spirituality “which is really awe and wonder at a sense of something bigger than oneself.” But what is bigger than oneself “doesn’t have to be unreal. It can be real and be part of an amazing cosmos.” He says that:

...being completely insignificant is uplifting and can be a spiritual experience. And every time I look at a Hubble Space Telescope picture, it’s spiritually uplifting. The spirituality of science is better than the spirituality of religion, because it’s real.

He admits that religion has some purpose. “Sure, we recognise that religion provides things, consolation, community. But the key thing is that it doesn’t have to be religion that provides these things.” Paikan asks if science can be spiritual and Dawkins replies that if by that he means what Krauss just called “awe and wonder or what Carl Sagan would have called awe and wonder, yes certainly.” He says that he is spiritual in the sense that he has “a poetic sensibility which is aroused by science and by the poetry of reality which is what science is.” Krauss concludes this part of the discussion by saying that the ideas of science are just as remarkable as the best symphonies or the plays of Shakespeare and they do the same thing. “They force us to reassess our place in the cosmos. They force us to reassess our views of ourselves ... You get a new perspective of yourself.”

Michael Shermer in his book *Why Darwin Matters* (13) addresses the compatibility of science and spirituality and concludes that there is no necessary conflict between them. In fact, he claims, with Dawkins and Krauss, that a scientific understanding of the world should be the preferred ground of a spirituality of awe and humility. For him, “spirituality is the quest to know the place of our essence within the deep time of evolution and the deep space of the cosmos.” (14) It is “a way of being in the world, a sense of one’s place in the cosmos, a relationship to that which extends beyond oneself”. (15) He says that there “are many sources of spirituality. ... Anything that generates a sense of awe may be a source of spirituality. Science does this in spades”. (16) He asks: “What could be more awe-inspiring – more numinous, magical, spiritual – than this cosmic visage” of the Big Bang and the expansion of the universe as established by Edwin Hubble’s discovery of the red shift of light from most other galaxies. (17) He finishes by saying that if

religion and spirituality are supposed to generate awe and humility in the face of the creator, what could be more awesome and humbling than the deep space discovered by Hubble and the cosmologists, and the deep time discovered by Darwin and the evolutionists? (18)

The Numinous and the Transcendent

Christopher Hitchens seems to go further. In his book *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (19) he makes no mention of the notion of spirituality as contrasted with the orthodox doctrines and practices of organised religion. His target is religion per se for which unlike other New Atheists he offers no definition. It was with considerable surprise, then, that I found that in a debate entitled *Is God great?* between Hitchens and Professor John C. Lennox in March, 2009, held at the Stamford University Socratic Club, and published on YouTube on 28th June, 2013, Hitchens asks how

... are people going to live when they've given up the supernatural and the superstitious? Are we still going to need ... I would say we are still going to need ... the numinous and the transcendent? That's innate in us too, as is reason, as is morality. (20)

He asks where the transcendent comes from and answers himself by saying:

I'm happy to say I don't really know what the wellsprings of the transcendent are in me or are in us. But it does us no good to say: 'Oh, don't you know? They come to you by divine permission'. Nothing is added; nothing is added by that explanation or that assumption. (21)

Meditative Empiricism

In his book *The End of Faith*, (22) after criticizing religious doctrine, Harris spends some time describing what he thinks of as spirituality which he associates with the sacred, with nondualistic notions from the East, with mysticism and with a kind of meditative empiricism. He states that there "is clearly a sacred dimension to our existence, and coming to terms with it could well be the highest purpose of human life." (23) A "certain range of human experience can be appropriately described as 'spiritual' or 'mystical' – experiences of meaningfulness, selflessness, and heightened emotion that surpass our narrow identities as 'selves' and escape our current understanding of the mind and brain." (24) These spiritual experiences "are real and significant and entirely worthy of our investigation, both personally and scientifically". (25)

He says that the "basis of our spirituality surely consists in this: the range of possible human experience far exceeds the ordinary limits of our subjectivity." (26) The changes that result from spiritual practice are "not merely emotional but cognitive and conceptual as well." (27) It is possible for us

... to have insights about the very nature of our own subjectivity. ... Such experiences are ... significant (in that they uncover genuine facts about the world), and personally transformative. They also "reveal a far deeper connection between ourselves and the rest of the universe than is suggested by the ordinary confines of our subjectivity. (28)

Furthermore, it is important "to realize that a healthy, scientific scepticism is compatible with a fundamental openness of mind." (29)

As to the rationality of such an enterprise, he says that mysticism "is a rational enterprise. Religion is not. ... The mystic has reasons for what he believes, and these reasons are empirical." (30) In relation to the investigation of subjectivity he says:

...the domain of our subjectivity constitutes a proper (and essential) sphere of investigation into the nature of the universe as some facts will be discovered only in consciousness, in first person terms, or not discovered at all. (31)

Speaking more generally of the human condition he says that: “Almost every problem we have can be ascribed to the fact that human beings are utterly beguiled by their feelings of separateness.” (32) Through meditation “the feeling we call “I” ... can disappear when looked for in a rigorous way. This is not a proposition to be accepted on faith; it is an empirical observation”. (33) In conclusion he says that man:

... is manifestly not the measure of all things. This universe is shot through with mystery. ... No myths need be embraced for us to commune with the profundity of our circumstance. No personal God need be worshiped for us to live in awe at the beauty and immensity of creation.” (34)

Conclusion

Although the New Atheists seem to be against all religion, the above references to what they have said and written discloses a much more nuanced approach. Clearly they wish to oppose traditional religion which they see as positing factual propositions about a supernatural, personal and interventionist deity and demanding literal commitment to these. In various ways, however, they acknowledge a legitimate place for spirituality in our lives from the poetic sensibility, the awe and wonder based on a scientific understanding of the universe, of Dawkins, Krauss and Shermer to the numinous, the transcendent of Hitchens to the rationalist, empiricist, meditative mysticism of Harris. Only Harris, however, explains in any detail the nature of a non-religious spirituality and its implications for our notion of self and its relation to the world, although Krauss and Shermer make some attempt at this.

From the point of view of a non-foundationalist traditional mysticism, however, these intimations of an atheist spirituality are incomplete. They are tentative, half-hearted and lacking in true commitment. They are not radical enough in their criticism of the self-deceiving approach of some religionists. As a result they are not free enough and are bound up in their own a priori assumptions. None of them, even Harris, fully understands the idea of the personal transformation and identification with the Absolute that take place on the religious journey. These spiritualities need to be intensified, deepened, opened up and followed to their logical conclusion. Because of the New Atheists' absolute objection to traditional religion they are tied to a literalist view of what they seek to oppose and thus to an unnecessarily narrow view of atheism. Their views are not, however, false in the sense of being absolutely wrong. Some religionists would see their approach as warning against idolatry and superstition which those religionists would also abhor. It is certainly possible that the two sides in the God Debate are both absolutely right and therefore both relatively wrong. What is lacking on both sides is the willingness to see the opponent's point of view. The problem is not so much what the participants in the debate are for as what they are against.

True mysticism speaks of an ultimate truth/reality which can be approached from many angles or points of view – for example, from a theist and an atheist point of view. This ultimate reality, when entered, justifies, transcends and transforms the point of view or way by which it is approached. That point of view, other points of view and the ultimate truth are opened up to each other in an integrated and holistic way. What is this ultimate truth? The paper is white; the ink is black. That is all we can say. We can say that the ultimate truth is existential, actional. We can say that the ultimate truth is Love. We can expose ourselves existentially to the Other without holding fast to the protection of any propositional truth, be touched by them and feel their love. But, ultimately, we are speechless. The ultimate truth can be expressed in many ways but all of these

will miss the mark unless we realise in our speaking them that they must fail, ultimately. If we do this our limited manner of expression will be informed by the ultimate truth and will be an expression of that truth.

Thus, from the point-of-view/no-point-of-view of ultimate truth the spiritualities expressed by the New Atheists must be seen as not-ultimate, that is, relative, because they seek to avoid this deeper aspect of their own truth. They place their spirituality in a determinate place within a limited, rational, word-bound worldview and reject all other worldviews. This is the accusation of scientism which is often made against them. Even Harris who goes furthest towards a liberated expression of the true nature of the spiritual, insists on the abandonment of the whole notion of a supernatural God and on the employment of “reason” to discover the truth by means of meditation and other “rational” spiritual practices. Whose reason? Which supernatural? Which God? What would a rationality of the infinite, the transcendent, the numinous, look like? Would it be like the rationality of New Atheists?

Encountering the ultimate truth can appear to be a frightening thing. Our normal ego-mind fears annihilation or entrapment. Once the “move” is made, however, we find that far from being frightening the ultimate truth relieves us of all worry. We are not in charge of everything; we are not responsible for everything. We can let the truth act itself out. We can let reality do the work of “realitising”. We can delight in unburdening ourselves of the monstrous, solipsistic grandiosity of the two-year-old. Thus we see that both we and the world we live in are fundamentally benign. We can enjoy a life of participation, co-operation and play. “*Singing and dancing are the voice of the law.*” The New Atheists appear reluctant to take up the challenge of realising this ultimate truth. They see it as unbridled licence, irrational superstition, make-believe, whereas in fact it is ordered, law-like, perfectly rational, self-evident truth. They cling to the safety, the false certainty, of their a-priori-bound “rational” worldview.

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Rapunzel

Sarah Sherringham

There was a baby with a little speck of longing.
A little speck of longing goes a long way!
It drove her mother mad to carry her,
and sorceress-magic could not contain her.
And the tale that wound around her is not a short one –
one which I measure, where I can, by my own feeling.

We meet her at a point of stillness, or stasis, or held breath;
A blooming youth kept in isolation, with only a little ache
where another name might have been.
She is: Self-bound. Tower-bound. Bordered by empty wilds.
She can read and sing and embroider and sigh
but nothing she does is of any use.
That little speck of longing grew and grew into
limitless ridiculous lengths of hair...
The very cells of her body are aching for destinations,
they course and flow and ferment and are spent
and the hair piles up in excess and death.

By night she walks about her tower room, feeling that longing
thick and heavy as a snake pouring down her back. The weight of it wallows
with unspent energies, destinies denied. With her comb, she quietly sits to trace
the languid shape of her stopped-off days.

Poor wretched prince. Riding beneath the forest-tower,
that little speck of longing fixed him in its gaze, and would not let go.
For him, the hair was cut, the girl discarded into the wilds,
he himself was hurled from the tower
and his eyes torn out on thorns. The story winds and binds us all,
our feeling measures it; the breath suddenly expelled.

We measure the severed shafts of hair.
The short starkness, shorn from the past.
In this moment, she could be whatever she wants.
She has been cut. She could walk right out of this story.

We learn instead that she passed years in wandering, searching,
her feet sweeping that path clean, right down to the last speck.
We learn that her tears had the power to restore sight.
And when Rapunzel comes home, we feel – we know – it is all just right.



Apsara- are female heavenly spirit dancers of the clouds and waters in Buddhist and Hindu mythology. These beautiful stone bas-reliefs, many hundreds of them adorning the crumbling ruins of the Angkorian Temples in Cambodia, are mostly from the 8th. - 13th. century AD.

Traditional Apsara dancers are described as celestial maidens, usually the wives of musicians, living in Indra's heaven.

Photo: Aspara. Glenys Jackson.

Which is the True Ch'ien?

Subhana Barzaghi Roshi

One of my favorite Zen stories and koans appears in Case 35 of 'The Gateless Barrier'. The koan is based on an old Chinese folk story of the girl Ch'ien. The reason why this story appears in full in our Zen sect is because, Wu-tsu asked a priest, "In the case of the separation of the spirit of the girl Ch'ien, which is the true Ch'ien?"

I loved this intriguing story and koan to such an extent that when I was asked to give my very first teisho in front of the old man, Aitken Roshi at Koko-an Zendo in Hawaii, in 1995, I choose this Koan. The original story is cited in the "Lui-show-li-hwan-ki", and recounted in Aitken Roshi's commentary on this case in the Gateless Barrier (p.214-215):

There lived in Han-yang a man called Chang-Kien whose child-daughter, Ch'ien, was of peerless beauty. His nephew Wang Chau, was a very handsome boy, the children often played together and were fond of one another. Once Kien jestingly said to his nephew: "Some day I will marry you to my daughter". Both children remembered these prophetic words, and had believed themselves thus betrothed.

Ch'ien grew into a beautiful, desirable eligible woman. A man of rank asked her father for her hand in marriage and her father decided to comply with the request, thinking that this was a worthy suitor for his daughter. Ch'ien was deeply troubled by her father's decision. When Chau heard of this news, he was hurt and aggrieved and resolved immediately to leave home and travel to another province. The next day he secured a boat ready for his journey and after sunset, without bidding farewell to any one, with a heavy heart he silently proceeded up the river. In the middle of the night the moonlight pooled in the boats rippled wake and spilled out along the river's banks. In this half light Chau was startled by a voice calling to him, 'Wait!- it is I' and glimpsed a girl running along the bank toward the boat. His heart skipped a beat, he was unspeakably delighted when he recognized it was Ch'ien. She sprang into the boat and the lovers found their way safely to the province of Chuh.

In the province of Chuh they lived happily for six years and bore two children. As the years past, Ch'ien was plagued by feelings of sadness and guilt and missed her estranged parents and longed to see them again.

Eventually she plucked up the courage to speak to her husband: "Because in former times I could not bear to break the promise made to you, I ran away with you and forsook my parents – although knowing I owed them all possible duty and affection. Would it now be well to try to obtain their forgiveness?"

"Do not grieve my dear", said Chau, "We shall go to see them." He ordered a boat to be prepared and a few days later he returned with his wife to Han-yang.

According to custom in such cases, the husband first went to the house of Kien, leaving Ch'ien alone in the boat.

Kien welcomed his nephew with every sign of joy and said, "How much I have longed to see you! I was often afraid that something terrible had happened to you."

Chau answered respectfully, "I am distressed by the undeserved kindness of your words. I have come to beg your forgiveness".

But Kien did not seem to understand. He asked, "To what matter do you refer?"

Mustering some courage, "I feared," said Chau rather hesitantly, "That you were angry with me for having run away with Ch'ien. I took her with me to the province of Chuh."

"What Ch'ien was that?" Asked Kien.

"Your daughter Ch'ien", answered Chau, beginning to suspect his father-in-law of some malevolent design.

"What are you talking about?" cried Kien, with astonishment. "My daughter Ch'ien has been sick in bed all these years ever since you left."

"Your daughter Ch'ien, returned Chau, becoming angry, "Has not been sick. She has been my wife for six years and we have two children. We have both returned to this place to seek your pardon. Therefore please do not mock us!"

For a moment the two looked at each other in shocked awkward silence. Then Kien arose and motioning to his nephew to follow led the way to an inner room where a sick girl was lying. And Chau to his utter amazement saw the face of Ch'ien – beautiful, but strangely thin and pale.

"She cannot speak", explained the old man, "but she can understand." And Kien said to her laughingly, "Chau tells me that you ran away with him, and that you gave him two children." The sick girl looked at Chau and smiled, but remained silent.

"Now come with me to the river," said the bewildered Chau to his father-in-law. "For I can assure you in spite of what I have seen in this house that your daughter Ch'ien is at this moment in my boat."

They went down to the river and there, indeed was the young wife Ch'ien waiting. Upon seeing her father, she bowed down before him and besought his pardon.

Kien said to her, "If you really are my daughter, I have nothing but love for you. Yet though you seem to be my daughter, there is something which I cannot understand... come with us to the house."

So the three proceeded toward the house and as they neared it, they saw the sick girl Ch'ien who had been bed ridden for years, rose up and came out to meet them, smiling in delight. And as the two Ch'iens approached each other, even though nobody could ever understand how, they suddenly melted into each other and became one person, one Ch'ien even more beautiful and radiant than before and showing no signs of sickness or sorrow.

Kien said to Chau: "Ever since the day of your leaving my daughter was dumb, lost, disconnected and most of the time like a person who had taken too much wine. Now I understand that her spirit was absent."

Ch'ien herself said: "Really I never knew that I was at home. I saw Chau going away in silent anger and the same night I dreamed that I ran after his boat... but now I cannot tell which was really 'I', the 'I' that went away in the boat, or the 'I' that stayed at home.

Our Koan study requires us to take up the last point, “Which is the true Ch’ien?” It is not enough to say they were one from the beginning. We must realise and embody the true Ch’ien here and now.

This old folk story is delightful in of itself, although more than a 1,000 years old, this story is still a useful metaphor for each of our lives, it is rich and layered in symbolism and there are multiple ways to enter into it and explore it. How I would like to approach it, is to go beyond the colorful drama and content and explore it as a teaching story, a process of healing and realization.

The story can be broken into three parts: the first phase of the process is, being separated - the split Ch’ien, representing the illusion of duality; the second part is, Ch’ien’s sense of longing to return home, representing the turning point and ones deep longing for reconciliation of the heart; the third part is when the two Ch’iens unite, representing integration, the return to wholeness, oneness, true intimacy and transformation.

The first phase - Ch’ien’s spirit is divided and separated.

If we take this story as our own story, how often do we live our lives in a fragmented, compartmental way, alienated from our environment, caught up in our own personal woes and ambitions and become disconnected and unresponsive to the people around us? If we are not mindful our attention can become split off and we are no longer congruent, no longer grounded and living an authentic life. For example, if you look into your own emotional and psychological states of mind, you may be thinking one thing, feeling another, saying something else and doing something entirely different. So many people are cut off or disconnected from their emotions or overwhelmed by them, either way this split disables one.

I find that my practice is a fine antenna to attune to my emotional currents, sense and feel into my experience, regulate and process particularly painful emotions. Mindfulness helps us to heal the splits in our psyche, process the pain and difficulty and let go of that psychological conflict, such inner attention is necessary for integrity and maturity.

At a deeper level, according to the Buddha’s teachings, this sense of separation and duality originates from identifying with false and limited notions and ideas about oneself, other and our world. This mistaken belief of a permanent, separate, entity called ‘self’, existing apart from the world is the root cause of much of our suffering. As Yasatani Roshi said, “The fundamental delusion of humanity is to suppose that ‘I’ am here and ‘you’ are out there”. The mind gets stuck in the world of conventional binaries and dualistic concepts, e.g., subject/object, self/other, oneness/emptiness, true/false, light/dark, body/soul.

The practice of ‘Just Sitting’ helps us to cut through those binaries. For me, silent illumination practice is to be with the raw, beautiful wild, vulnerable, ego unpredictable, unpinned down alive present moment and to notice and rein in my mind’s tendency to career off into fascination, speculation, anticipation of future reverie or dwelling in nostalgia, the haunted house of the past.

In this dramatised analogy, there was one Ch’ien who was sick, lying prone on a bed, like a ghost, living with her parents at home, not knowing she was at home. We can imagine that she was either depressed or lost in a romantic illusion, caught in dreaming, ambivalence and longing for a life elsewhere with her lover. When we split off from the present moment and lean so far into the future, we drain our vital energy and are basically ineffective, held captive to our unfulfilled longing. In this story Ch’ien was completely laid low.

Another major way in which we create suffering and alienation for ourselves and others is by clinging to our fixed opinions, judgments, views and beliefs. Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh created the first precept of the 'Order of Interbeing' which states: "Do not be idolatrous about or bound to any doctrine, theory or ideology – this includes Buddhist ones", because of the conflict, division and even great chasms between nation states that such fixed ideologies and religious intolerance creates.

The second phase – the longing to return home

The other Ch'ien was a wife married to her husband, a mother of two children living in a far city. Secretly running away, eloping with her lover, no doubt had its honeymoon years, yet this split inevitably causes her deep unresolved angst and regret about causing her parents such suffering.

For me personally, whenever there is a rupture with friends or some family discord, I explore my side of the fence and try to examine what is my contribution to this issue. Discord niggles away and causes me *dukkha*, it gives rise to a longing and wholesome intention in me to find harmony again.

Often one of our first wake up calls out of our slumbering ignorance is when we encounter the transience of life, the drum roll of sickness, loss of loved ones, ageing, grief, sorrow and death. When we are intimate with the impermanent nature of all things we recognize that there is nothing that we can hang onto in life that is permanent, solid and enduring. The face of impermanence gives rise to an underlying dissatisfaction the Buddha called *dukkha*. Hence the question arises, is there something more or what remains from this torrent of infinite change?

Ch'ien longs to see her parents again and longs for reconciliation and forgiveness. This is a wholesome longing of the heart's desire to find peace and ease. The deepest longing of love is not completely resolved in the arms of our lover no matter how sweet that is. This deep longing is the heart's longing for itself, to recognise its own original face, it is the longing to return to our true home and sit by that ancient charcoal fire.

The third phase – reunion, oneness and realization

In the story: The Ch'ien who was sick in bed rose up in delight to meet the Ch'ien who returned and stepped out of the boat. As the two Ch'iens approached one another they merged into one Ch'ien even more beautiful and radiant than before, free of sickness and sorrow.

Another aspect is reflected in this story, which is probably more relevant to women, particularly historically. Women have been defined and experienced themselves by traditional stereotypical roles with their embedded social norms and familial expectations. Ch'ien was a daughter and had obligations and duty to her parents, she was a loving wife with responsibilities to her husband and children.

Roles, status, jobs; they are an impermanent set of conditions, they dissolve, reform, change and come to an end. When you over-identify with your role in life, whether you are a student, doctor, teacher, parent, gardener, technician, etc., this identity formation tends to define who you think you are, which is a very limited perspective of the truth of one's being. I have my own little ritual of shedding when I return home from work at the end of the day. I remind myself that being a teacher or psychotherapist is just a role with a set of responsibilities, and to leave off that cloak at the doorstep.

Armed with the tools of mindfulness, the spirit of inquiry and concentration, we can inquire into this whole identification process, see through the constructs of our ego identification with role, personality, beliefs, one's conditioning, we can see through the "I, me, my" anxious dramas, see through the ego's 'selfing' process and liberate ourselves from our own small-mindedness.

There are irreconcilable tensions in this story between one's duty and love, honor and virtue, torn loyalties between freedom of choice and tradition. One can feel the crucible and cross of such a dilemma. If Ch'ien stays at home to honor her parents she loses her lover; if she runs off with her lover, she loses her relationship with her parents. There is a deeper communion that requires some soul searching. Ch'ien's maturity and ours requires us to stop and be in communion with our original face without definition, that knows no separation, no bounds.

"Which is the true Ch'ien?" needs to be resolved, needs to be realised.

When my heart is open wide, like the clear sky, I can embrace each person, each moment, the dark night and the bright day as none other than my very self. It is an inclusive, infinite varied oneness of heart, a true meeting.

If we see the world from the Bodhisattva's point of view that the actuality of our daily lives and the essential world are intrinsically one and the same, one indivisible whole, then our daily actions - driving the car, cooking the evening meal, cleaning the house - are all manifestations of the Tao. The summer heat, the clear sky, the smell of coffee, our feelings of vulnerability and the array of meandering thoughts are the very texture and body of the Buddha and the interconnected net of Indra.

Ch'ien's radiant union invites us to reconcile with all aspects of our being. Not to change from one form into another but rather to enable us to experience this ancient truth of oneness and formlessness, right here where we stand. Discover our quiet affinity with.....the way of true intimacy, true peace and happiness.

This story and case ends with Wu-men's beautiful Verse:

Moon and clouds are the same
Mountains and Valleys are different
All are blessed, all are blessed
Is this one? Is this two?

(p.213)

"The moon and clouds are the same", is a poetic line referring to the wisdom that realizes, that all beings by nature are Buddha, it is realizing the essential empty one ground of our true nature. "Mountains and valleys are different", refers to the differentiated world of uniqueness; each blade of grass, each snowflake and each fingerprint is utterly unique and unrepeatable. But if we cannot see into the essential empty world and only see and get caught in our uniqueness our differences, then we are separated from the essential truth of our being which is vast, fathomless and liberating. The Bodhisattva way is to nurture our longing to return home to find our unity with all beings; this then is indeed a blessed outcome.

Reference:

The Gateless Barrier – The Wu-Men Kuan, (1991) translated and with a commentary by Robert Aitken, North Point Press, San Francisco.



Photo: *Feet of the Buddha. Angkor Wat.* Glenys Jackson.



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