

# Mind Moon Circle

*Journal of the Sydney Zen Centre*



**ZEN AND THE SHADOW**

WINTER 2016

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# **Grandmother Hilda - Out of the shadows**

## **Releasing the shame that binds**

**Subhana Barzaghi**

It was a rare occasion to have afternoon tea at the Channon Tea House with my grandmother Betty Robbins, my mother, my brother Phillip, sister Narelle and myself. Although Grandma was elderly she had bravely driven down from Brisbane to the Northern Rivers region of N.S.W. in the summer of 1984. For the five of us to be together under the one roof was something that had not happened for three decades since we were young children.

Grandmother Betty was a spritely woman from a good resilient Scottish stock who rarely had a sick day in her life. Sadly, grandfather died from a heart attack in his mid-fifties leaving Betty to live for another forty years alone. Betty played lawn bowls even in her eighties and maintained her fitness with her daily walks along Queens Parade and Redcliff beach. Determined and self-reliant she continued to live in her own home until she was ninety years of age. She loved and collected antique grand clocks of all shapes and sizes, which were positioned in every nook and cranny of her house. I remember as a child feeling like miniature Alice in wonderland in her house, that I was living inside one big chiming grandmotherly clock. She was a generous warm and friendly soul, good-natured with a down to earth humour. Even in her nineties her mind was lucid and present, she was tuned into worldly events and the last lively conversation I had with her at 92 years of age was about the foolishness of George W. Bush and the craziness of the Iraq war.

At the Channon Tea House on a warm relaxed summer afternoon the pleasantries of an English afternoon tea arrived with scones, cream, strawberry jam and pots of Darjeeling tea. After the normal greetings and catch-up, suddenly out of nowhere from the far recesses of my mind, like an indigestible seed that just had to be vomited out, I suddenly blurted out over the china cups, "What happened to Grandma? ... Dad's mother I mean?" This question shocked and dumbfounded everyone at the table, including me. It was like the bad fairy had come along and tipped the teapot upside down spilling and staining the white tablecloth with shadows from the past.

Stunned expressions were cast across my brother and sister's faces, as if to say have you gone a bit mad? There was no preamble or entree. It seemed like a crazy question to ask that made absolutely no sense given that Grandma Betty was sitting opposite me and she was the only grandmother that we had ever known.

However, in that moment, I realised that she was my father's stepmother and not his biological mother and therefore Betty was not our biological grandmother. I cannot explain how this realisation suddenly dawned on me. There was no information or story that I could consciously recall where I had been told that Betty was our step-grandmother. I do have a psychic intuitive ability at times and have come to trust that over the years.

There was a long awkward silence before Betty spoke. "Peter's (my father) mother 'Hilda' died when he was a teenager," admitted Betty. "So," I asked curiously, "What happened to her, how did she die?" Betty's voice faltered betraying the awkwardness of the situation. "She took a lot of pills," she stammered.

My antenna was now on hyper alert, sensing that we had just headed into unknown and perhaps forbidden territory. The hound in me picked up the scent, “What do you mean, she took a lot of pills? How many pills?” I kept pressing.

“A lot of pills,” Betty stressed, her brow furrowing with concern.

Again there was a long pause and an old familial weighty silence hushed the table. It was like that strange eerier silence that comes after the first earthquake shock wave and everyone is poised, alert, bracing themselves for the after shocks.

“Do you mean to say, she took an overdose of pills accidentally or did she commit suicide,” I asked, my voice trailing into a whisper.

Betty silently nodded; she could not actually utter the word ‘suicide’. Shame fell like a frozen blanket of shock over the table.

It somehow took two generations to pass by before an unconscious splinter pierced through into my internalised genogram, into a grand-daughter’s mind on an innocent summers day over an English afternoon tea party - to possibly think and ask the unthinkable, to say the unnameable. Emotion at the table was poised, held in suspension. Phillip and Narelle sat there stunned their mouths tightly shut. Mum visibly upset now uttered under her breath that Peter had told her the story of his mother’s death just after they were newly weds. “Peter, forbade me to tell you,” she said, tears welling behind her eyes.

Years later I discovered that my biological Grandmother Hilda had died at 42 years of age. She had been buried twice, the first time literally and the second time concealed out of mind, silenced to the shadows and frozen out of our minds and hearts. She did not exist in my mind until now. It was a dark, shameful family secret but now the shadow was present at the table, like an unwelcome guest.

Hilda was born in the early 1900’s in a white Anglo-Saxon Christian conservative culture which viewed suicide as a cardinal sin and hence the family member was often not even given a proper burial. The priest could refuse to perform the funeral rites. It brought shame and disgrace to any family. That story had now been prised open and her life and pain had opened up an array of questions that flooded through my mind. Was it an accident or not? Who was she? Was she depressed? Who found her? Why did she do it? Where was she buried or cremated? Were her sons who were young boys at the time allowed to attend her funeral? While these questions rattled me, I was still, however, so shocked that I could not actually ask Betty any further questions. All those bits of information like an archaeological dig gradually came to the surface years later.

It was enough for now. I sipped at my cold tea and finished my scone leaving an indigestible lump in my stomach. Betty had graciously told us the painful truth, the shameful trance was broken and I was so grateful for her honesty. That afternoon, there was a new addition to the family reunion. Our tea party had grown and Hilda’s ghost was the unexpected guest. I silently drank tea to the Grandmother that I never knew.

My brother was quick to grasp the implications of this story and we later puzzled over its repercussions. I went home and bawled my eyes out. I cried for the grandmother that I had and the one I never knew. A spectre had arisen out of the dark reaches of the past; she had been buried but now not forgotten.

A whole lot of missing pieces from the family jigsaw puzzle had finally fallen into place. For the first time, I felt a quivering of compassion for my father. I was aware that Dad had never

bonded with Betty and now I had an inkling why. The sudden death of his mother when he was a young boy edging into adolescence would have been a terrible loss for him and his younger brother. His relationship with his mother was obviously bound up with love and then a curtain of shame. It was forbidden territory so terrible that one could not even mention her name. I began to understand the relationship between his abrupt loss of his mother and his abrupt departure from our family and the severing of connection with his own children. I suspect that Dad probably shut down after Hilda's sudden death, closed his heart as a young man. There was probably no grief counselling or emotional support available at that time. Men 'soldiered on with a stiff upper lip'. It started to make sense why my father was and still is so cut off from his emotions, his amputated affect, his introverted self-absorbed stance in life, his inability to communicate and reach out and take an interest in his own children's affairs. His frozen pain and therefore frozen love.

I pondered on how to reconcile this story and turned to my Zen practice. The koan that spoke to me and offered another dimension of healing to the family shadow was 'Save a Ghost.' This koan is part of the Miscellaneous Koan Collection and requires a deep understanding and realisation that dissolves the dualistic sense of separation between oneself and a ghost in this particular case. 'Save a Ghost' addresses an underlying broader Bodhisattva quest and question; how do we save all beings, how do we save anyone or anything? To save oneself and all beings is to wake up from the illusion of separation and to realise our true intimacy with all beings.

I became curious about the character dimension to this koan, which brought me face to face with the ghost. The 'ghost' is a metaphor and like all metaphors offers fluid interpretations. The 'ghost' in this koan is not referring to a childhood cartoon caricature of a ghost but hints at the 'hungry ghost' referred to in our Zen meal sutras. The 'hungry ghost' is an analogy for the restless, clinging, never-ending, wanting mind, never satisfied, which is marked as one of the root causes of suffering. The 'ghost' can stand in for our shadow, the disowned, the neglected, the fearful parts or exiled parts of our own psyche or it could be the shadow in the family system or our wider cultural legacy. To 'save a ghost' requires a fearless presence, an honesty and willingness to meet and know that which resides just on the outskirts of consciousness, to turn towards it and be intimate with all that it entails.

I sought to apply the understanding and wisdom of this koan to help me address and heal the shame of our family secret. The circumstances of Grandmother Hilda's death will never be fully known, whether it was an accidental overdose or her attempt to self-medicate against myocarditis (a viral infection to the heart that became fatal) or suicide – which resulted in sudden cardiac arrest from the overdose. However one turns the dice the result was that her death was cast in shadow.

What became important to me was to heal the family shame that binds us and to release Hilda's spirit and give her a seat at the family table. Shame can no longer continue to haunt us when it is brought out in the open and shared. For what was buried and lost to the shadows when resurrected into the light creates the possibility of healing and liberation. With these few morsels of information I felt an urge to write a letter to my long lost grandmother.

*Dear Grandmother Hilda,*

*Welcome, there is a seat at our family table; I am keeping it warm for you. You are no longer banished; the shame has been dispelled. No doubt you had dreams for a life beyond the*

*mundane shores of domesticity. I see the heart that failed you was also a heart full of love that flowed over and produced two young boys, who grew and fathered children in their turn that you would never know. You lived through the ravages of the Second World War and I can only barely imagine the scars of those dark times. I sense you struggled with your own dark nights of vulnerability and fear as we all do, surfing the 10,000 joys and sorrows of a life to the best of our ability. Whatever pain you suffered from myocarditis, whether your heart gave way or it all became too much for you to bear, I do not blame you, I understand that now. Perhaps it was an accident and you didn't intend to die when you did. Whatever the secret burden that shrouded your death, the veil is lifted now. You have become another hole in the family flute from the sweet music of forgiveness. You did not know you were an angel in disguise. I see you now and you are beautiful, you are free, unburdened, you have wings. The empty chair is filled with your scent of light, your presences graces our table of belonging once more. Would you like to have some tea and scones?*

All that frightens me I turn into holy incense ash and offer it up to the altar of the heart that dissolves all boundaries. A much loved Sufi poet from Persia, Muhammad Hafiz encapsulates the sentiments of forgiveness in his poem, *My Sweet, Crushed Angel*.

***You have not danced so badly, my dear,  
Trying to hold hands with the beautiful one.  
Our partner is notoriously difficult to follow,  
And even his best musicians are not always easy to hear.  
You have not danced so badly, my dear,  
You have actually waltzed with tremendous style,  
O my sweet, O my sweet crushed angel.***

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## Woman With Wings



Drawing, gold and silver oil sticks: Subhana

## The Song of the Butcher Birds

Helen Sanderson

Early in the still grey air  
Butcher birds sang an early morning prayer  
Butcher bird 1: Joy to the world  
Butcher bird 2: Here comes the day  
Together: Life is for singing  
We warble and pray.

## You Can't Get a Hold of It!

Maggie Gluek

Ah, shadow, that old trickster. That original shape-shifter. Now short and fat, now tall and skinny, like Fun House mirrors. Now a grand giant, and now an imp hiding. Now you see it, now you don't. Shadow plays in the illuminated world, and dances too. Sometimes it is summoned as entertainment...*there's a fox, and, there—oh, look out, rabbit!* But always when it appears, whether one is conscious of this or not, it is a reminder of the fluidity of existence, a mysterious two-dimensional upaya.

*All things are under the law of change. They are a dream, a phantom, a bubble, or a shadow.* The beautiful metaphors of the Diamond Sutra point to the fact that no form endures as a substantial or separate reality. Thus the shadow of this apparently solid body of mine—it's me!!—reveals not-me. One cannot be separated from the other. Self-nature is no-nature after all. But isn't there a lifetime of work in effectively embodying this realisation of not-self? In the language of the Diamond Sutra, you must realise this too: *a body is not a body; therefore it is called a body.* The next step is again and again returning to the market-place, to the ordinary, to living your life generously. Don't chase representations, don't get tangled in ideas. Hi there!

In the language of psychology, the construction called “shadow” also points to what is perceived as “not me.” Not in this case to something universal but to a particular unacknowledged part of one's personality, lying in shadow, unseen and indeed disowned. Paradoxically it *can* be seen in individuals who happen to embody the quality of character you deny in yourself. The clue that you are meeting such an individual is that the encounter creates psychic disturbance for you. Heat! Once recognized, then you just might reclaim and accept this quality in yourself.

A personal example: Having been schooled or having somehow decided to hold back rather than to risk putting myself forward I have tended through my life to be timid. And easily intimidated and put off by strongly competitive people. *I'm not like THAT!* An aggressive game player (my husband at Anagrams, say) angers and unsettles me. I am afraid of failure, but the fact is, I want to win! Though in school I competed intensely with myself, and therefore did well, opting out of competition may have closed many doors. While no doubt other doors have opened, I think it's important not to be afraid of your own power.

I wonder whether fear is not the real shadow in the psyche, for everyone. Whatever you don't want to face becomes stronger and scarier as it remains unexamined over time, as you cling to a misperception, an imagined story. Like the bogeyman under the bed whom you don't want to see. The more you refuse to look, the more and more real “he” becomes. There's an old Chinese story about a man who is offered a cup of wine by his friend. He looks in the cup and sees a snake but nevertheless, albeit with horror, he drinks the wine so as not to offend his friend. Thereupon he becomes extremely ill, convinced the snake has poisoned him. The matter is finally resolved when the “snake” is revealed to be the shadow of his friend's bow which hangs on the wall, reflected in the cup. Learning this, the man is no longer deceived and he instantly becomes well again.

True healing, psychological or spiritual, comes with seeing clearly, seeing through false perceptions and assumptions. And, it seems to me, it is always about wholeness, integrating the other side. Light is shadow's most intimate self!

Zen training begins with taking the decision to meditate. I did so with apprehension because I was sure that, if I looked “inside”, I would find my personal demons, those dark dimensions I had been avoiding my whole life. Guess what? You know. No bogeymen. Just hindrances in the mind, as the Heart Sutra puts it, thoughts and feelings that appear and dissolve like everything else. Not that fear doesn’t still arise with the unfamiliar, the unknown, the uncontrollable. At an extreme there is the valley of the shadow of death, a powerful condition to pass through. But practice lends perspective.

I am heartened in remembering Mahakala, wrathful Tantric deity, protector of the Dharma and manifestation of Avalokitesvara. Black and terrifying in aspect, he tramples delusion and as the Lord of Time subsumes the universe. Hello, darkness, my old friend! Maybe it doesn’t feel that friendly at 3 am when the world is in shadow and the mind subsumed in chaotic thoughts. Who said anything about perspective? What is it? To pinch a line from case 86 of the Blue Cliff Record, and out of context even—*The darkness is dark, dark*. But really, that’s all there is to it. The darkness is dark, dark. Just so.

Untitled



Photo: Caroline Josephs

## **I take up the way of Not Stealing**

**Brendon Stewart**

Self nature is subtle and mysterious. In the realm of the unattainable Dharma, not having thoughts of gaining is called the Precept of Not Stealing.

Leaving again for the front at 3.30pm.  
Arrived at 12 mile airdrome by truck  
& marched to commando's camp at Laloki,  
arriving after dark.  
Bedded down for the night,  
very tired.  
Saturday, re-equipped  
Left 4.30pm & marched to Goldie River  
(Harold Stewart)

A war story

We might be inclined to equate the second precept with "thou shalt not steal" as in the Ten Commandments. But the second precept is not a commandment and is not understood in this same way. A more literal translation from the early Pali texts is "I undertake the precept to refrain from taking that which is not given."

To refrain from taking that which is not given is more than just respecting other people's property. This second precept by way of paradox can also be an incentive to practice generosity. Stealing may be an attempt to relieve genuine distress and hardship. In this case a compassionate response to what seems like a misdemeanor is called for. And yes, it can be relatively easy to find the compassion when attempting to adjudicate in some circumstance that may only involve material things, food stolen from a supermarket by a hungry person, or the waywardness of a young person caught in the heat of showing off. What is at stake when it comes to lands taken without being freely given or cultural treasures plundered and appropriated?

I fell unwittingly into my Zen practice not long after coming home from living for half a dozen years in the United Kingdom. There is a strong resonance for me with my Anglo-Australian culture-scape. My cultural reach embraces the landscapes and histories that shape and embrace this complexity.

John Cooper, my yoga teacher at the time introduced me to Zen. His friend Robert Aitken Roshi and his wife Anne were on their first visit to Sydney in 1979. A little time beforehand John offered his yoga students the chance to experience Zazen one Saturday afternoon at his home in Boronia Park.

Robert Aitken came to Zen while spending time as a civilian prisoner in a Japanese internment camp near to the city of Kobe during the Second World War. To wile away the days, weeks and years he took up the study of haiku.

And then...

One evening a guard came into my room, quite drunk, waving a book in the air and saying in English, "This book, my English teacher . . ." He had been a student of R.H. Blyth at Kanazawa, and the book, *Zen in English Literature and Oriental Classics*, had just recently been published. I was in bed but jumped up to look at the book and was immediately fascinated. I persuaded the guard to lend it to me, and weeks later he bought another copy for me so that he could have his own copy back.

I suppose I read the book ten or eleven times straight through. As soon as I finished it, I would start it again. I had it almost memorized and could turn immediately to any particular passage. It was my "first book," the way *Walden* was the "first book" for some of my friends, the way *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* was the "first book" for Gandhi. Now when I look at it, even the type looks different, far smaller in size, and the references to Zen seem less profound. But it set my life on the course I still maintain, and I trace my orientation to culture - to literature, rhetoric, art, and music - to that single book.

It wasn't until May 1944 when the camps around Kobe were combined and housed together in a former reform school: Rinkangaku, in Futatabi Park on the hills above Kobe. It was here that Robert Aitken was able to meet Mr. Blyth.

After a time we established the intimate relationship we were to maintain until his death in 1964, and which we still maintain today, though he has been dead a long time.

I sometime wonder whether Robert Aitken ever thought about that gruff, drunk guard and his part in how that single book coloured his appreciation of literature, rhetoric, art, and music. I never did sesshin with Aitken Roshi. I was once however his driver, picking Anne and him up from the airport on one of their visits to Sydney. He wasn't in the least bit interested in my recently purchased old Mercedes 220 SE; I on the other side of this awkwardly silent exchange was quite besotted by the car.

So too was John Tarrant Roshi, a car buff and one time favourite son in the Diamond Sangha until falling out over the Dharma and Sangha relations. I attended a number of sesshins with John which I enjoyed. I wish I'd got to know him better. He liked the Mercedes:

Tuning the Mercedes goes like this:  
After I have despaired three times  
And three times cursed my poverty, my impracticality  
And the sorrow in the body  
As three useless things,  
After I have run propane through the carb,  
I build the invisible mandala  
Using a screwdriver, strobe and tachometer.  
The huge, restless engine grows docile  
At a thousand rpm. This is alchemy:  
Inert and lifeless matter  
Redeemed because it is loved,  
It is mended in a long, careful work  
That goes beyond itself because  
It never turns out quite how I intended. (John Tarrant)

A few years before the end of last century Kerry and I together with our two youngest sons, Patrick and Jesse, visited Aitken Roshi at his home on the Big Island of Hawaii. He was by now quite frail and in need of constant help. Despite this he was a genial host and we stayed for lunch and then chatted about sangha matters and how it was that he held great hopes for Dharma practice in Sydney. Over the afternoon we walked the peculiarly beautiful, shiny black volcanic platform that was his front garden stretching all the way to the Pacific waves, which collided ceaselessly onto slow moving molten lava. Robert Aitken lived on the very edge of the transient earth.

#### The Manchurian incident.

It claws the ground with crooked roots. It flails...

Over some years I had met up with a Japanese colleague at different international conference venues; we both had a professional interest in Analytical Psychology, particularly that aspect sometimes called Depth Psychology. Megumi Yama (a mother and professor in the faculty of Human and Cultural Studies, Kyoto Gakuen University) and her husband Herosi invited Kerry and I to spend a day together with them exploring Kyoto and later dinner. Megumi has written quite extensively on the Manchurian experience for the Japanese. In an extensive article *The Artist's experience of Formative Work. Japanese painter Yasuo Kazuki and his Siberian Series* she discusses how in the creative process that Kazuki engaged with, he sank deep into an inner world out of which the artwork emerged. Kazuki was drafted for military service in 1943 and was soon transferred to Manchuria. In 1945, after the defeat of the Japanese armies he was transported by the Russian military to Siberia to serve in a labour camp for two more years. He began painting on his return home to Japan.

Megumi, Kerry, Herosi and I spend a long day climbing the many stairs that lead to Tenryu-ji temple, the Temple of the Heavenly Dragon built 1339. Here legend has it Zen master Muso Soseki was the temple's founding abbot. Tenryu-ji temple occupies the site where the earlier Danrin-ji temple built in the ninth century once stood and then burnt down as per usual! This sacred site nonetheless is supposed to be where the first Zen temple in Japan was established.

The wall in front to left and right,  
Leads to the upper parapet of stone,  
From which old cherry-trees that alternate  
With maples on its narrow ledge have grown:  
Their leafage scant and eaten into lace,  
Where insects or the weather left their trace.  
Climbing this second stairway, I am brought  
To level ground again, the entrance court;  
And standing on its stone brink, look below  
On rustic stalls and restaurants that line  
The leafy tunnel, while their darkened row  
Baffles a sunburst, golden in decline.

(Harold Stewart)

I asked Megumi whether she thought herself a Buddhist. "Yes", she said with a sort of reservation. "As a baby I was blessed with my family in our nearby Shinto shrine, Herosi and

I were married there too, when I die I'll be buried from a Buddhist temple. We Japanese don't think of ourselves denominationally, being something like a Buddhist a Shinto or Christian is a European way of thinking".



Over a delicious dinner we talked about our experiences growing up at different ends of the Pacific. Both Megumi and Herosi's grandfathers served in the Japanese military and both were stationed in Manchuria. This seems to have meant, according to Megumi that they were not active in the Second World War but rather caught in attending to an internal national security skirmish. To this end and to our surprise we learn that the major concentration of the Japanese Imperial armed forces was stationed in both Manchuria and Korea. This might explain one of my father's war diary entries:

Saturday: Out on fighting patrol near Eilogo. Big rubber plantation. Had swim in Eilogo river. No Japs.

Emperor Hirohito ascended the Chrysanthemum throne on Christmas day, 1926. The Japanese military and political hierarchy encouraged the deep animist beliefs of Shinto towards a full-blooded form of Emperor worship. Hirohito assumed the status of a God with a corresponding blind obedience in the Japanese people.

An interesting historical aside is that General MacArthur, his military staff and advisors 'employed' R.H. Blyth to help draft certain surrender documents the emperor would eventually sign, whereby acknowledging himself as a mere mortal and asking the people of Japan to recognise him as such.

We knew almost nothing of Manchuria, and it wasn't until getting back to Sydney that I found out where indeed Manchuria is. Manchuria in East Asia can either refer to a region

entirely within China or a larger region today divided between Northeast China and the Russian Far East. The Russian part is known as Outer Manchuria, the Chinese region is Inner Manchuria.

Japan replaced Russian influence in the southern half of Inner Manchuria as a result of the Russo-Japanese War, 1904–1905. The outcome here was somewhat the same as to how the British and Dutch East India Companies economically occupied India and Indonesia and then expected their respective governments to supply a military and police force. From 1911 to 1931 Manchuria, nominally part of the Republic of China, was in practice controlled by the Japanese military. And then in 1932 Japan annexed Manchuria.

Over those early twentieth century years many Japanese people emigrated, most voluntarily, into Manchuria and south into Korea, which was also under Japanese rule and influence. This was the topic of our conversation over dinner. Herosi and Megumi are both university academics and practicing psychologists and both recognize that the Manchurian episode in Japanese history is contentious, especially as Herosi said, if you look at it from the Chinese and Korean points of view. This said, they both contended that the annexation of Manchuria in 1932 was not an invasion, rather like our own choice of the word ‘settlement’ when it comes to modern Australia; this was a legitimate settlement of a region already very Japanese. Indeed, the annexation was intended to bring modern prosperity to Manchuria as well as Japan.

The confluence in Manchuria of the Russian, Chinese and Japanese militaries and their national ambitions was bloody and violent, and like all battlefields there can be reasons to revisit, reinvent and review on the part of survivors. Murakami in his novel *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* has Lieutenant Mamiya, remembering his time as a young officer with the Hsin-Ching General Military Staff. Because he could speak fluent Russian, he spent a lot of enjoyable time with Russian waitresses. Later, as he awaits execution at the hands of the Russian military, he reflects on what “we Japanese had done in Manchuria. I’m sure you can’t imagine the number of Chinese labourers killed in the course of constructing our secret base in Hailar – killed with the express purpose of shutting them up.”

My father, and also Megumi and Herosi’s grandfathers were caught up in the defense and occupation of lands that were arguably not theirs. Then the turn of a history that describes victory and defeat has left us able to condemn with some sort of impunity the Japanese people for their strategic theft of Chinese and Korean lands and the consequent oppression of those people.

Surely there is a shadow here, what Jung would recognize as the impersonal or *archetypal shadow*, which for him identifies a collective evil that is in character transpersonal, exemplified by horrors like the Nazi holocaust, the fire bombing of Dresden and Tokyo, the Nanking massacre and here in our country with frontier incidences like the Myall Lakes massacre.

What about my dad, and in turn me, the direct beneficiary of his preparedness to risk his life defending our Australia in the mountains of Papua New Guinea? In the 1940’s modern

**Fan Dance**



**Photo: Glenys Jackson**

Australia was some 150 odd years in the making and only 74 years since the last convict ship to arrive in Western Australia had berthed in Freemantle on 9 January 1868. There was no language then that uttered a critique about my protestant Anglo families claim to the legitimacy of living here. Victory over the Japanese confirmed this more fully. We had defended ourselves.

The Tao, a favoured archetype for Zen Buddhists, can only ever exist idiosyncratically, a consequence of one's own journey. Its ineffable qualities prevent it from being defined or expressed in words. It can, however be known or experienced, For me, it's a shadow play, a poetic narrative with voices and actions that includes the bounty taken when my forebears settled in Sydney.

And too what can I say about this gift of Zen, or ikebana, tea ceremony and Japanese building aesthetics? Were they given freely or are they the consequence of a wartime booty? In the 1930's and 40's probably no one in the fledgling nation of Australia, certainly not my parents, would have known even how to spell Zen. A happenstance act of generosity brought from the shadow of war a book that landed in the lap of a young, probably frightened man penned up in a Japanese internment camp. Aitkin Roshi calls it his 'first book' and its legacy has found its way back along the treacherous geography of island hops that saw the blood of so many young men and innocent bystanders spill. Robert Aitken's *Taking the Path of Zen* was my 'first book' of Zen, my first Zen textbook, as I began an apprenticeship into the awe that is everywhere, and in every circumstance.

## **Mysterious Intimations**

**Sally Hopkins**

A disturbance in the night air,  
a vibration, a dark shadow  
on the wall,  
those tiny glove-sized bats-  
those intuitions that flicker,  
half grasped,  
messages not received,  
half understood, misunderstood,  
lost...  
our half-lit worlds.

## Zen and the Shadow....

Caroline Josephs

*It was the 'Shadow of a Time'...It was the 'Shadow of a Place'<sup>i</sup>...*

Fear arises -- just  
writing the word...  
'Jewish'.  
In public.  
As a child  
in the 40s,  
just after  
the War,  
I knew we were  
'bloody Jews' --  
our 'caption' from  
neighbours on  
one side  
of our home.  
The big sons would  
sling abuse as  
I returned from school --  
sitting on their  
verandah,  
crossing  
the road to  
avoid the  
fence  
where  
adolescent spit  
and spite  
was hurled out.

*It was the shadow of a  
time...it was the shadow of  
a place...*

I knew I never  
spoke the word  
'Jewish'  
at school...  
I joined the  
Christian  
main  
stream  
scripture...  
to prove  
I 'belonged'  
not to be one  
of three kids --

'no classification'!  
Followed the best  
storyteller of bible,  
Pilgrim  
Progress tales-- the  
Reverend Begbie.

I met the  
first Jews  
outside my family,  
at university,  
and in Art  
summer school --  
in the 60s.

I had no practice  
in Jewish ways....  
from my Jewish  
family,  
(moved out of  
Jewish  
Clovelly—  
to Manly  
for my father's  
job). I had some  
Jewish food --  
*pumpeskas,*  
*gefillte fish,*  
Yiddish words --  
*mishemashunah,*  
from my parents.  
My father  
believed  
all churches  
were 'Baloney!'  
designed  
to elicit  
money from  
the ignorant.

I married

a German -- born  
during the war  
like me.  
His father worked  
in War-torn  
Germany...  
strong socialist,  
Not a Nazi.  
However,  
The *Jewish* word  
never crossed  
my lips --  
during German  
family times  
I heard my  
brother-in-law --  
declare 'Hitler  
did a great  
job during  
the war--  
making trains  
run on time!'  
Enough to  
keep my lips  
sealed. Besides,  
I didn't  
know what it  
meant to  
'be a Jew'!  
Bringing *Jewish*  
history books, or  
anything  
about *Jewish*  
into the house  
elicited stormy  
outbursts from  
my husband.  
I learned that  
was not  
a way to go....  
My children did  
not know  
I was Jewish  
till years later  
after we, the  
parents,

separated –  
the unspoken  
secret could  
now  
be told.

My Jewish father,  
my German  
husband  
could not be  
in the same  
room  
together.  
Eruption!  
I held my  
'Jewishness'  
in a  
tightly bound  
bundle—not spoken,  
not daring,  
not knowing ....

***It was the shadow of a  
time...it was the shadow of  
a place...***

Years rolled on.  
Zen gave me some  
mindfulness,  
centring,  
stability,  
of a kind --  
I began to  
explore,  
slowly --  
what 'being  
Jewish'  
meant...In Zen  
I could study,  
search, practice,  
without taint,  
from the  
scary shadow,  
fear of  
being  
obliterated,  
annihilated --  
existential fear,  
of 'being Jewish'  
so unsafe,  
I didn't know.

***It was the shadow of a  
time...it was the shadow of  
a place...***

I was following  
the Dharma,  
Zen stories,  
Jewish  
storytellers,  
In my tent at  
Gorrick's,  
on retreat,  
reading  
Martin Buber –  
(*I and Thou*),  
crying,  
crying, wishing  
fervently --  
I had this  
Jewish-Zen  
Buber as  
*my* grandfather!  
I wanted that --  
older, wiser,  
steeped-in-Judaism  
person, to  
guide me.

***It was the shadow of a  
time...it was the shadow of  
a place...***

One evening at dinner  
with friends,  
I was asked  
about my time  
then --  
ruptured  
appendix,  
surgery  
at midnight,  
waking next  
morning,  
happy to be  
still, in the  
world'.  
One person,  
a long-time  
friend --  
uttered for  
those

assembled --  
'Jews always  
think  
they are  
worse off  
than  
everyone  
else!'  
Those around  
the table joined  
the laughter.  
Not one  
challenged  
the remark.  
Shocked, I was --  
beyond words.

Next morning  
I emailed  
speaker of  
the grenade  
to ask if I  
had heard  
correctly.  
'Yes', he replied,  
'It spilled  
from my  
childhood  
family'.  
Confusion --  
touching  
raw nerve  
-- the shadow  
remained --  
trust  
destroyed.

***It was the shadow of a  
time... it was the shadow of  
a place....***

Delving into  
'Jewish',  
I found  
two American  
Rabbis --  
Reb Zalman  
Schachter  
Sholomi,  
his disciple  
Rabbi David

Cooper,  
 both knew  
 Buddhist dharma,  
 feminist thinking --  
 stretching out  
 to the edges --  
 an inclusive  
 Judaism --  
 Dance, music,  
 scholarly debate,  
 prayer, women,  
 community--  
 all there.  
 I met Reb Zalman  
 in Bondi -- taking  
 Uncle Max --  
 First Nation  
 friend,  
 guide --  
 a pretext  
 introducing  
 Indigenous man  
 to Jewish Rabbi...  
 And for me, to be  
 in their shiny  
 presence...  
 conversing  
 like old trusted  
 friends....

David Cooper  
 Rabbi, with  
 wife, Shoshana --  
 Irish Catholic stock --  
 convert, to the  
 Jewish....  
 Joining them  
 on retreat,  
 to meditate,  
 dance,  
 converse, sing,  
 pray, listen --  
 80 others...  
 deep in an  
 American  
 winter  
 snow, icy lake,  
 sole walks  
 among the pines,  
 dancing in  
 rustic

wooden  
 synagogue --  
 woodpecker,  
 squirrel,  
 outside in  
 the white....  
 landscape,  
 Delight in  
 this moving  
 hymn  
 to earth, to  
 water, to  
 air, to  
 Nature,  
 unpacking  
 Hebrew  
 words,  
 peeling intricate  
 meanings,  
 like skin from  
 leaves --  
 in wonder.  
 In Sydney, it was  
 Christmas.  
 I was joyful not...  
 to be there!

*It was the shadow of a  
 time...it was the shadow of  
 a place...*

I set up  
 a group of 'oddball'  
 Jews like me...  
 unsure  
 of how they  
 fitted  
 in the great  
 scheme of  
 things....wanting  
 comfort of  
*communitas*,  
 shared  
 experiences,  
 for six years  
 and more we  
 met, sang  
 prayers,  
 danced Jewish  
 dances,  
 meditated on

Hebrew letters,  
 Kabbalah  
 practices,  
 were singularly  
 astonished  
 by *koans* in  
 Buber's  
 rendering --  
*Tales of the  
 Hasidim*.  
 Each time we  
 entered a  
 mystery, a  
 Hasidic portal,  
 sensing,  
 feeling  
 a way --  
 Jewish<sup>1</sup> *midrash*  
 A delicious,  
 beyond-  
 rational way...  
 This arguing,  
 sharing  
 Jewish  
 spiritual  
 obligation.  
 Like Zen, but  
 different.

*It was the shadow of a  
 time...it was the shadow of  
 a place...*

And yet....  
 one moment  
 erupted.  
 I said  
 something  
 funny-  
 negative  
 about Jews, in  
 a storytellers'  
 group  
 I had been  
 part of  
 for years.  
 I was soundly  
 told off by  
 someone  
 in the group.

**Sea Sculpture**



**Photo: Glenys Jackson**

I thought I  
could  
be free to  
turn on  
ourselves  
united,  
in humour.  
But NO!.....  
I reflected long  
and hard  
until...  
I saw that  
negativity  
I held internally,  
*interiorly* – a  
dense *shadow*....  
the Jewish  
fear....  
infused from  
anti-semitic  
elements  
in the culture  
I grew up in...  
from my own  
Jewish DNA  
fleeing pogroms.

***It was the shadow of a  
time... It was the shadow of  
a place...***

I wrote a thesis  
seven years of  
dedicated  
loving work...  
entering Zen,  
Judaic,  
Indigenous  
storytelling,  
becoming a  
storyteller  
inhabiting a  
transforming  
potential  
of story in  
sacred  
traditional  
cultures.  
I was visiting  
Zen temples  
in Hawaii, in

New York,  
and Jewish  
stories  
in Israel,  
*Yolngu* in  
Arnhemland,  
Indigenous  
Central  
Australia --  
in search of  
place,  
in search of  
meaning  
in search of  
another  
timeless  
sacred  
present,  
in search of  
my own  
'songlines' ....

In Zen I was  
free  
to be  
in 'emptiness'--  
there was  
nothing  
'sticking'  
At least I  
thought  
so...  
sometimes  
I was also  
'beating  
up' on myself.  
Troubling  
emotions.  
Anger. No  
Zen teacher  
at that time  
could  
point a way...  
Just,  
"Let it go,"  
would  
not suffice.  
I thought I  
was a terrible  
Zen student.  
After 25 years

I found  
Diamond  
Essence --  
a practice  
from America...  
where all was  
included, the  
psychological  
from the  
West,  
synthesising  
with  
meditation  
practices from  
the East..  
Zen  
taught me  
'monkey mind',  
given insight,  
a steady form  
of breath, and  
*koan*  
practice. DE  
worked with  
body, breath,  
emotional  
states,  
mindfulness,  
insight,  
memories,  
history.  
Patterns of  
experience  
in the  
body,  
potent,  
gave some  
clarity  
on anger....  
enlightened  
learnings from  
the womb,  
from birthing,  
from  
unarticulated  
unconscious  
early years  
of life...  
contexts of  
the first few  
years

(a father away  
mostly  
for the last 3  
years of War) --  
imprinted in the  
body....  
significant  
'triggers' the  
'tripwires',  
for me in  
decades of  
relating with  
habitual  
repetitions,  
with others,  
especially men.

Anger, and  
underneath  
it FEAR  
writ large.  
the fear of  
non-existence...

***It was the shadow of a  
place...it was the shadow of  
a time...***

In Zen I found  
real *communitas* --  
an emphasis  
of Jewish practice --  
the quality  
of being when  
human beings  
relate beyond  
roles, personas,  
structures, as  
whole human  
beings relating  
to whole human  
beings.  
Friendships  
enduring,  
living  
together  
through  
*sesshins*,  
through family  
bumps and  
crises, sorrows --  
joyful times,

together.  
I found  
some times  
*enlightenment*  
where heart-  
mind-body  
experiences  
connect  
with the 'All'  
a flash of  
recognition, a  
*felt* sense --  
profound  
calm...  
In Jewish --  
*chashmal*  
'the electric',  
deep meeting, the  
physical, spiritual --  
*Chash* - silence  
*mal* -speech.  
Speaking silence.

*eyn sof* --the  
Judaic is  
'infinite,  
endless,  
akin to  
nothingness,  
(not nihilistic)  
similar to  
Zen  
'emptiness'

*Tikkun* --  
Jewish repair,  
Primal divine  
unity  
shattered  
into sparks  
at Creation.  
*Tikkun*  
re-unifying  
through  
human  
action.  
As with Zen  
social action  
repairs  
divisions of  
the world.

***It was the shadow of a  
time...it was the shadow of  
a place...***

I am Jewish --  
Russian and  
Polish Jews  
my ancestry...  
I am Zen --  
from  
Japanese  
culture.  
the world I  
was conceived  
and born into --  
deeply  
divided in  
War -- with  
Japan, with  
Germany  
of that time...  
In the harbour  
as I was  
conceived -  
Japanese sub-  
marines  
Japanese ships  
off the east  
coast,  
I tried to heal  
ruptures  
in my soul...  
with marriage,  
with a practice  
spiritual, with Zen,  
with loving and  
embracing  
the other....

Knowing now  
as a *hybrid*  
whole --  
I am.  
If angry, is it  
*fear lurking*  
beneath that?  
where is that  
fear located  
in the *body*?  
Can I breathe  
with that?

Can I  
recognise it?  
Attend to it?  
And in the  
*being with*,  
find at length,  
a new kind

of peace, of  
Form *and*  
*emptiness*  
Both.  
Setting self  
free, to be,  
in the

Uni-verse.

**Postscript:**

*Having written myself  
towards some resolution here,  
I print out the piece, and roll  
it, tie it, with a band,  
intending to read a few pieces  
to my dear friend at lunch--  
but it has been lost -- as  
though it took wings and flew  
off to be 'in the world'. I  
cannot find it anywhere. I  
search over and over for it,  
afraid again of having this  
declaration, with my name on  
it – out in the world! It has  
been insistent.  
Now it shows itself, out there!*

Caroline Josephs July 2016

<sup>1</sup> Barbara Brooks (with Judith Clark), *Eleanor Dark: A Writer's Life*, Pan MacMillan, Sydney, 1998, p. 6.

**'The Shadow'**



**Oil Pastel: Caroline Josepshs**

## **A Zen Shadow Poem**

**Philip Long**

Shadow Zen  
Black Zen  
Dark Zen  
Bad Zen  
Hateful Zen  
Evil Zen  
Strange Zen  
Curious Zen  
My precious Zen  
Appearance of Zen  
Waves of Zen  
Hollow Zen  
Joyful Zen  
Zen Zen  
Zen Shadow

## “IS IT ENOUGH TO MEDITATE?”

Sarah Walls

When I was asked to give a talk at zazenkai, the first topic that popped into my head was: “Is it enough to meditate?” Of course, that immediately seemed a heretical question, and I wasn’t sure that I could or should raise such a question at zazenkai. Or indeed, if what I *really* wanted to talk about was even a suitable topic.

I was thinking partly of the many people who dip into the practice of meditation, find it difficult, don’t see tangible results, become discouraged, and drop out—and how easily I could have ended up being one of them. I was also thinking of the many people meditating as a way of coming to grips with life-threatening illness or life-shattering disability, or any of the existential crises that can make it hard to be patient with the process of meditation.

Many times, especially during the long, uncomfortable hours of sesshin, I wondered why I was persisting, when the ostensible goal of experiencing enlightenment, or at least some experience of inner transformation, seemed utterly beyond my grasp. Far from soaring into any state of bliss, I sometimes felt like a flightless bird, relentlessly grounded, not going anywhere, just watching while magpies, hawks, cockatoos and all manner of birds with functioning wings dipped and soared in the sky. It was frustrating, as I was hopeful not only of an inner transformation, but also of a physical transformation that might heal my injury and free from me from being trapped forever by physical agony.

Meditation helped soften that physical agony and make it bearable. But I don’t know that I would have had the tenacity to stick with the practice had it not been for the doorway to the inner world that opened through my dreams. In the fifteen years I have been meditating, nothing startling has ever really happened on the cushion. The surprises have mainly happened in bed, in that twilight land between waking and sleep. What I discovered as I tracked and explored my dreams completely overturned my old notions of reality and of the human mind. One surprise was to discover a dialogue, a conversation between the process of meditation and the dreaming process. Meditation seemed to open wide the door to the dreaming mind, and the dreams seemed to produce little snapshots, little situation reports, which gave me hope that perhaps I was making some progress in meditation after all, despite the disappointing lack of supernovas on the cushion.

So, what I really want to talk to you about is dreams and the support they can offer, especially when you are desperately in need of help. As to whether that is a suitable topic for zazenkai, well, I take reassurance from the fact that Robert Aitken Roshi considers that the three things most likely to influence the transmission of Zen to the West are democracy, feminism and psychotherapy—I figure that psychotherapy covers dreams. Dogen Zenji says that “The teisho of the actual body is the harbour and the weir”<sup>1</sup>, and dreams are surely part of the miracle of the actual body. And then, too, Subhana has given me permission.

In my pre-history, the days before I was injured, I was a journalist—and few occupations are more focused on the outer world than journalism. Then fifteen years ago, I suffered severe toxic damage to my central nervous system from a myelogram—a spinal injection of contrast medium—and large doses of corticosteroid drugs. My entire

nervous system became violently electrified. I had huge electric shocks, accompanied by loud noise and bright flashes of light, erupting through my brain, my spinal cord and the most intimate parts of my body 24 hours a day. I couldn't sit or lie still and I couldn't sleep. My heart raced, I bruised severely, and my teeth cracked. Even my finger and toenails ceased to adhere properly to the nailbed. I felt as if every nerve was exposed and my body was no longer solid flesh, just a web of taut, electrified barbed wire.

This went on not just for a few days, a few weeks or even a few months. For three years, the activity was so violent that other people could feel the electricity coming out through my skin. Fifteen years later, I still have enough high-voltage activity in my head to show up in a permanently abnormal EEG.

As you can imagine, this was a shock of unparalleled proportions. But the shocks this event held for me were not only physical. The night before the myelogram I had a dream so vivid that I wrote it down, something I never did at the time. I dreamt that someone had taken my Jaguar car without my permission, and that I was then completely contaminated in a nuclear explosion. In my dream this explosion took the form of a wheel with a shattered outer edge, something paradoxically so bright that it turned the whole sky dark. I later discovered that the wheel is a symbol of the chakra, a subtle energy centre according to the tenets of yoga. Like the outer boundary of the wheel, my outer being was shattered.

A year later, when my immune function was finally tested, a single abnormality showed up: an elevated level of anti-nuclear antibody, antibody to DNA. That I should have a high level of anti-nuclear antibody was perhaps not surprising, as I had been treated with a foreign biological product. But this vivid dream came *before* the investigation and treatment. Something inside me, it seemed, had known that I was in danger, at a time when consciously I had no idea.

So this initial dream opened the door to the inner world in an utterly dramatic way. The medical treatment proved so traumatic that I had no desire to seek further conventional treatment. I had to find another way to manage. I turned to yoga and Zen meditation, read countless self-help books, tried to improve my diet and de-stress. And I began to pay very close attention to my dreams. Eventually, I had the good fortune to find a highly gifted dream analyst who taught me the symbolic language of my own psyche.

As the months and years went by, my dreams proved a totally unexpected source of inspiration, wonder and information about my bodymind. Eight months after my treatment, I dreamed of an elephant foetus with its cervical spinal cord exposed, which was having great difficulty moving and keeping its head and body together. Months later, an MRI scan confirmed alterations in my cervical spinal cord.

As my dreaming mind dealt with what had happened to me, certain themes turned up repeatedly: losing jewellery and luxury cars; dreams about toxins, poisoning, radiation, fire and destruction; dreams about dilapidated houses and repair; dreams about descent and ascent; and dreams focusing on the neck, the bridge linking the head to the body from which I had previously been so disconnected. Sometimes, the development in the dreaming images was so obvious it needed little interpretation: after early dreams about losing precious jewellery and various luxury cars, I dreamed, eighteen months after the injury, of "finding my stolen bag, [...] full of dirt, dust and stones", then of "finding the little grey Morris Minor I had when I was 18", looking "decrepit", and of "coming back to my house after a long time away and finding it in desperate need of

repair”. The signs of healing in my psyche appeared before any external sign of healing became apparent, and gave me courage to continue working for recovery.

The dreams informed me not only of my physical state of health, but also of the condition of my spirit, my psyche—though of course, such distinctions are artificial from the dreaming perspective. About a year after my injury and six months after I had started Zen practice, I dreamed I was in a magnificent bushland valley, with a river on one side and a towering escarpment on the far bank. In the dream, I have come to see a small flower with four long thin lemon-coloured petals that is illustrated in the visitors’ brochure. When I look up at the edge of the cliff, I suddenly see the flower growing right on the edge, and I am astonished to realise that it is far larger in real life than it appears in the photo.

Then the scene changes and I am up on the escarpment further along at an old stone monastery, part of the “original settlement”, which is having a visitors’ day. There are displays and bookstands, but the doors to the monastery are boarded up, and there are three bored-looking monks sitting outside.

The dream seems to contrast two forms of spiritual practice, the Catholic tradition in which I had been raised but which was no longer accessible to me, and the coming to life of a new spirituality grounded in a different and more direct relationship to nature. It occurred at a time when I felt that I had been stripped of everything that gives meaning to life—identity, sexuality, the possibility of children, career, even something as simple as bodily peace and silence. To find images of beauty arising from my dreaming mind at such a time—though there were plenty of images of horror as well—was immensely comforting. The dreams seemed to be telling me that life still held something for me, that out of what seemed total destruction, new possibilities might yet arise.

As time went by, I began to live in a different way. Instead of running my life from my head and trying to control things as I had in the past, I began to allow room for the body, the unconscious, to take the lead. The dreams became, in a sense, my compass. I had embarked on a journey of discovery into the depths of my own psyche, a journey into a realm where the boundaries between self and other are far more permeable than in the solar, daylight world and where linear time does not rule. Illness forced me to slow my frantic life right down, and just to deal with what was happening each day. A parallel process happened in terms of dealing with my inner life. With each dream, I was given just what I could manage, no more, no less. The dreams compensated my conscious position: when I was feeling reasonably strong, they pointed to issues that needed to be worked on; when I was distressed, they often offered comfort and reassurance.

For example, after five years, my dream analyst told me that he was leaving Sydney. The dreamwork had become so central to me, such a useful tool in living with constant pain without drugs, that the news upset me. I wondered how I would manage without his help. In the next dream, I was in hospital being given treatment, and the nurse came to look at a computerised monitor to check what effect the treatment was having. The affected area was shown in purple, and when she turned the monitor on, the purple faded all the way down the screen till there was only a tiny patch remaining near the bottom. I woke up considerably cheered, for the dream was clearly telling me that almost all the healing work was done, and there was no need to worry.

There were times, too, when my dreams threw up utterly inexplicable images which seemed totally outside my experience. In one dream, I was on the side of a steep

green hill when suddenly I saw an absolutely magical animal with an equally magical keeper. The animal had huge wings and an extraordinary fluorescent, long, hairy, green plumage, and its keeper, a tall, dark-skinned man, had a costume from the same brilliant green plumage. I had never seen such an animal before. As I watched, it started to perform a figured dance, lifting up and down from the ground into the air. When the performance was finished, my companion and I set off down the hill, but the animal came bounding up to us as if we had something to feed it with, and it and its keeper did not seem to want to let us go. I asked where it came from, and the keeper's answer seemed to be somewhere in northern Africa called Tedda or Chedda, I couldn't quite hear which.

Then, in the sudden change of scene that often occurs in dreams, I found myself in a completely crazed and terrifying but oddly funny hospital ward. It was full of very technical-looking machinery that was hilariously inappropriate—like an intensive care unit with someone in what looked like an oxygen tent, but which turned out to be full of water. The nurses were all incredibly busy, but it seemed a matter of total chance whether you ended up alive or dead. There was no way out of the ward.

To my astonishment, I later discovered that in Islam, there is a figure called the Green Sufi. “He was always dressed in green and was called Khizr”—or Chidher—“(Arabic for green) because wherever he knelt and prayed the soil instantly became covered with thick vegetation.”<sup>2</sup> He is a wanderer and the patron of travellers, a figure met on the road, a teacher and counsellor who promises longevity and wisdom. According to William Hamilton, in his book on New Delhi called *City of Djinn*s, this mythological figure, which appears in the Koran, can be traced back to the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh. There it appears as Utnapishtim, the Survivor of the Flood, who shows Gilgamesh where to find the plant that will enable him to escape death.

A couple of years after I had this dream, I met a Christian Arab from the Sudan who told me that El Khidr, the Green One, was known among Sufis in the Sudan as a prophet who works miracles, and is considered the same figure as the Christian St George and the Dragon. His association with the dragon confirmed for me that this was indeed the figure in my dream. Interestingly, my acquaintance said that among the Sufi community were a number of Germans who had come to the Sudan as a result of dreaming about Sufism.

My dream seemed to contrast two styles of healing, one based on technology and the external world, the other grounded in the ancient realms of myth and nature—a realm that Western society has largely lost touch with, but which still calls to us in our dreams. That a mythological figure from another culture should appear in my dreams astonished me, but it also made me feel deeply and tangibly connected to the entire web of human existence. As I followed my dreams, I came increasingly to feel that my conscious self was just a thin layer of icing, and that the deeper one went into the mystery of the psyche, the thinner the veil separating us from the rest of humanity, until eventually one falls out into the Great Body of the universe where there is no separation, no boundary at all.

Prior to the injury, I didn't have much trust in the body or the universe. I had lost my father, my mother and one of my sisters, I had been present at both accidental death and violent death, and human existence seemed overwhelmingly precarious, unreliable and painful. But if something within me was capable of realising that I was in danger—even if I was then too ignorant to know how to listen to that inner voice—if that same mysterious something was capable of guiding and counselling me in dealing with the consequences of the injury, and of showing me how to grow, then the universe was a

**Untitled**



**Drawing: Graphite on Rice Paper**

fundamentally friendly place, after all. For this deep dreaming psyche is an inherent part of all human, indeed all animal life. We are born with what we need to live already built into us. It's just that we don't always know how to listen to the world within, which, paradoxically, can open the door to the interconnectedness of the entire universe.

I realised that mythology is not just something found in books, but a living force within us, the wisdom body that is part of our biological birthright. To realise that there was something within us which is capable of dealing with anything that life can throw up—for everything that we live through is but a variation of things that have happened to others before—was a revelation. I felt for the first time in my life that I had solid ground to stand on.

I have told you about my experience, but I don't think there is anything unique about it. It's just that we rarely pay attention to such inner clues. American author Marc Ian Barasch had a series of strange dreams, culminating in one where a group of medicine men stuck hypodermic needles into something called the “neck-brain”, before he was diagnosed with thyroid cancer. Clearly, his body, like mine, knew much more about what was going on than he did. In his wonderful book, *The Healing Path*<sup>3</sup>, Barasch maps the soul route of illness as a catalyst for profound personal change, a possibility which in these days of scientific medicine is rarely thought of, but which must surely have existed as long as human beings have been on the planet.

When we face life-threatening injury or disease, chronic illness, disability or any major crisis that seems beyond our capacity to deal with, we are often at a loss to know how proceed. Meditation then is extremely useful. It gives us a refuge, steadies us in our daily lives, allows quiet space in which insights and intuitions arise. Attending to our dreams can bring an additional, immensely useful dimension at times when we are frightened and in need of help. This is especially true if we are facing a situation where there may not be much that can be done externally.

In serious illness, our cultural bias towards the outer world persists, and the patient's attention is usually taken up with the various things being done to treat the disease. In the midst of all this activity, there is not always much focus on what is going on inside the person. When there is *no* treatment available—or no acceptable treatment—what is going on *inside* the patient takes centre stage. The patient has to confront the challenge of how to live with a life-threatening disease or chronic illness. Illness can be lived as a diminishing transition or as an opportunity to grow and transform. In the words of American surgeon Bernie Siegel, “Disease can teach us to live by confronting us with our own mortality, with the uncertainty embedded in every life. If we have the courage to follow where our fate leads us, a great rebirth can occur.”<sup>4</sup>

As Westerners, we usually do everything we can to seek control over our circumstances. Even meditation and yoga are often practised in an effort to gain greater control. Dreaming is one thing over which we usually have no control. We have to learn to be receptive, to listen to what is coming from within. To feel helpless, and to find help coming from within, is a life-changing experience. If we are seriously ill, it is critically important to sort out our psyche, for that lightens the body's load. The physical stresses of illness may already be almost intolerable, so we don't need psychological stresses on top.

To resolve old issues and allow our habitual preoccupations and worries to drop away, to learn to be more peaceful is a great boon in living with illness. By the simple act of attending to our dreams, we engage with our dreaming mind, and set in motion a

movement towards psychological wholeness. Instead of our waking and dreaming minds travelling on parallel but unconnected paths, they become partnered in a dance of opposites which can help us live in harmony with life, rather than trying to control it.

From the solar left-brain point of view, illness and misfortune strike randomly. Our minds, however, are structured to create meaning. Everything means something, for the psyche's universal language is symbol and image. So our dreaming mind will reflect what the particular illness or misfortune means for us, how it fits into our story, our individual myth. Becoming aware of that allows us to begin to make sense of our own experience, to come to know ourselves at a deep level, to lose some of our ignorance about ourselves and the world, and to gain a deeper sense of how we are interconnected with everyone else and the seamless web of the universe.

To learn the meaning of misfortune in one's own life should not be confused with some New Age notion of being responsible for one's own disease. That's simplistic and rarely helpful. We do not control everything that happens in life; indeed, that's often one of the key lessons illness and misfortune teach us. But we do have choices about how we respond to what happens. Having a sense of where an event fits in the pattern of our lives, what it means to us, can help us see different ways to respond. By listening to what comes up in dreams and meditation, we can step outside our habitual grooves and engage more fruitfully with life.

In her book *My Grandfather's Blessings*, Rachel Remen tells a beautiful story of a young man having trouble coming to terms with juvenile diabetes, who was shown the way forward through a dream. In his dream, he found himself sitting facing a small stone statue of the Buddha. He was surprised to feel a kinship with it, and to experience an unfamiliar sense of peace. Suddenly, a dagger was thrown and buried itself deep in the Buddha's heart. The young man was shocked. Then the statue began to grow, its face as peaceful as before. The knife didn't change either. Gradually, it became a tiny black speck on the breast of an enormous, smiling Buddha. The young man woke up in tears.

Rachel Remen says that when the young man had been told that his disease was incurable, "his response had been rage and despair. He had felt that the life in him had been stopped and that there was no way to move forward. But in the most exquisite way possible, life had shown him something different. His dream offered him the hope of wholeness, and suggested that, over time, he might grow in such a way that the wound of his illness might become a smaller and smaller part of the sum total of his life. That he might have a good life, even though it would not be an easy life. [...] Disease is at various times brutal, lonely, constricting and terrifying. But the life in us may be stronger than all that and free us even from that which we must endure."<sup>5</sup>

So, is it enough to meditate? In one way, of course it is. But exploring our inner life by attending to our dreams can also be immensely valuable, especially when we are suffering and need help. And that is true whether we are physically ill or well.

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*This article was first given by Sarah as a Zazenkai Talk at the Sydney Zen Centre on Sunday, 20<sup>th</sup> November, 2005.*

<sup>1</sup> Precept No 10. Not defaming the three treasures [...] Dogen Zenji: The teisho of the actual body is the harbour and the weir. This is the most important thing in the world. Its virtue finds its home in the ocean of essential nature. It is beyond explanation. We just accept it with respect and gratitude.

<sup>2</sup> William Hamilton, *City of Djinn*s, p. 298 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Marc Ian Barasch, *The Healing Path*, Penguin Arkana, 1993.

<sup>4</sup> Bernie Siegel, Foreword to *The Healing Path*, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Rachel Remen, *My Grandfather's Blessings: Stories of Strength, Refuge and Belonging*, p. 142, Riverhead Books, U.S., 2000.

### **Zen Women Walk in the Storm, Culburra**



**Photo: Caroline Josephs**

# Me and My Shadow

Philip Long

## The Little Fete

I take a bottle of wine and I go to drink it  
Among the flowers.  
We are always three,  
Counting my shadow and my friend  
The shimmering moon.  
Happily the moon knows nothing of drinking  
And my shadow is never thirsty.  
When I sing, the moon listens to me in silence.  
When I dance, my shadow dances too.  
After all festivities, the guests must depart.  
This sadness I do not know.  
When I go home, the moon goes with me  
And my shadow follows me ... follows me ... follows me ... follows me ... follows me  
Evangelos Papathanassiou (Vangelis)

## Me and My Shadow

Like the wallpaper sticks to the wall  
Like the seashore clings to the sea  
Like you'll never get rid of your shadow  
You'll never get rid of me

Let all the others fight and fuss  
Whatever happens, we've got us.

(Me and my shadow)

We're closer than pages that stick in a book  
We're closer than ripples that flow in a brook  
(Strolling down the avenue)  
Wherever you find him, you'll find me, just look  
Closer than a miser or the bloodhounds to Liza

Me and my shadow  
We're closer than smog to all of L.A.  
We're closer than Ricky to confessing he's gay??  
Not a soul can bust this team in two  
We stick together like glue.

...  
Al Jolson, Billy Rose, and Dave Dreyer, updated by Robbie Williams

## The Story

I was brought up by my mother to be a nice boy - a nice, clean Catholic boy. The worst possible sin was to be like one of those dirty Protestant boys. Among my mother's strongly Irish Catholic friends, also, I was regarded as a nice boy, ok to trust with babysitting their young children.

What did being a nice boy mean? It meant polite and willing and observing all the social graces. Above all it meant "going along". After a social gathering among my mother's friends, I would write to the hostess a thank you note - "lovely company, beautiful food", etc, etc. At the Parish church I was a regular altar boy. (To whom, I

might add, nothing irregular happened. Was I just too good to offer a temptation?) Later on I was the conductor of the church choir. I topped my class at school in Religious Knowledge several years running and I am sure my Jesuit teachers had me marked down as a future missionary, as my prize books at the end of each year were mostly about the missionary service.

For my mother there was a need for perfection, for a holy purity untrammelled by any connection with anything earthly or bodily. The body was just one of those burdens one had to bear and carry through life. My dad was repelled by all this anti-body stuff. He had converted to Catholicism at 18 after doing a personal survey of all the major (Christian) religions. He said that for him Catholicism was the most realistic and convincing (logical). He was extremely devout and unquestioningly admired my mother's absolute, unshakeable faith in God and in the Church. I think he clung to the security the Faith offered; when the vernacular was introduced into the Mass, he immediately joined the Latin Mass Retention Society.

I was a strange mixture as a child – on the one side clinging to my mother and on the other imitating my father's blustering and not entirely convincing independence. I had a deep fear of being abandoned which had at some point become overlaid on an almost physical trust of others. When I was about 5 or 6 I stole some money from my parents (I remember the exact amount: it was 12 shillings) and bought a whole lot of sweets from a local sweet shop. I then distributed them among my classmates at school. I think I had decided to "gamble everything for love" to quote Ben Lee (If my parents didn't love me I would get the love elsewhere.) I was greatly disappointed and frightened when my parents were summoned to the school to deal with the matter. I realised then that I was not going to get away with it. My father dealt with it by giving me a terrifying thrashing. I was overwhelmed. I can remember him standing in the corner of my parents' bedroom, red in the face, his jaw tense and quivering with rage, while I ran all over the room, including on the bed, trying to escape him. I can remember his words as if they were carved in stone in my heart: "Stand still and take your punishment like a man!" I don't remember being hit. Later in life he told me that I had in fact repeated the exercise on two days running in defiance of his reprimand on the first day and that he had been at a complete loss on how to control my behaviour. This being so, I think nevertheless that he never admitted that his shame, rage and helplessness at my behaviour had triggered off his own childhood abuse. (So severe and entrenched was that abuse (from his mother) that at 18 he was made to stand still while his mother beat him black and blue with a broom handle and he offered no resistance.)

All this is the story.

### **Pleasant and Unpleasant**

It has been my custom all my life to divide my feelings sharply into pleasant and unpleasant, allowable and not allowed. To even exist (register) a feeling must fall into one of these two absolutes. The pleasant feelings were allowed, and even indulged in, while the unpleasant feelings needed to be pushed out of the way or repressed. Pleasant clusters with pleasant, unpleasant with unpleasant. It is like two (his)stories, two people in one.

### **The Shadow and the Split**

For each of us there is the split into the Conscious and the Shadow. I simply ignore (or pass over quickly) the very unpleasant feelings and cling, sometimes desperately, to the pleasant. The ignored feelings are split off and repressed. Sometimes, however, the Shadow becomes the Conscious and then from the point of view of the Shadow the Conscious is the shadow of the Shadow. Because of the split the contents of the Conscious and the Shadow are exaggerated and extreme. One minute I am defiant the next I am overcompliant. The defiant side sees its shadow as a wimp and the overcompliant side sees its shadow as dangerously out of control.

## **The Knot**

At times in zazen I encounter a knot in my mind/body which is rigid, defiant and frightening. In the past approaching it inevitably led to more fear, tension and frustration. I would be completely caught by it and have no ability to get out. Sometimes it felt as if I was going to die if I went anywhere near it.

### **Reflex**



**Photo: Philip Long**

## **The Nature of Evil**

Is the mechanism of Shadow or Unconscious hiding the Evil in us? Is there such a thing as pure Evil? Certainly, at times I find unconscious material very terrifying and it would be dangerous and wrong to indulge or get caught up in that material so long as the Split is not overturned. Some Christians say that Evil is the absence of God; I would prefer to say that Evil is a result of the Split (or alienation, if you like). Evil is then not Evil but is Good split off from Good. Even the Split itself is not entirely Evil since the (relative) distinction between good and evil is preserved even when the Split is overturned. Thus the reconciliation of the Conscious and the Shadow releases the Good energy locked in the Split and there is the Great Opening Up in which all that exists, or has existed or will ever exist plays its part.

## **The Shadow Makes Its Appearance**

Over the last few years in my Practice I have become aware of a deep cluster of rejected feelings – rage, at times bordering on the murderous, contempt, defiance, disgust, hatred, revulsion, loathing, horror and so on are all mixed up in this. This seems to be a liberation of deeply repressed feeling, a bypassing of the repression mechanism and the Split and the Knot. At first encounter it was terrifying (and hateful and repellent, etc, etc.) So much so that in the past I had preferred to squash or repress such feelings by descending into a state of depression and anxiety, as painful as that was. It was a case of disgust, hatred and revulsion for my disgust, hatred and revulsion.

### **Liberating the Shadow and Seeing through the Split**

Gradually, working with these difficult feelings, I am coming to discover that looked at calmly and rationally, feelings don't divide up so neatly into pleasant and unpleasant. I have come to acknowledge unpleasant feelings and to be able to deal with them by learning to love them, even to the point of getting into the middle of them and enjoying them. However, it is important not to get caught up in them by approaching them from the outside or in fear. When I see my feelings in this loving way I feel able to be that recalcitrant Protestant boy located right at the centre. The naughtiness of it is deeply enjoyable, absolutely right. I am just I. I just am (angry, sad, frightened, rebellious, etc, etc). The effect this has on depression and anxiety is to overcome the "stuckness", aversion and hypostatisation accompanying such states and to reveal the repressed feelings "below". It is to free up the stuckness and those repressed feelings and to heal the Split.

When engaging with repressed material, it is crucial to our Practice to realise that the Conscious has its (very good) reasons for controlling the shadow material, to respect that control and own it while at the same time encouraging it to become less fixed and absolute and more responsive to current experience rather than relying on past experience. On the other side the Shadow may learn to accept that submitting to the control of the Conscious may be crucial in learning self-control and ultimately in achieving full satisfaction.

### **Untying the Knot**

Correspondingly, untying the Knot involves learning to accept and even enjoy the unwanted feeling of extreme tension that constitutes the Knot and the feelings that lurk in its shadow, that constitute it with no remainder. This seems so counterintuitive that I have traditionally simply done anything I could to avoid it. But come to enjoy it I did – eventually. And this is not indulgence or clinging but only the freedom to be my whole (integrated) self. The Knot and its shadow feelings are transformed by the enjoying of them without trying to deliberately change them. But one must be careful to keep one's balance and not be caught by the Knot or the feelings. This is a tricky business and requires much practice and a good deal of courage. One treats the knot and the feelings as one would a child, not always passively indulging and not always aggressively squashing it.

### **What Do I Do With These Feelings?**

Of course, all this has taken place in the container created by the Practice and within the safety of deep samadhi. Except on the odd occasion I have been able to prevent these feelings from spilling over into my daily life. Where they have done so I have found them to be innocuous shadows of the feelings as they were when I first encountered them and to be the progenitors of a range of more acceptable feelings ameliorated by being interpenetrated by insight, reason, calm and love. As the feelings emerge from the shadows and reach the light of day, they are, as the Heart Sutra says, "transformed". My GP in response to the question: "What do I do with my feelings?" answers: "Feel them!"

### **Flux**

When unwanted feelings are fully accepted they quickly and unpredictably rejoin

the flux of experience, making way for a range of exquisite and often unclassifiable feelings which at first were felt to be lost altogether.. The range of feelings becomes wide and deeply complex and at the same time ultimately simple. The sharp division into acceptable and unacceptable is overturned. Unpleasant feelings mix imperceptibly with pleasant feelings; unpleasantness mixes imperceptibly with pleasantness. Some feelings are neither pleasant nor unpleasant. Nevertheless, disgust is disgust, revulsion is revulsion, etc. It is like the traffic noise that comes at night through our window from Pennant Hills Road. As my partner, Peter pointed out recently, it is one continuous roar but as you listen to it you realise it is made up of many sounds, rising from and falling back into, and as, the roar.

### **What Does It All Mean**

So I ask myself one or two ultimate questions. Who am I? Am I hateful or loving? Is life in an overall sense pleasurable or painful and if it is both why do we bother? Am I, as I am, acceptable to others? Of course the events of my life are, as a whole, neither painful nor pleasurable. What then makes life worthwhile? Frankly, it is worthwhile because it is all we have, even as we feel it slowly slipping through our grasp. It is the nature of all things and events to be insubstantially constituted. What we do not possess we cannot lose. We can say of someone to whom yesterday we said (or felt like saying): “You bastard!” “My love for you goes beyond words, beyond love itself.” Obstacles in life are only obstacles to our will. A moment’s acknowledgement of their insubstantiality, and of the insubstantiality of our will itself, and they are no longer obstacles nor are we only the protagonist of a life story.

### **Some Real Life Shadows**

At the sharing circle at the end of a sesshin led by Fr. Ama Samy the person sitting on his immediate left described in detail how during sesshin she had experienced a knight in shining armour on a pure white horse who had come to save her. “Oh”, said the person sitting on Fr. Samy’s immediate right, “you are very lucky. Some of us have to be content with the Emptiness of Zen.” The two immediately began a verbal battle as to whose was the most authentic experience. Gesturing with downward movements of his arms and outstretched hands Fr. Samy said: “Be quiet, be quiet both of you; there is room for all of this in Zen.”

### **Japan Sketch**



**Drawing: Brendon Stewart**

## Face to Face

Sally Hopkins

“Now we see through a glass darkly, then face to face”. St Paul, 1 Corinthians 13:12.

I always found those words mysterious, and in some odd way understandable, though not in the sense Paul meant them. The nature of Shadow is that you can't see – or see accurately. How to speak of it? What words to use?

In the Full Moon Ceremony we hear: “Our dark side is hard to see, yet it is wonderfully rich and fertile”. These words give me an image of a half moon, as perhaps they are meant to, but I no longer see ‘myself’ like that- a discrete ‘self’. But how else to say it? I was brought up in a solid, rational, ‘happy’ family, for all I was plagued by feelings of “wrong” “wicked” “unwanted” if I died “everything and everybody would be alright”. It made no sense. Scarcely shadow, more total darkness. I wanted to KNOW why. I was like a lone self trying to feel safe in one of those old castles with 18-foot thick walls, and a moat to prevent people from passing across. Religion taught at school could be inspiring.... If I tried hard enough I could be saved, loved, all right, but it was our sin that had caused the suffering of Jesus, God's wrath. All very confusing. And full of shadows. Of course you never spoke of any of this, too shameful, too irrational. In my early 30's my mother told me she'd tried to abort me as I was conceived before my parents were married. So what? It was nothing at all to me. Though my poor mother was ashamed to the end of her days.

In my late 30's after various disasters, I started to break down, not coping with life at all, the shadow taking over completely. In desperation I did “primal therapy” in a very weird set up in a private house with a whole lot of others. You lay on the floor and were aware of the thoughts in your head and the feelings in your body, and instead of ‘observing’, you “went into it”. A weird overwhelming experience ... baby cries (for years) that I could never do by trying, vivid pictures of what I hadn't ‘known’, words out of my mouth I knew not of. I found that all the strong feelings that drove me had their foundations from my earliest beginnings. At two, after a car accident (I thought my father was going to kill us “Look out! Look out! He's going to hit us!” my mother had cried) these were completely deleted from my conscious mind.

This was no miracle salvation. I ‘primalled’ with others, and then by myself for 16 years, by which time it petered out. Old feelings that felt so solid that I thought they were “me” would suddenly just evaporate. So much just dropped away. Present life became full and rich and interesting, the past ‘boring’, and stories –well they are just stories after all, never the whole. But crystal clear? NO.

Intellectually knowing was no help. One had to “know” experientially, beyond intellect and feeling, just as one has to do in Zen practice. Reading the books and knowing the answers does nothing except perhaps inflate the ego, or make you ‘feel’ better, or in control, for all they can point out a direction.

Perhaps all configurations of LIFE are not quite it? Primalling was about a perceived disconnect between head and body, and re-connecting –becoming whole- I think. It helped me- but it didn't help many others.

I came to Zen for companionship of the Way rather than grasping a rope to rescue myself. My feeling of being a limpet in the ocean of Life, clinging to a rock, well protected by the shell, fell away. Now more and more these images of defence and separateness disappear- become Ocean, Life itself.

But Knowing? It's never certain. Everything so complicated, various, so much ungraspable, unknowable. We can set ourselves free from our delusions, but so much has to be taken on trust. Not shadowed, but ‘unknowable’. We just need to endlessly explore each day, each moment.

When trapped by myself, in myself, I did learn clearly what we have to work with:

What was done to us when small and vulnerable, we sadly tend to do to others, and imagine others are still doing to us. Indeed, we put ourselves in the way of the same happening, and anything that touches on those old feelings can really set us off. And also, unbelievably, we also tend to do the same thing to ourselves again.

If we have some huge feeling (good or bad) about a person or situation, we should investigate, for it is almost certain we are putting our own old feeling onto that person and not really seeing them at all. Our “knowing”, conscious or unconscious, is based on past experience, past understanding, and so is skewed. Not just a glass darkly but one of those distorted mirrors.

I think truly seeing is not wonderful, or terrible, it is as it is said: “The things of the world are just as they are. The gates of emancipation are open.” Our task is to investigate the shadows and see as clearly as we can, so that our actions can be non-harming, non-controlling, un-neurotic-allowing everything and everybody, including this “self”, to just BE. Life so much more mysterious, more wonderful, than we can imagine. Whitman’s, “I contain multitudes”?

Or “Face to Face”, maybe?



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