

ZEN GONGI

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1

- 4/ Twenty Years Ago**
Albert Low
- 9/ Pardonnez-nous nos offenses**
Albert Low (traduction Monique Dumont)
- 12/ On Death**
Master Suzuki Soshan
- 14/ Into Each Life Some Rain Must Fall**
Roger Brouillette
- 15/ N'étechez pas votre soif**
Monique Dumont
- 17/ Thy Will Be Done (2)**
Albert Low
- 24/ The Jump**
Winifred Geller
- 25/ Juste le bout de la Langue**
Luce Desmarais
- 26/ "Nous restons chez nous...."**
Louis Bricault/ Jeanne d'Arc Labelle/ Janine Lévesque
- 29/ A Letter to the Teacher**
- 34/ Gurdjieff's Aphorisms**
- 35/ Le Calendrier/ the Calender**

*The rose is without
why or wherefore : it blooms
because it blooms. It takes
no notice of itself/asks not if
it is seen.*

(Angelus Silesius)

*One of the best means for
arousing the wish to work
on yourself is to realize that
you may die at any moment.
But first you must learn how
to keep it in mind.*

(Gurdjieff)

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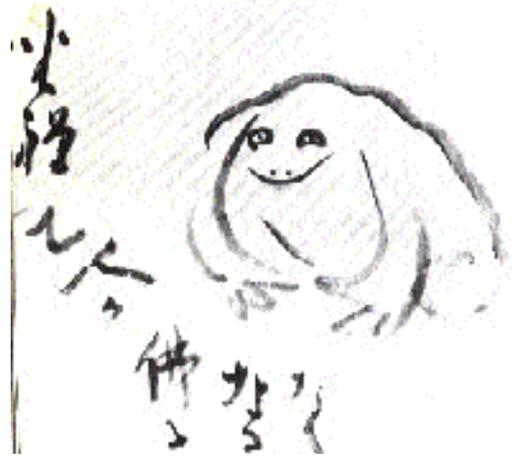
Éditorial

Les vingt ans du Centre

Le 19 septembre prochain, nous allons fêter les vingt ans du Centre. Il y a vingt ans, en juillet 79, Albert arrivait à Montréal en compagnie de Jean afin de prendre la direction du groupe qui était alors affilié à Rochester. Un de leurs premiers gestes a été de chercher un endroit plus approprié pour aménager un Centre et ensuite déménager. Ce sont les péripéties de ces débuts qu'Albert raconte dans le premier article de ce numéro. Pour une grande partie des membres actuels, ce sera l'occasion de faire connaissance avec notre petite histoire et de se rappeler que si le Centre existe tel qu'il est en ce moment, c'est grâce aux efforts d'Albert et de Jean, ainsi que de plusieurs autres ouvriers de la première heure.

La fête du 19 septembre offrira une bonne occasion d'exprimer notre gratitude, envers tous ceux qui ont rendu et continuent à rendre possible, par leur travail et leur dévouement, l'existence de notre sangha, gratitude aussi envers la collectivité dans laquelle on vit. Il est utile de se rappeler de temps à autre que nous vivons dans une société dont la largeur d'esprit et la tolérance nous permet d'adhérer à une tradition spirituelle qui, même si elle est très ancienne, demeure encore relativement récente en Occident. Nous sommes chanceux de pouvoir méditer, faire des sesshins, parler du Zen et même le promouvoir sans être exclus de notre communauté par le ridicule ou la suspicion (ou pire encore, cela s'est déjà vu). Nous vivons dans une culture où le religieux n'est plus monolithique. Cela permet à des voix différentes de se faire entendre et d'exercer, en retour, une influence qui dépasse souvent de beaucoup le seul poids du nombre. C'est en ce sens que l'on peut dire que le Zen fait maintenant partie de la culture québécoise. Et si l'on en juge par la rapidité avec laquelle il s'est fait connaître en Occident, et ici au Québec, on peut en conclure qu'il venait répondre à un besoin pressant.

En fait, la possibilité d'avoir accès à une tradition spirituelle éprouvée comme celle du Zen et de jouir de l'enseignement d'un maître comme Albert Low est un privilège dont nous ne mesurons pas toujours toute la portée. La rencontre dans un même lieu d'une tradition et d'un maître authentique est rare; peut-être en a-t-il toujours été ainsi. Soyons donc reconnaissants qu'il existe à Montréal en 1999 quelque chose comme le Centre Zen et voyons le comme une bonne raison de fêter.



La journée du 19 commencera par la méditation. C'est le cœur de notre pratique et la raison d'être essentielle du Centre. Cette célébration de la spiritualité sera suivie dans l'après-midi par une célébration de la créativité. Spiritualité et créativité, non pas deux activités séparées, mais bien deux manifestations d'une même réalité, toutes deux émergeant d'une source commune, comme le dit Albert. Et si l'on voulait ramasser dans une seule formulation ce qui les apparente toutes deux, on pourrait reprendre cette phrase de Cocteau qui disait de la poésie : « Je sais qu'elle est indispensable, mais je ne sais pas à quoi ! » Réponse paradoxale, mais bien la seule possible à la question que ne cesse de poser notre pensée inquiète. A quoi sert la spiritualité, à quoi sert la créativité? A rien. Heureusement, pourrions-nous ajouter. Et lorsqu'on y regarde de plus près, on peut voir qu'il y a une geste commun à toutes deux, et c'est le remerciement. Fondamentalement, méditer est un geste de remerciement, comme créer ; nous remercions le fait d'être et de savoir que l'on est. « Qui suis-je » ou Qu'est-ce que Mu », lorsque la question n'est pas posée dans l'espoir avide d'une réponse, est un remerciement, une « reconnaissance » du fait d'être et de savoir que l'on est. Comme la vie, une activité généreuse et ludique qui n'a pas besoin de raisons : être et savoir, cela suffit. La forme est le vide, le vide est la forme. Fêter aussi est un geste de remerciement. En définitive, nous n'avons pas besoin de raisons pour fêter. Ni pour remercier.

Twenty years ago

Albert and Jean arrived in Montreal in 1979. From that moment on the Center underwent great changes, beginning with getting a new location and moving there in October of that year. We have asked Albert to write something about those years. For most of us who were not there at the time, this article will help to remind us that underlying what is now a dynamic and viable Center, lies an enormous amount of work, dedication, courage, often boldness, and sometimes sheer faith.

We will celebrate the Zen Center 20th anniversary in September. This will offer an opportunity for us to express our gratitude toward Albert and Jean, as well as toward the people who were there during those difficult years and also toward all the Bodhisattvas that have manifested themselves at the right moment and in the right place. Like a writer said: « Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth : that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. » In reading Albert's article, we cannot help but feel the profound truth of that saying and conclude with Goethe : « Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. » This article gives us a good example of that.

In a way it all began as a joke

Jean and I came to Montreal about the 27th July 1979. We arrived at the same time as a heavy thunderstorm. All our belongings were in the back of a pick-up truck, and most of these were books packed in cardboard boxes, so we had to move in very fast!

4● Soon after our arrival we began to look for some new accommodation for the Center. Since its start in 1975 it had been renting half a duplex on Marlowe St. in NDG. When we arrived it had about thirty members. The Marlowe St. house could just about accommodate this number. It would have been difficult to accept more, and it would have been difficult to have more than a two day sitting because the place was just not big enough. The group felt that, if we were to expand, we would need a place of our own.

Day after day Jean and I walked around different parts of Montreal, searching for a house that would be large enough for our needs. Surprisingly, although at that time many houses were up for sale, very few were suitable.

We searched everywhere, and, after about six weeks of non-stop walking, decided to take a day off. We

noticed on the metro map that a river flowed at the north of the island and decided to see whether we could have a picnic on its banks. We took the metro to Henri Bourassa but, as we walked out of the station, felt sure that we had done the wrong thing. At that time buses that served Laval used to be parked on the south side of Henri Bourassa boulevard and, coming out of the station, we walked into the noise and pollution of about twenty five buses coming or going. However we walked east along Henri Bourassa until we came to a street that looked calm. It was lined on both sides with maple trees and led down to the river. After the noise of Henri Bourassa Boulevard, the street seemed so peaceful. We turned down it and headed for the river. At the end of the street there was a large house up for sale. It was a beautiful old house on a large tract of land. I joked with Jean, saying, "There it is; there is the new Center." This, as I said at the beginning of this article, was in a way the beginning. The place was so obviously out of our price range, that it was a joke even to think about buying it.

We walked on and found a table in a small park by the side of the river and sat there to eat our lunch. While eating I asked Jean somewhat tentatively, "Should we ask how much they want for that place?" It seemed so idiotic in its way, even to ask. However we were

desperate. We had walked and walked and had not found anywhere suitable. We had begun to lose hope. Here was a place that seemed as though it would work. So we walked back and found the name and phone number of the agent. We phoned, 225,000\$ was the asking price. "Would the owner be prepared to come down from this price?" "Maybe, but not much."

225,000\$! Where would we get 225,000\$? As I said, the Sangha had about thirty members. These were young people, some still students, others without work, and those who were working were fairly low on the income hierarchy. But we put the proposition to the directing committee and it decided to go ahead and to see what would happen. I had the feeling no one was exactly excited about the idea.

When we saw the place inside it was a shock. For example, in the dining area the wallpaper was bright purple with blue, pink and white motifs. The carpet, which went up the wall about nine inches all round was also patterned in purple and dark and light blue. Room number four had huge red and pink tulips on the wallpaper. We called it later the red zinger room. Room number three, the dokusan room, was bright yellow. A cascading chandelier was hanging in the dining. Outside the house sparkled a very large, and obviously very expensive, swimming pool. But a small building which, it seemed, belonged to the property, was tucked away in one corner. When we went into that building I knew that, in spite of the color of the rooms, the chandelier, the large and expensive swimming pool and even the cost of the place, somehow the Center simply had to have this house. One would not find another like it in all of Montreal. I tried hard not to show my enthusiasm. I must have succeeded because the owner, feeling that we were losing interest, delivered what he thought would be the telling argument to make us want to buy. "You'll never guess who would be your neighbor!" "No," I replied, "Who?" "Rocket Richard!" he said with awe in his voice.... "Who is he?" I asked in all innocence.

The directing committee decided that we should try to buy the property. The Center had a member who was a lawyer, one of the few affluent members. I visited him and asked him to make an offer on behalf of the Center of 135,000\$, just over half the asking price. He refused to do so at first, saying that it would be rejected as a joke. However I insisted and said, "Give the owner until Monday to make up his mind." The offer went in, Monday came and went. No response. Then the next day the lawyer phoned me to say that he had received a reply and that the price had dropped to 175,000\$. I knew that with such a drop the man was desperate to sell. "Offer 150,000." I said. Eventually the price was settled at 155,000\$ and we signed an intent to buy.

Now we had to find the money! In those days we used to finance the Center by subscription but also by passing the hat around once a year to finance extra expenditure. So the membership was not surprised when we did this to finance the mortgage. We obtained 30,000\$ This sum in 1979 would be worth about 100,000\$ in present currency. Coming from a group of young people, many of whom were without work or just getting on to the labor market, this was certainly a major accomplishment. With this sum as equity we began looking for some financial institution willing to finance us. This was not easy to find. We must have visited four or five places and were turned down by all of them. They were not excited about the idea of lending 125,000\$ to some strange Buddhist sect that only had 30 members and whose annual balance sheet had a total of about 10,000\$.

Then one Friday I happened to be in my own bank, the TD bank in Westmount. I had naturally tried there first but had not even got as far as the manager before being turned down. This time I saw the manager, called him over, and asked him why he would refuse a loan to a client that had been with the Toronto Dominion for about sixteen years. He looked quite bewildered, as obviously he had no idea what I was talking about and invited me into his office. I prevailed upon him to lend

us the money, which he finally agreed to do. In order that he should not change his mind over the weekend I asked him to sign a letter of agreement which he did. The mortgage was for 12% on 100,000\$.

We had to find another 25,000\$. I managed to get someone to lend 10,000\$ and Jean and I lent the remaining 15,000\$. When I went to see the manager on the Monday he congratulated me on my getting the agreement signed on the Friday. The bank rate had increased to 13.5% over the weekend.

The directing committee signed the mortgage contract. The purchase contract was signed about the 6th or 7th of Oct and we were due to move into the house on the 15th of October. However we did not have the money to pay for the moving, nor did we have the money to pay the attorney. In fact we were flat broke. I estimated that we needed at least five thousand dollars to tide us over and pay the expenses of moving into a new house.

Again we passed the hat around but by this time very little could be offered. I wondered how we could ever find the money in time to cover these expenses.

On the Wednesday of the week we were due to move, a member, who was somewhat peripheral to the Center, phoned. He said that he had a trust fund and, in the past, his father had paid the interest of the fund into the account. This year he had decided to give it to his son. The member went on to say that he had no need of anything in particular at that moment and would like to donate the money to the Center. The amount was 5,000\$

6● Our next concern was taxes. The taxes on the property, which in those days was the corner lot on St. Hubert-Park Stanley. were 4,000\$ per year. I contacted the municipality and was told that we could not be considered a religious organization. The people to whom I spoke knew nothing about Zen and, in any case I was told, "There is no salvation outside the Church." Fortunately Vatican II had decided that Buddhism was a religion and I obtained a copy of the Pope's declaration to this effect. It was then a question of showing that Zen was a legitimate off shoot of Buddhism and that we had a legitimate line in the Zen tradition. We got our exemption because, as one of the inspectors, remarked, "You can't argue with the Pope!"

We moved into the house in the middle of October.

The first thing that greeted us on going to the basement was a broken hot water heater. It was standing there like the Belgian Prince with a stream of water pouring out. This was the first of a series of water calamities and the plumbing that proved the truth of Murphy's first law which says anything that can go wrong will go wrong. In time almost every pipe has taken its turn. Several memorable occasions are the following. One day, about three hours before a sesshin was to start, I looked up at the ceiling of the bathroom on the second floor to see water streaming through at every joint. The water heater on the third floor had collapsed and emptied itself on the floor.

On another occasion, again of course just before a sesshin was about to start, we found we had no water at all from any tap in the house. We decided to ask the neighbors if we could use their outside taps to fill up every available container, including the baths, with water so that we might have enough for at least the time being. Fortunately before actually going ahead with this plan I had an idea, and phoned a contractor who had done some work on our sewerage system a couple of months before. I felt sure that he was responsible in some way. He came around immediately and after a short while located the cause of the problem. Someone, and we never discovered who, had turned the water off at the main on Park Stanley Street.

On another occasion the pipes froze in the zendo building which left us without water in the toilet. I tried to unfreeze them using a small propane torch. The pipes are located in a very small basement under the stairs of the sesshin building. There is just about space to crawl, and no space to turn around. Because of the cramped conditions and poor light it was difficult to be quite sure of what one was doing. I melted the joints of the pipes and suddenly they gave way letting out a flood of freezing water. As I could hardly move, I was soaked in freezing cold water.

Buying the house was not the end, but the beginning of our difficulties. We had to do something about the decor which made the house look like a place of ill repute, and more important still, what was potentially a zendo had two major leaks in the roof and was filled with all kinds of junk. It had at one time been a schoolhouse and the staircase had tiny stairs about 5 inches high. The downstairs had been used also as a garage and had large garage doors where the dressing rooms are now. The second floor was filled with old

wood, broken glass, iron pipes and other junk. Unfortunately I knew nothing about construction, in fact did not even know what was gyproc (the material that one uses to make the walls.) I remember a group of us standing dazed looking around the second floor of the Zendo. Someone asked, "What shall we do first?" I said, "Pick something up and put it somewhere!" For the next three years we worked sometimes as much as 12 hours a day, and we did three hours sitting each day as well. We worked weekends as well as weekdays.

One of our main problems was financing the place. We had a mortgage of about 1250\$ per month, plus the cost of the utilities, maintenance and construction. As I mentioned earlier, in addition to charging a monthly fee, each year at the time of the annual general meeting, we would pass the hat around asking people to donate money, and this we had to continue to do. Another way we solved the problem was to have residents. In those days the Sangha was made up mainly of people in their early twenties, and, being unattached, some could easily come to live here at the center. We had ten residents. This included Jean and me; we lived on the third floor. In those days Jean paid rent and fees like everyone else. She used to sew under-ropes and robes as well as make cushions to earn some money for us. In addition she made the cushions that the Center needed for the Zendo as well as later doing much of the organization of the work for sesshin and the day to day running of the house. Until 1986 I was paid \$100.00 per month to cover various costs that I incurred in running the Center.

I worked on a two-month budget. In other words I would make sure that the Center had enough money, one way or another, to last us through the following two months. Once or twice, in the summer months when people were on holiday and did not pay their fees, we did not have the money to get us through these periods. In this case I supported the Center until things sorted themselves out.

We lived a communal life. We had all our meals together formally, just as we do now at sesshin. We took it in turns to cook and some of the cuisine was eccentric to say the least. For the first couple of years morning and evening zazen was done in the dining area of the house. When we started using the zendo we began to have sesshins. We began with two and three day sesshins, and gradually increased the length until we were running seven-day sesshins. The Center

began to have the kind of atmosphere that is so necessary for a committed practice.

A Zen master said that if one commits oneself to the Buddha way Bodhisattvas spring up everywhere to help you on your way. As you can see this proved so true during the birth and growth of the Center. One thing after another fell into place. All kinds of people in their turn have contributed to the emergence of what is now the Montreal Zen Center. People have given freely of their skills, experience and support. I have talked about my part in some of what has happened in the hope that it might prove of interest. However I was, if anything, simply the catalyst that made it all possible.

It might be of interest to the Sangha to know the names of the directing committee of the day, those brave souls who said, "Let's go ahead." Bill Byers was one, Ovid Avarmaa was another. A third was Jacques Lesperance who still comes on occasions to sit with us and who has over the years helped us enormously with the publication of Zen Gong. A fourth was a man named Schoell Shuster who went to Toronto and who is still, I believe, a member of the Toronto Zen Center. A fifth was Ron Rower an English teacher and good friend of the Center.

It would be tempting to mention many of the others without whom we would not have a Center, but it would make for a very, very long list. However it would not be right to fail to mention Jacques Fortin. Jacques was a very retiring, modest man. He was among the first group of people who stood with me looking somewhat dumbfounded at the wreck that was to be the Zendo. I noticed that somehow, when we got to work, he seemed to move with a lot more assurance than the rest of us. I asked him whether he knew anything about construction. He said that he did not. But it turned out this was simply his modesty and that he knew a great deal, and what he did not know he had the willingness and tenacity to find out.

It would not be possible to say all of what he did because he did so much. He built the entranceway, the dressing rooms, realigned the floor of the zendo and so much else. However one job that he did stands forever in my mind. We had a problem with the sewerage in the basement. This was another of the plumbing problems and one about which delicacy forbids me to say too much. In any case it was necessary to lay new sewerage pipes and it was urgent that the job be done

right away. Jacques started early on Boxing day to replace these pipes. He worked almost non-stop for twenty-four hours. I helped him up until 2 o'clock the next morning but by that time was completely worn out. And I had done hardly any of the hard work. One thing that he did was to saw through a cast iron pipe of about 4" diameter with a blunt hacksaw. We could not get a replacement for the blade because, in those days, the shops were closed on Boxing Day, and we could not afford to wait to get the job done..

In the twenty years we have been here we have had some very difficult, some bizarre and some hilarious situations. Perhaps, to end this article, I could tell of one, that had all three and a large measure of the hilarious.

About 1986 the Center ran into hard times, financially and otherwise, and we had to sell some of the land in order to pay our way. Some land surveyors came to survey the land and, of course they did this during a sesshin. In the process they drove one of their stakes through the intermediate pressure pipe that fed gas to our regulator.

I was about to give dokusan waiting for the first people to come across when someone rang the bell of the house. I went to the door and two men were standing there. I was in a hurry to get rid of them because I did not want them to disturb the sesshin, and so did not listen carefully to what they were saying. I still have difficulty sometimes with the French accent of some people and this added to the difficulty of understanding. I told them to go away. They did so reluctantly and I noticed that they just went to the end of the driveway and stood there, ringing their hands standing now on this foot now on that. I then heard a fairly loud hissing noise and could smell gas. I suddenly realized what these men had been telling me! A geyser of gas was erupting in the garden.

I went across to the Zendo and announced that we had a small problem and that dokusan would not be given. I hurried back to the house opening windows as I went, wondering all the time if the place was going to blow up. I phoned 911 and in seconds heard the wail of the fire engines. In a very short time we were surrounded by the flashing lights of fire trucks, police cars, gas company cars and crowds of people out to enjoy seeing a house blow up. We continued to sit in the Zendo. It was Friday afternoon of a seven day sesshin and I was determined that a gas leak was not going to destroy that wonderful taut atmosphere that had been built up during the past six arduous days.

As we sat I heard thumping and banging at the door of the zendo building. I went down stairs and found three huge firemen with helmets, boots, axes and with oxygen tanks strapped to their backs, struggling to get through the door and into the building. I held them at bay like Horatio at the bridge, but they demanded that we evacuate the building immediately. I could not argue, so, with hands in kinhin, eyes down, we, all twenty-four, filed down the stairs, past the unbelieving firemen, two policemen and a clutch of gas workers and into the garden. I led the file to a far corner of the grounds where we sat as best we could in the zazen posture and carried on with the practice. All the while firemen were running every which way with hoses, gas men were digging up the lawn, the police were reporting over the radio and literally dozens of people stood watching and hoping. But we sat there. Eventually I managed to persuade the authorities to allow us back into the zendo so that we could go on with the sesshin.

It is hard to believe that twenty-years have past since I joked with Jean. It is truly like a dream. I look forward to dreaming for another twenty years.

Pardonnez-nous nos offenses

*Par soi-même le mal est fait,
Par soi-même l'on souffre.
Par soi-même le mal est défait,
Nul ne peut purifier un autre.*

Imaginez la scène suivante : vous êtes un Juif ou une Juive dans un camp de concentration. On vous convoque au chevet d'un SS qui agonise. Il vous confesse alors une horrible atrocité que lui et d'autres ont commise envers des hommes, des femmes et des enfants juifs. Il vous demande, en tant que Juif, de lui accorder votre pardon afin de pouvoir mourir en paix. Que feriez-vous ?

Simon Wiesenthal, qui s'est fait connaître comme chasseur de Nazis, a été placé exactement dans cette situation et c'est cette expérience qu'il raconte dans son livre « The Sunflower »(1). Il termine son témoignage en disant : « Vous, qui venez de lire ce triste et tragique épisode de ma vie, pouvez vous mettre à ma place et vous poser cette question cruciale : 'Qu'aurais-je fait ?' Dans l'édition de 1976, le livre inclut un certain nombre de personnes dont le Dalaï Lama, Mathew Fox, Rebecca Goldstein, le cardinal Franz Konig, Herbert Marcuse, Albert Speer, Primo Levi et beaucoup d'autres, donnant leur réponse à cette question.

Je pratique le Zen assidûment depuis 35 ans et je l'enseigne depuis 20 ans. « Qu'aurais-je fait à sa place ? » Il m'est bien sûr difficile de me projeter moi-même dans cette horrible situation, installé comme je le suis présentement dans un bureau confortable, entouré de gens que j'aime et qui m'aiment, protégé par la police et l'armée, vivant dans un pays où la loi est souveraine. La question n'en demeure pas moins une question vraie et j'ai senti, après la lecture de Wiesenthal, que je devais répondre à son défi, ne serait-ce que pour moi-même, et aussi honnêtement que possible. Permettez-moi donc de partager avec vous certaines de mes réflexions qu'il faut voir comme étant provisoires et que je présente beaucoup plus

comme des suggestions que des opinions définitives.

Que veut dire pardonner ? Qui peut pardonner à d'autres ? Quelle est la validité du pardon ? Celui qui récite le Notre-Père supplie que ses péchés lui soient pardonnés « comme nous pardonnons à ceux qui nous ont offensés ». Le pardon est exigé de la part de ceux qui le demandent. Dans les Béatitudes, il est dit : « Heureux les miséricordieux : il leur sera fait miséricorde ». Le cardinal Franz Konig, dans sa réponse à la question de Wiesenthal, écrit que le Christ a nié explicitement toute limite au pardon. Il semblerait donc qu'un chrétien n'a pas le choix, qu'il doit pardonner. Dans sa réponse, Edward Flannery, un prêtre jésuite, réitère cette position en disant : « C'est un des principes cardinaux de l'éthique judéo-chrétienne que le pardon doit toujours être accordé à celui qui se repend sincèrement ». Il cite, pour appuyer ses dires, ce que Jésus a répondu lorsqu'on lui a demandé combien de fois il fallait pardonner : «soixante dix-sept fois sept ». Cette expression, explique-t-il, est une métaphore pour « toujours ». Mais lorsque Wiesenthal posait sa question, nous invitait-il à ce genre de débat abstrait, théologique ? Nous demandait-il de lui fournir des règles de conduite et de la théologie ? Je ne peux m'empêcher de penser que le cardinal, le prêtre jésuite et ceux qui raisonnent comme eux, y compris le Dalaï Lama dont la réponse est basée sur le fait que de condamner les autres n'est pas la voie bouddhique, se sont retranchés derrière des principes religieux. Je ne peux m'empêcher de penser que d'une certaine façon ils ont évité la question.

Encore une fois, qu'est-ce que le pardon ? Pourquoi le demande-t-on ?

La réponse qui vient immédiatement : on se sent coupable et on sollicite le pardon pour soulager ce sentiment de culpabilité. Mais pourquoi se sent-on coupable ? Doit-on commettre un crime horrible pour se sentir coupable ? Certainement pas. À preuve, le titre de ce livre que je me rappelle avoir vu dans une

librairie : « Pourquoi est-ce que je me sens coupable quand je dis non ? » Même lorsqu'il faut dire non, même lorsque la situation l'exige, on se sent coupable. Il suffit de passer devant un mendiant dans la rue pour ressentir un serrement, une tension, et derrière cette tension, la culpabilité. Est-il possible que les actes du soldat SS ne soient qu'une amplification, une immense amplification je vous l'accorde, mais une amplification tout de même, de ce geste d'éviter un mendiant dans la rue ? On peut voir des gens porter un très lourd fardeau de culpabilité causé par ce qu'un observateur impartial pourrait juger comme une infraction mineure. D'autres par contre, et les noms de Hoess et Goring nous viennent immédiatement à l'esprit, ne manifestent aucune culpabilité apparente, alors même qu'ils ont les mains tachées du sang de millions d'individus. La culpabilité ne serait donc pas le résultat d'actions que j'aurais commises, mais le résultat de mes réactions à ces actions. Je suis coupable, non à cause de ce que je fais, mais à cause de ce que je suis.

Qu'est-ce que cela signifie ? D'où vient la culpabilité ? Du péché originel, répondrait l'Église. Nous participons à la malédiction d'Adam. Le bouddhisme dirait : nous sommes coupables parce que nous sommes ignorants. À première vue, ces deux réponses semblent se situer à des kilomètres de distance. Pourtant Adam a été puni parce qu'il s'est détourné de Dieu, parce qu'il a ignoré ses commandements. De même que l'ignorance pour le bouddhisme n'est pas le résultat d'une carence dans l'instruction, mais elle est l'ignorance de nos origines. Nous avons tourné le dos à notre propre nature. Tous les deux, le christianisme et le bouddhisme, affirment qu'une rupture s'est produite, une rupture qui donne naissance à la souffrance et à la culpabilité, qui la sous-tend.

Hakuin, un maître Zen, a dit : « Depuis le commencement, tous les êtres sont Bouddha ». Depuis le commencement, tous les êtres sont l'intelligence créatrice. Unité et plénitude, voilà les mots bouddhistes pour le Jardin de l'Eden. L'unité est amour ; quand j'aime quelqu'un, je fais un avec lui. L'amour donc est mon état naturel. C'est aussi l'état naturel du SS. Quand je me détourne de l'Unité, je rencontre un monde fracturé et je tombe en enfer. Quand je ne le fais plus, quand je ne tourne plus le dos à la source, le sentiment d'être en opposition avec le monde, cette opposition d'où le monde semble tirer sa réalité même, n'existe plus. C'est le paradis. Le monde ne semble plus être « là-bas », froid et impersonnel, mais « ici », c'est moi-même. Bassui, un maître Zen célèbre, a dit : « L'univers et vous-mêmes êtes d'une

même racine ; vous et chacune des choses formez une unité. Le murmure du ruisseau et le souffle du vent sont votre voix. Le vert du pin et la blancheur de la neige sont votre couleur. »

Un samouraï demanda au maître Hakuin : « Qu'est-ce que l'enfer, qu'est-ce que le paradis ? » Hakuin rétorqua : « Qu'est-ce qu'un balourd ignorant comme toi peut savoir du paradis et de l'enfer ? » La colère envahit le samouraï qui se précipita sur Hakuin l'épée brandie. Hakuin dit : « L'enfer, c'est ça ! » Le samouraï, comprenant ce que Hakuin voulait lui montrer, rengaina son épée. « Ça, c'est le paradis », dit Hakuin.

Quand je me détourne de la source, je me retrouve dans un monde de colère, d'agressivité, de cruauté et de haine. Face à ce monde séparé, fragmenté et douloureux, je lutte pour saisir l'unité à nouveau. Je tente de le faire par la destruction, en imagination ou dans les faits, de tout ce qui ne s'accorde pas avec mon idée de l'unité. Dans cette lutte pour saisir l'Un, je m'aggrise de plus en plus à une idée de moi-même, de ce que je suis, à mes idéaux, à ce qui donne sens à ma vie ; ce faisant, je me coupe de plus en plus des autres. En cherchant à obtenir le salut, je me déchire de plus en plus, je m'éloigne de ma véritable demeure.

Tout le temps où je réussis dans ma lutte pour être, ou connaître, ou posséder l'Un, je me sens sûr de moi, je fais preuve d'arrogance, je suis immunisé. Mais lorsque ma prise s'affaiblit, le roc sur lequel j'avais bâti ma sécurité s'effrite. Je me sens alors vulnérable, faible, et la culpabilité s'infiltrer de plus en plus. C'est alors que je peux, dans un dernier effort, tenter de boucher les fissures avec de la haine et du fanatisme.

Le soldat SS, lorsqu'il s'acharnait cruellement sur ses victimes souffrantes ressentait, sans aucun doute, de la pitié et du remords, de la culpabilité même, mais ces sentiments devaient rapidement être engourdis par la potion de pouvoir brut qu'il buvait. Mais lorsqu'il s'est retrouvé étendu sur son lit dans le noir, blessé à mort, le roc sur lequel reposait son arrogance se mit à fondre et la culpabilité, comme les eaux qu'un barrage ne retient plus, le submergea complètement.

On dit que Dieu est amour. Dieu est Un. Jésus a dit : « Le Père et moi ne faisons qu'Un ». Il ne parlait sûrement pas exclusivement pour lui-même. Il ne disait pas moi, Jésus, et le Père sommes Un tandis que vous tous, tous les autres, vous êtes condamnés pour toujours à être séparés de la source même, du fondement de votre être. Bouddha également a dit :

« Partout au ciel et sur la terre, moi seul suis l'Un honoré. » Il ne voulait certainement pas dire que lui, Siddhartha Gautama, était le seul et l'unique. Quand il disait « moi seul suis l'Un honoré », il parlait pour nous tous. Si Dieu est amour, alors je suis amour, je suis Un. Si tel est le cas, pourrait-on dire alors que la culpabilité est l'amour torturé par la séparation ? Cela signifierait que le seul péché est la séparation. Je cherche le pardon de mes péchés pour redécouvrir le Jardin de l'Eden, pour guérir la blessure au cœur même de mon être, pour transcender la coupure de l'existence. Mourir complet et entier, c'est aller au paradis ; mourir fracturé, déchiré par ma propre arrogance, ma peur ou ma stupidité, c'est aller en enfer.

Mais qui peut me pardonner mes péchés ? Qui peut guérir cette blessure que je m'inflige moi-même ? En épigraphe nous avons placé cette citation qui dit : « Nul ne peut purifier un autre ». Nul ne peut pardonner à un autre. Seul Dieu peut pardonner. Seule l'Unité peut guérir l'Unité fracturée, seul l'amour peut faire fondre la haine. Le père Flannery écrit : « Le pardon doit toujours être accordé à celui qui se reprend sincèrement. » Mais non ! Le pardon est toujours accordé à celui qui se reprend sincèrement. Nous n'avons pas besoin de quelqu'un d'autre pour nous dire : « Vos péchés sont pardonnés »(2). En réalité, pardonner ses péchés à quelqu'un, c'est le priver de la véritable absolution.

Qu'est-ce que le repentir ? C'est ressentir de la tristesse, du remords. Le mot « remords » est probablement celui qui frappe le plus juste. Il vient du latin et signifie littéralement « mordre à nouveau ». Le repentir, c'est être mordu à nouveau ; l'on entre dans la douleur du conflit et l'on vit cette douleur. Le repentir, c'est de payer ses dettes, celles que nous avons faites en nous séparant de notre source. Pour payer nos dettes nous devons, par la prière, la méditation, la réflexion profonde et sincère, retourner à la source, abandonner notre orgueil et notre arrogance, nos peurs et nos désirs, et permettre au pouvoir de notre propre compassion innée de guérir nos blessures. Le repentir est douloureux. Il implique l'abandon de ces barrières mêmes que nous avons construites pour nous protéger des conséquences de la séparation. À mesure que nous obtenons l'absolution (3), que nous nous délivrons de notre propre emprisonnement, notre culpabilité augmente, une peur primordiale s'empare de nous, nous laissant nus, sans défense, seuls (alone - all One). C'est alors que nous voulons crier au secours, demander de l'aide, demander pardon. Mais si nous cédon à ces impulsions, nous ne faisons que reconstruire nos défenses, rebâtir les murs qui nous

emprisonnent. Le repentir est le purgatoire, là où s'accomplit la purgation de nos péchés. Plus grand est le péché, plus nous avons crucifié l'Unité au profit de notre moi, plus intense doit être le feu de la compassion.

Qu'en est-il de celui qui pardonne ? Le pardon que je donne à quelqu'un peut ne pas avoir de valeur pour lui, il peut même être un obstacle à sa propre absolution, mais quel est sa valeur pour moi ? Peut-être que la question, ici, serait plus significative si je demandais : « Qu'arrive-t-il si je ne pardonne pas ? » Cela aussi constitue un rejet, une séparation. Et plus la demande de pardon est sincère, plus profonde est la blessure qui résulte de mon refus. Nous avons tendance à pardonner pour soulager les feux de la douleur qui brûleraient en cas de refus, non chez l'autre mais en nous-mêmes. Mais la paix s'achète-t-elle à si bas prix ? Si je pardonne, je dois faire un avec celui qui m'a offensé. Je dois porter son fardeau comme si c'était le mien. Si je ne le porte pas, mon pardon est un ersatz, de la fausse monnaie qui n'a pas son équivalent en or.

Aurais-je pardonné au soldat SS ? Si je ne le fais pas, je dois me séparer de lui. Je dois le porter comme un fardeau pour le restant de mes jours. Simon Wiesenthal a refusé. Est-ce la raison pour laquelle il a écrit son livre ? Ce soldat SS a-t-il continué de le hanter comme un fantôme non apaisé ? Mais si je lui pardonne, je dois porter son fardeau avec lui. Je dois faire ma paix avec ses atrocités, non seulement en mon nom propre, mais au nom de toutes ces âmes qu'il a assassinées.

Non, je ne crois pas que j'aurais pu le faire, je ne crois pas que j'aurais pu lui pardonner. Mais son sort aurait-il été meilleur si j'avais pu ?

1. Simon Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower : On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*, Shocken Books, New York, 1976.

2. Le lecteur intéressé à poursuivre cette réflexion pourra consulter le chapitre V de mon livre *Flowers of Air : Zen and the Sutras* qui sera publié l'automne prochain chez Charles E. Tuttle and Co.

3. Le mot absolution vient du latin et signifie être dégagé de, être relâché.

On Death

Extracts from the book : Warrior of Zen, The Diamond Hard Wisdom Mind of Suzuki Shosan, Kodansha International, 1994.

« The strength of Soshan, the seventeenth-century warrior-turned-monk, is that he gives us a wake-up call about death so full-throated that it reverberates through the centuries. His voice coming through loud and clear, he carries himself like a two-fisted fighter, confronting death at every moment, and striding with his warrior glare into the lion's den of death - or, more precisely, our fear of death. Death is famously a way of focusing our attention and sharpening our priorities. Soshan takes us back to a wisdom that all traditions cherish. As Montaigne, his contemporary, wrote :

He who has learned how to die has unlearned how to be a slave. »

Rouse death-energy

In the spring of the fourth year of Keian (1651), the Master said : « Rather than carrying around your own views, it's better to rouse death-energy. From the time I was quite young, I had an inkling of this vital energy, but it wasn't until a long time after that it was transformed to death-energy. I adopt the mind of one about to have his throat cut, just as if my own throat were about to be cut. When I hear of all the people who die, I receive death's vital energy just like that. I don't know how much of what I am saying has penetrated your hearts. When I'm attacked by the anguish of death, my heart pounds and it's quite unbearable. As time passes, I should find myself drained of this vital energy, and yet I never seem to be without it. At first I thought it was harmful, but later I

realized that this energy is the perfect medicine for any disease. It takes care of everything. It even shows me how to reason. One who possesses this death-confronting energy will gradually improve. So I believe this death-energy can be the beginning of freedom from birth and death. »

Only others will die

One day, after a funeral, the Master said in astonishment : « People think that only others will die. They forget that sooner or later they will, too. They carry on without so much as a thought that death could possibly happen to them. They are shocked when it comes upon them unexpectedly. How foolish ! »

If you try for quick results, you'll only regress

The questioner said : « I have engaged in a fair amount of religious practice but have made no progress. » The Master responded : « It's not an easy matter. If it were that easy, I would be an arhat or a bodhisattva. But I still haven't left the world of hungry ghosts and fighting demons. That's why, more and more, I engage in severe practices. Even if you apply yourself once as though you were brushing fire from your head, it will be of no avail if you don't continue. If you try for quick results, you'll only regress. »

The coward's Dharma

In an evening talk, the Master said to the congregation: « Do you know what it is that operates in universal virtue ? Can you tell me the substance of it ? » A lay disciple answered : « Virtue is liberation ». The Master said : « Put liberation aside for the

moment. You would have been better off saying that it is no-mind and no-thought. Everything is derived from this. When there is no-mind and no-thought, everything is in harmony. When I hear clapping to a beat, for example, I become a part of it. And when I sing, « Here is the wandering monk walking through all the provinces, » I become one with that feeling. Though I do not know how to hold a fan (in the appropriate way for the dance), with a heart that dances freely, I can throw myself into the dance, becoming one with the tune. Allowing the form to manifest in accord with the situation also applies in the realm of no-thought. For example, someone who loves to dance comes along and says : « I love to dance and would like to be shown how to attain Buddhahood through dancing. » If I didn't show him, I would not be acting in accord with universal virtue.

In connection with this, the Master said : « I've had the experience of being asked by someone who liked to hunt how he could attain Buddhahood through hunting. I said : « Is it fun when the birds fly around in a frenzy crying kyaa kyaa every time you kill one of them ? If so, will you enjoy yourself when you also are about to die ? If you're happy when you die, that's Buddhahood. Buddhahood is dying with a calm mind. Therefore everytime you kill a beast of prey, you

should feel as though your own bones are being crushed and you are preparing to die with it, laughing in the face of death. That's the attitude of a true hunter. » When I said that it was a strange warrior who didn't hunt in this manner, he was in a quandary. He stopped hunting and later progressed in his religious practice.

I didn't learn this universal virtue from anyone. But I suffered because I wasn't prepared to die. So I trained myself in various practices and came to understand the principle. My way is the coward's Dharma.. »

Eradication of the « I » is the true Dharma

One day a lay person asked : « I'm told that there are mistaken practitioners and true practitioners. How can we distinguished one from the other ? » The Master responded : « When the « I » is eradicated, that is the true Dharma. Practitioners of wisdom establish a « wise I. » Practitioners of compassion establish a « compassionate I. » Practitioners of meditation establish a « zazen I » Practitioners of a particular viewpoint establish an « I » with that viewpoint. Ordinary people tend to elevate themselves. One is always trying to elevate above others. No matter how humble a person's position, if he upholds the truth, I will step aside for him. »



Into each life some rain must fall.

An expression in English that is often used to depict the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune in our lives is : « Into each life some rain must fall. » But where would we be if some rain did not fall in our lives? We can always ask the people of the Sahel or of the Kalahari. We would live in a sun parched land, sustaining but little life and a very hard one at that.

Kyosaku in Japanese means attention stick. It is a hardwood stick about 45 cm long, square at one end and fanning out to a flat surface of 3 cm at the other. In our practice, it is used regularly to encourage the practice and help the body.

The kyosaku is placed on the altar in front of the Buddha. When the time comes for the monitor to use the kyosaku, which is usually half-way during a sitting period, the monitor will get up from the mat and walk towards the altar. The altar is never approached directly, “brazenly” as one might say. No, the altar is approached humbly, from the side. When the monitor is level with the front of the altar, he steps in front of the Buddha, or as is the case during a Sesshin, in front of Manjusri, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, and he makes a bow.

The kyosaku is picked up as quietly as possible, so that others do not hear it being picked up. With the kyosaku at eye level, the monitor makes a bow, then the kyosaku is turned completely from one side to the other and he makes another bow. He will then hold the kyosaku straight up in front with the mid-point at eye level. Then he will walk around the zendo in a counter-clockwise fashion.

At a signal from a meditator, the monitor will rest the kyosaku lightly on the right shoulder to signal the kyosaku. Then the monitor strikes each shoulder twice at the base of the meditator’s neck. An acupuncture or accupressure node is located at each of these points.

The kyosaku is to offset drowsiness as well as to relieve tension and pain that tends to build up in the neck and shoulders. [The motion is not one to hit but to take away so that it has to end with the kyosaku in the air after each tap.]

After using the kyosaku, the monitor will then bow to the person he has just struck and move on. The monitor will go around the zendo twice and then return the kyosaku to the altar. Again, the altar is not approached directly but sideways and a sidestep is used. Again the monitor makes a bow holding the kyosaku at eye level, he then turns the kyosaku completely from one side to the other, and makes another bow and finally places the kyosaku on the altar, as quietly as possible. Finally he bows holding his hands in gassho and returns to his mat in kinhin.

During sesshins, the kyosaku is not given at the meditators request but as the situation arises and the blows will usually be heavier than during an evening sitting. A participant at the sesshin can ask the monitor not to use kyosaku on him or her or to use it very lightly. The kyosaku is used during sesshin with a flowing quality to it. For instance, the kyosaku will be applied with a crescendo, i.e. applied in a more and more lively fashion, so to say, to match the increase in energy as the sesshin progresses. The kyosaku is a vital part of the sesshin.

When the monitor uses the kyosaku, that is his practice. When using it there is just that: using the kyosaku, nothing else.

Kyosaku is like rain. Sometimes it falls softly like a late spring shower bringing freshness and release to our bodies. Sometimes the crack of the kyosaku wakes us from slumber like a thunderclap in a summer thunderstorm. At other times, the kyosaku is hard and cold like an autumn rainfall bringing us back to ourselves from our lulling dream-world. But into each life some rain must fall if the seeds are to grow.

With profound gratitude to the guidance of our teacher, the support of the Sangha and the forgiveness of those whose shoulder blades and ears we sometimes, unfortunately, graze.

N'étanchez pas votre soif

Un instant très bref durant un sesshin, j'ai entrevu ce que serait ma vie si j'arrêtais de pratiquer, si je cessais ce travail sur soi-même qui est le propre du Zen, sa musculature, rigoureuse et exigeante, si j'arrêtais pour revenir à la vie d'avant, avant que ma pratique ne devienne le centre de gravité de ma vie. Bien sûr, il m'est tout à fait impossible de revenir en arrière. Quand on commence à s'ouvrir les yeux, a dit Gurdjieff, cela devient de plus en plus difficile de faire comme si l'on ne voyait pas, il devient impossible de se fermer les yeux ensuite. "Vous devez prendre conscience du risque, a-t-il dit. C'est facile de commencer, mais, une fois que vous avez abandonné votre chaise, c'est très difficile d'en trouver une autre, et cela peut causer beaucoup de malheur." Non, ce que j'ai entrevu à cet instant, ce n'était pas uniquement l'impossibilité d'un retour en arrière, ou même de m'établir dans une sorte de statu quo, de me dire voilà, j'arrête ici, je retourne à mes occupations habituelles. "Qu'est-ce que vous allez faire?" m'a déjà demandé ironiquement M.Low un soir où j'effleurais l'idée de tout lâcher, "vous allez écouter la télévision?" Non, ce que j'ai entrevu durant ce sesshin, c'était la saveur de la vie telle que je devais la goûter autrefois, dans des moments d'agonie, quand les compensations ne jouent plus et que l'on se retrouve nu devant le néant, moments fugaces car ils sont proprement insoutenables, quand on ne sait pas que le tunnel est une voie et qu'il y a une lumière au bout, que l'abîme n'est pas un engouffrement mais la porte de la liberté. C'est cette saveur qui m'est revenue à la mémoire et je mesure la distance qui me sépare de cette vie d'avant par le sentiment d'horreur que j'ai éprouvé à ce moment-là. J'avais oublié à quel point la vie endormie dans le rêve peut être cauchemardesque.

La vie au fonds du puit de mélasse, engluée dans les apparences, livrée à l'anecdotique, à l'arbitraire, à l'agitation, à la fausse intensité; la vie de la totale identification à tout ce qui se passe, à tout ce qui passe, les événements, les émotions, les idées, les gens, vie de marionnettes manipulées par les circonstances, poupée qui pleure, poupée qui rit; la vie de l'angoisse, de l'angoisse qui se cache elle-même, qui ne cherche qu'à se masquer, à se nier, tellement elle est intolérable; la vie des compensations, illusoire mais nécessaires pour survivre, "le gin au jus d'orange" de Malcolm Lowry, "le seul remède contre

la déroutante stérilité de l'existence telle qu'elle nous est vendue", disait-il, le gin au jus d'orange, métaphore de toutes nos compensations, toutes, qu'elles soient nobles ou banales, la carrière, le prestige social, les possessions matérielles, les connaissances, les plaisirs, la drogue, la télévision, tous des remèdes qui inévitablement deviennent d'autres maladies, et elles s'empilent les unes par-dessus les autres pour masquer des angoisses plus tenaces, celles de la détérioration physique, du vieillissement et de la mort, et elles-mêmes masquent la première, l'angoisse fondamentale, ce sentiment d'être complètement et irrémédiablement séparé de soi-même.

Et quand les joies et les déceptions, quelquefois très grandes, se rétrécissent avec le temps, se rapetissent au fur et à mesure que la vie se referme devant soi bouchée, bouchée, comment ne pas voir qu'on s'en va dans le trou, le grand trou noir? Comment ne pas voir l'impasse, la totale impasse, comment ne pas suffoquer? "Rien n'est jamais parfait, m'a dit déjà quelqu'un pour me consoler, à l'époque où j'étais engluée dans le puits de mélasse. Ton erreur, c'est de chercher l'absolu. Il faut savoir se contenter." Ce "il faut savoir se contenter" me faisait frémir. Pourquoi est-ce que ça ressemble tellement à une démission? Qu'est-il advenu de vos rêves de jeunesse? "Oh! ma chère! je suis devenue réaliste!" Comme c'est horrible. L'absolu est impossible? Soyons réalistes! La vie est courte? Buons, mangeons! Qu'arrive-t-il quand on a mal au foie, quand le plaisir laisse des traces, que la jouissance ressemble à des grimaces?... "Oh! ma chère, je m'occupe de moi maintenant. Je fais du conditionnement physique, du jogging, je me nourris bien, je prends des vitamines. Je me couche tôt, je me lève tôt, je suis efficace, active, productive."... Où est-ce que tu t'en vas comme ça avec tes souliers de jogging? Tu penses que tu vas éviter le grand trou noir? Tu penses que la mort est différente quand on crève le ventre plat? ... Direct dans le trou, voilà où tu t'en vas, comme tout le monde.

*« O noir noir noir. Tous s'en vont dans le noir,
Dans les vides espaces interstellaires, dans le vide au
dedans du vide,
Les capitaines, les négociants, les hommes de lettres
éminents....*

Tous, ils s'en vont tous dans le noir. » (T.S Eliot)

L'erreur, ce n'est pas tant de chercher l'absolu dans le relatif, que de cesser de chercher. L'erreur, c'est de ne pas être assez radical. "Vous êtes pas tannés de mourir, bande de caves." Le poète avait raison. Non, il ne faut pas savoir se contenter, il faut savoir être radicalement mécontent plutôt... Voilà, mais c'est ça qui est long à apprendre. Il y a une réserve infinie d'illusions qui guettent au détour, véritable miroir aux alouettes, promesses fallacieuses, mirages, la soif sera étanchée, la soif d'absolu sera étanchée... Mais elle ne l'est pas. Elle ne l'a pas été pour moi. Heureusement.

L'insatisfaction nous pousse à la recherche d'une voie, une voie qu'on imagine comme une porte de sortie, enfin je vais sortir de cette prison, dehors c'est le ciel pur, les grandes immensités vertes... et on découvre que la porte de sortie, la voie, est une voie qui nous ramène d'abord au plus profond de nos insatisfactions, qu'on ne les avait jamais regardées en face, avant elles étaient presque abstraites, maintenant elles sont brûlantes, encore plus brûlantes parce qu'il n'y a plus de baume. Et c'est alors que je vivais une de ces impasses dans la pratique, alors qu'on a l'impression de s'être embarqué dans une chimère, une autre, l'ultime chimère de la libération, alors que je souhaitais recevoir quelque chose de tangible, une confirmation que je ne m'étais pas trompée, que le bonheur était là, à quelque part, palpable, à portée de la main, préhensible, compréhensible, alors que je voulais que cesse cette déroute, cette confusion, monsieur Low ma demandé : "Voulez-vous vraiment qu'on vous enlève votre question, cette question qui vous brûle?" Pendant un instant d'éclair, j'ai senti ce que pourrait être ma vie sans cette épine dans la chair, sans cette interrogation brûlante et j'ai dit non.

16•

Quelques années auparavant, j'avais fait un rêve et ce rêve était pour moi la représentation de ce qu'est une vie sans brûlure. Il y a des gens qui sont déjà morts, disait Gurjieff. On en rencontre souvent sur le trottoir des grandes villes et il ajoutait qu'heureusement, la plupart d'entre nous ne pouvons pas les voir. Car quand on n'est pas prêt, cette vision peut nous terrasser. Mon rêve était cette vision. J'étais dans un grand magasin du centre-ville et je voyais des gens pendus à des crochets. Ils avaient tous le corps flasque dans des vêtements fluorescents, mais ils avaient les yeux ouverts, ils étaient vivants, mais insensibles, indolores. Des morts vivants. Et le manège où ils étaient suspendus tournait lentement, au premier étage de ce grand magasin, à côté des escaliers roulants, et les gens allaient et venaient, et personne ne

semblaient horrifiées de ce spectacle. Il y avait un homme à côté de moi, mince et cynique, le personnage du diable dans mon rêve, et je le suppliais de laisser mourir ces gens, de ne pas les laisser tourner en rond comme ça à perpétuité, flasques, indolores, inertes, mais vivants. Une sorte de vision de l'enfer, l'enfer qui n'est pas chaud ni froid, mais tiède, l'enfer de «l'interminable finitude».

À mesure que j'avance dans la pratique, mon passé s'estompe. Il devient flou. Et il se refait constamment aussi. C'est un peu comme lorsqu'on se promène en bateau et qu'on ne voit pas le rivage. On mesure le chemin parcouru en regardant les traces sur l'eau. Notre vie est souvent comme ça. Devant, c'est l'inconnu, mais quand on regarde les traces laissées derrière, on voit qu'il y avait une orientation malgré le parcours sinueux. Mais les traces changent à chaque changement de cap. C'est comme ça que le passé est toujours présent : il se refait constamment sous nos yeux. Ce que je voyais comme des échecs au moment de les vivre, je les vois comme des chances maintenant, des occasions opportunes... plus que ça, c'était des intentions réalisées, souvent à mon insu. La direction était là pourtant. Je sentais confusément qu'il ne fallait pas que j'étanche ma soif, justement...

« N'étanchez pas votre soif », m'a souvent dit M. Low. Elle votre meilleure amie, elle est votre guide. La soif du réel, c'est elle, la voix qui crie dans le désert, celle qui appelle, qui attire, oui, il a fallu qu'il me le répète souvent avant que je la reconnaisse cette soif, enfouie sous les multiples soifs, que je reconnaisse finalement la valeur des gestes que j'avais posés jusque là, qui m'avaient menée ici, cette voix je n'avais pas réussi à l'étouffer, quelle merveille!, elle n'avait jamais cessé d'agir comme ma plus puissante motivation, c'est elle qui m'avait menée là, à travers un parcours sinueux, là où j'étais maintenant, assise sur un coussin, dans la salle du dokusan, face à M. Low, essayant maladroitement de démêler le réel de l'illusoire, de discerner le vrai du faux, de répondre à la question des questions: "Qui suis-je?"

Thy Will be Done (continued)

This is a continuation of an article Thy Will be Done, which appeared in the last issue of Zen Gong.

Let us now refer directly to the account given by Father Ciszek and see how closely what he has to say meshes with what we have already said.

Father Ciszek was a Jesuit priest who found himself in Russian occupied Poland at the out-break of world war two. After the Russians had taken over Poland, he infiltrated into Russia with the view of ministering to the spiritual needs of the Russians. Unfortunately however he was arrested as a Vatican spy and incarcerated in the dreaded Lubianka prison.

Lubianka, he tells us, was formerly a hotel and its cells were still more like hotel rooms than prison cells. Although it had a regular window, this was completely barred and covered with a sheet of tin. Only a brief opening at the top allowed some light and air into the room. A bed was the only item of furniture in the room. It had no table or chair, nothing to sit on. He could only lie on the bed to sleep otherwise he leaned against the wall or paced up and down the tiny six by ten-foot room. Apart from one twenty-minute exercise period and two visits to the toilet, he spent the entire day alone in this bare room. As he said, "An hour can seem an eternity in such isolation, and time has little meaning at all after a while. A week was simply seven identical days, a month simply a way of mathematically marking four such weeks, thirty such days of sameness." In addition to the suffering induced by this bare life, and by the rigid discipline that surrounded any activity at all, there was the suffering brought about by the silence. The guards wore soft-soled shoes so that he could not even hear them moving around. There was no one to talk to and no sounds in the corridor except at meal times. This tomblike silence was itself terrifying and he constantly listened for some slight sound that would break the silence.

Ciszek spent five years in Lubianka, most of the time in solitary confinement. Throughout all of this time he

was subjected to interrogation which was visited upon him very spasmodically sometimes intensely over a period of days and weeks and sometimes with long intervals of several months. Bad as these sessions were, as much as he dreaded the march down the corridor and up the stairs to the interrogation rooms, there were times when the silence became so bad, so overpowering that he said that he almost looked forward to this terrible ordeal simply in order to have a face that he could look at, someone with whom he could talk.

When he returned from interrogation he was on his own again. He would agonize again and again over every question and wonder about every answer, torturing himself constantly. He could get no relief from talking to another about it nor by sharing experiences and sympathizing with another person.

In spite of the difficulties, at first Ciszek was confident, confident that he would be released when it was realized that a mistake had been made, confident that he could withstand the difficulties, confident that the training he had had would sustain his will power. In other words he had what Ramana Maharshi called ego-confidence. He said "I rather prided myself on this will power and felt I could probably hold my own with any interrogator" But then he began to realize that the NKVD could simply wipe out its mistake by a simple order of execution. This new fear of death, the solitary confinement, the interrogations and their terrible aftermath of self-doubt and anguish, began to take its toll. His morale began to crumble, and he began to lose ego confidence. He said, "It was then, especially that I turned to prayer."

Ciszek at first felt that the false center, the false self imbued with illusory "self power," was all that was necessary. All he had to do was constantly to feed and reinforce this false center and all would turn out well. But this false center began to weaken, the stable point

began to wobble, and he turned to prayer. Almost from the beginning of his imprisonment he established what the Jesuits call a “daily order,” a routine of activity by which to structure their time. This would start with the Morning Offering and then after the morning trip to the toilet he would do an hour’s meditation. He would say the mass and say the Angelus morning noon and night. At noon he would make an examination of conscience and so on. As the routine was similar to the daily orders in most Jesuit homes, his days began to assume some kind of pattern.

He said, being human he made the usual human mistakes with prayer. He prayed for the conversion of his interrogators, he prayed hard for more food, but, although he learned soon enough that prayer did not take away the bodily pains and sufferings, nevertheless it provided a certain moral strength whereby to bear the burden patiently. He felt that it was prayer that surely helped him throughout every crisis. Gradually however he said that he began to purify his prayer. In other words instead of praying to strengthen the power of the illusory center, which up until now had been his rock and support, his prayers began to change. These prayers had for their basis the phrase that comes from the Lord’s prayer, and to which we have already made reference, “Thy will be done.”

18• He soon came to realize that although it is a phrase that all spiritual writers use, and although it sounds simple, it is indeed a very difficult prayer. First of all he came to realize that words do not make a prayer, not even the words of The Lord’s prayer taught to us by our Lord himself. He realized that there is no formula that works of itself, no magic charm that must automatically be heard by God and produce its effect. In prayer, he says, “we must do more than merely visualize God as present as some sort of father figure. His fictionalized presence will not do; his imaginative presence will not do. Faith tells us that God is present everywhere and is always present to us if we but turn to him. So it is we who must put ourselves in God’s presence, we who must turn to him in faith, we who

must leap beyond an image to the belief-indeed the realization-that we are in the presence of a loving Father.” He goes on to say, “It sounds so easy when spiritual writers describe it or novice masters speak of it. In fact, on those rare occasions when it does happen, prayer is easy.”

Faith too is the basis of Zen practice. Zen master Hakuin tells us that we must have great faith, great doubt and great perseverance, but above all, great faith. If we have great faith we can allow our doubts to emerge and so be dealt with. Awakening is often referred to as the awakening of the faith-mind. The faith-mind is not identified with the search for something, the restless mind that is always seeking. With the awakening of the faith-mind real prayer is possible, prayer in which, to use father Cizek’s words, “we at last find ourselves in the presence of God.” Words are no longer necessary with this kind of prayer. In the Greek Orthodox Church prayer is said to be standing in the presence of God. Zazen is sitting in the presence. If one wishes one can add the words ‘of God’ or ‘of the Self,’ as long as one does not use the words to bolster what Cizek calls “a fictional presence.” If we pray in this way we no longer have the false center as our orientation. “Such prayer is all-absorbing. Once you have experienced it, you can never forget the experience/ the spontaneous outpouring of a soul that has come to realize-however fleetingly- that it is standing at the knee of a loving and providing Father.”

“Sometimes, by God’s grace, such a moment of insight and of prayer occurs almost unexpectedly. But for the most part, prayer demands an effort on our part.” This is something that most people do not at first appreciate. Prayer and meditation take effort, sometimes great effort. We are dominated by a restless desiring, seeking mind. “Our chief instrument in all human communications, is also our chief stumbling block to prayer.” This mind, as the priest goes on to say, “wants to be forever occupied, constantly at work, worrying, remembering, planning and scheming,

preventing and arguing, searching and questioning—even, in our attempts to pray, taking to itself God’s part and answering our every petition, carrying on by itself all sides of our attempt at a divine conversation. Or it will flare up with pride, impatience, ill feeling, bitterness, or hate when least we want it to. It will feel injured or offended, guilty or discouraged, just when we have almost reached our goal. Sometimes, indeed very often, the time we have set aside for prayer passes simply in a struggle to control our restless mind, collect our thoughts, and focus our attention upon God.” Who ever has practiced meditation seriously will sympathize with the father in this. If one has spent long barren hours in sesshin, the Zen Buddhist retreats during which all the waking hours are given over to meditation, one knows well this impossible restless mind. In the legends of his awakening, Buddha, after long years of bitter austerities, finally settles down under the Bo tree to meditate. Then, it is said, Mara and his legions assailed him. Mara was another name for the restless mind.

In Zen practice great attention is given to the posture, it being felt that the posture of the body should reflect the attitude of mind necessary in practice. This attitude is one of vigilance, of non-striving of openness. In Christian prayer posture is often ignored but Ciszek gives some attention to it. “Kneeling,” he says, “is not necessarily more conducive to prayer than sitting, nor is standing necessarily better than lying down. Yet mortal man is a peculiar thing made up of body and soul; so our efforts to control the mind can often be connected with an effort at bodily control” He says that if we relax the body the mind goes running off to recreation. He says that we are creatures of habit, and “we can sometimes help ourselves achieve a sort of self-control that leads more readily to recollection by taking up a posture we traditionally associate with prayer.” Not only this but “the very effort to take up a posture is an earnest indication of our desire to respond to God’s prompting and to do his will.” Earnestness, he says, is the willingness to try over and over again to find God and his will in prayer. It is itself a grace and

a blessing of major consequence. What other purpose, he asks, has man in life but to do God’s will? And every effort, at any moment, to follow the prompting of his will is itself both a grace and a blessing of no small consequence.

Even our most unsuccessful efforts to achieve union with God in prayer are nevertheless an effort to respond to his inspiration and his grace to pray. They are efforts, therefore, to conform our will to his and do his bidding. And perseverance in such efforts is, at the very least, practice in the habit of finding the will of God at all times and in everything. If we could achieve union with God in prayer, we would then see his will quite clearly and desire nothing but to conform our will to his.

As we said throughout his five year stay in Lubianka Father Ciszek was subject to continuous interrogation. The interrogations at first were directed to getting him to sign a confession saying that he was a spy for the Vatican. For a year he held out but eventually the implied threat of death, the isolation, the nagging doubts and guilt eventually wore him down to the point that he signed the confession. He said. “As I signed the pages, largely without reading them, I began to burn with shame and guilt. I was totally broken, totally humiliated. It was a moment of agony I’ll never forget as long as I live. I was full of fear and yet tormented by conscience. After signing the first hundred pages, I stopped even the pretense of reading the rest. I just wanted to finish signing them as quickly as possible and get out of the interrogator’s office. My aversion to the whole thing was overwhelming; I condemned myself before anybody else could do the same. I was despicable in my own eyes, no less than I must appear to others. My will had failed; I had proved to be nowhere near the man I thought I was. I had yielded, in that one sickening split second, to fear, to threats, to the thought of death. When the last page was finished, I literally wanted to run from the interrogator’s office.”

“Back in my cell, I stood shaken and defeated. At first,

I could not even grasp the dimensions of what had happened to me in the interrogator's office and why. I was tormented by feelings of defeat, failure, and guilt. Yet above all, I was burning with shame. Physically, I shook with spasms of nervous tension and release. When at last I began to regain some control of my nerves, my thoughts, and my emotions, I turned at once to prayer as best I could."

Shame and guilt, guilt and shame, this poor man was so tormented. But why? What was the source of these shattering emotions? On the face of it, they arose because he had signed the confession. However we must ask ourselves whether signing the document was the cause or the trigger. If it was the trigger wherein lies the dynamite that was exploded?

He said he turned to prayer. "My prayer at first, though, was a matter of reproaches. I reproached myself for failing to stand up against the interrogator and speak out, for failing to refuse to sign the dossier. I reproached myself for caving in out of fear, for giving way to panic, and acting sheerly out of some defense mechanism. And I did not spare God from these reproaches. Why had he failed me at the critical juncture? Why had he not sustained my strength and my nerve? Why had he not inspired me to speak out boldly? Why had he not shielded me by his grace from the fear of death?" In other words his prayers were a desperate attempt to reestablish the center.

Then he said that gradually he began to wonder he felt so guilty. As he said the sense of defeat could easily be explained but not such a strong feeling. What he had done in the face of the threat of death and the panic that had ensued was understandable. He asked, "Why should I hold myself so fully responsible, why feel so guilty, for actions taken without full deliberation or full consent of the will? I had failed, true; but how much guilt should there be and why

should I feel so ashamed?"

According to the Catholic tradition the signing would have been the trigger, not the cause. The cause of the guilt lies in the fact that we are all guilty. Our guilt has its origin in the original sin of Adam and Eve. Guilt therefore is latent in us all and only made manifest by our actions. Adam and Eve were turned out of the Garden of Eden and cursed. Strife, conflict, and travail were the result. Human beings have been compelled to support and endure Adam's curse, each in his and her own way being turned out of the Garden of Eden. Buddha too said that strife, conflict and travail are at the basis of our life. He said, in the first noble truth, that life is founded on suffering. Shame and guilt are well known to any one who meditates. Hakuin, the great Japanese Zen master looked upon shame as a driving force in meditation and repentance he considered to be an outcome from zazen.

Adam and Eve, when they disobeyed God, in fact turned their back upon him, ignored his injunction. In other words it would be true to say that they turned themselves out of the Garden of Eden, they separated themselves from God. They created their own suffering, by turning their back, separating themselves from, their source and origin. Guilt and shame in other words come from the act of separation. We are absolved from our guilt through atonement, which could be spelt as at-one-ment, or becoming one again, through letting go the separation.

We have said that we create a false center. We invest in this center the power, wisdom and even divinity that rightly belongs to our source. We ignore our source. In Buddhism the cardinal 'sin,' (klesa in Sanskrit) is ignorance, and the most fundamental act of ignorance is to ignore our true nature. The creation of the false center brings with it separation and incipient guilt, guilt which is made manifest by our actions. Many people feel guilty if they say "no" to someone who

asks a favor, even though saying no may be quite reasonable. To say “no” is to separate oneself from the other. It is so much more pleasant to say yes, to be one with the other. Some people are so riven with guilt that they are exploited by all whom they meet, because they cannot say “No.”

The mechanics of guilt are simple. If the false center is threatened greater force would be necessary to hold it in place. The greater the force, the more pronounced the separation and the greater the feeling of guilt. What was simply a smoldering fire bursts into a raging furnace. The threat can come from outside, as in the case of the interrogator. Or it can come from inside. One of the basic questions asked in many religions is, “Who am I?” If sustained, eventually this question will begin to undermine the false center and suffering in the form of guilt, shame, fear and anguish arise. Humiliation is a direct attack on the centrality of the false center coming from within or from without. This questioning, in the case of the priest, was inflicted from outside. The false self was undermined. He said, “My will had failed; I had proved to be nowhere near the man I thought I was.”

Slowly and with great reluctance he began to face the truth of what was at the root of his problem and his guilt. The answer, he said, was a single word “I”. “I was ashamed because I knew in my heart that I had tried to do too much on my own and had failed. I felt guilty because I realized, finally that I had asked for God’s help but had really believed in my own ability to avoid evil and to meet every challenge.” He went on to say that although he had prayed over the years, he had never really abandoned himself to prayer. In a way he had been thanking God all the while that he was not like other men, that in fact he was unique, distinct apart from all the others, and that he would continue to do God’s will at all times and to the best of his ability. He said, however, that in the year of

interrogation and particularly in the last terrible few hours, “The primacy of self that had manifested itself and been reinforcing itself even in my method of prayers and spiritual exercises, underwent a purging, through a purgatory that left me cleansed to the bone. It was pretty hot furnace to say the least, very nearly as hot as hell itself.” The result was that he had learned to the depths of his shaken soul, how totally he depended on God for everything.

As he said, “Just as surely as man begins to trust in his own abilities, so surely has he taken the first step on the road to ultimate failure.” Once we separate ourselves from our true source, call it God or true Nature, and set up a false center, we have set ourselves on the road to suffering and guilt. “And the greatest grace God can give such a man is to send him a trial that he cannot bear with his own powers - and then sustain him with his grace so he may endure to the end and be saved.”

Father Cizek said that he had long ago decided what he wanted to hear from the spirit and when he did not hear precisely that he had felt betrayed. “Whatever the Spirit might have been telling me at that hour, I could not hear. I was so intent on hearing only one message, the message I wanted to hear, that I was not listening at all.” Who does not know this experience when meditating? We make up our mind what it is that we should get from our meditation and ignore everything else that may occur. As a consequence we so often think that nothing is happening in our meditation. We feel that it is a waste of time, that meditation does not “work,” that we are on the wrong track for one reason or another.

This tendency, he says, to set acceptable conditions upon God, to seek unconsciously to make his will for us coincide with our desires, is a very human trait. “The more important the situation is, the more totally

we are committed to it, or the more completely our future depends upon it, then the easier it becomes for us to blind ourselves into thinking that what we want is surely what God must also want. We can see but one solution only, and naturally we assume that God will help us reach it. It is an awful thing, this dross of self that spoils even the best things we do out of supposedly the highest motives.”

He went on to say that we were created to do God’s will and not our own. “To make our own will conform to his and not the other way around. We can pray daily for guidance to do this, without always meaning it; we can promise quite easily in prayer that we will do it. What we fail to see is how much of self remains in that promise, how much we are trusting in our own powers when we say we will do it.”

After he had broken down, confessed and signed that awful document he had hoped that at least the interrogations would have ended. However they were to go on for another four long years during which the interrogators tried their best to turn Father Cizek into a spy for the Russians. Then, he said, one day utter despair fell upon him and in a moment, blackness closed around him completely, and he reached a point of complete despair. “I was overwhelmed by the hopelessness of my situation. I knew I was reaching the end of my ability to postpone a decision. I could see no way out of it. Yes, I despaired in the most literal sense of the word: I lost all sense of hope I saw only my own weakness and helplessness to choose either position open to me cooperation or execution.” It was not the thought of death that bothered him. Sometimes, in fact, he thought that suicide was the only way out of his dilemma.

22•

He was not sure how long that moment lasted nor even how to describe it. But once it had passed he knew with horror and bewilderment that that he had gone beyond all bounds, had crossed over the brink into a fit of blackness he had never known before. “For that one moment of blackness, I had lost not only hope but also the last shreds of my faith in God. I had stood alone in a void and I had not even thought of or recalled the one thing that had been my constant guide.” As he said, he had lost sight of God. One thinks of Christ on the cross when he called out in despair, “My God! My God! Why hast thou forsaken me?”

Let us remember what Shibayama had to say about the koan. He said that it is the most difficult and rough means for the student to go through. Good koans are those that are the most intricate illogical and irrational, in which the most brilliant intellect will completely lose its way.” When one is working on a koan one must demonstrate to the teacher one’s insight into the koan. Constantly he challenges demanding that we produce a response. Constantly we fail. Constantly he chases out of the room with a ring of his bell. This can go on for years. As Shibayama goes on to say we are finally like a blind man who has had his stick, by which he had found his way, suddenly torn from him and will not know where to go or how to proceed. “He will be thrown into the abyss of despair. In the same way, the koan will mercilessly take away all our intellect and knowledge. In short, the role of the koan is not to lead us to satori easily, but on the contrary to make us lose our way and drive us to despair.”

The circumstance surrounding the suffering, or the degree of suffering, is not the same as the despair and suffering of Father Cizek, but the quality of the despair is the same. Despair is despair. One loses all hope. As Zen Master Rinzai said “It is darkness all over.” One feels the utter impossibility of ever finding one’s way. One has surrendered all of one’s props and supports, and nothing seems to remain. I remember this moment so well in my own practice when the teacher asked me, “Albert are you really convinced that you can do this?” And I knew in a moment that I could not, it was utterly and completely beyond me. It was a moment of true blackness and despair. But subsequent events showed that that moment was the moment when the possibility of finding a source other than the false center was made available to me.

During one of my first retreats the head monk, wanting to urge us on to greater efforts gave a talk in which he told of a Zen master who had a Westerner as a student. And the master asked the student, what were among the last words of Christ on the cross? The student mumbled something about my God, my God why has thou forsaken me. The master said “No, not those.” The student asked what words were they then. The master raised himself up to his fullest and cried out MY GOD! MY GOD! WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME? It was a very moving moment when the monk recounted this, and I knew then that the road that I had to travel was not going to be an easy

one.

This moment of utter despair was a moment of regeneration for the Priest also. He said, "Suddenly I was consoled by the thoughts of our Lord and his agony in the garden. 'Father,' he said, 'if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.'" In the garden of Olives he too knew the feeling of fear and weakness in his human nature as he was faced with suffering and death. Not once but three times did he ask to have his ordeal removed or somehow modified. Yet each time he concluded with an act of total abandonment and submission to the Father's will. "Not as I will, but as thou wilt." It was not just conformity to the will of God. It was total self-surrender, a stripping away of all human fears, of all doubts about his own abilities to withstand the passion, of every last shred of self including self-doubt."

Seeing this, father Cizek saw clearly what he must do. "I can only call it a conversion experience, and I can only tell you frankly that my life was changed from that time forward. If my moment of despair had been a moment of total blackness, then this was an experience of blinding light. I knew immediately what I must do, what I would do, and somehow I knew that I could do it. I knew I must abandon myself entirely to the will of the Father and live from now on in the spirit of self-abandonment to God. And I did it. I can only describe the experience as a sense of "letting go," giving over entirely my last effort or even any will to guide the reins of my own life. It is all too simply said, yet that one decision has affected every moment of my life." As he said, suddenly, in a moment, this turn about, what in Sanskrit the Buddhist calls, paravritti, occurred. This suddenness is the hallmark of a genuine awakening in Buddhism. In a flash one knows in a way that one had not known before. It is not that one knows something new, it is that one knows in an entirely new way. It is a moment that changes one's life radically.

What he says about it is very interesting. He says that up till then he had always seen his role, the role of the human being, in the divine economy as an active one. Up to this time, he had retained in his own hands the reins of all decisions, actions, and endeavors. He saw it as his role to "co-operate" with God's grace, to be involved to the end in the work of his salvation. God's will, he said, was there somewhere, hidden, yet clear and unmistakable. It was his role, that is to say the

human being's role, to discover what that will was and the to conform to it. "I remained — the human being remained-in essence the master of my own destiny. Perfection consisted in learning to discover God's will in every situation and bending every effort to do what was necessary."

Then with sudden and almost blinding clarity and simplicity, he realized he had been trying to do something with his own will and intellect that was at once too much and mostly all wrong. "God's will was not hidden somewhere "out there" in the situations in which I found myself; the situations themselves were his will for me." This last sentence is the most important one: the situations themselves were his will for me. What is necessary is "an act of total trust, allowing for no interference or restless striving on my part, no reservations, no exceptions, no areas where I could set conditions or seem to hesitate. He was asking a complete gift of self, nothing held back. It demanded absolute faith."

This is how it is in Zen practice. What is required is that one is entirely and unconditionally one with whatever happens during the practice. Fundamentally nothing needs to be done. Working with this faith one ceases to strive to attain, to get rid of, to overcome, even to accept. Whether it is pain or boredom, despair or anguish whatever one simply stays one with it. One breathes it in and out. For a long time one struggles against this, feeling that "I" must do something, if "I" do not do something then nothing will be done. Finally the power of the false Center is relinquished and the healing power, the power of unity and harmony is able to permeate.

As he says, once understood, it seems so simple. And one is amazed that it has taken me so long in terms of time and suffering to learn this truth.

He said, for my part, I was brought to make this perfect act of faith by the experience of a complete despair of my own powers and abilities that had preceded it. It was at once a death and a resurrection. It was not something that I had sought after or wanted or worked for." For most of us it only comes after long years of hard work. But when it comes, it comes as a moment of grace and in a way one can also say, "It was not something that I had sought after or wanted or worked for."

The Jump

I was home, upstairs, making the bed when I looked down and saw my dog, Kippy, tearing up a tube of chocolate. She was biting at the tube, barking loudly and trying to gobble up all the chocolate. She was also making quite a mess on the white rug. I yelled at her and told her to stop. I tried to pull it away from her, but she was very persistent. She kept lunging at the chocolate, barking and coming back for more. I finally got exasperated and gave her a few good smacks and chased her away. I continued with the bed making. When I looked around again, I noticed my two year old daughter Josie, quite naked, standing there, squeezing chocolate into her mouth and all over herself. I yelled at her to stop that immediately and put down the chocolate. She ignored me and continued eating. I then got very annoyed and yelled louder. Finally, after much commotion, she too was given a smack on the bottom and she took off for other parts.

I continued making the bed. After a while, I began to feel very guilty and I started to ask myself why I had made such a fuss about a bit of chocolate. I had actually hit my poor dog, smacked my poor little daughter and for what? They were only doing what came naturally. In fact the whole situation was a bit odd. I didn't feel quite myself. The bed looked distinctly strange. With all my bed making, pushing, pulling and tucking, it was still very lumpy. Together with the fact that I had never before hit my dog or my daughter I began to realize that something was definitely not right with me.

One possibility was that perhaps I was not awake. Maybe this was a dream. I pinched my arm really hard until it hurt quite a lot and a red welt appeared. I didn't wake up, so maybe this was real. But again there was that lumpy bed and a kind of fuzziness around the edges of everything. Something was really not normal.

Suddenly I knew exactly what to do. I would jump off the roof. If I could fly I reasoned, I was quite likely dreaming because everyone knows that in normal consciousness regular people cannot fly. With that in mind, I walked through the room that let out onto the roof, opened the door and ran to the edge of the roof. I jumped. Instead of yelling "Geronimo" as I leapt into the abyss, to my astonishment I remembered my koan and I yelled "Who oo oo oo o". Of course there was no reply so I said "Look I'm really serious, I must have the answer. Who oo oo oo o". Still nothing, but I was

definitely flying. I soared off up higher and higher until euphoria took over and I was free. Off into a dappled grey somewhere.

Waking up in a dream and becoming lucid is really interesting because there is nothing you cannot do. Nothing at all to fear. You can ski amazingly well down steep, icy slopes with your feet together, or you can swan dive off tall buildings and soar through the air. If I could just hold it together for a little longer. Still I was rather pleased that for the first time I had remembered my koan in a dream and spent a few moments with it before lapsing back into unconsciousness.

If, however you accidentally make the bed with someone in it or you are obsessing more than usual about chocolate, control issues or nudity, do not jump off the roof. If the world is looking fuzzy or you are behaving really badly, again, do not jump. There could be any number of simple explanations. You could have ingested a mind altering-substance, or you could have accidentally drunk too much. You could be wearing someone else's spectacles, reversed your contact lenses or you could simply be having a bad day.

When your body is asleep and dreaming and you seriously question whether you are asleep, somewhere deep down inside you KNOW you are dreaming and that it is perfectly safe to jump off the roof, and fly.

Now as I sit watching my pen move across the paper, I wonder about the Winifred who jumped off the roof. Who was that person and where is she now? Was that dreamer any less real than the bag of flesh person sitting here? I feel thoroughly awake and lucid right now. But she thought that she was awake too, when she was clearly in a sleep state.

The sofa is not lumpy, the walls are not moving and I am behaving reasonably well, but still, how can I be sure that I am awake? Albert repeats over and over again that we must be vigilant, that we must wake up.

The sleeping woman was convinced that she was awake but somewhere deep down, she knew she was asleep and it was safe to jump. The Winifred here and now also thinks that she is awake but somewhere deep down she knows that she is fully awakened but needs to make the big leap and wake up into full consciousness.

To dig deep, to find the courage, to trust, to doubt, to persevere, I will, I will wake up.

Juste le bout de la langue!

Et dire que j'ai failli tout lâcher il y a quelques semaines. Il me semblait que j'étais allée au bout de mes raisonnements sur la vie, au bout de mes spéculations sur l'origine et la nature de la Réalité, et au bout de mes ignobles marchandages "spirituels". Bref, je pensais que tous ces efforts n'avaient plus aucun sens; j'étais découragée. Je me sentais trop stupide pour comprendre, je m'accusais de manquer de ferveur et d'être bourrée d'orgueil.

Heureusement, j'avais tout expliqué à monsieur Low et j'avais compris qu'abandonner serait bien pire encore que ce désespoir. Sa compassion, sa patience avaient brisé ma colère et mon amertume. J'avais donc repris ma pratique, mais sans espoir, en me jetant là-dedans pour m'être fidèle à moi-même.



Et puis, hier soir, au moment de m'endormir, il s'est produit quelque chose d'étrange. J'étais couchée sur le côté, presque endormie. D'un mouvement machinal j'ai commencé à me retourner sur le dos. Les doigts de ma main droite ont effleuré mon avant-bras gauche et soudain, c'était là! Entre les doigts et le bras, il y avait une intense présence, vibrante, si réelle et d'une telle densité que d'un seul coup j'étais réveillée. J'étais si surprise qu'à l'intérieur, je me suis exclamée : "Mais qu'est-ce que c'est que ça?" La présence s'est aussitôt évanouie. Ensuite j'ai pensé : Et où est-ce que j'étais, "moi", pendant que c'est arrivé? J'ai réalisé que "je" n'étais pas là du tout à un certain moment, mais que pourtant, jamais je n'avais senti avec une telle intensité qu'à ce moment-là justement où "je" n'étais pas là!

"Il n'est pas nécessaire d'être quelqu'un pour sentir".

J'ai ressenti un immense soulagement à l'idée qu'il y a quelque chose d'immensément plus vrai, qui dépasse tout ce que je pourrais imaginer. J'ai aussi constaté que rien de ce que je pourrais tenter de faire ne pourrait ramener de force ce quelque chose. Cela est arrivé, semble-t-il, de soi-même!

Ce soir, j'ai raconté tout cela à monsieur Low qui m'a dit avec un humour savoureux que je n'avais que "goûté" du bout de la langue, et que la Réalité, c'était bien autre chose que ça. "Mais tout de même, a-t-il ajouté, c'est un encouragement".

“Nous restons chez nous...”

Les exigences du quotidien nous empêchent parfois (souvent?) de participer aux sesshins mensuelles qui se déroulent au Centre. Que faire alors? Dans cet article, trois membres de la sangha nous font découvrir leur réponse: une retraite chez soi.

Janine: Pour moi, les choses se sont présentées d'une drôle de façon. J'étais censée faire la sesshin au Centre. Je croyais être acceptée, mais finalement je ne l'étais pas. Je me suis présentée au Centre pour apprendre que je n'étais pas inscrite. Je suis retournée chez moi. C'était une sesshin de trois jours. J'étais, disons, psychologiquement préparée. Je me suis dit: "Bon, je vais le faire chez moi." Le premier matin, je suis allée faire l'épicerie puisqu'il n'y avait rien dans la maison. Je m'étais préparée à partir pour trois jours, donc le frigo était vide.

Louis: C'est vrai. C'est important que tout cela soit préparé à l'avance.

Janine: J'ai essayé en faisant l'épicerie de copier le menu du Centre: brocoli, riz le soir, soupe le midi, céréales genre bulghur le matin. Ça a été ma première période de travail, qui a duré peut-être plus d'une heure... mais qui a servi à préparer ma sesshin. Après, j'ai suivi à peu près le même horaire qu'au Centre. Sauf que, comme je n'avais pas de dokusan dans l'après-midi, j'écoutais un deuxième teisho. Donc, un teisho le matin et un deuxième, l'après-midi, ce qui écourtait évidemment les périodes de zazen de l'après-midi. Le teisho durait une heure et je faisais ensuite deux périodes de zazen d'une demi-heure. Après, je faisais des exercices. C'est une période très importante pour moi. J'ai toujours trouvé que c'était très reposant, très régénérateur. Ensuite, venait la période du souper.

Louis: Est-ce que tu prenais des périodes de repos?

Janine: Je ne m'en souviens pas. Je devais en prendre, j'imagine. Ça date quand même des débuts de ma pratique. Elles devaient probablement être plus courtes, puisque les périodes de travail sont plus longues quand on est seul. Préparer les repas, faire la vaisselle et tout le reste. Les heures de travail sont

prolongées. Les périodes de repos étaient écourtées d'autant. En plus, je suivais de près l'horaire régulier de la sesshin au niveau des périodes de zazen. C'était au mois de juin. Il faisait très beau dehors, très chaud. C'était très tentant de sortir. J'ai tenu le coup. J'ai fait mes trois jours, incluant l'heure supplémentaire du dernier soir. Je pense que le dimanche, j'ai peut-être fini un peu de bonne heure ...

Louis: Donc, tu commençais tes journées à cinq heures le matin et tu suivais vraiment toutes les heures de la sesshin. Si tu le faisais à nouveau aujourd'hui, est-ce que tu le ferais de la même façon?

Janine: Je ne le sais pas. Quand j'en ai parlé aux gens - surtout que c'était en juin et c'était tellement beau et chaud - là, j'étais partie avec l'idée de faire une sesshin au Centre ... Avoir su que c'était aussi dur, je ne l'aurais peut-être pas fait. Être seule, ne pas avoir le teisho, les périodes de dokusan, ne pas avoir l'encouragement du groupe et du maître, l'encadrement... Quand on est seul, la tentation de laisser tomber est plus forte.

Louis: L'engagement est plus difficile à maintenir. Jeanne-d'Arc et moi, notre expérience est quelque peu différente. Nous avons fait l'un et l'autre des retraites solitaires mais également ensemble. Lorsqu'on le fait à deux, c'est très différent.

Jeanne-d'Arc: On a commencé à utiliser les cloches. J'étais sonneur. On suivait l'horaire du Centre et on ajoutait le kinhin, en faisant le tour de la maison, d'avant en arrière. Quand je l'ai fait seule - c'était en octobre, je ne pouvais pas m'engager dans la sesshin d'octobre parce que je devais travailler les trois premiers jours - j'ai fait les quatre autres journées. J'ai suivi l'horaire du Centre. Je m'étais préparée une petite

épicerie, moi aussi. Des menus. Je n'écoutais qu'un teisho. Je faisais mon kinhin. J'ai même essayé un soir de faire une nuit complète de zazen, du yaza à la maison. J'ai trouvé ça difficile. Il faisait aussi très beau. Moi, le faire toute seule - la première fois, ça a été comme ça - je me suis aperçue que ma pratique, ce n'était pas seulement le Centre. Je pouvais en même temps suivre le groupe, je savais qu'à telle heure, c'était telle ou telle activité, un moment donné, j'écoutais un teisho, c'était "Everyday's mind is the way", ça a été vraiment très fort pour moi comme si tout à coup, j'avais compris que c'était ça aussi ma pratique. J'ai trouvé ça très encourageant. J'ai suivi la sesshin jusqu'à la fin. Comme on le fait au Centre, j'ai mis de la musique à la toute fin. J'avais choisi une musique. J'ai trouvé ça très émouvant. Je pleurais. D'être seule dans la maison, tout était si différent. J'ai trouvé ça difficile moi aussi de le faire seule. Quand on l'a fait à deux, c'était différent.

Janine: D'avoir le support de l'autre personne, c'est quelque chose qui aide. Moi aussi, le fait de penser que les autres, ceux et celles qui étaient en sesshin au Centre, faisaient la même chose en même temps que moi, c'était un support. Essayer de faire un trois jours, quatre jours, encore moins un sept jours, seul, n'importe quand dans l'année, en-dehors de l'horaire régulier des sesshins, c'est sûrement beaucoup plus difficile.

Louis: Jeanne-d'Arc et moi, quand on a fait les sesshins à la maison ensemble, on n'excluait pas complètement le fait de se parler. On pouvait, par exemple, avoir à faire des choses, aller à la Caisse, faire les dépôts, en fait, toutes sortes de contraintes continuaient à s'exercer. Alors, on ne pouvait pas tout interrompre et on restait en communication jusqu'à un certain point, tout en essayant de limiter nos échanges au minimum. On excluait évidemment toute une foule d'autres stimulations: radio, télévision, musique, le café était mis de côté, l'alcool ... Donc, c'était tout de même très silencieux dans la maison.

Jeanne-d'Arc: Pas de télévision, pas de radio, est-ce que c'était comme ça pour toi?

Janine: Ça faisait déjà un bout de temps qu'il n'y a plus de télévision, plus de radio de manière générale pour moi. En fait, la radio me servait surtout de radio-réveil, avec la musique plutôt qu'au "buzz" qui te réveille ... mal. Mais en général le jour je n'écoutais pas la radio du tout. Alors, c'était tranquille en tout temps.

Jeanne-d'Arc: Moi, je bloquais la sonnerie du téléphone. Je trouvais aussi dans la sesshin que j'ai faite seule ici que la période de travail durait beaucoup plus longtemps du fait que j'étais seule pour faire toutes les tâches. J'étais étonnée de voir à quel point, dans cet esprit-là, j'en faisais plus. J'avais le temps de faire la cuisine, nettoyer la salle de bains, préparer toutes sortes de choses: quand l'heure était finie, c'était étonnant de voir tout ce que j'avais fait.

Louis: J'ai remarqué que lorsqu'on a fait les sesshins ici ensemble, l'heure de travail durait aussi plus longtemps. Moi, souvent, je travaillais à l'extérieur: nettoyer les gouttières, fendre du bois. Le travail n'arrêtait pas, ça pouvait durer deux heures, deux heures et demie. Quand on les a faites ensemble, une des contraintes, comme mon bureau de consultation est à la maison et que, n'allant pas au Centre pour la sesshin, j'essayais de ne pas complètement interrompre mes activités. Je recevais donc des clients les avant-midis pendant la semaine. Les samedi et dimanche étaient consacrés en entier à la pratique, mais quand arrivait le lundi, je recevais des clients. La période de zazen du matin, de cinq à sept heures, était complétée et, après une période d'exercices, le déjeuner et une courte période de travail, je rencontrais des clients de neuf heures à midi sans interruption. L'après-midi et la soirée étaient consacrées à la pratique en suivant d'assez près l'horaire du Centre. En février dernier, comme il ne m'était pas possible d'aller à la sesshin au Centre, je suis resté ici et, pour la première fois, j'étais

seul pour entamer ma retraite à la maison. J'avais déjà choisi les sept teishos pour ma semaine. Je les choisis toujours en suivant l'ordre dans lequel ils ont été présentés au Centre: teisho du jour un pour ma première journée et ainsi de suite. L'impression de suivre la sesshin qui se tient en même temps au Centre est encore plus forte. Quand M.Low annonce: "En ce deuxième jour de sesshin ..." au début du teisho, j'en suis moi aussi à mon deuxième jour. Étant seul, j'ai prolongé cette fois-ci, mes heures de zazen. Je recevais quand même des clients l'avant-midi, mais j'allongeais les heures de méditation, environ sept heures chaque jour.

Janine: Recevoir des clients le matin, tu ne trouvais pas que ça dérangeait beaucoup ta concentration?

Louis: Jusqu'à un certain point, oui. Il y avait tout de même une différence importante. En temps ordinaire, ma pratique quotidienne s'organise "autour" du travail: les clients viennent l'avant-midi, l'après-midi, parfois même en soirée. Là, le rapport était inversé. Les clients arrivaient et là, de neuf heures à midi, le travail prenait sa place, mais ce travail s'inscrivait dans le temps de la pratique. C'était une période de travail à l'intérieur de mes journées de méditation.

Janine: C'est une bonne façon d'inclure la pratique dans la vie de chaque jour.

Louis: C'est exactement ce que j'ai vu.

Jeanne-d'Arc: C'est ce que j'ai senti aussi dans ma première sesshin à la maison.

Janine: Moi, je n'ai pas ressenti ça du fait que mon travail de tous les jours se fait à l'extérieur, à l'hôpital. En faisant une sesshin à la maison, je ne peux pas intégrer ça de la même façon. C'est comme une sesshin au Centre finalement. C'est complètement coupé de mon travail.

Louis: C'est coupé du lieu de résidence. Moi, travaillant la plupart du temps à la maison, c'est comme si, tout à coup, toutes mes activités prenaient une place à l'intérieur du contexte d'une retraite d'une semaine. J'ai beaucoup apprécié de découvrir que je pouvais maintenir une pratique comme celle-là à la maison, dans laquelle le travail et la méditation sont partagés d'une autre façon. Une autre chose à laquelle

j'étais plutôt attentif: l'horaire de la sesshin au Centre. A la minute près. Là, le moniteur vient de donner le kyosaku, là, la cloche vient de sonner, les gens font gassho, le kinhin commence, là, le mot d'encouragement avant le dîner, etc, etc. Je crois bien être un peu maniaque de tous ces détails qui font une sesshin. Je suivais donc la sesshin à la minute près et j'organisais mes activités en fonction de celles du Centre le plus souvent possible.

Il faut dire cependant que le support du groupe, tel qu'on le vit lors des sesshins au Centre, le fait aussi qu'il y ait le dokusan, les teishos en direct, c'est vraiment autre chose.

Janine: Pour moi, c'est vital. Ne pas avoir de dokusan, je trouvais que c'était une grosse lacune, malgré les deux teishos que j'écoutais.

Louis: Je pense que ce qui m'inspirait le plus, c'était le fait de me sentir en lien avec les gens qui pratiquaient au Centre. J'avais le sentiment que les efforts que je faisais dans ma pratique venaient appuyer leurs efforts. Comme s'il y avait une sesshin qui se faisait au Centre et d'autres sesshins qui se faisaient en périphérie en appui à celle du Centre. Je le ressentais de cette façon. J'avais une motivation forte de ce côté-là. Ça rejoignait pour moi l'idée que lorsque l'on pratique, on ne pratique pas isolément. On pratique dans le but d'aider, ce que je ressentais fortement à ce moment-là. Tout en étant isolé physiquement, je ne me sentais pas isolé.

Janine: Je connais d'autres personnes qui, sans faire une sesshin complète à la maison, m'ont dit que, lorsqu'une sesshin se déroule au Centre, elles pensent à ce qui s'y passe: "Ah, il est telle heure. Les gens font telle chose..." Aussi, elles vont augmenter le nombre d'heures de zazen à la maison.

Louis: Quelle bonne idée de s'entraider. Nous, Jeanne-d'Arc et moi, l'idée nous est venue de le faire du fait que nous ne pouvions pas participer à une sesshin et que nous nous sentions désolés. "Pourquoi ne pas organiser quelque chose à la maison?" Nous sommes partis de là et, depuis, nous avons continué en peaufinant peu à peu notre façon de faire.

Jeanne-d'Arc: Il y a peut-être beaucoup de gens qui le font déjà et qui vont se reconnaître. Pour d'autres, ce sera peut-être une petite découverte, une petite surprise...

A Letter to the Teacher

Dear Mr. Low,

Once again, after the sesshin, my heart is full of gratitude. During this last one, I became more conscious how much support is available when it is needed. My heart was so full of joy that I felt the strong need to share some of the blessings that I had received during this sesshin with some of my dearest friends who have been significant in so many ways and for many years in my life. Most of them are Christians as I am, though some are not. Yesterday, I wrote to them some kind of news letter.

I thought of sharing that letter with you also because in it, I spoke essentially about my experience as a Christian but from the perspective of my Zen practice or inversely. Until now, I have shared very little with you about the importance it has in my life. As my identification as a Christian is one of the strongest one, I just cannot consider it anymore as something outside of my Zen practice. I certainly need your help to go on this path. It is so easy to get stuck somewhere on the road.

Until now, I have kept quite apart the expression of my Zen practice and my Christian one, using a Zen language in the Buddhist communities and a Christian one with the other, experiencing a great difficulty in finding words which could be understood in both.. Maybe also being in doubt of the real possibility of a unifying experience of both and/or avoiding being misunderstood by others.

In fact, sometimes, it gets quite scary because I simply do not know where I am going. Will I discover that I am not a Christian anymore or cannot go further on a Buddhist path without becoming unfaithful to my Christian beliefs ? But after this sesshin, I realize that all those questions, fears, doubts, are just other forms that I am letting vanish away in the furnace of the here and now of the koan Who. But the fear keeps coming

back in different ways. Henri Le Saux, a French Cistercian monk who lived most of his life in India, speaks in his autobiography of this anxious fear he had carried along his spiritual path for years, about his identification as a Christian monk and the other one as a practitioner of yoga. Maybe the difficulty was bigger for him because of the strong training he had received in the West before going in the East ? He had taken the name of Swami Abbishilctananda. He came to full enlightenment later in his life.

What I didn't tell my friends in the letter I sent them is that now, in fact, I couldn't say anymore who is Christ, Buddha or anyone else including myself. This must come through my practice, since when I come in contact with any kind of conception of who is Christ, I let it burn like any conceptions or ideas. Is this what is meant, when it is said « If you meet the Buddha, kill him » ? Of course, that state of consciousness creates a deep discomfort in my relations with both communities. What is strange for me, is that I continue nevertheless to be both Christian and Zen practitioner.

Yesterday night, I went to hear Raymond Devos, a wise French humorist who shows in a very poetic and refined manner the ridicule of our little failings. I was astonished by the ostentatious aspects of the physical place of the theater itself, all enhancing the artificial and pretentious importance of our little selves. Suddenly, it was as if all this artificiality, including mine, melted down like burning metal. Even the letter I had written yesterday to my friends, that I am including here for you, appeared as pretentious as all the rest which surrounded me. It gave me the impression of complete collapse. I came out of the theater absolutely depressed. I thought of burning the letter. This morning, after having remembered your admonitions at the end of the sesshin, I realized it was probably an effect of the ego dethroning. Although it was still harder to send the letter than to not send it, I decided to send it.

Reply

Thank you for your letter, which I found very interesting indeed, and I am glad that you did not burn it. You say that you are struggling with your identity as a Christian and wonder how to deal with this in the face of the practice. You ask « Will I discover that I am no longer a Christian or cannot go further on a Buddhist path without becoming unfaithful to my Christian beliefs ? » I am well aware that such fears and concerns can plague one. Of course one can reply that what you will ultimately discover is that you are neither Christian nor Buddhist, that belief in Christianity is itself a block on the way. However that may simply substitute one set of thoughts for another and will not ultimately help you with your practice, even though it is worthwhile keeping it at the back of your mind.

As you know I wrote several articles on Christianity for the book *Se connaître, c'est s'oublier*. I wrote them with the Quebec students in mind because many have expressed the same concerns as you. One article in particular that I should like to draw your attention to is the one on « Christian Love and Buddhist Wisdom » in which I tried to make a comparison between Buddhism and Christianity. This was the text of a colloquium that I gave at Queen's university to the faculty of Religion there. In this article I make the point that if we are going to make a comparison of Christianity and Buddhism we

must ask whose Christianity and whose Buddhism. You quote St. Paul, but you must know that Paul's Christianity and Christ's Christianity are not the same. The Christianity of Meister Eckhart and St. Theresa of Avila are not the same any more than the Christianity of Mother Theresa and Paul Tillich, the German theologian, are the same. I need not labor the point in talking of the different « Buddhisms » : Theravadin, Pure Land, Zen and so on.

By and large, as you know, the foundation of the Catholic faith is the teaching of Paul. But as I said Paul's Christianity and Christ's are not the same. Paul had an « enlightenment experience » on the way to Damascus. In this experience he saw a bright light and heard Christ calling on him « Saul, Saul why persecutest thou me ? » This vision of light is a

common one in religious life. One hears about it quite frequently these days with the so called « near death experience ». One finds it frequently mentioned in Sufi tradition and, for example, a book by Henry Corbin, in English *The Man of Light in the Sufi Tradition* speaks of this. When Arjuna calls on Krishna to show himself, Krishna reveals himself as an immense and bright light. In Buddhism there is Amida Buddha, the Buddha of boundless light.

A Chinese emperor had this bright light experience and all the courtiers came to congratulate him, except one, a Buddhist. The emperor asked the Buddhist why he had not joined with the others in congratulations, and the Buddhist said, « The light that you saw was the light of your guardian angel. It is not the light of Buddha. » When the emperor asked what was the light of Buddha, the Buddhist walked away.

As a consequence of the experience, Paul was convinced that he had encountered Christ, in the same way that Arjuna was convinced that he had encountered Krishna and the Emperor was convinced he had encountered some supernatural being. Paul's religion was therefore based on a conviction, a belief, a very powerful belief and one undoubtedly inspired by « the supernatural » (whatever that might mean) but a belief nevertheless. Christ's religion was not based on a belief. He did not say that he had encountered God. He said « The father and I are one ». He was not following a Way. He said I am the Way, the Life and the Truth. When he said I am the light of the world, this was the light of Buddha, this was not the light that Paul saw. Thus when you say that you are a Christian, are you a Christian as understood by the teachings of Paul or by the teachings of Christ ? If you say the latter, you need not repudiate the former, but you will approach it with some circumspection. Paul's religion is a religion of belief ; Christ's is a religion of knowing. « Know the truth and the Truth will set you free. » Not « Believe in Christ and this belief will set you free ». Both Christ and Paul offer freedom, but the freedom that they may offer is not the same.

You say that when you begin to look at your beliefs that you feel anxious. Beliefs form the bedrock of our sense of self. This is why we protect them with such energy when we believe someone is attacking them. Religious and political beliefs in particular create a foundation for the sense of « I am something ». And

this foundation gives us freedom from fear. When this foundation begins to move, the sense of self is profoundly disturbed and so we feel fear. This is why it takes great courage to practice Zen. We must be prepared to examine this foundation. We must know the truth, not have beliefs, and the truth will burn up all beliefs. You can then say with Christ, « I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. »

My way of dealing with this kind of thing has always been to say, « Throw it on the fire. If it is gold it will not burn ; if it burns it is not gold. » This questioning of our fundamental beliefs is what is meant by the exhortation, « If you meet the Buddha, kill the Buddha. » You must remember that Buddha meant as much to the followers of Rinzaï as Christ means to you. What Rinzaï was saying was very radical. Remember also that when a monk asked Ummon, « What is Buddha ? » Ummon said, « Dried shit ! » He was not blaspheming. If you have the book on the koans that I wrote, reread koan number 21.

Second letter

Dear Mr. Low,

Since I have received your letter, answering my questions about my Buddhist and Christian identity, I have taken time to reflect and would like to pursue our conversation about it.

First, I realized that the struggle never takes place while I am practicing zazen or while I am participating at the celebration of Eucharist. It arises only when having a period of time during which I can reflect about those ideas. Those periods of reflexions are usually initiated, in fact, by the questioning of « other persons ». When I am really present in either of those places, zendo or church, that questioning about being Christian or Buddhist is absolutely out of my mind. Only someone from « outside » myself, « I » or others, could wonder if that person is Buddhist or Christian. During these last years of my life, I have become Buddhist and Christian, knowing more and more at the same time that I am neither of those two !

But that perception brings me back to the question « What does it really mean to be Buddhist or Christian ?

» What does it mean to realize the Buddha way or the Christ way ?

In your last letter, you opened my eyes to the existence of the different christianities and buddhisms and also on the enormous influence St.Paul's teachings have had on our perception of the catholic faith. Since I received your letter, I am reading more carefully St.Paul's writings. It is true that when he speaks of God, Christ, he seems to refer often to some exterior entity. I had never realized this before. From the perspective of each one's understanding and degree of realization, maybe we could say there are as many christianities and buddhisms as there are people identifying with one or the other of these faiths or ways ?

The apostle who has had the strongest influence on my faith is certainly the evangelist, St.John. I would really appreciate hearing you commenting his gospel, specially the chapter on the last supper.

Like many « Québécois », I was brought up in a family who had a strong catholic faith and beliefs. My mother was a very religious person. At the age of 6 years, when I received my first « official » communion, my parents offered to buy me a white dress and veil, so that I could be dressed as all the other little girls who used to wear those clothes on that occasion. I refused categorically, saying to them : I want to go for my first communion with my daily clothes, my old boots. « Jesus likes us as we are ». I was convinced of that. My parents accepted. That day was a great day. My experience then was that Jesus was really there in my little heart. We were becoming one together and I would lose the perception of time. Two years later, the day of my confirmation, I had the impression to be in an enlightened church. Light and joy were pervading all and everywhere.

At the age of « 5 » years, I got a sickness from a cat. They didn't know how to cure it at that time. For 2 weeks, I was in coma. Doctors didn't know if I would survive. My father didn't take off his shoes during those 2 weeks, staying by my side all that time.

Before my first « official » communion, the year before or the year after that event (?), I used to get up very early in the morning before all members of my family. There was a mass at 6 a.m. I remember especially during winter, it was very dark and cold. I

was afraid walking alone in those black and cold mornings to the church. But my longing of encountering Jesus was stronger than my fear. Very few people went to that mass. When communion was distributed, I would check carefully that no neighbour who knew me or my parents was there. Usually, there was none. Then I would present myself to receive communion. I would come back full of joy, just on time for breakfast, before everybody would get up. I did that for many weeks, even months, until my eldest sister discovered that secret. I can still hear her, screaming in the house, saying that I had committed a mortal sin because I had not made my first confession yet. My parents asked a priest to come talk with me. He asked me why I was going to mass and receiving communion. I told him about this thirst and hunger I had of being with Jesus. He smiled but asked me to wait to receive communion until my official one.

Who was Jesus for that little person I was then ? Certainly some luminous loving being ! But I don't think he was just someone outside her ? Who was he then, and who was she? And now ? An experience of light ? The same kind of light that St.Paul refers to ?

Here the koan number 21 you had invited me to read, finds its place. I had already read it, and your comment, some months ago. But this time, after having read it again, I received a big shock, exactly as if you would have slapped suddenly not only my face but my whole being. I stayed with that shock for some time. Once in a while the koan kept coming back. First, I realized how this perception of Jesus as a loving luminous being was bathing in a very affective substance. « Dry shit ! » What a shock for « that little Jesus ! » During zazen, this morning, this thought of Jesus presence came. « Dry shit », it says. It brought me back immediately to no form. Jesus, the dry shit as any other thought, all melt away, bringing back this « I don't know ». No more words.

Apart from my parents and family, three other people

have had a significant influence on the construction of my identity as a Christian. The first one is Mr.V., who founded some international communities. Through the quality of his being and presence, I began to discover how we are really brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of God. How the poverty and all the limits apparently revealed in the handicapped persons or any others, perceived at that time as our enemies, are a mirror of our own limitation and offer us an opportunity to discover it. The founder of those communities helped me discover more deeply the truth that we are really loved as we are. He himself has always loved me in a very unconditional manner.

The other person who has had a great influence on the growth of my Christian faith is a Cistercian monk. For me, this monk has always been and still is a man of God. His whole being is radiant of love and joy. He is such a simple and humble man with a very delicious sense of humor. The word « offering » would be the one which could describe him best. We have passed many hours together these last 25 years, never talking very much. It was just not necessary. There is always a smile in my heart while we are together and for some hours after I have left him or at any time I just think of him.

I have lived some years in India. I had the occasion to meet Mother Teresa several times. One very hot and damp day in Calcutta, I became deeply desperate about the crude daily reality of sickness and death in the streets of that city. I had been asked to go bring a piece of information to Sister Agnes, who was living at the Sisters of Charity's main house. Mother Teresa was sitting under a tree in an inner courtyard, surrounded by hundred of Indian women and their small children. I was sitting at a little distance from that group, leaning against a wall, in the shade. In the morning, I had been at Prema House, one of Mother Teresa's houses which welcomes young children found in the street or left at the door. I had been asked by the sisters to take care of a 6 months old baby who looked in fact millions and

millions years old. He would refuse to drink the milk we offered him, letting it flow passively outside of his mouth. He had been found in a refuse-bin. Looking at Mother Teresa and all those Indian women, I was really wondering what life was all about. Then Mother Teresa stood up, made her way through the little crowd, and walked towards me, opening her arms wide. I was so surprised to see her coming, that I looked to the right and to the left to check if no one else was there. There was just the wall. She hugged me simply in silence against her breast. What did I receive exactly at that moment ? I couldn't say. But when I went back on the street, I had courage again just to go and keep on walking.

Am I a Christian by the teachings of Paul or by those of Christ ? Most probably by the two. I think or realize that the practice of Zen is helping me to enter more and more in the realization of Christ's truth.

Being with the koan 21, I am ready, Albert, to throw in the fire all conceptions and beliefs which prevent me from entering into the way. But I certainly need your help. The thirst which pushes me to go on with the practice, to go on walking in the street of Calcutta, in the nights of my daily life, I believe, is gold. I think it is what Paul is calling « The spirit crying out ! » And if it is not, let it burn with all the rest. (Sincerely, a member of the Center.)

Le babillard

Le babillard posé dans le hall d'entrée de la maison est à la disposition de tous les membres. Si vous avez quelque chose à annoncer, une information à faire passer, le babillard est là pour vous. Profitez-en.

La journée de travail

Vous devez vous inscrire pour la journée de travail. Nous devons prévoir d'avance le nombre de personnes afin d'assigner les tâches et de préparer le lunch en conséquence.

Les nouveaux membres

Si vous avez des raisons de croire que le Centre n'a pas votre adresse ou que votre adresse n'est pas la bonne, veuillez s.v.p. rectifier la situation en inscrivant votre adresse complète ainsi que votre numéro de téléphone sur un petit papier et le déposer dans la boîte à la maison.

Le nouveau conseil d'administration

Roger Brouillette (Président)
Monique Dumont
Peter Karaoglanian (Trésorier)
Janine Levesque
Albert Low

The notice board

The notice board that has been put up in the entrance to the house is for the use of all members. If you have something that you would like to announce, or have some information to pass on, the notice board is there for you

The work day

Please let us know when you are coming to a workday. We must know in advance the number of people who are coming in order to be able to allocate the jobs and to prepare enough lunch

New Members

If you believe that the Center does not have your address or that the address that we have is not correct, please write you full address, as well as your telephone number, on a piece of paper and put it in the treasurer's box in the house.

The New Board of Directors

Roger Brouillette (President)
Monique Dumont
Peter Karaoglanian (Treasurer)
Janine Levesque
Albert Low

Gurdjieff's Aphorisms

(Inscribed in a special script above the walls of the Study House at the Prieuré)

1. Like what "it" does not like.
2. The highest that a man can attain is to be able to do.
3. The worse the conditions of life the more productive the work, always provided you remember the work.
4. Remember yourself always and everywhere.
5. Remember you come here having already understood the necessity of struggling with yourself - only with yourself. Therefore thank everyone who gives you the opportunity.
6. Here we can only direct and create conditions, but not help.
7. Know that this house can be useful only to those who have recognized their nothingness and who believe in the possibility of changing.
8. If you already know it is bad and do it, you commit a sin difficult to redress.
9. The chief means of happiness in this life is the ability to consider externally always, internally never.
10. Do not love art with your feelings.
11. A true sign of a good man is if he loves his father and mother.
12. Judge others by yourself and you will rarely be mistaken.
13. Only help him who is not an idler.
14. Respect every religion.
15. I love him who loves work.
16. We can only strive to be able to be Christians.
17. Don't judge a man by the tales of others.
18. Consider what people think of you - not what they say.
19. Take the understanding of the East and the knowledge of the West - and then seek.
20. Only he who can take care of what belongs to others may have his own.
21. Only conscious suffering has any sense.
22. It is better to be temporarily an egoist than never to be just.
23. Practice love first on animals, they are more sensitive.
24. By teaching others you will learn yourself.
25. Remember that here work is not for work's sake but is only a means.
26. Only he can be just who is able to put himself in the position of others.
27. If you have not by nature a critical mind your staying here is useless.
28. He who has freed himself of the disease of "tomorrow" has a chance to attain what he came here for.
29. Blessed is he who has a soul, blessed is he who has none, but woe and grief to him who has it in embryo.
30. Rest comes not from the quantity but from the quality of sleep.
31. Sleep little without regret.
32. The energy spent on active inner work is then and there transformed into a fresh supply, but that spent on passive work is lost for ever.
33. One of the best means for arousing the wish to work on yourself is to realize that you may die at any moment. But first you must learn how to keep it in mind.
34. Conscious love evokes the same in response. Emotional love evokes the opposite. Physical love depends on type and polarity.
35. Conscious faith is freedom. Emotional faith is slavery. Mechanical faith is foolishness.
36. Hope, when bold, is strength. Hope, with doubt, is cowardice. Hope, with fear, is weakness.
37. Man is given a definite number of experiences - economizing them, he prolongs his life.
38. Here there are neither Russians nor English, Jews nor Christians, but only those who pursue one aim - to be able to be.

1999

1999

Janvier

Vendredi 15-17th Sesshin de deux jours

Février

Samedi 6 Atelier

Dimanche 7 Séance d'une journée

Jeudi 11, 25 Cours pour les débutants

Vendredi 12 - 19 Sesshin de sept jours

Mars

Jeudi 4, Cours pour les débutants

Jeudi 11-14 Sesshin de trois jours

Jeudi 18 Cours pour les débutants

Samedi 2 Atelier

Dimanche 21 Séance d'une journée

Jeudi ,25 Cours pour les débutants

Avril

Jeudi 1, 5 Sesshin de quatre jours

Jeudi 8, 15, 22 Cours pour les débutants

Samedi 24 Journée de travail et assemblé
générale

Mai

Samedi 1 Atelier

Dimanche 2 Séance d'une journée

Jeudi 6,13, 27 Cours pour les débutants

Vendredi 14 - 21 Sesshin de sept jours

Juin

Jeudi 3 Cours pour les débutants

Vendredi 4 - 6 Sesshin de deux jours

Jeudi 17 - 20 Sesshin de trois jours

September

Thurs eve 2 -6 sept Four day sesshin

Saturday 11 Workshop

Sunday 12 One day sitting

Thursday 16, 23 Beginners' Course

October

Thursday, 14 Beginners' Course

Friday eve 1 - 8 Seven day sesshin

Saturday 16 Workshop

Sunday 17 One day sitting

Saturday 23 Workday

Thursday 21, 28 Beginners' Course

November

Thursday 4-7 Three day sesshin

Saturday 13th Workshop

Sunday 14 One day sitting

December

Friday eve 3 - 10 Seven day sesshin

Thursday 2,16,23 Beginners' course

Fri 31

(8pm - midnight) New Year's Eve ceremony

Sell your cleverness and buy bewilderment.
(Jalal Ud-Din Rumi)

One does not discover new lands without
consenting to lose sight of the shore for a very
long time.

(André Gide)