

NOT THIS, NOT THAT



Abhinyana

DEDICATION

I offer this book to
Special Friends along the way,
for what is life
without?



INTRODUCTION

This is the second volume of my memoirs ~ following on from *SO MANY ROADS* ~ and covers that period of my life from 1978 until 1998. It is advisable to read the first volume otherwise many things in the second will not make much sense. And if I do not lose interest and feel inspired, there will be a Part III, and possibly a Part IV, in due course.

Rather than call it *SO MANY ROADS, Part II*, I decided on the present title. And if you think it odd, let me say that in ancient India, when people asked of a sage, "*Master, what is Truth?*", often, the master would reply, somewhat cryptically, "*Neti, neti*", meaning, *Not this, not that* ~ that is, we cannot say what is truth, but can approach it only by a process of negation, much like a prospector, looking for gold in a stream, removes all that is not gold from his basin ~ first, the water, then the stones, sand, twigs and mud ~ and, when all the *not-gold* has been removed, perhaps he will be left with some particles of gold, gleaming there in the bottom. He does not begin by taking out the gold.

I know, I write this, that I'm sticking my neck out, and that there will be complaints, not just because of the contents but also because of my style. I considered this, but still decided to write, as there is a need to tell things as they are. And look, without criticism, we would still be living in caves, and would you like that? Criticism is like a double-edged sword: it has two forms; one destructive and the other constructive; the second is invaluable and we could not do without it, as it not only helps us maintain a standard, but to improve things. We should propose something positive in place of that which we criticize.

As anyone who has been to Kathmandu will have noticed, the streets there are in a shocking condition. People dig them up whenever they feel like laying pipes and cables, then loosely fill in the holes without any attempt to restore the surface to what it was before; consequently, the roads have great bumps and hollows in them which become very muddy when it rains. Nepalese obviously don't think much about it (nor about letting their dogs bark all night without trying to prevent them; Kathmandu should be renamed *Dogmandu*, as there are so many barking dogs!);

civic-consciousness is far from their minds. And *that* is a criticism, made because I know they are capable of better things; if they were not, it would be pointless to criticize them.

As a citizen of the world ~ hackneyed though this cliché might be considered by people who do not feel this way ~ I could not keep quiet about this, and several times told shop-keepers in the tourist-belt that they should return the streets to their original condition after digging trenches across them. I was gratified to see that in two cases, my complaints resulted in attempts being made to correct the irregularities, but I'm pretty sure that had I not complained, nothing would have been done. How sad that it needs someone like me to shame people into doing what common-sense should tell them to do! But this is my world just as much as anyone else's, and I care about it, instead of turning away and letting it degenerate. It is easy to let things go, but hard to build them up. I respect and am grateful to anyone who tries to improve things.

It is essential to understand the difference between the Container and the Contents: Buddhism and the Teachings of the Buddha. If people are satisfied with Buddhism it is alright, of course; but for those who are not and who want something more than the mere name-and-form, it should be said that though Buddhism is now old, tired and travel-stained, having come a long way and endured many ups and downs, the Teachings of the Buddha are still quite intact. However, these, too, should not be looked upon as something magical that produces miraculous effects just by being believed or recited, but should be understood and realized, for they are *a finger pointing at the moon*, not the moon itself. There are 3 levels, as it were: (1) Buddhism, the organization, which deserves our respect for having preserved the Contents until now; (2) Buddha-Dharma, or the Teachings of the Buddha; and (3) Dharma itself, upon the realization of which, Sakyamuni became the Buddha, and thereafter tried to point it out to others. If we insist on clinging to the Container while disregarding the Contents and making no attempt to understand, it is such a waste, to say the least.

Now, Buddhism is more than 2,500 years old, so it is not surprising that it has changed a lot since it started out on its long journey. Not only is it tired and travel-stained, but things crept in

along the way that have very little to do with what the Buddha taught; like a damp stone gathers moss, it gathered its fair share of superstition. This was unavoidable, and there is little we can do about the past except learn from it. This doesn't mean, however, that we should be complacent and condone the ongoing corruption, but should understand how it happened that things crept in, and ask ourselves if this is what we want. For my part, I am not content to just let things go, as I've seen better things, and see no reason why improvements cannot and should not be made. I consider my criticism ~ though it might not be sweet ~ to be constructive. The words of *Lao Tse* had a great impact upon me: "Sweet words are seldom true; truthful words are seldom sweet." If we are serious in our quest, we should be prepared to face the unpleasant at times, as it will not always coincide with our desires or expectations.

I passed my 34th year as a monk in May this year, but it was only because I realized the difference between the Container and the Contents ~ Buddhism, the religion, and what the Buddha taught ~ even before I became a Buddhist, that I was able to make it this far; had I not done so, I would have given up in despair long ago. So, it is my responsibility to point out this difference to others; there are people even today with just a little dust of ignorance in their eyes, who might still understand. I have come across such people, one here and another there.

The front-cover shows a church, a mosque, a Hindu temple, and some Buddhist stupas. Draw your own conclusion.

And to anyone reading this, I will say as way of benediction, May you be Well and Safe, rather than Well and Happy, as no-one is happy all the time, nor can be. Accept the vicissitudes of life and make what you can of them. Have a good journey!



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THE PHILIPPINES

A new phase of my life began when I went to Philippines in January of '79. There, I met the abbot of the temple where I would stay, *Ven. Sui Kim*, and bowed to him, as protocol required. I was given a nice room on the second-floor of this opulent temple ~ *Seng Guan See* ~ where about ten monks were in residence.

Some of the monks were somewhat friendly, but from the day I went there until I left 5 years later, most of them did not even smile or nod, but looked straight through me as if I were invisible. True, the language-barrier prevented verbal communication, but even that was not insuperable, and I might have understood their attitude if, after being there long enough for them to get to know me a little and possibly conclude that 'this fellow is no good,' they had become cold towards me, but to treat a complete stranger like that didn't say much to me about their understanding of Dharma. And my opinion of them was not improved by their focus on lucrative ceremonies for the dead, whereby they had their pious but gullible followers over a barrel. Such monks become very rich, financially, by their activities, but one really wonders about their spiritual wealth!

Because of my observation of such things in Chinese temples, where the emphasis is on death-ceremonies, I'd resolved, before going to Manila, not to get drawn into all this, and I kept to my resolution, never once joining their ceremonies. Nor was I concerned how this appeared.

I waited, knowing things would happen, as they always do, no matter if we go looking for them or not. We often hear people say that life is boring, and that nothing interesting ever happens to them, but this not so. Life is *never* boring or uninteresting, but always new and there is *always* something happening. But because it might not be what we expect or want, we often don't see what is going on (or even ignore it). Our eyes and minds are set on other things; we look, but we do not see. I'd gone to the Philippines knowing only one person there and with no definite

plans or agenda, so was quite open to the unexpected ~ a fascinating way to live, because you can be flexible and go with the flow. Many people would consider this to be aimless drifting, but it is not so; instead, it is a matter of not trying to fearfully control and manipulate everything. We are *not* in control ~ when will we learn this? Does it take a typhoon or tsunami to make us understand? We are constantly bombarded by huge amounts of sensory impressions, any *byte* of which may change the course of our life, and sometimes considerably, just as a pebble dropped into a smoothly-flowing stream will somehow ~ imperceptibly, maybe, but nevertheless so ~ change the flow of the stream. And so, not knowing what I would do, but letting things happen, into my life came people who changed it, and I would like here to tell of some of them, as not to do would be not only rude and ungrateful, but would rob my story of so much color and sense.

There was *Mariano Tuitan* and his girlfriend, *Vicki Juan*, who discovered me ~ not I them ~ living in that temple. They were members of a local *ARE* group ~ '*Association for Research and Enlightenment*' ~ an organization founded to follow up the work and 'readings' of America's most-famous psychic, *Edgar Cayce*. (I'd first heard of Cayce in Bangkok in '72, when Dhammaviro spoke about him in glowing terms, and lent me a fascinating book, *Many Mansions*, by *Gina Cermina*. Since then, I'd read a number of other books about him and the 'readings' he made under self-hypnosis). I needed little incentive to attend their weekly meetings, which were held in a building in *Ermita*. I used to walk there, unaware that this was Manila's 'red-light' district, and I remember quizzical looks as I walked down *Mabini* Street to the venue, past the brightly-lit and garish bar-fronts and night-clubs, but my mind was clear and I paid little attention ~ so little, in fact, that it was only when I was told that I realized what this area was famous ~ or infamous ~ for!

The small *ARE* group welcomed me, and I joined in their discussions, contributing my share and becoming, in effect, a member, although I never subscribed. And there I met and formed friendships with others, one of whom, *Victor Chua* ~ a Chinese whose name fondly morphed in my mind through *Victorado* to *El Dorado* over the years ~ remains a friend until now, and I often

placed my life in his hands, which is what we do whenever we get in a car with someone; but more than this, I came to trust him and know he would never intentionally let me down (and there are not many people like this around now, it seems). The same age as me, he was English-educated, spoke with a nasal American accent, and worked in the office of the family glass-business, which his father had built up over his long life and made his fortune by. His father spoke no English at all, but became very supportive when he observed and approved of the work that I later became involved in.

Victor was still single at that time, and I thought would remain so, living with his parents in an old house, but later moved into a large new house his father was to build for him. By then, Victor had married, and was in a position to invite friends to stay with him; I would be among his frequent and many guests; he was a generous and open host and friend. Long before he moved to his own place, however, I used to stop by his office where I was sure of a soft-drink and snack while I cooled off in the air-conditioned comfort and exchanged banter with him. He was not a Buddhist as such, his philosophy of life being mainly Christian-based, but as an ARE member he accepted the concepts of Karma and Reincarnation, which most Christians don't. Such concepts, if examined for their implications, instead of simply believing in them, have the effect of opening the mind. Faced with a vista of many lives, we would have to consider the likelihood of having lived all over the world, now a member of this race and nationality, now a member of that, sometimes as male and sometimes as female; now as a Muslim, perhaps, and other times as a Buddhist, Christian, etc. This concept ~ and it *is* only a concept at our stage, not a proven theory ~ would be good even if it were not true ~ and we are not in a position right now to say it is true or not ~ because it has the flavor of liberation, liberation from bigotry, intolerance and partiality.

Then there was *Rita Villacorta*, a talented pastry-cook, with standing orders for her delicious cakes from a well-heeled clientele. She was soon to open *The Pastry Shop*, an upstairs room of which was to become the venue for ARE meetings ~ a much better place than the last! *That* had belonged to another lady, a close friend of Rita's named *Maring Llamado*, joint-owner of a

chain of restaurants across Manila. She was a widow and lived with two of her sons in a large house in a suburb near the palace of the head prelate of the Philippines, *Cardinal Sin* (strange name for a Prince of the Church, but such it was!) Maring was eclectic, into alternative life-styles and New-Age philosophies. In fact, I must say that, during my years in the Phils ~ although I saw that Filipinos in general had a kind of identity-problem, unsure if they were Asians or Westerners, having lived under rigid Spanish control for 350 years, followed by 50 years under the Americans ~ they were quite open-minded, and I never felt any kind of prejudice towards me as a foreigner or as a monk ~ rudeness and impoliteness at times, yes, but no real prejudice. I was commonly addressed as '*Pare*', which was their term, a *respectful* term, for priests.

Another ARE member was *Anthony Nchausty*, a locally-born Spaniard, but with strong Basque-separatist sympathies. He was quietly wealthy, middle-aged, and a bachelor. Another member was one of Victor's nieces, *Lucy*. These few, then, were the main members of ARE in Manila.

Of course, many things go on in your life at the same time, but it's impossible to tell of them all at once, so we must back-track, fast-forward, jump about, and try to make things interlock into a comprehensive whole; this is not easy, especially for anyone who might want to read such an account, but I hope you will continue, as this is not just about me; you will probably find that it's about you, too ~ at least, parts of it are.

I'd been in Manila a month when I heard of a refugee-ship named the *Tung An* in Manila Bay. Some local Buddhists took me to visit it, and we found 2,300 refugees living in crowded and dirty conditions; they were badly-treated by the Navy personnel, given meager food-rations, and had to stay on that rotten old hulk through rain and shine, not allowed to come ashore. I was shocked by the deprivation of these people, and resolved that, since I was not involved in anything else, I would do what I could to extend solace to them. I visited whenever I could get permission, but this was never easy, and meant going to several offices for applications, signatures and approvals; it became harder with each attempt, and I had the feeling that the authori-

ties wished to deter me from going, as they didn't want people to see how poorly they were treating the refugees; they had *that* much shame, anyway.

Finally, after keeping these people on the *Tung An* in Manila Bay for eight months, the authorities transferred them to *Tara*, a tiny island in the south, an uninhabited place where almost nothing grew, and the well-water was brackish, so everything had to be brought in by ship. It was very difficult for the delegations to get there to interview refugees; however, some refugees *were* resettled from there.

Eventually, the Philippine authorities realized they had made a mistake, and in January 1980, moved the remaining refugees to the newly-opened *PRPC* ~ *Philippine Refugee Processing Center* ~ in *Bataan*, about 200 kms NW of Manila. This was a project of the-then First Lady of the Phils, *Imelda Marcos*, although funded by the UNHCR, and rumor had it that by setting up this Refugee Center as a 'show-case,' she hoped to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Be that as it may, the *PRPC* was a vast improvement on the *Tung An* ship, *Tara* Island, and the *Jose Fabella Center* in Manila, which was another crowded, dirty and rat-infested refugee place that I used to visit and nick-named 'Mosquito Hotel' because of the swarms of mozzies there; it used to be part of the old mental-asylum.

In September, I applied to visit Manila City Jail, to bring Dharma to some of the inmates, and when I got permission and went there, the gate opened, I entered and found myself in a large, open compound, divided into sections, where the inmates were free to roam, not locked in small cells. Immediately, everyone's eyes zoomed in on me, and I was met by unfriendly faces. I was alone, without a guard, but unafraid. Wandering through the various sections, I tried to make contact with people there, and slowly, over the ensuing weeks, they began to relax with me and lower their masks ~ fierce, sullen, tough masks ~ to reveal, in many cases, the faces of little children who responded to a bit of sympathy and care. I think they realized I was there to listen to their stories and help them in whatever way I could, not to judge.

There were almost 2000 inmates in that jail, mainly members of gangs ~ *Sige-Sige Sputnik*, *Bahala-na-Gang*, *Kommando*, etc.,

deadly rivals on the streets ~ many heavily tattooed, and in for crimes like armed-robbery, manslaughter, and murder. Many were from poor or broken homes where they'd known little love, and it was easy for them to get into bad company and go wrong.

I got people to translate for me when necessary ~ *Bong Reyes* and *Blessing Adiao*, in for drug-dealing; without them, it would have been hard for me to communicate. Now, Bong and Blessing were vegetarians and so, I began to take some of the left-over food from the temple for them (which would only have been discarded and collected by someone for his pigs); of course, they were very happy with this, as it was very good food, especially compared to standard prison-fare. When the abbot came to know of this, however, he objected and said I couldn't do that. He later showed me his stinginess in other ways.

This became almost a full-time job, and I had many interesting experiences there, and learned several lessons, among them not to think of people as bad just because they had done bad things. When I started there, I used to recoil inwardly upon asking people what they were in for, and they said "Murder". But upon reflection, I came to see that it's not hard to kill someone ~ we are all capable of it; all it takes is to become angry, 'lose our mind' for a moment, pick up something lying nearby, like a knife, bottle or axe, and hit someone with it, and that person could easily die. It would then be too late to say: "Oh, sorry! Don't die! I didn't mean it! Please don't die!"

Once, I explained to people how to show concern for others by the way we walk. The sidewalks are congested and many people walk on the street, which is quite hazardous. Asking for volunteers, I showed how we should walk facing the oncoming traffic, and if people are walking towards us, to walk on their outside, so they will then walk nearer the curb, instead of on their inside, which would only push them further into the road. We can see the traffic coming towards us, while they, without eyes in the back of their heads, cannot. Now, there was a young guy named *Joy* (many strange names in the Phils; President Marcos' son was called *Bong-Bong!*) listening to me that day. He was in for murder, and told me his story: One day, high on drugs in a cinema, he'd freaked out, pulled a knife from his pocket, and

stabbed a complete stranger sitting next to him! Anyway, he was released on bail, and some months later, while visiting some of his friends in the jail, he came to me and said: "Remember what you told us about how to walk on the street? I'm doing that now!"

In the mornings, I would go to the courts, to attend hearings and trials, to talk with lawyers and judges, to give moral support to prisoners I knew, and get information. One day, a lawyer there asked who I was, and when I told him I was a lawyer, too, he asked what kind of law I practiced, so I told him of the Law of Cause-and-Effect, and he said, "Oh, you are a *real* lawyer!"

After lunch and a short siesta, I would spend some hours in the jail; the time would just slip away, and sometimes, I stayed so long the gate-guards forgot I was still there, and locked me in! I had to shout to be let out!

One day, on the way back to the temple for lunch after being in the courts, I saw a cardboard-box in the middle of a busy street, obstructing traffic-flow, so went over to remove it. Imagine my surprise to find five kittens inside! Where this box had come from or how long it had been there, I had no idea. I put it on the sidewalk and went on to the temple, thinking I should have taken them with me, but knowing that this would not have been approved of. I decided to check if they were still there when I went to the jail afterwards, and they were, so I took them with me and gave them to some of the inmates, who were very pleased to have an object of affection. One of the recipients named *Phalai* really loved and cared for his kitten, until one day, when I went, he looked very sad, and when I asked why, told me that he'd rolled on the kitten in his sleep and squashed it. He was later released, and I saw or heard nothing of him until one day, when I went to the jail, someone said to me, "Phalai's back."

"What?" I said, "To visit?" (it was easy to do so; even whores used to visit, to provide their services!) "No, arrested again!"

"Then tell him not to see me," I said, "He's stupid". So for some days, he didn't come near me; whenever he caught my eye, he would lower his head in shame. Then, one day, I was sitting somewhere, and he came and sat beside me. I looked at him, turned away, and looked at him again, saying, "What happened?" He then told me his story.

He really had wanted to go straight, he said, but his old friends kept coming around saying, 'Don't stay home; let's go out somewhere and have fun,' until finally he agreed to go, and although they had said they wouldn't do anything wrong, they took him to break into someone's house, but before they could steal anything, he saw a Buddha-image, and it reminded him of me, so he said, 'Let's go, quick!' (apparently, it was the house of an Indian, and there aren't many Indians in the Philippines, so it was rather strange). They then broke into another house, but this house had no Buddha-image, and they were caught by the police. "Oh, well," I said, "you tried; better luck next time."

Sometimes, people would ask, "What is your religion? Are you a Buddhist?" If I'd said "Yes," it might have created a space between us, because, in most cases, they called themselves Catholics. So I said "No".

"Then what *is* your religion?" they would persist.

"My religion," I said, "is life. Have you heard of that one?"

"Yes, I think so," replied one or two, hesitantly.

It allowed me to present things in an open way, without labels. I told them that I didn't care what they might or might not have done, as I didn't know them before, and what is important is now. "You might say you were framed and are innocent, but only you know that. Was it the police who put you here, or was it yourselves?" I could see some of them thinking about this, and one said, "You are right. We put ourselves here. If we hadn't done what we did, we wouldn't be here."

I continued: "I'm not here to take you out of this place, and if I tried, well, I'd be in here with you, in a different way than I am now. I can't take you *out*, but maybe I can take you *in* ~ inside yourselves." Although it wasn't ~ by any stretch of the imagination ~ a nice place, I met a lot of nice people in that jail; they were unlucky, and had been caught; the biggest criminals usually don't get caught, and remain free. I started a meditation-class, and had a steady little group; they had plenty of time for this and nothing else to do.

Some of them called me *Father*, just as they addressed their priests; but I told them I didn't like that, as ~ playing on words ~

it means far away (*farther*), so it would be better to call me *Nearer*, as I was trying to get near to them. Some of them started to call me *Nearer*, therefore, while some still called me *Father*, and some even called me *Father Nearer*. Now, I liked the Yin-Yang sound of that!

I was supported in my jail-work by a number of people, some of whom came with me at times to distribute various things. And the superintendent of the jail ~ a Filipino-Chinese named *Alfredo Lim* (a fair-minded man who was popular with the inmates and who later became mayor of Manila), approved of my activities there. But not everyone was happy with what I was doing, and one day, the abbot of the temple called me to his room and scolded me for not joining the other monks in performing ceremonies, but going to the jail "to be with all those bad people" (as he called them). I could have scolded him back, as I'd lost my respect for him by then, but remained silent until he'd said all he wanted to say. Then I replied: "I also can perform ceremonies for the dead if I wish, but my way is more for the living than for the dead. I don't think I can help the dead very much, but I might be able to do something for the living. Anyway," I went on, "We teach that everyone has Buddha-nature, and may become enlightened." He was unable to say anything else then, but soon after, stopped the allowance I'd been given. However, you can't keep me quiet for \$10 a month! I'm not for sale like that!

There was another room near mine on the landing, occupied by an old man named *Pue Ling*, who was in charge of maintaining the altars downstairs; we shared a bathroom. Now, this old man didn't speak any English, so we could not communicate, but he must have disliked me so much that at times, he'd wait until I was taking a shower and was all soaped up, and then turn on a tap downstairs, cutting off my water, and making me await his pleasure to turn off his tap so I could rinse myself. (I learned of this only much later, of course). And if I left anything by mistake in the bathroom, such as razor or soap, it would 'disappear.'

Some of the people in the jail were much nicer than old Pue Ling, and at least were not hypocritical about what they'd done.

I found my way all over Manila, visiting families and friends of prisoners, usually by bus or *jeepney* ~ a kind of open-sided and

highly-decorated mini-bus ~ but often by foot, too, if it wasn't too far. I would regularly walk from the temple to the courts, about 2 kms, and people were amazed that I should do this. "You *walk*?" they'd say, as if it was a stupendous feat! I would be all sweaty, but I would be so no matter what I did or didn't do; I put up with that awful climate, but never got used to it.

To create a little privacy, some of the prisoners constructed ingenious 'tents' of *papier-mache* on a network of strings running from nails in the ceiling to nails in the floor. Many of them were quite artistic, making handicrafts for sale. Several even had their young children in with them; one such child, about 5-years-old, had been coached to draw his forefinger across his throat in response when anyone asked him, "What are *you* in for?" Not a very good education.

Because there was such a need, I would collect used clothes for distribution in the jail, but this became a problem, as everyone wanted what I had to give; how to give to some without upsetting others? I solved this by holding raffles: whoever got a scrap of paper with a number on it got the article of clothing with the corresponding number; I was able to avoid blame that way.

Skin-diseases like scabies and ring-worm were rampant, so I would carry creams and ointments to treat things like this (I had a bad case of ring-worm myself, that took months of treatment to eradicate). Some prisoners took advantage of me, and asked me to get things like cough-syrup for them, but when I discovered they were using it to get high on, I didn't fall for it any more.

For some months at this time, I conducted a Sunday meditation-and-discussion group in the temple, and a few people attended regularly, one of them being *Bet Pe*, whose real name was *Evelyn*. We kept in touch ~ with a break of a few years in the '90's ~ until now, and of course, being the joker with names that I am, her name morphed through *Evergreen* and *Eveready* to *Bettery*.

One evening, in February '80, I returned from the jail, and in the dim light outside my room, was a strange monk; I nodded, but he didn't speak, so I thought he was waiting for someone else. I went into my room, and when I came out to go to the bathroom, he was still there, so I asked who he was waiting for, and he told

me, in his broken English, that he wanted to meet *me*. He said he was a refugee from PRPC, and had heard from someone in Jose Fabella that there was a Western monk in Manila who was involved with the refugees, so had boldly left the Camp alone to come to search for me. But, since he didn't know my name or location, he wandered around Manila until he came to Chinatown, where he began asking people if they knew where to find a 'European monk.' Finally, someone who had seen me directed him to the temple, where he found me. He told me that he'd been in PRPC since January, and asked me to pay a visit, but I said I was very busy at the jail and wasn't free. "Maybe next time," I told him. He went back to Bataan a bit disappointed, but two weeks later, came again, with a friend, and this time, I agreed to go with them, "But just for one day, okay?"



"It is a century now since Darwin gave us the first glimpse of the origin of species. We know now what was unknown to all the preceding caravan of generations: that men are only fellow-voyagers in the odyssey of evolution. This new knowledge should give us, by this time, a sense of kinship with other fellow-creatures, a wish to live and let live, a sense of wonder over the magnitude and duration of the biotic community."

Aldo Leopold, American Conservationist, 1886 - 1948 -

THE REFUGEE CAMP

That brief visit was enough for me to decide to go to stay there; I told *Thich Thong Hai* (the monk's name), "Let me round off my work in Manila, and I'll come." By the end of March, I was in PRPC to stay, not realizing I'd stay long-term. Thong Hai had arrived there from another camp in Malaysia ~ Pulau Bidong, near Kuala Trengganu ~ and before being taken to Bataan, had agreed to stay for two years until resettled in the US. After a while, he got people to help him build a temple at the top end of the Camp, and they went to the jungle nearby to cut trees and bamboo; before long the temple was in use.



The First Temple in the Camp

While they were doing this, other people helped me build a small hut beside a waterfall in the jungle; it was peaceful and pleasant, but impossible to stay there once the monsoon began, so I had to move back to the Camp, and a bigger hut was constructed for me beside the temple. It was to remain my abode throughout most of my stay there.

Imagine Thong Hai's surprise ~ *and* mine! ~ when, less than six months after he got there, he was informed that he would be among the first batch to leave, on the 1st of July; he hadn't long to prepare, and was soon on his way, but only after requesting me to stay and take care of the temple he'd set up. I never imagined I would stay there almost 4 years.

My main purpose in going to stay there and in remaining so long had to do with the suffering of the refugees. Having realized that Suffering is the *First and Foremost Teacher* ~ *Guru Dukkha* ~ on

the *Way*, I felt an attempt should be made to show some of them how it can be turned around and something gained, otherwise, it would be an even greater tragedy than the suffering itself. This was, and still is my main purpose. The Buddha is not our *First* Teacher but the *Second*. Suffering is the First Teacher, because without Suffering, nobody would be interested in the Buddha's Teachings about how to deal with and overcome Suffering.

Christian missionaries were soon hard at work there, and many refugees were induced, by fair means and foul, to change their religion. I protested, not because I'm against people changing their religion, but because they were pressured and bribed into converting. I didn't blame the refugees for changing, but held the missionaries reprehensible for using whatever means they could devise to convert these poor, suffering and trusting unfortunates, many of whom had little left to call their own except the traditional religion of their ancestors; it was cruel, calculating and ruthless of the missionaries to exploit them in this way. Sure, I know many Buddhists understand little or nothing about Buddhism, and that one name ~ *Christian* ~ is just as good as another ~ *Buddhist* ~ but still, that is no reason to pressure them to convert; these people risked everything to be free, and should have been left alone to choose for themselves something as personal as religion. I had little choice but to oppose such proselytisation, and encourage the Buddhists to keep their religion, and most of my talks in the Camps were given for this purpose. How much success I had in this, no-one could say; perhaps very little, if any. On the other hand, no-one could say what would have happened had I not exhorted people as I did. My words were seeds, freely scattered, in the hope that some of them ~ a tiny proportion, perhaps ~ would grow. Have any grown so far? That is not for me to say, but I like to think that some have.

Apart from the Vietnamese, who had been brought here from Camps in other countries, like Malaysia, Hong Kong, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia and Macau, there were many Cambodians and Laotians from Camps in Thailand. As more refugees came in, it was necessary to construct more accommodation for them, and *Phase Two* came into being, with four new neighborhoods, making ten from the original six. The three groups were housed separately in barracks in these neighborhoods; each neighbor-

hood had thirty barracks, each barrack ten billets, and each billet was meant for at least six people; so, at maximum capacity, the Camp held 18,000 refugees, most of whom considered themselves Buddhists.

As time passed, whenever people died, they were buried in a plot of land off to one side; this became known by the refugees as *Neighborhood Eleven*. During the time I was in the Camp, over a hundred people were buried there.

As one batch of refugees left, others came to take their places; there were so many in other Camps in the region. Countries like US, Canada, Australia, France, Germany, Norway, and so on, were still taking in large numbers of refugees; 'compassion-fatigue' was not to set in until some years later.

I became friends with someone named *Trinh De*, who was teaching English in order to earn a little money; he was the eldest of 5 brothers, and because some Vietnamese names appear not so good to non-Vietnamese, I soon gave them English names, so De became Paul, and his brothers, Simon, Charles, Julius and Robert. Anyway, they helped me a lot, and sadly for me, they were among the second batch to leave for the US. I accompanied them on the bus to Manila airport, where they had to wait for some hours in a large hall for their flight out. A *Flying Tigers* (the CIA airline) plane had been chartered especially for them, as they were so many, and when it was ready, they all trooped out to it, leaving me behind, feeling solitary and lonely. I waited until the plane took off, my right hand raised in benediction, and then left the airport to return to the temple. It was still dark as I walked down the road to get a taxi about 4 o'clock, and the words of an old song ran through my mind:

"In the early morning rain,
With a dollar in my hand,
And an aching in my heart,
And my pockets full of sand."

Left in charge, I became increasingly aware of the depredations of the missionaries, some of whom ~ and there were so many, of different sects, all doing their utmost to 'catch fish' ~ were spreading the rumor that since America was a Christian country,

and the people sponsoring the refugees were Christians, they should change their religion; they used many other tactics to achieve the same end; after all, they'd had centuries of practice at this, but could no longer do it at the point of a sword! I could not just let this happen, and so, discussing the matter with various people of the three ethnic groups ~ including several Lao monks who were there, and a Vietnamese monk who had just arrived ~ we agreed to hold a festival, and use it to elect a joint Buddhist committee, in order to put on a united front.

I enlisted the support of Buddhists from Manila for this, and many of them came out for the event. Lots of food was prepared and everyone ate. I gave a long talk about the situation, translated into the three languages, after which, we elected the committee, comprising members from each group; and, because I wasn't of any of these groups, they elected me president. Afterwards, the Cambodian committee-members came to me and asked if it would be alright to offer a small sum of money to the monks for participating in the festival; I said yes, as long as the nuns were offered the same amount (there were several white-robed Cambodian nuns, you see). They objected to this, saying it wasn't their tradition to offer money to nuns, but I countered this by saying that these nuns had left their homes and families just like the monks, and were living similar lives, and that since traditions start somewhere, we could start a new one that day. They went away to discuss this, and then came back to tell me they agreed. I believe in treating people fairly and equally, I told them, even though there is no such thing as equality in nature, but only variety and difference; we should try to treat others as we would like them to treat us.

I settled down to life there, doing what I could, and sometimes standing up to the authorities on behalf of the refugees, who were afraid to speak for themselves in case it jeopardized their resettlement; the threat of this was one way the authorities used to enforce order, but with limited success. Soon, there were various scams going on. Wherever there were opportunities to get more than they otherwise would have done, there was no shortage of takers. Some refugee-volunteers in the food-distribution centers soon had more than their fair share. And those in the Camp post-office were unable to keep their hands

off their fellows' mail. Large numbers of letters would disappear, later to be found in the forest or the stream near the Camp, devoid of any checks or cash they had contained. People lost not only money that way, but also important documents they had been waiting for. And over the time I was there, I lost at least \$1,200 that I knew of ~ money that had been sent for temple-purposes or for personal use. It was really a big problem, and I felt sure it was an organized racket. My ears were always open for tales of who might be responsible, and indeed, I *did* manage to have several refugees apprehended for it. But there was little I could do about the Filipino post-office staff, some of whom must have become very wealthy from working there. They knew I was watching them, and once, when I went to the post-office, I read the lips of one of them as she said to another: "*Abhinyana!*"

One girl who worked in the post-office often came to the temple to stand in front of the Buddha-image silently moving her lips in fervent prayer. After she left, someone told me that she had helped herself to the contents of many letters. No wonder she felt the need to pray so much!

There were always people staying in the temple to help with the work there, as it was a big area, and much had to be done. They were usually young men, mostly Vietnamese, but also some Cambodians; they had to be vegetarians while there, as we had no meat or fish ~ not *dead* fish, anyway; there were *live* ones in the pond that had been built, but they were not for food. As some of these unpaid volunteers left, others came to take their places, and at times, we had as many as ten or twelve. I didn't just tell them what to do, but set an example by working myself ~ building, cleaning, gardening, etc.; the temple became perhaps the most beautiful place in the whole Camp.

At the end of 1980, the Camp Admin suggested I set up another temple at the lower end of the long and narrow Camp, for the convenience of the Buddhists there; it was a walk of about 40 minutes from bottom to top. I agreed, and with support from the Buddhists of Manila, was able to build a small temple in quite a pleasant spot, with a lovely grove of mango-trees, and behind, a beautiful vista of the mountains, forest and stream running be-

low. It was years before I actually stayed at that temple, but I used to go there regularly to give talks.

At this time I met *Tomas Pabiloña*, a devout ~ and sometimes, *too* devout ~ Buddhist in Manila, and gave him some relics; he was very happy with these and said he'd just been wondering how he might obtain some. He was a qualified engineer but ran a hardware-store with his wife, *Avelina* ~ a quiet, self-effacing lady. They would help me very much over the next few years.

For some reason I never understood, the Admin decided to move the Vietnamese from near the temple to make room for Cambodians. Now, the Vietnamese had been there almost a year, and some had created small gardens, so weren't happy to have to relocate, but had no choice. About their gardens, however, they *did*, and some, thinking that if *they* couldn't have them, no-one else would, pulled up the flowers and vegetables they'd planted, and cut down the papaya-trees and bananas, not stopping to think how we depend upon others for almost everything, including the food we eat; it was planted by others, not by us. We all eat others' food, wear others' clothes, live in others' houses, use things made by others. We sit in the shade of trees, unaware that they were probably planted by someone long ago, someone whose identify we can only guess at; why don't we plant trees, so that others later on ~ others we don't and cannot know ~ may enjoy their shade and fruit after we've moved on?

The place from which the refugees left the Camp by bus for re-settlement was known as the 'departure-area,' not far from the temple, and there was a long straight path leading down to it. I sometimes went to see people off, then return to the temple by this path, which I thought of as the *Via Dolorosa*, after the route that Jesus was forced to take on his way to be crucified in Jerusalem; my heart was often heavy as I returned to the temple.

One time, I met a young man at that area; I'd not known him before, but he said to me, "I have been here for seven months, and the only thing I could think of was the day of my departure. Now that day is here, but I'm sad and don't want to go, because I see that the hills around the Camp are green!" Imagine that! The hills around the Camp had not become green just on that day, especially for him; they'd been green for a long time, but he'd not no-

ticed them because he was thinking of other things ~ looking, but not seeing! This is not uncommon; in fact, most of us do this very thing, and are seldom aware of what is right in front of us!

The Camp was in a beautiful setting, with rolling, grassy hills on two sides, a stream running through the forest on another, and the ocean some distance away on the fourth. Some refugees couldn't resist the temptation to set fire to the grass, and the hills would go up in flames! This took place every dry-season, even though the Camp authorities had had the hillsides planted with saplings. No-one was ever caught and punished for this.

There was a stockade for the incarceration of miscreants, and it soon became known as '*The Monkey House*'. I became aware of it at the end of 1980 because of a boy named *Nghia*. He had a mental problem, and was forever up to some mischief ~ stealing from the camp-market, setting fire to his billet, and so on. He would be locked up in the Monkey-House, but *Houdini-like*, would always escape. Late one night, when I'd already gone to bed, I heard gun-shots nearby, so went out to look. At the temple gateway were some Filipino marines (a small detachment of them was stationed in the Camp to maintain order), grappling with *Nghia*, who had in his hand a papaya-leaf, with which he was hitting the marines over their heads! It looked so funny, but I said, "What's going on here?" and they said something about him making trouble somewhere. Now, no-one had ever been able to do anything with him except me; for some reason, he would listen to me, so I asked them to turn him over to me. I then gave him a place to sleep, and the next day assigned him some jobs, like sweeping the temple-floor. He was alright when I was around, and if he got a bit out of hand, I had only to look at him over my glasses and say, "*Nghia!*" and he would become quiet. But he was incorrigible, and no sooner did I turn my back than he'd get up to mischief again. Once, when I returned from a few days in Manila, I found that he'd taken some of my clothes and gone around the camp wearing them, and because of this, he became known as '*The Mad Monk*'! There were many other incidents, but eventually he was resettled in New Zealand. I had no idea we would meet again one day.

The Admin was headed by Army personnel, the boss being a *General Tobias* who came out from Manila every week for what was known as the 'Inter-Agency Meeting'. Under him were several ex-Colonels, one of whom, Col. Banzon, was alright with me, but another ~ Col. Ouzon ~ wasn't, as I'd had a bit of a run-in with him over something or other. In '82, he saw an opportunity to get back at me. Two monks arrived from VRC, and not knowing that they should register for billet-allocation and food-supplies, they were brought straight up to the temple by other refugees to stay with me. The next day, when I was down at the other temple on my bicycle, someone said to me, in a state of consternation, "*Come quick! Two monks in the Monkey House!*"

"*What?*" I said, "*Monks in the Monkey House? How can this be?*" and quickly rode off there to find that it was so. They told me Col. Ouzon had come looking for them and arrested them. I went to see him and asked him why he'd done that. "Because they broke the rules," he said.

"**H**ow long do you intend to keep them there?" I asked.

"A few days," he said. "In that case then, you'll have to keep me there, too, as I'll camp outside until you let them go!" Fearful, maybe, of a demonstration in favor of the monks, he had to back down and release them, and I said to him, "Now you can give me a van to take us back up to the temple!" He did, too.

Not having been given permission to stay in the Camp, I was there unofficially. I'd applied, soon after moving there, but was never told personally that I was cleared; someone who worked in the Admin building later told me he'd heard it coming over on the radio-link from Manila (there was no phone-link at that time). I became a bit of a thorn-in-the-flesh, and they didn't know what to do with me as I had no boss who they could complain to; unlike other foreign personnel in the Camp who worked for various agencies, my position was unique, and I exploited it; I could get away with things that others would not have been allowed to.

The Buddhist committee was as ephemeral as the life of a butterfly, because as the members left, it was very hard to replace them, and few people cared enough anyway. Soon, therefore, it fell apart, and it was left to me to take care of everything, and this was not easy, especially as some of the Cambodians began

to ask for a temple of their own where the Vietnamese couldn't go. I made it clear that the temples were Buddhist temples, not Vietnamese, Cambodian, Chinese or whatever, and were open to everyone, Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike, and while I was in charge, they would remain so. They could use them on equal terms as the Vietnamese, but they couldn't have one for themselves, I said. What an unenviable position I was in, caught between the two communities. The Vietnamese never said things like that ~ at least, I never heard of it, and they would have known my response if they'd said it.

I was closer to the Vietnamese because of my vegetarianism and other things (Vietnam had been more fortunate than Cambodia, in receiving the 3 streams of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism from China, whereas Cambodia had had only Theravada Buddhism and some Hindu influence from India). Because of this, some Cambodians were quick to say I favored the Vietnamese. Whenever I had used-clothes from Manila to distribute, they accused me of giving the best to the Vietnamese. Well, I *did* first give such clothes to my temple-volunteers, but that was only natural. Later, I tried to prevent such complaints by dividing clothes into three piles on the floor of the temple, calling representatives of the three groups, and saying to the Cambodians: "You choose first." They then had the task of distributing them to their people rather than me; I wondered how impartial they were in this.

Of course, it's impossible to please everyone, and one day, a Vietnamese came to the temple and said: "I'd like some clothes, please. You didn't give me any last week, and I'm a Buddhist. You gave some to Christians instead!" I was astonished. "Look," I said, "there are 18,000 people in this Camp, and I don't have clothes for more than a few; moreover, I don't know everyone here, and don't discriminate like that anyway!"

Because we were short of so many things in the Camp, now and then I would bring empty oil-cans from Seng Guan See to use for carrying water, and partly-burnt candles, of which there were so many. When Sui Kim came to know of this, however, he told me not to do it, as they needed them there. Yes, I thought, just like they needed the left-over food.

Needless to say, it wasn't easy to maintain the Camp, and sadly, many refugees were content to sit back waiting for their resettlement and let others do the work. It was necessary to institute a 'Work-Credit System', and each adult refugee was required to do some kind of work for two hours each day; for this, they were awarded points, and only if they had enough points by the time their basic English course and medical exams were complete, were they allowed to leave. Volunteers in the temples could get their points for working there, and I had to sign their work-sheets. Monks were also supposed to work, and there were jobs they could have done, but some of them were reluctant, considering it beneath their dignity. One Vietnamese Theravada monk, staying at the lower temple, refused to do anything, although I told him I wouldn't sign his paper when it was time to leave. He disregarded me. The months passed, and his English-course was over, so he needed his work-paper signed. I told him he did not qualify for points as he'd done no work. He almost wept, but I reminded him of what I'd told him earlier, and refused to sign. One day, before dawn, I was upstairs in my kuti and heard the sound of sweeping outside; thinking this odd, I went out to see who was working in the dark. It was this monk, trying to shame me into signing. "Come on, give me the paper." I said. "Now go!" as I signed it. He didn't last long in America before he disrobed.

Every two or three weeks, I went to Manila for a few days, and before going, would open the donation-boxes in the temples and take any money to help towards buying whatever supplies we needed. One time, opening the box in the lower temple where there was another monk in residence, I found only a single coin, so thought it wasn't worth taking. Upon my return, I opened the box again, expecting to find at least one peso there, but there was not even that! I knew that someone had been stealing from the box, and found out that it was the monk, who'd been sending someone to get it at night and bring it over to his kuti, where he used a wire to hook the money out through the slot. When I confronted him about this, he made the excuse that he'd been sick, and a lady had come to the temple to offer him money for medicine while he was out, so had put it in the box!

At the same time, a man by the name of *Duong Van Qui* became active in the temple, and formed the idea of getting hold of

the temple funds, unaware there *were* no funds. I was told he'd been saying that the temple should be under the control of Vietnamese rather than an English monk. He had wormed his way into some petty position with Col. Banzon, and using his imaginary power thereof, informed people he'd be able to help if they had any problems. But it was a scam, and to thwart him, I put a notice next to the donation-box exhorting people to put any complaints they had ~ in writing, with or without their names if they wished ~ into the box, so I could read them and maybe do something for them. Soon after, there was a note from a woman saying that Qui, knowing she had a problem regarding resettlement, had approached her and told her he would help her if she paid him some money! I had him! I informed Col. Banzon about him, and he was dismissed. I told him to keep out of the temple.

Now, it wasn't uncommon for people to brand others 'communist' if they took a dislike to them, and this was the worst thing they could do, as it was useless for the person so branded to deny it. Once, someone came to inform me that another man who frequented the temple was a communist, and asked me to ban him from coming. "Look," I said, "the temple has a gateway but no gate. It means it is open to anyone, and I cannot keep people out unless and until they make trouble."

The refugees were sometimes given 'gifts' bearing names and slogans such as "*Jesus Loves You*," "*International Christian Aid*," "*Jesus Care For You*," making it clear where they'd come from and leaving them feeling obligated, just as intended; there were strings attached. Once, I had a small consignment of bars of soap and cans of milk from Manila for distribution and, to avoid the missionaries' tactics, I sent my Vietnamese volunteers to the Cambodians and Cambodian volunteers to the Vietnamese, to hand out the stuff to them, and if anyone were to ask where it came from, tell them it wasn't important. If I'd sent the Vietnamese to the Vietnamese, and the Cambodians to the Cambodians, they would have given it to their friends. They set off with their boxes, but before long, several Filipino marines came to the temple with my Vietnamese volunteers and some Cambodians. The Cambodians couldn't understand why anyone ~ especially Vietnamese ~ would give them anonymous gifts, so

used were they to getting things with labels. "Look," I said, "This is simply soap and milk; not Buddhist or Christian, but just soap and milk, but if you don't want it, of course, you won't get it," and I took it back. It was very hard to be fair with these people.

Life is like a play, in which we are all actors, with the script written as we act, not before, and no-one knows what will happen next. In 1975, one of the most murderous regimes the world has ever known took control of Cambodia, and this once-gentle land became a slaughter-house, with more than two million people murdered or dying of starvation or disease. The killing would probably have gone on unabated if the armies of Vietnam hadn't attacked in 1978 and taken over, driving *Pol Pot* and his demons into the jungles or over the Thai border, thus saving the remaining Cambodians. I met few who saw it this way, however, but many who hated the Vietnamese for invading their country. Ironically, had it not been for the Vietnamese ~ and the Vietnamese *communists*, at that ~ few of these people would have survived; they owed their lives, therefore, to the Vietnamese. Which is better: to be dead in one's own country, which had become a charnel-ground, or to be alive and free in another? There was ~ and still is ~ an hereditary hatred going back centuries on the part of the Cambodians as a people towards the Vietnamese; being neighbors, conflict between them was endemic. It's hard to get such hatred out of the national psyche; insight is reached by the individual, never by groups.

Once, a middle-aged Cambodian lady came to see me; educated, intelligent, cultured and refined, she told me, in her broken English, how she was the sole survivor of her family in Cambodia during the reign of the Khmer Rouge; her parents, siblings, and her children had all perished; her husband had died of starvation with his head on her lap! She was crying as she told me these things, of course, and I listened, without interrupting; it was important to tell her story and be heard. "I lost everything," she sobbed. When she'd said all she wanted to say, I spoke to her as gently as I could and told her that she'd not lost everything, and that much might yet be won; I forget my words to her, but explained how few come to Dharma except through *dukkha*, and how pain leads to compassion. As I spoke, I saw a wonderful transformation come upon her face; I'd never seen

anything like it before ~ it was like a light shining outwards through her skin ~ and I knew she'd understood, but didn't know how *deeply* until she came again just before she left the Camp for the US, and she said to me: "Abhinyana, before I leave here, I want to tell you that what you said to me that day was sweeter to me than had been the love of my husband when we were first married." Imagine that! It was the best compliment anyone has ever paid me, and has been one of the things that have kept me going all these years. Her name was *Ping Kim Suor*. But this is not the end of her story. More about her later.

In '81, I received a letter requesting me to visit the smaller Camp on Palawan island in the south, for the opening-ceremony of the renovated temple there, so I got a plane-ticket and went. Temple committee-members met me at the airport, and took me to the Camp (indeed, the Camp was situated right beside the airport-runway, and people used to walk and exercise there when there were no planes landing or taking-off; there was only one plane each day, anyway. On another side was the sea). There was a simple room for me at the temple, but at that time there wasn't a toilet in the temple, and no-one showed me where to go, and the Camp toilet-blocks were too bad to be considered, so I spent an uncomfortable five days there, really needing to *go*. Apart from that, my visit was quite a success, and the talks I gave were well-attended; I was the only Western monk they'd ever seen, so I had attraction-value. People who were in that Camp at one time or another may recall the scene of the talks out in front of the temple there, in the open air, with the moon and stars shining down through the coconut-palms, the scent of the frangipani trees, and the sound of the surf in the background.

This Camp was a camp of first-asylum ~ that is, for refugees who had arrived in the Phils directly from Vietnam; no matter whereabouts in the Philippines they landed, they were brought here. It was known as *VRC ~ Vietnamese Refugee Center*.

Several Brits were teaching English in the Camp at that time ~ Muriel Knox (a Scot), Marion Lynch, Tony and Leslie. I got on alright with *Knoxey*, and kept in touch with her for some years, but she wasn't the best correspondent, and we eventually lost touch (strangely enough, we'd *almost* met in England before my first

trip overseas in '65; several times, out of curiosity, I joined the meetings of an organization called *Moral Rearmament* in a town some 5 miles from my home, and it appeared she also attended meetings at the same place, around the same time, though what she was doing in that area, I don't know). Marion later married a refugee she met in VRC, and now lives in the US. Tony also married a girl he met there, and the last I heard of him he was in Holland. When these people left the Camp, they were replaced by other British volunteers; they were given a stipend in place of a salary, but it was barely enough to live on; they were there from commitment, out of the goodness of their hearts.

I was to visit VRC a total of ten times between 1981 and 1987, and stay for periods varying from the five days of my initial visit to two months later on. The population was less constant than in Bataan; in '81, if I remember aright, it was about 5000, but by '84, maybe only 2000. Some people spent up to five years there, waiting to be accepted for resettlement in other countries; without relatives elsewhere, or people willing to sponsor them, it was hard for them to get out. Then, like in Bataan and other Camps, there were an inevitable number of deaths; corpses were either buried in a local cemetery or cremated.

Sometimes, walking through the Camp, I would be struck by a sense of the terrible suffering of the refugees, and my legs felt so heavy that I could hardly move and had to sit down somewhere ~ it didn't matter where, or if there were people and noise all around ~ and my mind automatically became calm and clear. Indeed, suffering is the gate to the Way, and few people come to it in any other way. Writing of it now, I got a *thought-shiver*.

Not all in PRPC were refugees; some left Vietnam on what was called the *Orderly-Departure Program*; Somehow, having obtained clearance, probably by large bribes, they were allowed to fly out. I became close to one family who'd come in this way, as they were devout Buddhists and very supportive of the temple. They'd arrived via Bangkok, but there was some problem about their resettlement in the US. They had a son in Canada, but had not disclosed this, as they wanted to go to California, and the US officials discovered this, and put them on hold. For three years, they were kept in a state of uncertainty, running a small business in the camp market to earn a bit of money. The man's

name was Dong, his wife's Phuong, and their children ~ two girls and a boy ~ Thi, Yen and Kien. Eventually, they were told they would be allowed to go, but only if Dong and Phuong made an effort to learn more English, which they did. I called Phuong *Chi*, or elder sister, as per the Vietnamese custom, so *Chi Phuong*.

I experienced several earthquakes while I was in Philippines, one when I was in Seng Guan See, when the temple began to sway in what was to me an alarming way, but was nothing out of the ordinary there. Another time, I was on the toilet in PRPC when there came quite a strong tremor, and I was concerned that the concrete slab over the pit below might crumble and send me plunging down to a place I really didn't want to go!

At the end of 1981, Sui Kim asked me to attend an *International Sangha Conference* in Taiwan as part of the Philippines delegation, the temple covering the costs. I had a two weeks' break from Bataan therefore. In Taipei, we were taken to *The Grand Hotel* ~ one of the top hotels in the world at that time ~ where we were to stay and the conference to be held. I thought I'd died and gone to heaven! Monks from many countries came, and we were well-treated. With robes of various colors, fabrics and designs, it was like a fashion-show. Having noticed me wearing what he must have thought was a too-old robe merely because it was a bit patched, a Thai monk came up to me and presented me with a new one. I thanked him, but didn't wear it there and then, as I don't like new clothes, all stiff and shiny, so continued to wear my old robe; it was clean, even if it was patched.

An enormous amount of money must have been spent, as no expense was spared. But I wasn't very impressed and couldn't see what came of it. To entertain us, we were taken to various museums and temples in and around Taipei, and even as far as *Kaohsiung* in the south, where there is a huge temple, the headquarters of *Fo Guang Shan (Buddha's Light Mountain)*, the founder-abbot of which ~ *Venerable Hsing Yun* ~ is incredibly talented, and has established branch-temples all over the world; we were served so graciously there.

When the conference convened, every monk was introduced as 'Venerable

outstanding, therefore when a senior Vietnamese monk from Canada arrived late and had himself introduced as 'The *Most Venerable*'. I felt embarrassed for him! I have never been to another such conference.

One day, an old lady had seen a monkey for sale in the market and, knowing that some people liked to eat monkeys, spent some of her no-doubt limited funds to buy it and bring it to the temple where she knew no-one would kill it, and offered it to me. When I saw it, however, I put my head against the door-post, because when it had been trapped in the forest, its right hand had been cut off, and the stump was bloody and swollen, with two bones protruding from the wrist. I was sad to think that some refugee, who had fled his country in search of peace and happiness, had gone to the forest to trap monkeys, never thinking for a moment that these animals also had families and friends and wished to be free and happy, just like him; the money he got for his victim ~ a few pesos ~ would soon be spent; but the results of his callousness would go on for a long time. When we are suffering or in danger we pray for help and make promises, but it is often too late and the pain must run its course. If we wish to avoid suffering, we should consider the causes, more than the effects. Most suffering is self-caused, and so we are able to do something about it. To pray for release from pain if we have sown the seeds of it won't have much effect.

I thanked and praised the old lady and tied the monkey up behind the temple and gave it food and water, then I went to look for someone to treat its wound, but found no-one. Feeling it useless to apply ointment and bandage (as it would only have pulled it off), I left it, not knowing what to do and thinking it would soon die. When I went to see it two days later, however, I was surprised to see only *one* bone sticking out of its wrist! How it had broken the other off, I don't know, but several days after this, the *second* bone was also broken off, and the flesh and skin began to grow around the wound until it was completely healed, without any infection! "*Wonderful!*" I thought; "I spent years in school, studied various things, learned something and traveled widely, but with all my knowledge, I didn't know what to do. This monkey didn't know anything about First-Aid, because monkeys don't, but somehow, it knew what to do to save its life.

Surely, there's a lesson in this for me. Perhaps we listen too much to others and over-depend upon them to teach us. What if we listened more to ourselves ~ to our deep, inner voice ~ like this monkey had obviously done? It somehow knew what to do to save its life, but how? Did it, perhaps, have a store of natural wisdom? And, if so, might we not have, too? And if we have, why do we not use it? Is it the 'common-sense' we hear about, but which is really not so common?"

So, because of the train of thoughts that this event started in my mind, I can honestly say that "My teacher is a monkey". Some people have misunderstood this, of course, and a least *one* monk ~ hearing this story ~ thought I was being sarcastic about monks, but such was/is not the case. There is no hidden meaning in it; it means just what it says; but if people wish to interpret it otherwise ~ and no doubt some will ~ let them.

One of the monkey-house monks ~ *Thich Tinh Giac* ~ stayed in Jetavana with me, while the other one ~ *Thich Tien Phat* ~ stayed at the lower temple. One night, I'd already gone to bed, when Tinh Giac, who'd been studying downstairs, called me: "*Sir, sir, come quick! Con cop! Con cop!*"

Knowing his excitable nature, I said: "Oh, why are you calling me to see frogs? It's late and I'm tired, and need to sleep."

"**No frog**", he said, "*Tiger! Tiger!*" (I thought '*con cop*' meant frog, when it actually meant tiger).

"**Tiger?** No tigers in Philippines," I said, but because he was so agitated, I went down to see, and there, outside, reflected in the light from the lamp, were the red eyes of his 'tiger' ~ a buffalo that had got into the temple compound during the night! We laughed so much about this; thereafter, Tinh Giac became known as 'Tiger Monk'! He'd been picked up by a German ship from his boat, so should have gone to Germany, but I spoke with the UNHCR officer about him, and was able to help him go to Australia instead; he was sponsored by a temple in Perth.

By 1982, I wanted out, but decided to rebuild both temples first so as to leave them in good condition. But I had no funds, and wondered how I'd do it. Tomas came to my aid, and told me to get whatever I needed from his store and pay him later. He even

gave me one of his trucks and drivers to transport the material, apart from much financial help; his generosity was unlimited.

There was a professional sculptor in the Camp by the name of *Do Ky*, who offered to make images for the lower temple. I got the material he needed and he set about it. After some weeks his work was done, and the image of the Buddha installed on the temple-altar, while outside, beside the pond that someone else had built, he made a large and beautiful image of Kwan Yin. I requested him, while he was working, not to put his name on his sculptures, explaining that I wanted no-one's name in the temple, as it wasn't necessary for people to know who'd done things there. He understood and agreed with me, and so his name didn't appear. This was his contribution, and I'm sure many people were inspired by it.

While I was engaged in the slow job of rebuilding the temples ~ slow because I had to rely upon volunteers, and there were not great numbers of these, even though most of the refugees were Buddhists ~ I got a letter from a Vietnamese monk in one of the Camps in Hong Kong, asking me to help him get out of there.

Well, I had no power to do this, of course, but wrote back, saying that the Camp was a good place for a monk, and urging him to stay with his people and do what he could for them instead of considering only himself, but obviously, he wasn't the kind of monk to think of this. Let us call him, Monk X.

Because I'd heard about the condition of the Camps in HK, I also wrote the following letter to one of the foremost HK monks:

Philippines. 29th March 1983.
Dear Ven. Kok Kwong,

al-

low me to introduce myself: I am the monk in charge of Buddhist affairs in the Philippines Refugee Processing Center. I have been here three years, during which time we have built two small temples for the Buddhist Refugees.

I have had the pleasure of meeting you on two occasions ~ once in Bogor, Indonesia,

in 1978, and again, in Taipei in 1981 ~ though probably you will not remember me.

My reason for writing to you now, Venerable, is to ask for your assistance: you are well-known for your compassion, and I am confident that you will help. The problem is this:

I have heard, from several refugees who arrived here from Hong Kong, that there are 2 Vietnamese Buddhist monks in two separate Camps there; they are very much in need of help since, apparently, no-one is allowed to go in to see them. Somehow, though, it seems that Christian missionaries are allowed inside the Camps, and are very active trying to convert the refugees. What a shame for our religion that no-one is allowed to go there to minister to the needs of our co-religionists! (Even in Thailand, where there are about 300,000 monks, the Buddhists just sit idly back and permit the endless streams of Christian missionaries to commit their outrage against Buddhist refugees ~ buying them, and otherwise influencing them to change their religion).

Ven., please try to help these two monks; they need Buddhist books, Buddha-pictures and other articles for distribution to their faithful followers; ceremonial instruments such as a wooden-fish, gong and bell, would be very much appreciated. I also understand that they are personally in need of clothes. More than anything else, though, they are in need of care and moral support from local Buddhists. [The names and addresses of the two monks were included].

Many Thanks and Sincere Regards - "

There was no reply to this, but that was not unusual. I wrote to several monks about various things since then, and was not graced with replies. Maybe I'm a bit old-fashioned in this, but I consider it ill-mannered not to reply to letters of a personal nature. In Asia, however, the standard seems to be different. Anyway, I was disappointed at the non-reply of this monk, as he had probably fled Communist oppression in China and become a refugee himself years before. He loved to print photos of himself in his magazine, in the act of releasing fish, crabs, turtles, etc., as an act of merit. Did I expect too much to think his compassion might extend a bit further than to such creatures and the pages of his magazine, to refugees like himself? He did nothing about my request, and when I tried to see him two years later, had an excuse for not meeting me. So much for his compassion!

This monk was of a different nationality than the refugees, but so what? Buddhism helps us to see beyond such things as race and nationality. We had no control over where we were born, and might have been born anywhere, but we can be born in only one place per life. There is really no reason to be proud of race or nationality, as it is not a thing we achieved by our own efforts; if it were a matter of choice ~ as some *reincarnationists* like Theosophists believe, who would choose to be born in countries which suffer regularly from famine, drought, pestilence and war? No, nationality is a consequence of being born where we were. However, if we understand something of Dharma, we come to look at this matter differently than most people do, and see it in clearer perspective.

This idea is one of many that we become liberated from as we go deeper and our consciousness expands. Therefore, although I was born in England, and cannot deny this, I do deny that it makes me English. I don't want to be English, because I found something bigger and better than that; if other people consider me English just because I was born in England, it's up to them. Of course, before anyone asks, I should say that I cannot dispense with the formalities of passports and so on, and still travel on a British passport, which identifies me as 'British'; I am also a citizen of Australia now, so have an Aussie passport, too. What I mean, however, is that I don't think of myself as 'English,' and

am not about to start thinking of myself as Australian". If asked where I'm from, sometimes I reply: "When?"

"No, where are you from?" they repeat.

Again, I say, "When am I from where? ~ this morning, yesterday, last year? When do you mean? If you mean where I was born, I was born in England. Since then, however, I have been *to* and come *from* many places. But where I am really from, I don't know, any more than you know where you are from!"

We learn to see beyond artificial divisions to the basic fact of our humanity. Shall we therefore restrict our compassion to just one group of people? What kind of compassion would that be?

The scriptures record the story of a certain monk who was so ill and incapacitated that he could do nothing for himself and was left lying in his own filth by the other monks, who wouldn't go near him because of the stench and dirt. When the Buddha heard of this, He called for hot water and cloths, and went to clean up the sick monk with His own hands. Of course, when He did so, many monks rushed to help, but the Buddha insisted on doing the onerous job Himself, as an example to all. He explained that, since none of them had mothers, wives or anyone else to take care of them, they should take care of each other when necessary, living as a community, in brotherly love. This incident led Him to utter His famous words: "He who serves the sick serves the Buddha". Unfortunately, that rarely happens these days, according to my experience, at least.

It is important to understand the difference between the Container and the Contents: Buddhism and the Teachings of the Buddha. If we are satisfied with Buddhism it is alright, of course; but for those who are not and who want something more than name-and-form, it must be said that though Buddhism is now old, tired and travel-stained, having come a long way and endured many ups and downs, the Teachings of the Buddha are sufficiently intact. However, these, too, should not be looked upon as something magical that will produce miraculous effects just by believing or reciting them, but should be understood and realized, for they are *a finger pointing at the moon*, not the moon itself. There are 3 levels, as it were: (1) Buddhism, the organiza-

tion, which deserves respect for having preserved the Contents until now; (2) Buddha-Dharma, or the Teachings of the Buddha; and (3) Dharma itself, realizing which, Sakyamuni became the Buddha, and thereafter tried to point out to others. If we insist on clinging to the Container while disregarding the Contents and making no attempt to understand, it is such a waste, to say the least.

One of the central elements of the Buddha's Way is Compassion, but many people obviously think of it as just something of the scriptures ~ a word or idea ~ and seldom apply it in their lives; we talk a lot about it, which shows we haven't got the real thing. Some monks have spots burned on their heads when they undertake 'Bodhisattva precepts' (some lay-people have spots burned on their arms). Now, a Bodhisattva is someone who dedicates himself to developing qualities which will enable him to help others, and he does so by ~ among other things ~ selfless service. Such a person would not seek or expect recognition for doing what he does, and would not make a show, but do good simply because he sees it as the only thing for him to do; at that stage, he has gone beyond choosing between good and evil, and does good with an undivided mind full of love and compassion. A person becomes a Bodhisattva not merely by talking about compassion and 'saving all beings', by burning spots on his head or taking 'Bodhisattva precepts,' but by serving others and showing compassion. Moreover, such a person wouldn't think of himself as a Bodhisattva, and would not even know that he/she is one. We must be careful, therefore, when talking about compassion and Bodhisattvas, lest we injure ourselves spiritually and set ourselves back by casual and thoughtless words.

A certain man used to come to the temple every day during his time in the Camp ~ a quiet, humble, but rather sad man named *Tran Cong Nam*, who always spoke politely, but never told me his story. Only after he'd left did someone tell me that when he had escaped from Vietnam, his two children had drowned before his eyes, and there was nothing he could do for them. We kept in touch by letter, he and I, but it was only after some years when he referred to the tragedy, that I felt free to advise him not to blame himself, and to let go insofar as he was able to. He addressed me as 'Father' in his letters, although he is somewhat

older than me, and was so moved by the starfish-story in one of my books that he used to sign off, "Your Small Fish."

Work on the temples went on intermittently, until finally it was done and the opening-ceremonies over. The temple at the top end I renamed *Jetavana*, after a monastery in India where the Buddha often stayed.



Jetavana under construction,

1982



Jetavana Completed, 1983

I didn't leave immediately, though, as I knew some of the Cambodians were waiting to take over when I'd gone, so I remained in place. Thus thwarted, someone ~ some *people*; it cannot have been just *one* ~ decided to do something about it.



My kuti, 1983

I came out of my *kuti* one morning before dawn, and ran into a thin wire that someone had stretched between two trees in the night at eye-level; I reacted fast, however, and drew back as soon as I hit it, so it did no damage.

Knowing I was fond of animals, they saw a way of getting at me. Two of my dogs disappeared, and I was informed they'd been killed and eaten; my cats were poisoned and died in agony, and I could do nothing for them. This was the final straw, and I said, "Okay; I'm going now!" But, in order to protect the Vietnamese and make sure they were not driven from the temple, I drew up a document giving them my *kuti* for their residence; the temple wasn't mine, so I couldn't give them that. I gave a copy to the Camp administration, and then I left.

After a few days in Manila, I went to Palawan again. This time, my talks in the temple were translated by a Catholic ~ Dr. Tuan, whose wife, Diep, also a doctor, was a Buddhist. It must have appeared strange, him sitting in the temple translating for me with a crucifix around his neck, when he never went to the church. They were an incredible couple; they'd tried several times to escape from Vietnam, and once, were wrecked on a barren rock where they survived until rescued by a VC boat by living on shell-fish and sea-birds, eaten raw! They were taken back and jailed, but managed to escape again, and this time, had been picked up by an American ship and brought to the Philippines. Because of this, they could have gone to the US early, but requested ~ not *volunteered*, but *requested* ~ to spend an extra six months in the Camp to serve their people. They were allowed to do so, but were not given preferential treatment, just the same rations and accommodation as the other refugees. When they went to the US in mid-'84, they had only a small bag of clothes and \$10 to their name. They settled in California, and Tuan had to study to requalify, as his papers from Vietnam were not recognized. Diep got a job as an assistant-nurse so as to support him, and when friends said to her, "You were a fully-qualified doctor in your own right in Vietnam, but now you're only an assistant-nurse; don't you feel bad about this?" she replied, "No, why should I? I'm still helping sick people."

During my stay in Palawan, I dreamed I saw Cambodians in Jetavana with sand and cement, remodeling the altar there. Back in Manila, knowing I was soon to leave Philippines for Hong Kong and onwards, some of the Buddhists of Manila ~ led by a nun named Biao Chin, who had helped me so much over the previous few years ~ asked me to stay and not leave, and knowing how I felt about Seng Guan See, offered to build me a temple. I was touched and grateful, and thanked them for their kindness, but said I felt I must go now, and added that I might come back later. Then, after booking a flight to Hong Kong, I went to Bataan again, to find that my dream had been accurate, and the Cambodians had indeed taken over Jetavana after I left there. I was told how it had happened: Monk X had arrived from Hong Kong, and not long after, began to act very strangely, uprooting plants and flowers and cutting down trees in the temple-compound, until one day, he cut down the bodhi-tree that I'd brought as a sapling and planted there in 1980! And when the Cambodians saw this, they became very upset, and came running in their hundreds. They might have killed X if the Filipino marines had not timely turned up to intervene, and then the Vietnamese had to vacate my kuti, and the Cambodians finally got what they'd long-wanted; Monk X had given it to them! There was nothing I could do about it when I returned; it was too late. He was eventually resettled in California, and soon after getting there, disrobed and married.

Fearing that I'd come back to take over the temple again, some Cambodians made a lot of trouble for me, but I was impervious, and after assuring the Vietnamese that they had my heart even if the Cambodians had got my shirt, as it were, I left again, to prepare to depart from the Philippines.

I considered what to say to Abbot Sui Kim before I left Seng Guan See, and decided to say, "When I came here five years ago, I bowed to you, because I didn't know you. But now that I know you, I'm not going to bow." I didn't need to do this, though, as ten days before my departure, members of the temple youth-group asked me to give a talk the following Sunday; I agreed, and thought about what I would say in the meantime. On the day, they came to me again and told me it was Sui Kim's 80th

birthday, and they were giving him a tea-party, and asked me to attend before giving my talk. I complied, and afterwards, went to the hall where my talk was to be given. I didn't expect Sui Kim to attend, but he did, and sat in the front row. Now, I'd already decided what to say, and thought, "Should I change it because he's here?" and decided, "No, why should I?" So I went ahead and said it. It included the old story of a monk who lived in a tree. One day, a certain scholar, proud of his studies, visited him to compare what he thought he knew with the monk. Standing at the foot of the tree, he called out, "Oh, Venerable Sir, I'd like you to explain to me the essence of the Buddha's Teachings."

The monk looked down and said, "Well, very kind of you to come all this way. The essence of the Buddha's Teachings is this: Not to do evil, to do good, and to purify the mind."

"Is *that* all?" said the scholar, surprised at the simplicity of the monk's answer; "But *even* a little child of eight knows *that*!"

"Yes, perhaps he does," replied the monk; "But even an old man of eighty doesn't know how to practice it!"

I could have changed it to seventy, eighty-five or any other figure, but the story says eighty, and so I said it. Sui Kim didn't move a muscle, but I felt good that at the end; I'd had my say.



"If I have seen further than others, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants."

Sir Isaac Newton, English Scientist and
Mathematician, 1642 -1727

Indeed, we owe so much to so many. No-one achieves or does anything by himself, but only with the help and support of countless other people, living and dead. Realization of this leaves no room for arrogance and feelings of superiority.

3HONG KONG AND ON

I had no contacts in Hong Kong, but Biao Chin arranged for someone to pick me up. To cut things short a little here, I went to stay with a prominent Chinese monk in his flat-temple, and from there, set about finding a German monk by the name of *Saddhaloka* who I'd met in Bangkok in 1972, and who was based in H.K. I tracked him down easily enough, as he was quite well-known, speaking, reading and writing Chinese better than most Chinese, and found him operating a small Buddhist printing-press, above which he slept in a windowless attic. I enlisted him to help me get permission to visit the refugee camps, as that is what I'd come for. He introduced me to one of his supporters, a lady named Leung Wai Lan, who was to help me a lot, and was very kind.

It wasn't easy to get permission, but when we eventually did, together with Mdm Leung, we began our visits. There were six or seven camps, scattered all over, run like prisons, which most had actually been; the refugees were strictly regimented. In one camp, when Saddhaloka was not along, a government official approached me (my activities until then had surely been monitored and approved, otherwise they would soon have been terminated), and politely asked if I could visit the Camps regularly, or, failing this, if I knew of any monks in Hong Kong who would do so. He said many Christians visited the Camps regularly, but so far no Buddhists.

I regretted to say that I was unable to visit regularly myself, as I was passing through, and didn't know of any Hong Kong monks who would. I was ashamed to say that I'd written to the monk the previous year, and got no response. Nor did I know that Saddhaloka and Mdm Leung would continue to visit the Camps after I left.

Mdm Leung took me across to Macau to visit a Camp there. We got permission to do so from a Catholic priest who was in

charge ~ Father Lancelot, a Malaccan ~ and found most of the refugees feverishly engaged in making plastic flowers, for which they were paid a pittance; it was almost slave-labor. None of them wanted to stop working to talk with us.

Now, when some refugees in Hong Kong said, "We've been here four years already, but you are the first monk to ever visit us," I felt very sad. "I can do this as I have been doing, but I don't speak Vietnamese or understand their culture; I must go to the U.S. to try to find some monks to come back". I had no idea how difficult this would be.

While in PRPC, I never thought I'd see the departing refugees again, as the U.S. was just so remote to me that it seemed like another planet! We cannot see the future, however, and it is because of this that I do not make promises, as so many things may happen in the meantime ~ things over which we have no control whatsoever and which we cannot possibly anticipate ~ that may prevent us keeping the promise; and if we cannot or do not keep our promises, people may lose their trust in us ~ if they had any to begin with ~ and loss of trust is a very sad thing; so, make no promises, and break no promises.

I did not carry out my resolve immediately, as I'd decided to go to Nepal and India again, having been away so long; and even before that, must go to Singapore, to meet up with my parents on their way from Australia to England for a visit.

Therefore, from Hong Kong, where the temperature hadn't been above 18 degrees, I flew to Bangkok, where it was 36! I visited Banyat, who by this time was married, and told him of my plan to go to Nepal and India again; he asked if he could go with me, and I said yes, if he got his parents' and wife's permission by the time I returned from Malaysia. I then took a bus to Phang-nga to see Dhammaviro again, and from there to Penang to see Ashok, who I'd not seen since '78. His wife had hated me since then, but I didn't find out why until some years later, when I was told that I'd once gone to visit him when he was out, and because she said he wouldn't be long, I asked if I could wait for him. Well, apparently, she was on the verge of taking their child to see a doctor, but was afraid to tell me, and so had been unable to go because I was there. But was that my fault, and was it reason to

hate me? There was something else, unsaid; she was the possessive-type, and was probably jealous of my friendship with Ashok, since we had known each other long before they met. This same thing was to happen later with another good friend in Malaysia, although I really posed no threat to their marriage.

On to Malacca, where I found the Humanistic Buddhist group had shifted to bigger premises, and went to stay with them again. Next morning, while I was out to get a newspaper, Hock Guan pulled up beside me (he and I had lost contact while I was in the Philippines, and *he'd* recently married, too); his wife had seen me, and having heard of me, pointed me out; it was good to see him again, and meet his wife, Joan, a Eurasian girl of *Christang* stock (descendents of the Portuguese who'd ruled Malacca centuries before). She had been his first and only love, and he'd insisted on marrying her in spite of his parents' objections. I couldn't know that I would stay with them many times over the next 20 years. Earlier, I'd given him the Buddhist-name *Dharmavira*, meaning *Dharma-Hero*. I'll refer to him as *DV* from now on in this account, as that is how I came to address him.

I also met *Teoh Hai Siang*, who I'd first met in '76, and asked if he'd like to go with me to India, as he was still unattached; he jumped at the chance, especially as I would subsidize his trip, not having enough money himself. I told him I would collect him on my return from Singapore, which is where I went next, to meet my parents. I went to their hotel the morning after they got in, and was surprised at how they'd aged since I'd last seen them, but 6 years can do a lot to people, especially when they are already old; dad was 75, and mum 73, but still quite healthy and fit. I took them to places like the *Bird-Park* and the equally good Botanical Gardens. And of course, I took them to Phor Kark See, where I was staying, and introduced them to Ven. Hong Choon, who treated them graciously; they were very impressed with the temple, particularly as the Ven. had embarked on a series of building projects which had really transformed the place. They enjoyed their few days in Singapore.

After they left for England, I returned to Malacca to pick up Hai Siang, and we went to K. L., to get permission to visit the refugee camps of Sungai Besi (near K.L.) and *Pulau Bidong*. I went

to *Sungai Besi* first, but don't recall much about it now; my visit to Pulau Bidong was more memorable, as this is where many of the refugees I'd met in Bataan had come from. I got to the island by the boat used by the UNHCR personnel, the *Blue Dart*; it took an hour or so to get there. I had just 4 hours, between the time the boat got there and the time it returned, so had to do all I wanted in this time. I wasn't expected, so it took a while to let people know I was there and would give a talk in the temple; a translator also had to be found. I was then taken to the temple ~ *Chua Tu-Bi (Temple of Compassion)* ~ on a hill over-looking the sea, and when people had gathered, gave my talk.

There were 5000 people on Bidong at that time, but I couldn't imagine how it was when it had reached its maximum of 43,000 in '79! How could they all possibly have slept? It was such a small island, with seemingly standing-room only; I visualized them all standing up, bunched together like chop-sticks!

We went on to Bangkok to collect Banyat, who'd got his parents' reluctant permission to accompany us. His father had given him money for the trip, and his wife also had to let him go, not having much choice about it; he'd married under his parents' pressure, but he didn't love her at all, and unkindly called her a pig!

Before leaving for Kathmandu, I wished to visit the refugee-camps in Thailand, so went to the office of the UNHCR, but they either couldn't or wouldn't help me, and advised me to go to the Ministry of Home Affairs. There, I faced an unsympathetic official, who asked me why I wanted to visit the camps. "To encourage our co-religionists," I said (as a Thai, he probably considered himself a Buddhist).

He answered, "They are illegal immigrants."

"They are also human beings," I said, and when I saw that he wasn't going to give me permission, I added, "You know, we are all refugees, you and I included. Today, you are here in a nice office, but tomorrow, you don't know."

In spite of this, still hoping to get into one of the Camps, I went by bus to *Panatnikhom*, some hours out of Bangkok, and spoke to the guard at the gate in Thai, but with no more success. I had to return to Bangkok unfulfilled. What a tragedy, that these Camps should have been swarming with Christian missionaries,

committing their outrages upon the vulnerable Buddhists, while the Buddhists of Thailand either didn't give a damn, or were simply unaware of what was going on. Thailand has much to answer for as regards its treatment of the refugees. How can we reconcile this with all the temples and monks there?

Well, although there are monks and temples in great profusion there, Thailand is no more a Buddhist country than the U.S. is a Christian country. There is no such thing as a Buddhist country (or a Christian country or Muslim country). There are Buddhists in Thailand, to be sure, but there are also many people who are not, including people who think of themselves as so; calling oneself 'Buddhist', and even wearing Buddha-images around one's neck ~ as many of the pirates did and do ~ does not make one a Buddhist. If Thailand were a Buddhist country, however could we explain the existence of the world's most blood-thirsty pirates, the rampant drug-trade, the sex-industry, or the trade in endangered animals? No, Thailand is not a Buddhist country, and never has been. It is individuals who are Buddhists, not whole countries.

We got tickets from Bangkok to Kathmandu, and Calcutta to Bangkok. I was a bit surprised at Hai Siang in the plane, however, because it was his first flight, and he slept, not at all interested when we came in view of the magnificent panorama of the Himalayas. I was soon to regret taking them with me, as I had regretted taking George to Istanbul all those years before. My desire to have some companions was at the root of it.

We were given room and board in Anandakuti, for which I made a donation when we left, as is customary; we stayed there over the Wesak celebrations, and meanwhile, I showed them around Kathmandu. Banyat was enthralled by the temples, but otherwise was quite hard to take care of, and a bit like a baby with his bowel-movements; he'd not trained himself, and would want to *go* suddenly and inconveniently, such as when we were about to board buses. Hai Siang later developed home-sickness.

From Kathmandu, we went to Pokhara, where Banyat almost drowned in the lake while we were boating. What a big responsibility it was to take people with me! Then it was on to Lumbini

for a while, from where we crossed the border into India to visit the three other main Buddhist places. And while we were at the bathing-ghats in Benares, Hai Siang decided to bathe in the Ganges to 'wash away his sins.' Stripping down to his undies, he dived in among other bathers, and when he surfaced, noticed a rather putrid smell, and saw what he took to be a child's doll floating nearby, but soon realized it was the bloated and rotting corpse of a baby! Horrified, he scrambled out as fast as he could! Never again would he try to 'wash away his sins' in this manner. Apparently, Hindus don't cremate dead babies, but put them into a river ~ preferably the Ganges ~ for crocodiles and fish to eat; the corpses of sadhus are also disposed of like this.

Next, we went to Budh-Gaya, spending a few days in the Chinese temple, before getting a train to Calcutta. We'd had enough by this time, and couldn't wait to draw the trip to a close. The monsoon was just about to break when we arrived. We got a taxi from Howrah station to the Mahabodhi Society, but neither of them thought to take the umbrellas out of the boot when we pulled up, and so we were left at the mercy of the heavens. I bought another for myself, as I was the one who had to go to the airline office to book the flight back to Bangkok, and the computers there were down and not running again for several days, meaning several long walks back and forth. Finally, we were on the plane, and I breathed a sigh of relief. In Bangkok, Banyat went home, and I put Hai Siang on a train to Malaysia before booking a flight to Manila, flying out two days later; it was good to get back to some friends there.

Over the next 4 months, I shuttled between Bataan, Manila and Palawan, and while in VRC I wrote my first book, especially for the refugee-situation. It was called *KEYS FOR REFUGEES*, and translated into Vietnamese. It was just a cyclostyled effort, and we printed only 150 copies, but the feedback from it so positive that I felt inspired to continue writing. It was at this time, too, that I met *Pham Thanh Hung*, and nicknamed him *Hung Xe Rac* because he drove the garbage-truck (*Xe Rac*) around the Camp. I also came to know *Adrian Seviour*, another volunteer teacher from England, who would stay in VRC longer than the others, and become popular with the refugees.

Meanwhile, back in Bataan, the *Vietnamese* temple ~ for such it had become after the Cambodians took over Jetavana ~ was being renovated. When I visited in September, I was told of a tragedy that had just happened there. While working on the roof of the temple, someone had fallen, and a timber had tumbled down on him, crushing his head! His name was *Le Van Diem*, and he left his wife and five or six children to go on without him.



"One of the first things learned by anyone who seeks an answer to the riddle of the universe is that, while chance may play a part, our lives, our world, and the universe are not governed by chance. They do appear, however, to be governed by what may best be described as laws ~ physical, moral, and spiritual laws.

"Certainly, this is true of the physical world. Gravity may be defined as the mutual attraction between all matter, but it is so much more than this. The law of gravity makes mobility possible. Obey the law of gravity and you are free, in normal circumstances, to move about as you will. But disobedience of the law of gravity is not an option ~ you *must* obey it or suffer the consequences."

~ American ex-pastor Charles Templeton: *Farewell To God* ~

"A fanatic is one who can't change his mind
and won't change the subject."
~ Winston Churchill ~.

4

A YEAR IN THE U.S.

Having got my visa for the US in Manila, in October '84, I flew to Los Angeles, and was met by quite a delegation of old faces from Bataan ~ Paul and his brothers, Chi Phuong and her family, Tran Cong Nam, Hoang Dac Loc, and Tomas (who'd come to the US ahead of me for a visit), and some others. And, because I'd not known where I would stay when I got to L.A., Loc, who was staying in a temple ~ *Phat Hoc Vien Quoc Te* ~ north of the city, had arranged for me to stay there. So, from the airport, I was taken to this place. It had been set up as a training-center for young monks and nuns by a senior monk named *Thich Duc Niem*. He also operated a printing-press, and reproduced a number of books written by prominent Buddhist writers (all in Vietnamese; he hadn't realized the importance of printing in English, too), plus his own quarterly publication. He was aloof, who loved to be addressed as '*Dr. Duc Niem*' because of the Ph.D. he'd gained in Taiwan years before. Within a week, he appointed me to the quite-meaningless position of 'Vice-President for Dharma-Propagation' in his organization, without first asking if I'd be willing to assist. But I soon came to see that this was just a ploy for getting me on 'his side', as he was involved in a long-running feud with another senior monk in L.A. ~ *Thich Manh Giac* ~ although the nature of this feud I never managed to ascertain; it was probably just a personality thing, something quite common among monks.

While in southern California, I again met Tuan and Diep, and he translated for me in one of the temples that were coming up like mushrooms in Orange County. I also met Ping Kim Suor. She'd married an American named Jim, but he wasn't too healthy and

needed quite a bit of care; she was working for an agency helping newly-arrived refugees settle into their unfamiliar surroundings, and was ideally suited for this, having learned so much about compassion. Chi Phuong and Dong were running a hair-dressing salon, and were doing alright; they always were hard-working and enterprising.

I had no plans for my stay in the US, so played it by ear, as had been my way for a long time; it was no different there. But after a while, together with Tomas, I went to San Francisco, and we were met at the airport late at night by *Thich Quang Chon*, who had been with me in Bataan in 1980 (he was the second of the Vietnamese monks there, after Thong Hai); he took us to his temple in the city, *Chua Tu Quang*, where he was staying with his uncle, the abbot, *Thich Tinh Tu*. Quang Chon and others showed us something of San Francisco, and I instinctively liked the place; it had a sense of character that L.A. lacked.

Victor was also over from Manila at this time, so we met up and spent a bit of time with him. His family owned a house in S.F.

From there, we went to San Jose, invited by *Thich Giac Luong*, a monk I'd met in Manila in '79 when he had just arrived there as a refugee. He showed us a video about the Buddha, but I'd have been ashamed to show it to anyone, as it was such a travesty, and portrayed the Buddha more as an E.T. than a teacher who people could follow. He also took us to a Buddhist Youth Camp in the mountains, where I met Thich Manh Giac, who was there to conduct the opening-ceremony. He gave me with one of his name-cards, and when I saw what was written there, among his numerous titles and awards ~ *Great Dharma Master* ~ I almost laughed out loud! But I should have known better and not expected anything different!

We returned to L.A., Tomas soon to go back to Manila, and I to stay in PHVQT again. The pettiness that prevailed there, however, became more obvious. Tinh Tu of San Francisco had established a meditation-center in the mountains near San Jose (Northern California), which he'd called *Kim Son (Gold Mountain)*, so Duc Niem felt he had to do the same in Southern California (Tinh Tu was a nephew of Duc Niem's rival, Manh Giac),

and bought a piece of desert-land in the mountains nearby which he called, *Tien Son (Zen Mountain)*; he paid \$100,000 for it, but I don't know if anything was done to develop it, and it was without water or other facilities. What rivalry will do!

By then, it was no secret why I had come to the US; I'd spoken about it openly, but several monks made transparent and silly excuses for not going back to the Camps. Some said, "I have no passport", but though this might have been true, it was not a great obstacle, as anyone who'd been there over a year as a refugee could get a travel-document in place of a passport, which would permit him to go overseas. Some said, "I have no money". Again, no big problem, because if people knew that a monk needed support to visit the Camps, they would have generously helped out. Duc Niem himself said, "If you stay here long enough to help me learn more English, I will go with you to the Camps." Had he forgotten that the people in the Camps were Vietnamese? He didn't need to speak English with them, and anyway, his English was quite adequate for him to go to Taiwan. One monk even said, "If I go to the Camps, will I be able to find a cushion there?"

"**A cushion?**" I said, "*What for?*"

"**Oh**, I need a cushion for my meditation." I felt like telling him to sit on his head, as that was soft enough! I was very disappointed at being unable to find a single monk in the US or later, in Canada, willing to go back ~ they were all too busy setting themselves up like petty kings in their own temple-kingdoms! Months later, I wrote a letter, copies of which I sent to as many temples as I could get addresses of, telling how I felt and why. Maybe this letter had some effect in disturbing some of them, as later, several monks *did* visit some of the Camps, but far too few and much too late, because by then, of course, so many refugees who hitherto considered themselves 'Buddhists' had succumbed to the pressures of the missionaries or their already-changed friends, and converted.

A talk ~ or so I assumed ~ was arranged for me one Sunday at *Chua Viet Nam* (Manh Giac's place in downtown L.A.). When I got there, however, it seems that I'd only been invited for lunch, but I said that's not what I had come for, and didn't need to go

anywhere for lunch. A talk was hastily arranged, and while I was waiting for the people already in the temple to assemble, Manh Giac sent his secretary-monk to tell me that he wanted to offer me some money to take back to the Refugee Camps in the Philippines, but I said. "Look here, I didn't come to the US to look for money, but for monks who would go back to the Camps, so don't offer me money, because I won't accept it!" I gave my talk ~ it wasn't a success ~ and when I saw Manh Giac's face over lunch, I could tell he wasn't happy over what I'd said, but neither was I happy about him being willing to use me as a stop-gap in the Camps instead of going himself or at least arranging for someone else to go. I never saw him again.

Not long after this, Duc Niem made a trip to Taiwan to buy stuff and visit a brother-monk, and asked me to take charge while he was away. Well, not long after he left things began to happen. There were two nuns, you see, one of whom ~ *Quang Tam* ~ was very close to Duc Niem, and seemed to have some hold over him ~ an unhealthy situation! The other nun, *Dieu Thanh*, was more easy-going and amiable, and did most of the cooking; she was from Canada, and had been there over a year. Quang Tam was clearly resentful of Dieu Thanh and probably jealous, fearing some competition, wanting to have the whole scene to herself. One day, a letter for Dieu Thanh came by registered-post; it contained a one-way ticket from L.A. to Montreal, and a note saying something to the effect that: "You have overstayed your visa here, so take this ticket and leave before someone reports you and you are deported." There was no name or signature. Needless to say, we were all shocked by this ~ except the person who had sent it, and suspicion fell on Quang Tam, of course. Nothing could be proved, however, and she denied it, but who else would spend so much money on a ticket for such a purpose? No-one else hated Dieu Thanh as much as that! It made my stay there very uncomfortable, and before Duc Niem returned, I'd resolved to leave as soon as possible.

While these funny things were going on in PHVQT, I got a call from someone in Minneapolis ~ again, someone I'd known in Bataan ~ who, learning I was in L.A., got my number and called; it provided me with a way out, and I accepted his invitation to

visit, especially as he told me that other people I knew from Bataan were there. Duc Niem returned, but did nothing about what had happened during his absence, although he must have known who the culprit was.

My stay there had not been a waste of time in spite of all these things, as I'd rewritten my simple book, *Keys For Refugees*, and several people had helped translate it ~ accurately or not, I was unable to tell ~ and although Duc Niem arranged for someone to type out the Vietnamese for me ~ a relative of his, as I recall, and for which I was charged some \$400 ~ he never offered to print the book for me; so much for my position of 'Vice-President in Charge of Dharma-Propagation'!

It was still winter, so very cold when I arrived in Minneapolis. Again, there was a group of people awaiting me at the airport, and since the temple there was unheated, I was taken to stay in someone's home, going to the temple only on Sunday to give a talk, which was well-received. There, I met a family I'd known at the end of 1980 in Bataan. The day after arriving in the US, Nguyen Tang Huyen and his wife had gone to work in a friend's restaurant, and some months later, opened their own, and were so successful that people lined up, in all weathers, to get in! They were lovely people, and I was sure their clientele were attracted just as much by their charm as by the food they served.

In Minneapolis, I extended my visa by another 6 months; it was no problem at all in those days.

Two hours south of Minneapolis, in Rochester, I found *Chi Ba* ~ a lady ~ one of several ~ who had cooked for me in Bataan, and went to stay with some of her friends. She was as industrious as ever, and had always had a job of some kind since she arrived from the Phils in '82, and sometimes two at once. From there, I went to Chicago, to spend six weeks in the temple there ~ an old clap-board house in a run-down inner-city area where I didn't feel safe. I retyped my book and got it ready for printing, then sent it ~ together with the Vietnamese version ~ to Loc in PHVQT, where it was printed, at a cost of \$4,000 for 2,000 copies. But it wasn't well done; the ink on the cover rubbed off, the paper was of poor quality, and the pages were only thinly glued in and soon came loose. My first printed book was behind me.

Later, I wrote to Duc Niem to say that I wouldn't be coming back, so he should find someone else for the position; I didn't need a position or title for something I had been doing for some years already and would continue to do, and hadn't come to the US to get involved in feuds and take sides, as I was on no-one's side. I don't know how he reacted to my letter ~ probably with disdain; I can imagine the expression on his face as he read it.

While watching the TV news one evening, I saw a flash about a Vietnamese man in a Chicago hospital being treated for leukemia; his younger brother had been allowed by the government of Vietnam to fly to the U.S. to donate bone-marrow for a transplant, after which he'd have to go back to Vietnam. I called the hospital and asked the receptionist if she could find out for me if the patient was a Buddhist, and if so, would he like me to visit him. She went away and came back not long after, and said yes on both counts. I immediately got someone to drive me there, and found the man lying there with tubes running into and out of him in all directions, but he was lucid and aware. I asked if there was anything I could do for him, and was surprised ~ and very pleased, as it's quite rare ~ when he asked me to speak Dharma to him, the best thing he could have asked me for. Well, I told him about *dukkha*, and related the story of *Kisa Gotami*, as I had explained to Ping Kim Suor several years before:

There was a young woman named Kisa Gotami. She'd not had a happy life, but her parents did their duty, and managed to scrape together enough to find her a husband. He was also poor, but was kind to her, and when, later, she gave birth to a boy, her happiness knew no limits, because a boy meant status in the community, and whereas before, people had ignored and looked down upon her, they now respected and befriended her.

One day, when the child was about two years old, she put him outside to play in the garden, as she often did, while she did her housework, and could hear him playing happily. After some time, however, she noticed he'd become quiet. Wondering what was wrong, she went to see, and found him lying on the ground, unmoving. She ran to him and picked him up, but he was cold and still and quiet; she did not know that a snake had bitten him while he was playing. Shaking him, and holding him tightly to

her, she said: "Speak, cry, move, do something," but he remained still and cold. She ran to her neighbor's, saying, "My baby's sick; he won't move or talk. Can you tell me what to do? Do you have any medicine?" The neighbor could see that the child was dead, but said: "I'm sorry; I have no medicine for that."

Kisa Gotami went to the next house, but got a similar answer. She went to many houses, and some people said they had no medicine, while others unkindly laughed and told her the baby was dead, and nothing could cure him. But she couldn't accept this ~ her baby, who'd been so well and happy just a short time ago, dead? She continued to ask around for medicine until one man, wiser than the others, said: "If you follow the path into the forest over there, you will come to a place where a monk sits beneath a tree. Ask him; perhaps he knows of some medicine."

Overjoyed, she ran along the path until she came to the place where the Buddha was sitting. She was disheveled and out of breath and said: "Please, please, Sir, can you help me? My baby is sick; he does not move or even cry. Do you know of some medicine that might help him?"

The Buddha could see, of course, that the baby was dead, but He said: "Yes, I know some medicine for this sickness. Go back to the village, and ask for a handful of mustard seeds from a household where no-one has died".

Hearing this, she was overjoyed. "It's so easy," she thought; "everyone has mustard seeds." So she ran back to the village, and at the first house she came to, said: "Please help me; I need a handful of mustard seeds as medicine for my baby."

"**C**ertainly," said the woman, and went inside to get it, but when she returned and gave it to her, Kisa Gotami said: "But tell me, friend, in your family, has anyone ever died?"

"**W**hat is this you ask?" said the woman, surprised; "many of my family are dead: my parents, some of my sisters and brothers, and even two of my own children ~ you *know* this."

"**O**h, in that case, I can't take the seeds," said Kisa Gotami, and returned them. She hastened to the next house, and the next, and the next, but although they were all willing to give her the seeds, the story was always the same: so many people had died; she could find no family that had not been visited by death.

Then she realized that it is normal, that everyone will die. And when she understood this, she took her baby to the riverbank, and gently put the tiny body in the water, as was the custom, to be carried away by the current. She then went back to the forest, to the Buddha, but this time, she did not run, and her face was calm and peaceful, instead of sad.

The Buddha saw her coming, and knew what had happened, but asked: "Did you get the medicine I sent you for?"

"Yes," said Kisa Gotami, "I got it, Lord. And now I wish to become your disciple; please teach me more".

Such is the Buddhist way: by understanding things clearly, we reach Enlightenment. That is how we overcome suffering while living in this world. When we understand, although we are still subject to the pains and problems of life, they do not affect us so much. Whatever happens to us is not unusual, as it happens all the time, and can happen to anyone, even to rich people with all their money; money is no protection against *dukkha*. We must accept the woes consequent upon birth, and try to find ways to deal with them instead of hoping and praying they'll go away.

He was happy with what I said, and I said I would visit again when I returned from the trip to Canada I was shortly to make.

I flew to Montreal, and went to stay in the temple of a friend of Duc Niem, *Thich Tinh Nghi*. I gave talks there, but he didn't like what I said; perhaps he felt threatened by it. Nor was he happy when I visited other monks in the city; he wanted to be top-dog. I thought he was silly.

One of his young monks took me by train to Toronto, where Tinh Nghi had another temple. I enjoyed Toronto; it seemed free of the tension I felt in American cities; in fact, Canada was generally so; I felt a difference in the air; it was cleaner and safer than the US. I even thought of settling there, but the winter put me off ~ so long and cold!

Returning to Chicago, I visited the man in hospital again, but alas, the transplant had failed, and he was in a coma; I thought he was dead, but the support-system he was on made him appear to be still alive. I sat beside his bed, sending him positive thoughts. He died a few days later, and together with some peo-

ple from the temple, I attended his funeral; he left a wife and four young children. The temple later made a collection for her.

Traveling on from Chicago, I went to many places in the eastern states, and even visited an old great-aunt ~ *Aunt Bess* ~ in rural Pennsylvania, who I'd never met before. She was a lovely old lady, and was very kind to me during the 3 days I stayed with her, but other relatives, who came over in a bunch to check me out, were not so friendly, and I felt their distinct disapproval because I'd deserted the faith that they ~ as *WASPS: White Anglo-Saxon Protestants* ~ so strongly upheld; in their eyes, I was clearly a renegade, an apostate and infidel!

I was picked up from there by an Indian friend, *Ramesh Jain*, who I'd met in Bataan when he was working on a nuclear-power-plant near the Camp. He was living with his family near Pittsburgh, so it wasn't far for him to come and get me and take me to his home for a few days. This was the beginning of July, and on the 4th, we went into town for the Independence Day celebrations near the river, and the fireworks-display there at night was really spectacular! It was many years since I'd seen fireworks, and none as resplendent as those!

Lancaster is the center of the Amish community, and I was taken to visit one of their villages, where the people were living according to their old ways, without electricity or motor-vehicles, their farms neat and tidy, their dress somber, using horse-drawn buggies to get where they needed to go; honest, hard-working, content with their simple lifestyle, helping each other and living in harmony, they compromised little with mainstream society.

July is hot and humid in Pennsylvania and other eastern states of the US, with temperatures in the high 30's. I was to stay this side all throughout the summer and into mid-autumn.

In Atlanta, I met *Hien*, who'd prospered to an amazing degree, and was living in a mansion; I also met his mother and younger sister, who were over from England on a visit. I never really knew what Hien did, but he had the golden-touch ~ everything he did turned to gold!

I met other people I knew from Bataan; in fact, they were all over, and often, people would come up to me and ask if I remembered them; well, sometimes I did, and sometimes didn't,

as there were just so many; over 100,000 people passed through PRPC while I was there. I have a good memory, for some things, but not so good that I remember everyone I meet. Sometimes, I'd ask what we'd talked about, and if they told me, the memories often came back.

While in Atlanta, I got a letter from Bobby; she was in Germany, where she'd been teaching English after leaving Israel some years before. We'd kept in touch by letter since she'd left Bangkok in '73. She said she was in hospital, with a tumor on her spine; she didn't say it was cancer, but you always suspect the worst in such cases. As she'd given me the hospital phone-number, I immediately called and asked how she was. Somewhat jokingly, she said, "Fine; I'm dying. The doctors have given me just three months to live!"

"Alright", I said, "I'll come," but couldn't go immediately, as there were still some talks arranged for me that I didn't want to cancel, and so, leaving Atlanta soon afterwards, I went on to Hartford, Connecticut, where I was expected and met at the station by someone else from Bataan, *Cao Van Pha*, who took care of me during my stay in the temple. This was really a house the Vietnamese Buddhists had rented for use as a temple ~ a house belonging to a wealthy Jew who, when he heard the Buddhists were in need of a place for a temple, offered to rent it to them for the nominal sum of \$1 per year! He had survived incarceration in one of Hitler's death-camps and had come to the US penniless after the war to make a new start (with the number tattooed on his arm to remind him for the rest of his life). He'd worked hard and prospered, and was now in a position to help others, having learned something from all his suffering. What a story!

The resident monk there ~ *Thich Tinh Tuong* ~ was to attend a ceremony at a temple in Boston, so took me along with him to give a talk. *This* temple was a converted church, and the stained-glass windows were still in place in the large hall where a sizeable crowd had gathered. Needless to say, I met some ex-Bataan people there.

I'd been invited to New York by some Vietnamese there, so got a ticket and informed them of when I'd arrive the next day, so

they could meet me at the bus-terminal. When the bus finally got to the huge terminal, however, we docked at a different bay from the one where I was expected, and I waited for over an hour ~ and US bus-stations have lots of strange characters hanging around in them ~ until I was found. They'd been waiting for me in another part of the terminal. They then took me to someone's apartment in *The Bronx* ~ not the most up-market area of the city ~ where I stayed for the next five days. I gave a talk in the only Vietnamese temple there at that time ~ a makeshift place, just a few upstairs rooms somewhere ~ although there were quite a few Chinese temples, the Chinese having been there much longer than the Viets.

Then, knowing I needed a ride out to the airport at Newark for a flight back to Cleveland, another ex-Bataan refugee offered to drive me, and I gratefully accepted, but soon had cause to regret it, as he picked me up late, just at peak-hour, and took over an hour to reach the freeway, where he drove at 35 mph in the middle lane! Needless to say, I missed my flight and had to wait for the next one some hours later, but wasn't too upset; I was only too glad to be still alive after that crazy ride, getting honked and cursed at and almost rammed many times! The people in Cleveland didn't know what had happened, and all except one had gone home, but he was still there waiting when I came in on the late flight. A week later, I flew out to Brussels via Newark, by *People's Express* ~ a budget airline which was later forced out of business by bigger airlines ganging up on it. You didn't get or pay for your ticket beforehand, but merely made a booking over the phone (it had no offices, you see). Then you went to the airport in time for your flight, checked in your baggage, boarded the plane, and only then paid for your ticket, as upon a bus. And, being a no-frills airline, there was no food ~ and not even a cup of tea ~ unless you paid for it. Newark to Brussels: \$199.



It is a strange civilization wherein
sportsmen are paid obscene amounts of money

while people like teachers and nurses must struggle for a living.

5

EUROPA

In Brussels, I took a train to reach the historic town of Kleve, in Germany, and checked into a hotel before going to the Catholic hospital where Bobby was confined. Entering her room, I was shocked to find her emaciated and almost bald from the treatment she'd been through, but there was a smile on her face as our eyes met; it had been twelve years since the last time. Her daughter, Rebecca ~ who I'd not met before ~ was with her, together with *her* boyfriend, but Sean hadn't bothered to come, even though he was living at the time in Sweden and had been informed of her condition.

The hospital authorities, knowing I'd come so far to see her, and was staying in a hotel, offered me a room for a nominal sum, and with vegetarian food, too, so I could be near her. I gladly accepted and moved in, spending much of the time at Bobby's bedside. As the days passed, however, and the realization that she hadn't much longer set in, her forced cheerfulness faded and she became snappy whenever I tried to turn her thoughts towards Dharma. She'd been a Buddhist for many years, but hadn't bothered to go very deeply into the teachings; she'd spent her time focusing on her pet project, 'Save the Whales' instead, and so, at the end, when she really needed help, and help was there, she was unable to use it. I left after five days with her, not knowing how much longer she'd linger, and went to stay with *Kiet* ~ an ex-monk who'd been in PRPC in '81 ~ in another town, leaving his phone-number with Rebecca. She called me several days later to tell me her mother had gone. Rebecca had her mother's body cremated, and scattered her ashes in the North Sea.

Kiet and his wife had settled into their new life alright, and treated me well during my short stay, and took me to a Buddhist ceremony in a large hall where ~ you guessed it ~ I met *more*

people from Bataan, and a monk who'd come down from *Hannover* to conduct the ceremony ~ *Thich Nhu Dien*. Learning that I intended to go on to Denmark and Norway to visit refugees there, he invited me to go back with him and spend some time in his temple, as I'd need to pass through Hannover anyway. After the ceremony, therefore, we picked up my baggage and off we went; it snowed on the way as we drove through the night. Nothing much happened during my stay there, and I was soon on a train to *Nyborg* in Denmark, having called my old friend, Pete, to tell him the time of my arrival some hours later. (He'd moved to Nyborg from Middlefart years before). We were pleased to see each other after so many years, and had so many things to talk about; he took me to visit his father, who'd married again after Pete's mum had died; he seemed quite happy with his new wife, who regaled us with coffee and cakes. We also visited his younger brother and sister, both of whom had their own families.

From Nyborg, I went to *Frederikshavn*, to catch a ferry across the *Kattegat* to Oslo. I bought my ticket and located my cabin deep in the bowels of the ship. It was an overnight trip, and the sea was quite rough; I was a bit nervous as the ship pitched and rolled with the swell, but we reached there safely, and I was greeted on the dock by *Khang* (who had been my most-able translator in Bataan two years before), *Hanh*, with whom I would stay, and several other people. It was already cold, being mid-November, and during the two weeks I spent there, it dropped to well below zero.

Hanh had been there, with her young son and daughter, since '83, having been rejected for resettlement in the US while they were in the Camp, as the US embassy claimed she had been a VC-supporter in Vietnam and had even kept a 'safe-house' for them in Saigon ~ a claim she strongly denied, but to no avail. Finally, just as she was becoming desperate, she was accepted for resettlement in Norway. She often went to the temples in Bataan to seek comfort there, and was now in a position to offer me shelter. (Her husband was later to rejoin her from Vietnam, but not long after that, alas, she suffered a stroke from which she never recovered, leaving her partially paralyzed and in great pain. I continued to keep in touch with her over the years, but her short replies became fewer and less, and her kids ~ adults

by now, and surely conversant with email ~ never bothered to contact me on her behalf. Poor Hanh!)

Khang, with his brilliant intellect, was already fluent in Norwegian, and well on his way with his medical studies; before long became a doctor and won national acclaim. He escorted me by train to Bergen on the west coast, to talk to the Vietnamese Buddhists; he translated for me. But he was a poor correspondent ~ like many Vietnamese ~ and I had no contact with him since then, much as I would have liked.

While there, I was told of something that had happened not long before ~ something that, with a little foresight, could have been avoided. A Vietnamese had died, and his family had a swastika engraved upon his tombstone. Now, this symbol, to Vietnamese Buddhists ~ as it is to people of various religions in Asia ~ is auspicious, else why would they have put it on the tomb-stone? Many Vietnamese and Chinese Buddhists also wear small gold swastikas, or have it tattooed on their arms. Having asked a number of people wearing this symbol as to its meaning, however, I found that few knew. Apparently, it originated in ancient Persia, about 3,500 years ago, predating Buddhism by 1000 years, and whichever way it is used in Asia ~ clockwise or anticlockwise ~ it symbolizes Safety, Well-Being, or Happiness. The word comes from the Sanskrit, *svasti*. However, while in Asia, the swastika always symbolizes something good, in the West, because Hitler adopted it, it is regarded as a symbol of evil. Very few Westerners know of its ancient origin and meaning.

Norway, like many other countries, suffered under the occupying forces of Nazi Germany during WW2. So, when Norwegians saw the Swastika on the Vietnamese tombstone in a public cemetery, the memories of Nazi terror rushed to the surface, and there was an uproar. At first, the Vietnamese did not know what the fuss was about, as they say the way the Buddhists use the swastika ~ clockwise ~ is different from the way Hitler used it ~ anticlockwise. Well, this might be so to them, but most Westerners are not aware of the difference, and so it was in Norway. Anger flared, and the Vietnamese had to explain and apologize publicly, and remove the mark from the stone.

There have been incidents regarding this symbol in the US, too, and so, because I didn't want to see the Vietnamese in trouble or danger, a number of times, I tried to explain that it is inadvisable to use this symbol anymore, as it causes misunderstanding. And it's not the only symbol we may use; there is the Lotus, or the Dharma-Wheel, too. In this, as in all things, we should be practical, as it is impossible to explain to everyone that the Buddhist swastika is different from the Nazi swastika ~ impossible! And not only might using it lead to trouble, but may hamper our efforts to propagate Dharma in the West; some people, who might otherwise be sympathetic, would only feel alienated by the presence of swastika signs in temples. It is we who must understand, bend and adapt on this point, not others. If the Vietnamese and Chinese Buddhists continue using this symbol in the West, they will only invite trouble and be to blame for the consequences. This is my well-meant advice, meant to preserve, prevent and protect, to bring about a little of the quality that the Swastika originally symbolized: Safety and Well-Being.

From Oslo, I went by train and ferry to Copenhagen, where I got another train back to Nyborg, to stay with Pete again, but hadn't been there long when I got a call from someone in Copenhagen requesting me to return there and stay at his home in order to meet a few people. I consented, needing little excuse to revisit what used to be one of my favorite cities, even though it was winter. So, saying goodbye to Pete for the last time, back I went, to be met at the train-station and conducted to his home. After some time, he asked if I was hungry. Of course, I was, after the journey of some hours, so I said, "Well, yes, I am."

He then said, "Er,...are you vegetarian?" which was a strange question; he should have known, dressed as I was; he had been a Buddhist for many years and was a disciple of Thich *Tam Chau*, one of the senior-most prominent Vietnamese monks in the West. Again, I said, "Yes, I am."

"Then I'll ask my mother to prepare something for you." After a while, he called me to eat, and I sat down to bread-and-cheese. Now, this was quite alright for me, as it had been my staple-diet years before, but it became a bit monotonous, as this is what I was served for every meal during my 3 days' stay there.

I was not sad to leave and return to Germany, where I'd arranged to visit Jo-Jo and his family. He met me off the train and took me to his home, where he showed me souvenirs from the time we camped on Darwin beach together in '71. It was really good to see him again; he had a nice wife and kids. When it came time for me to move on again, like a grasshopper, he got me a ticket to Kiet's town, and I stayed with him again. Several ex-Bataanites came to visit me there, until one of Kiet's friends came and said he would soon be driving to Paris, and offered me a ride if I wanted to go with him. Of course, I accepted, and was soon over the border of France and on to the *City of Light*. Now, although I'd passed through Paris twice in the '60's, I'd never stopped there, and was happy to have an opportunity to see something of what was to become another of my favorite cities. I was dropped at *Chua Khanh Anh*, the abbot of which ~ *Thich Minh Tam* ~ I'd met several times in the US; he received me kindly, and arranged a talk for me in the temple the following Sunday, and in the meantime had one of his young monks to drive me around and show me some of the sights.

I was very pleased about this, and greatly enjoyed visiting Notre Dame Cathedral, where, although it was winter and very cold, it was instant meditation! The atmosphere is so profound in such places, as though the very stones have absorbed, like batteries, the devotion and piety of the faithful over the centuries. We went up the Eiffel Tower and almost got blown off the top by the strong winds. On, from there, through the *Arc de Triomphe*, to the Church of *Sacre Coeur* at *Montmartre*, and the next day ~ as we had by then run out of time ~ to *Versailles*, the Palace of the *Sun King*, *Louis XIV*, the construction of which, with its vast symmetrical gardens, had practically bankrupted France in the 17th century. We spent hours wandering through the salons and mirrored halls, admiring the marble, the furniture, the tapestries, statuary and paintings ~ including the huge canvas of Napoleon crowning himself Emperor ~ and then, quite overcome by it all, headed back to the temple for food, having long grown hungry. I'd enjoyed it all immensely, but sadly regretted being unable to see more of Paris; alas, there was no time to visit the *Louvre*..

My talk went well, and the next day, I got a train to Calais and crossed the Channel again after so many years. Another train brought me to London, getting through which was no less a pain than it always used to be for me, especially with heavy baggage on the Underground at rush-hour! Finally, I was on a crowded train to Crewe, only two hours away. There, I got a taxi and gave the driver Glen's address, but he said he didn't know it, so I told him it was near the hospital, unaware that the hospital I'd known had been demolished years before ~ I'd not been back in England since 1970, remember ~ and a new one built some miles away; consequently, this is where we went in search of Glen's street, but it wasn't there, of course, and it was only after driving around for quite a while and several inquiries that we found it, and I had to pay a whopping fare!

Now, mum and dad were visiting from Australia again, although they shouldn't have come in winter, as their blood was thinner from years in Oz, and they were unable to stand the cold.

Harold drove me to Burwardsley, and as we came up into the village, I saw someone leaning on the gate of a farm-house where I used to know the people. I didn't recognize him, but asked Harold to stop the car anyway, and went over to him. He saw me coming, dressed in my robes, but expressed no surprise. I asked him: "Are you one of the Bensons?"

"**M**aybe," he said.

"**A**re you Philip Benson?"

"**Y**ep," he said, seemingly unconcerned, as if he saw Buddhist monks every day of his life.

"**D**o you know me?" I asked.

"**N**ope."

"**W**ell, you should do," I said, "as I went to school with you for 10 years."

"**W**here did you live?" he said.

"**U**p near the pub."

"**O**h, bloody hell," he said, "Mike Houghton," and called his wife: "Sandra, Sandra, come and see who's here!" ~ a girl from the same village.

Here was this guy, living in the house he'd been born in, never having gone very far, and I come along as a Buddhist monk, having been all over the world! But it was too much for him, and he couldn't comprehend; he didn't ask me anything, nor did he invite me in for a cup of tea, but just kept me standing there for a while, until we drove on up the village. He did, however, alert some others that I was there, and I met several people I had known long ago because of this.

The house where I was born had gone ~ almost without a trace ~ demolished long ago (it was so old that to renovate and modernize it would have cost too much); the garden was like a jungle. I was born and lived there? Not much remained apart from a tree I used to climb, an oak gate-post ~ still solid ~ set firmly in the ground by my dad, a lilac-bush that my mother had planted, and a few moss-covered stones in a garden-wall.

Of course, I stopped by to visit Mr. Ravenscroft, but found him old and shrunken, and so senile that he could not remember me. But *I* could remember *him*, and thank him, personally, for helping me understand something, and that was the important thing. I left feeling lucky to have seen him again.

Glen called the local newspaper, which sent someone out to interview me; his report, together with a photo, was duly published, and at least one person recognized me when he saw it.

Then, I called an old friend ~ Stan, the guy who had said, years before, that he wished he could do what I was doing ~ and said to him: "Three guesses ~ who's this?" He answered, "Well, it isn't Santa Claus, that's for sure!" I gave him a clue, and he guessed correctly, surprised to hear my voice again. He came to see me the next day, and later, took me to see other old work-mates before taking me home to meet his wife, Jean, who I'd met briefly before they married. They had three children, two girls and a boy, the youngest, who was then about 5 years old.

Now, I'd kept in touch with Hien's mother and sister after they'd returned to England from Atlanta, and spoken with them on the phone; they were living in Cardiff in South Wales, and invited me to visit them, so I did, when I left Crewe in January, '86. I'd never been to Cardiff before ~ and indeed, had seen very little of the

UK at all, and knew countries like Malaysia and India much better than I did the land of my birth; this was a great pity, really, as it is a beautiful land, steeped in history ~ and they showed me around somewhat; I especially enjoyed visiting the castle, which was well-preserved. They also took me to *Bath*, the famous spa-city dating back to Roman times, but unfortunately, the spa itself was closed for renovations at the time.

These kindly people sent me on by train, and I went to visit Adrian and Tony who were both teaching at a privately-funded establishment for newly-arrived refugees outside London called *The Ockenden Venture*, and after a few days there, Adrian took me to London by train to meet Muriel, and we stayed in her flat for 2 days, during which she showed us something of London; again, I was sorry I didn't stay longer in order to see more, but it was winter, and Knoxey had booked me on an *Aeroflot* flight to Singapore, as I'd asked her to do before coming to London; she drove me to Heathrow airport.

It was the first time I had flown *Aeroflop*, and hopefully, will be the last; the cabin-attendants were a surly bunch, and a request for even a glass of water seemed too much for them. We flew via Moscow to change planes, and getting through Immigration there, even though we were going no further than the transit-lounge, was quite an ordeal; again, no smiles or warmth. And, because there was a snow-storm raging outside, the ongoing-flight was delayed, so we had to wait in that gloomy hall for some hours until the runway was clear enough for take-off. Nor was it a direct flight from there to Singapore, but via New Delhi, where I watched the great red orb of the sun rise from the hazy horizon, reminding me so much of the dewy and cool but soon-to-warm-up Indian mornings.

What a difference between the wintry climate of England and the steamy heat of Singapore! Although I spent many years in the tropics, I never got used to that climate, and the older I get, the harder I find it to take; it is just something I have to endure; I certainly don't enjoy it when I am constantly sweating!

In Phor Kark See, I met an Australian monk named Dhammika, who'd been there some months. He was busy giving talks all over the place, and was already well-known as a good speaker

and prolific writer. He wasn't vegetarian, however, and it came to a point when two younger monks, who'd somehow got themselves into positions they shouldn't have had, made up their minds to *get* him. An opportunity arose when they saw someone bringing take-away food for him, and suspecting it wasn't vegetarian, followed them to his room, demanding to search it, and found prawns in his food ~ as they'd expected and hoped for. This nasty pair ordered him to leave the temple forthwith, but he shouldn't have had such food brought in for him; that was *his* mistake. He moved into a flat that some of his supporters rented for him, and was there for some time before moving again, this time into a flat over a Buddhist center known as the *Buddhist Library*. I kept in touch with him for some years after this, and even stayed with him a couple of times, but he was a hard person to be with, as am I (and I'm the first to admit this).

I made preparations to visit the large Vietnamese Refugee-Camp on *Galang* Island in Indonesia. To reach this, I had to take a fast passenger launch from Singapore, first to *Batam* Island ~ the port-of-entry to that part of Indonesia known as *Riau*, which is notorious as a pirate-lair. At *Batam*, I went through Immigration before going on to another island, *Tanjung Pinang*, where I put up in a Chinese temple. One of the monks ~ who I'd earlier met in Singapore, and who'd invited me there ~ helped me to get permission to visit *Galang*, but this wasn't easy, and probably involved the exchange of 'coffee-money'. Once I'd got permission, he went with me by a UNHCR boat to *Galang*, taking me to a temple on a hill that he'd assisted the refugees to establish; it was named *Chua Quan Am*, and we had lunch there before walking from *Galang One* (the area where this temple was situated), to *Galang Two*, where there was another recently-built temple called *Chua Quang Minh*. I was to lodge here during my stay on the island. Between *Galang 1* and *Galang 2*, we passed what was euphemistically called *Galang 3* ~ the cemetery where any refugees who'd died there ~ not a few ~ were buried.

The monk returned to *Tanjung Pinang*, while I stayed in *Quang Minh* temple for the 5 days of my permit. There were several monks in that temple, and I was made reasonably comfortable.

Talks were hastily arranged for me, and every night I spoke in either Quang Minh or Quan Am temple to large audiences, with someone translating. During my talks in Quang Minh, I noticed two white butterflies fluttering around inside, night after night, and thought it strange, as butterflies are not nocturnal. Then I was told that some months before, two sisters who'd been raped when pirates attacked their boat, were so traumatized, that upon being brought to Galang, had hung themselves on a large tree near the temple. At this, I recalled hearing of a Vietnamese belief that the consciousness, mind or spirit of deceased people sometimes takes the form of butterflies in order to appear to the living. During my talk that evening, I spoke about this, and asked the audience to join me in sending positive thoughts to any entities that might be in the vicinity, and wishing them peace and freedom from fear and anxiety. The next morning, I found one of the butterflies dead on the temple floor.

Now, to fast-forward a little, a similar incident took place later that year in PRPC: One day, a woman came to the temple with her young son and told me she'd recently received news that her husband had died in Vietnam, and whenever she made offerings on her makeshift altar for him, a large butterfly would settle on her son's shoulder, making them both rather scared. I told her they had no need to fear, as butterflies never hurt anyone, and that it was a good sign, maybe from her husband trying to assure her he was alright, and that when the butterfly appeared again, they should focus their minds and send strong thoughts of love to him through it, telling him *"Let go, and go on your way, and may you be well and safe, brave and strong, and if we have enough affinity, we will meet again."* She followed my advice, and the next time she saw me, said that the butterfly had ceased coming.

If anyone can help a dead person in any way, who would be more qualified to do it than his or her own family members? If we demystify the ceremonies that are performed for the dead and cease to look upon them as sacred traditions, we might understand their purpose and what lies behind them.

If, as all religions claim, life does not die at the body's death, if something immaterial survives and continues ~ soul, spirit, consciousness, mind, call it what you like ~ how would it be possible

to help? Surely, food, drink, clothes, flowers, money and other offerings are of no use but are just symbols, tokens of respect, love and concern for the safety and well-being of the deceased.

Recent research has revealed many cases of people being declared clinically dead, but after some time, returning to life, telling of how it felt to be dead. Such accounts, from people of various cultural and religious backgrounds, tally to a remarkable degree. Many told of being aware of what was going on around their just-vacated bodies from their own outside viewpoint; they recounted, in accurate detail, what doctors, nurses, and others said and did in their efforts to resuscitate the body, of the grief of relatives, etc. But, although the 'dead person' could hear and see all that was going on, he / she / it could not communicate with the living in any way; it was strictly one-way. (See *Life After Life* by Dr. J.D. Moody, and other books on the subject).

From this, it seems that the 'dead' can be contacted, but ~ as far as this particular type of research has extended ~ on a *speaking-to* rather than a *speaking-with* basis. It is not known, however, for how long this one-way channel of communication is open, nor if it is open in the case of *all* dead people; it might be for just a short period, while the spirit or consciousness is in the immediate vicinity of its corpse and before it passes on to other dimensions; of that, I'm not qualified to speak, as I have only personal opinions and not verifiable facts. Some religions tell of an 'intermediate' period between the death of the body and re-embodiment or rebirth; some say this can last as long as 49 days (49 being 7×7 , and to many, 7 was/is a mystical number for some reason or other, though there is no objective evidence to support this, any more than there is for 13 being regarded as an unlucky number; it is probably just an old superstition, given weight by people's hopes and fears). Others believe the intermediate period can last for hundreds of years as we reckon time on this side of death, and others say that rebirth takes place immediately upon bodily death. On this point there is no consensus and it is best to keep open minds, without forming any conclusions, as nobody knows and neither can it be proved one way or the other. We are concerned here with how to help the dead ~ if this is possible ~ not with metaphysical speculation.

Let's suppose that a just-deceased family-member or friend is still 'within range' of us: what can we do to help? We cannot pull him back to his abandoned vehicle, and it is worse than useless to try, for that might 'tear him apart' between staying and continuing on the way he must go; we can impede as well as expedite his passage, and so should know how to go about the latter.

If we love someone, we want him/her to be happy, not sad; if we saw him sad we would be sad, too, and try to cheer him up and encourage him to overcome his sadness, would we not? So, suppose the deceased could see his family and friends sad and grieving over his death: would he not also feel sad about that? By grief, we cannot help a 'dead' person; in fact, our grief might only intensify his uncertainty over his new and unfamiliar condition. So, the best way the living might help the dead (who are not really dead, but just in a different dimension or frequency, having left behind their physical forms), is not to be sad and mourn, but to send positive thoughts ~ and even spoken words; there is no harm in that ~ of love and encouragement, bidding the dead person be strong and to go on with his journey, as there is no point in 'hanging around'. This 'transmission' (like a radio broadcast), would be best done in surroundings where the deceased lived and was happy, and no-one is better qualified to do this than his immediate family members or close friends. Why should we consider anyone more qualified than these? There is no need to call in outsiders or 'professionals,' with whom the dead had little or no contact, outsiders who might not really care about the welfare of the 'dead,' and to whom it's 'just another'. Moreover, it isn't necessary to spend anything on the 'send-off'; it wouldn't be disrespectful on the part of the relatives to do things by themselves without spending lots of money. Fear of what others might think and say if the family does not comply with tradition impels people to spend money that sometimes they cannot afford. Would this please or help the deceased?

Long before I saw the movie, "*Ghost*" ~ starring Patrick Swayze, Demi Moore and Whoopie Goldberg, and which became probably my favorite movie ~ I had said that this is how it happens; some people die so suddenly and unexpectedly that they don't realize they're dead; they can see and hear everything here, but cannot be seen or heard by anyone except people with a special

sense of clairvoyance or something of that kind. Now, to be in that state, not understanding what's happened, and trying to communicate with people they can see and hear but getting no response, must be a most miserable condition; just think how it is to be 'sent to Coventry' in this world, by people around us, even for only an hour or a day: not a pleasant feeling at all! And this, I think, is the rationale behind the funeral ceremonies performed for the dead ~ or *should* be. That movie strengthened my conviction that this is so. I recommend watching it with this idea in mind; it makes a lot of sense; it would be interesting to know of the research that went into the making of this film.

In the obituary columns of the newspapers we can sometimes read: 'No flowers, please; instead, donations in the name of the deceased may be made to cancer-research [or similar cause]'. This shows more understanding and is certainly of more use; also, if the deceased was of a charitable nature while alive, and could observe such donations being made in his memory, he would probably feel happy thereby, and that might cause him to be released, mentally, from any miserable condition he might be in ~ or rise above it ~ for joy makes the mind buoyant and light.

Following tradition, some Chinese burn paper houses, paper cars, and other things made of paper, such as token bank-notes ~ *hell-money* ~ in the naïve belief that their departed ones will receive these things in real form on 'the other side'. What a quaint idea, and also, what a waste of money, as such are far from cheap, produced as they are by people who depend for their living on the superstitions of others who ask no questions or who are afraid to go against the traditions of their ancestors. But such practices are rather incongruous now, and should be quietly left behind, like the old-style Chinese coffins, which are rarely seen now. There are much better uses for money than that! In short: *DO IT YOURSELF!*

Now, wondering how I ever managed to reach such a 'ripe old age', I think more and more of my own demise, and the funeral, if any, that will follow; it cannot be far away, at the most.

I carry a note in my passport with the following text:

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

Since I found Dharma some years ago, I have tried to serve others in various ways. I would like to continue to be useful even in death, and so, wherever I die, I wish my body to be used for medical research and/or organ transplants.

To date, and as far as I know, my kidneys, liver and heart are functioning well, and might be useful.

I was diagnosed with diabetes in '98, and must confess that my control of it is not very good; because of this, I could no longer donate blood.

My bronchial-system has also been weak for many years, rendering me susceptible to coughs lasting months that respond only to antibiotics; in 1991, such a cough developed into pneumonia.

I have been free from headaches, but have had sharp nervous pains in my feet, probably from nerve-damage caused by the diabetes. For many years, a pinched nerve in my right hand has caused permanent semi-numbness in my little finger and the finger next to it, and that half of the palm; there is also pain there at times.

There is no need to consult my next of kin about this my decision, as I am a monk and have no wife, children or other dependents to consider.

At one point, I hesitated about it because of the widely-held belief that the body should not be disturbed for several days after death, in order for the spirit or consciousness to disengage and complete the process of leaving the body. But I decided to go ahead with the idea for my body to be used for medical research and 'spare parts'; I don't want it to take up space needed by the living (by burial), nor to cause pollution in the atmosphere (by cremation). If it is not used for medical research and spare parts, next in line of preference would be sea-burial, to become food for fish, but since there is little likelihood that this would be allowed, nor burial at the foot of a tree, to nourish its roots, the next alternative would be cremation, but in the most economical way possible, and the ashes scattered at sea or somewhere on land, not kept anywhere to cause bother to anyone. A cardboard coffin ~ such as is now coming into use in the West ~ or simply a shroud like Hindus use, is all that is needed.

I do not want a ceremony, with monks, priests, drums, bells, lots of smoke and so on, as I don't believe in such and am in fact against them! If I die in a place where I have friends, I'd like a few selected songs to be played in my memory, as they have Dharma content, and were meaningful to me, and I have tried to live by their spirit; also, some readings from the scriptures. In my baggage is a cassette-tape that I made some years ago; this should be played at my funeral, so I can do it myself. There is no need for anything other than this. Oh, and no flowers; leave them growing where they are. Anyone wishing to make a donation in my name may do so for the purpose of printing Dharma-books to help someone understand something.

Back to Galang: I quite enjoyed my stay there before returning to Singapore and going on to Kuala Lumpur where someone had arranged for me to stay in a temple by the name of *Tham Wah Wan*. This had originally been set up many years before as a place where visiting monks could stay, and was run by a middle-aged lady who people called *Ah Ko*. This was to become my base in K.L. for the next 15 years. I was to discover later on that *Ah Ko* had a junkie-nephew, who, on a pretext that no-one knew, extorted money from her in huge amounts ~ many thousands of *Malaysian Ringgit*, maybe *hundreds* of thousands, if rumor could be believed! ~ until she had nothing left, and became distraught; he almost drove her mad.

I met *Wong Chap Kin*, who I'd known in Malacca in the old days; since then he'd started his own business installing fire-fighting equipment. He was an easy-going guy, and still single. He would do anything for me; nothing was too much trouble for him.

From there, I traveled up to Bangkok, to fly out to Hong Kong to visit the Camps again, and spent a month there. Since my first visit, two years before, *Saddhaloka* had continued to visit the refugees on a regular basis, carrying with him two large bags of Chinese medicine; he became a familiar sight, lugging these around, sweating under their weight in hot weather. He considered himself a Chinese physician, and treated any refugee who showed signs of illness (I even came in for it myself!) *Mdm Leung* told me of the time a baby had fever, and there he was, working on its pressure-points while the baby howled piteously.

During this trip to Hong Kong I rode for the first time on a hovercraft and a hydrofoil. I also visited Macau again. Mdm Leung took me everywhere and had herself become quite well-known to the refugees while I was away; they called her 'Ba Leung' (Mother Leung). I was glad that at least two Buddhists had shown their concern for the boat-people.

It is just two hours from Hong Kong to Manila. This time, however, I didn't go to Seng Guan See, nor would I ever go there again, but stayed with Tomas and Avelina for a few days before going out to Bataan. There, I found a Vietnamese monk named *Van Dum* in charge of *Chua Van Hanh* (as they'd renamed the lower temple), but it was very dirty and dilapidated. The toilet-hut was a see-through wreck, and the toilet-bowl so filthy that I had to buy scouring-powder and a brush and clean it before I could use it! Then, before leaving for Palawan, I told Van Dum that unless another toilet was constructed while I was away, I would not stay there anymore. And, to impress upon him that I meant this, I called some people to help me dig a pit in another part of the compound, and expected them to make another toilet there before I returned.

Several weeks later, when I returned from Palawan, I found that, instead of building a new toilet, they'd merely patched up the old one, using sheets of plywood taken from somewhere else; they obviously thought this was good enough; they had no idea of what would happen to the plywood when the monsoon came, as it did shortly afterwards: the hut disintegrated! So, again, the toilet became unusable.



"There are no shortcuts to any place worth going."
~ Anonymous ~

6 TO OZ AGAIN

In November, I flew out to Singapore, where I got a tourist-visa for Australia, then went to Perth, spending three weeks with Tinh Giac in the temple; they organized just one talk for me while I was there. Next stop was Adelaide, where I spent some time in the Vietnamese temple before Sheila came to pick me up and take me home with her. During the time I'd been away, our parents had moved to live alongside of them in their own self-contained 'granny-flat'. Mum had become unwell ~ she'd diagnosed herself as having bowel-cancer, but it wasn't so; what she'd really had we never ascertained ~ and felt too isolated out at Moonta; there were pros and cons about this move, but they couldn't have gone on living there much longer, so it really was for the best; and poor old Gran had died several years before. It was nice to stay with them for a while; it was quiet, nothing was expected of me, and I was able to relax and 'let my hair down'.

Back at the temple, my Dharma-talks were well-received, especially because people there seldom had a chance to listen to a talk; the resident monk never gave any himself, and maybe because of this, he began to resent me, and somehow got the strange idea ~ I was informed about this after I'd left Adelaide by someone close to him ~ that I was out to take over his temple. To this, I responded: "Well, he made two mistakes. Firstly, he thought of the temple as his own private property, when it belongs to the whole Buddhist community and not to any individual; and secondly, he thought I wanted his prison." I am often asked if I have my own temple, and I usually reply that I don't, nor do I want one, and that if I had a temple of my own, I wouldn't be free to say what I feel should be said, but would have to say things to please people in order to get their support; truth is not popular, nor is it a big money-earner. If I wanted a temple of my own, I could have had ten or fifteen in different countries. No thanks!

While I was in Adelaide, someone from Melbourne called ~ a person named *Nguyen Thanh Liem*, I'd met briefly in Manila in '79 when he'd just arrived by boat, and was staying in the Jose Fabella Center. He'd heard I was in Adelaide, and requested me

to come to Melbourne, and offered to send me a plane-ticket, saying he would organize talks for me. I accepted, and he met me at the airport. On the way to the temple where I was to stay, he lost no time in excitedly telling me of the talk he'd arranged for me in a large hall he'd rented for that purpose the next Sunday, saying he'd announced it in the Vietnamese press, and expected about 800 people to attend. How he'd dreamed up this figure I don't know, but I was to see that he was capable of all kinds of crazy things. He came to collect me from *Chua Quang Minh* ~ the small house-temple in the western suburbs ~ to take me for my talk. When we got to the venue, however, we found it locked and no-one there, and he had to look for the caretaker for the key. Eventually, only about fifty people turned up, and we were 'lost' in that large hall, where Liem had hung 'Welcome' banners over the stage. He'd also arranged a talk for me in the other Vietnamese temple on the far side of the city for the following Sunday, but it was no more successful than had been the first.

On my first day in Melbourne, I ran into Pham Thanh Hung, who had not long before been resettled in Australia from VRC.

I had tracked down Ray Seibel, having lost contact with him some years before, and through an old address was able to get his current one and phone-number ~ in Melbourne! I called and spoke with him, and he came to take me over to his place. We had lots to talk about over dinner, for which Judith had made an egg-pie dish. Now, I'd not eaten eggs for years, but partook of it, not knowing how it would affect me. Next day, I was producing a gas so potent that when the cook brought lunch to my room, her face changed color, and she looked under the bed and chairs thinking the cat had brought in a dead rat or something. Deeply embarrassed, and ashamed to say, I let the cat get the blame, saying that it did sometimes come in through my open window! Since then, I've always tried to tell people who wished to invite me for food that my vegetarianism includes eggs, except if they are in cake, when I can't take them out; somewhat hypocritical of me, you might say, but then, we are all hypocrites in some ways; none of us live exactly by what we say, but do and say things that contradict our philosophies; long ago, I recognized this about myself; nor is it because we want to be or try to be; it's just part of our stage of evolution.

I came to know of the case of a young guy who had been hospitalized for a minor operation on his ear in 1984, but the operation had gone wrong and his brain was starved of oxygen, with the horrifying result that he was left disabled, unable to do anything for himself, or even to speak. Why this terrible thing befell *Tai* ~ for such was his name ~ we can't say, and must be careful not to casually and callously dismiss it as 'his karma', as if we know, for we really do not know. What we *do* know, however, is that he didn't want or try to be like that; it happened to him; one day he was young, healthy, and handsome, with everything going for him, and the next day, his life had changed forever, and he'd become a prisoner in his body, wanting both to live and to die, but caught between and unable to do either.

Two years later, his case came to the notice of a lady named Jacquie, who responded to his needs, and not only went every day to take care of him as normally only a mother would, but contended with the hospital authorities until they finally but reluctantly agreed to pay ongoing care-costs; this was no minor victory, as the hospital had denied responsibility for negligence. Jacquie's loving care for Tai touched many people, and caused some to remark that they must have had some strong bond from a previous life. I can't say much about that, but was full of admiration for her tireless efforts with Tai. He responded so well to her that he even made an attempt to write short notes to her, the first of which, though hard to read, of course, said: "*Chet roi*," which is Vietnamese for 'Dead already,' probably meaning that he was as good as dead, and, therefore, there was no point in taking care of him. This didn't deter Jacquie, however, and for seven long years until he died, she bestowed her love and care on him, and the Vietnamese that she had previously learned came in very useful in facilitating communication with him.

Liem drove me to the airport, with his wife and small daughter, *Diana*. While I was checking-in, this little girl wandered off alone. It caused a panic, and I was so scared. We had to make an announcement on the P.A. system, but it was quite a while before she was found down by the departure gates! This child was as hyper-active as a hurricane!

Now, here, my memory fails again. All I remember is that I stayed in several places, including *Chua Phap Bao* and *Chua Phuoc Hue*, but not in what order. During my talk in Chua Phap Bao, although people were interested and wanted to listen, the abbot, *Thich Bao Lac*, rang the bell to cut me off, as it was near lunch-time; this was so rude, and had never happened to me anywhere before.

Like in Los Angeles, there was rivalry and acrimony between these two temples, and instead of subsiding over the years, it became worse.

I met someone I'd known in VRC: *Vo Tan Hong* and his family were living in a small flat; he and his wife were sewing for up to sixteen hours a day in order to stay afloat. They would later get into the bakery-business. I'll refer to him hereafter as *Baker Vo*.

Liem had arranged for me to stay with a friend of his in Sydney, *Minh Quang*, another ex-monk like himself. He lived with his wife and young son in a small flat, where he wanted me to watch videos ~ a 12-tape series about Kwan Yin, in Chinese, dubbed into Vietnamese, which I found extremely boring ~ just like Giac Luong's video about the Buddha in San Jose.

I bumped into *Tam Dao*, from VRC. He was a follower of *Cao Dai* ~ a Vietnamese religion comprising elements of the major world religions and other things beside; he lived in the house that served as a temple for their activities. Many Cao Dai-ists are vegetarians, and I always got on alright with them.

From Sydney I went to Brisbane, to be met by *Le Bang*, who had been with me in Bataan; he took me to one of the temples. There, I met *Tran Van Hoa*, who had worked in the dental-clinic at VRC, and had studied in this field since arriving in Australia in '82; the first thing he did upon meeting me was to look at my teeth, and asked me to 'open wide.' "You need a partial denture," he said; "I'll make you one." So he took an impression of my teeth and made the denture. He then took me to his home for a fitting, and forced it in ~ it had sharp wires sticking out on it ~ hurting my gums. Afterwards, I ate with it in, but it was hard-going. It was impossible to wear.

During my stay in Brisbane, the monk from the temple where I was staying arranged to take me to the *Chenrezig Institute* at

Eudlo, a Tibetan center that had been established mainly by the efforts of an Aussie doctor ~ *Nick Ribush* ~ and his wife, Marie, who had become monk and nun, and who I'd met at Kopan in '74; they were not at Chenrezig at the time.

Returning to Sydney, I went to Canberra to stay for a while with Thich Quang Ba, who arranged a talk for me in the Uni; he also drove me around Canberra, but was such an erratic driver that I said, "Look here, I don't mind visiting people in hospital, but don't take me to stay there!" He was well-known for his driving. Back in Sydney, I flew out to Singapore before my Aussie visa expired, and again went back to the Phils for some months.



Enlightenment is like the moment of death: when it comes, it is always instantaneous, but the process leading up to it is gradual; in fact, we spend our entire lives building up to it — no, more: the moment we are born, we begin to die, for death is not something separate from life, but part of it; it might even be said that living is dying — the wheel turns, and the life-force runs out.

The problem is not that there are problems.

The problem is expecting otherwise and thinking that having problems is a problem.

~ Theodore Isaac Rubin, U.S. Psychiatrist & Author, 1923 ~

7

A TALE OF TWO TOILETS

When I returned to Bataan in '87, I found the temple in a worse condition than ever, and though there was a temple-committee, composed of people who couldn't live without some kind of position and title in society, nothing had been done to and around it since my last visit the previous year. Unable to bear it, I started to clean up, but the committee-people not only just sat around and watched me working, without coming to help in any way, they even tried to obstruct me in different sneaky ways. I went ahead and did what I thought needed doing anyway, in spite of these useless people.

Raising funds in Manila, I hauled in material from Tomas's store and, with the help of volunteers, replaced the temple-roof before the monsoon.

Since my last visit, the Camp authorities had taken note of the toilet in the temple and built a new one, complete with cement walls, door, a decent roof, and a toilet-bowl of the sit-down type. This was for use only by monks and special visitors to the temple. Other people who were staying in the temple were using the pit I'd dug the year before, with a few boards across it, shielded by a few brambles and long grass. Using old material from the roof of the temple, we built a new toilet-hut where the old ruined one had stood, and installed a new toilet-bowl of the squatter type. It was by no means luxurious, but was a great improvement over what it had been, and was clean. I felt satisfied with it.

My satisfaction, however, was short-lived, because two months later, I asked one of the young Vietnamese nuns living in the compound and who used that toilet, along with other people: "How is your toilet now? Is it clean?"

"Yes," she said, "very clean". I took her word for it, so didn't go to inspect it until a few days later. I was amazed and appalled at the condition of the toilet-bowl: what had been brand-new and spotless just two months before was now so filthy that it looked as if it hadn't been cleaned for ten years! To make matters worse, when I confronted the nun about it, and reminded her that she'd told me it was very clean, she insisted that it was.

"*Clean?*" I said; "you should look at our toilet and see the difference!"

"Ah, but there are only few people using your toilet," she countered, "while there are many people using ours".

"Well, then," I said, "you have many people to clean it, don't you?"

Unwilling to back down, she said: "But we don't have duty to clean toilets!" (meaning not their responsibility). I was astonished! How could a Buddhist nun stand there and brazenly say such a thing?! Whose duty was it to clean the toilets? Was she above such work? Did she expect me to do it for them? No wonder there was little understanding between me and many of the people who stayed in the temple!

I'd taken a photograph of the two toilet-bowls before confronting her about it. And only after I complained about it did they condescend to clean it somewhat, after which I took other photos; I still have these as evidence of the kind of things I had to put up with from these people. What I did there was for everyone ~ the good, and those not so, the intelligent and the foolish.



Enlightenment is like the moment of death: when it comes, it is always instantaneous, but the process leading up to it is gradual; in fact, we spend our entire lives building up to it ~ no, more: the moment we are born, we begin to die, for death is not something separate from life, but part of it; it might even be said that living is dying ~ the wheel turns, and the life-force runs out.

"There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle, and the other is as though everything is."

~ Albert Einstein ~

ANOTHER TRIP IN INDIA

That was my final time in PRPC as a functioning Camp. Soon after that, I left for Singapore, and stayed there longer than I should, thereby missing ~ by just one day ~ the wedding of D.V.'s eldest sister, Maggie, in Malacca. This time, I stayed with D.V. and Joan in their home, and there prepared my second book, *Just A Few Leaves*. I left the manuscript for his brother to type out on computer for me and get it printed while I was away in India.

I then went to K.L. to get my ticket and Indian visa, which is always a hassle, requiring 3 trips back and forth to the embassy; Indians take a delight in complicating things with their red-tape; it's a way of exercising power over others, but would they like it if others did that to them? Wong Chap Kin took me wherever necessary, and helped me buy a bike which I took to Madras with me, figuring it would enable me to get to places that otherwise might be out of reach and give me more freedom. This was to be one of my best trips in India. After some days in Madras, waiting for heavy rain to subside, I rode to *Kanchipuram* (about 50 kms away), and some distance from there before putting it on a bus to Bangalore, where I had an altercation with Buddharakhita who ~ not surprisingly ~ disapproved both of my dress and bike; I should have known better than to go there. I ended up telling him what I thought of him and went to stay in a hotel.

Next morning, I took a bus to *Puttaparthi*, some hours away. *Sai Baba* was in residence, and the ashram crowded with about 4,000 people, half of them Westerners. I stayed in a hotel outside rather than in the ashram, but I ate there as the food was carefully prepared and pure vegetarian, of course. I attended the *darshans* morning and evening, but didn't ask for an interview, figuring that other people had a greater need than me, and that if he wanted to see me, he would call me; he didn't. Now, I'm not the devotional-type, and don't go in for guru-worship, and so I sat there while people all around me expressed their *bhakti* (devotion) in various ways, including placing their hands on the ground that he'd just walked on. Sick people come here from all

over the world, hoping to be cured of whatever is ailing them, and there are numerous cases of people getting what they desired, but they must be just a small proportion of those who hope. Obviously, Sai Baba *does* have some kind of power, despite what his detractors say; just what the nature of this power is, I'm unable to say, but power like this is well-known in India, and spoken of in most works on yoga. Someone is supposed to have asked him: "Why don't you use your power to help all these sick people who come here in hope of a cure, instead of only a few?" He replied in a way that makes a lot of sense: "I can help them only if their karma permits," meaning that if we have the right conditions within ourselves ~ in our minds, hearts, spirits, psyches ~ then we may receive help from outside, but if such conditions are not there, it would be very difficult for others to help us even if they want to.

After three days there, I left and proceeded to *Hampi*, which was the capital of the ancient Hindu kingdom of *Vijayanagar*; situated in an area scattered with massive granite boulders, it was a remarkable site even in ruins; I could only dimly imagine what it had been like in its prosperous heyday. I'd never been there before, but this is so of many places.

Next stop along my way was *Bijapur*, capital of another ancient kingdom, this one Muslim rather than Hindu, so there was a plenitude of ruined mosques, tombs and fortifications, on one part of which was a massive bronze cannon, which had required several elephants to pull it along on its carriage; India has a long history of internecine wars, with kingdoms rising and falling, like the waves of the sea.

Onwards, then, to *Poona*, where I arrived late at night and had some difficulty finding a hotel; more than once I have been turned away because of the color of my skin; racism is not just on the part of whites towards non-whites, but on the part of anyone who considers their race the best ~ and who doesn't? If it is not inborn ~ and I am not sure it isn't ~ it is certainly acquired soon afterwards as part of our upbringing and background; we can only be born in one place at a time.

The next morning I went to the ashram of *Rajneesh* (or *Osho*, as he was later known) to ask for directions to the Buddhist temple, but didn't go further than the gate, as I wasn't interested. Someone told me and I managed to find the temple and spent a while talking to people, but wasn't asked to stay and I rode out of the city until I got to a long, steep road. What with my body-weight and my bags behind me, I overtook everything on the way down: cars, buses and trucks. Then I turned off for *Bhaja Caves*, near which is a newly-built temple run by one of *Sangharakshita's* followers, an Englishman who had shed his monk's robes and married an Indian woman so as to get a long visa. I stayed there three days and visited the caves at *Bhaja, Bedsa* and *Karla*.

Outside the entrance to *Karla's* main cave is a brightly-painted Hindu shrine, where animal-sacrifice is performed. It was a long-established tradition, and there was nothing I could do about it. I went inside the *chaitya* (chapel-cave), and sat before the stupa there to meditate. After some time, I was startled by a woman running around in a disheveled state, and thought it might be something in my mind, an illusion, but I continued to sit there and not long after, another woman came and repeated the performance, so I knew it was *outside* rather than *inside*, and though I didn't discover why they were doing this, I supposed it was a ritual designed to help in becoming pregnant, the stupa being regarded as a *lingam* (phallic-symbol; India abounds in such; no wonder it has a population problem when worship of it is such an integral part of Hinduism!)

On then, by train to Bombay. I hadn't been there since 1970, and it used to be my favorite of the four mega-cities of India, but I didn't enjoy it this time, finding it seedy and grimy.

I soon left, by bus, to *Jalgaon*, to the north-east, arriving at night and staying in a hotel near the bus-station. Early next morning, before dawn, I set out to ride to *Ajanta*; 6 hours away. I got a room in the rest-house by the caves and spent ten days there, getting to know some of the vendors of stalls selling crystals and *geodes* ('thunder-eggs', as they are known in Australia) which are found in this area, and someone named *Humne*, working for the Archaeological Department in the caves. Wanting to meditate in the Caves at night (they are locked at the end of the day), I went to *Aurangabad* to ask permission from the Superinten-

dent, but he wouldn't give it; my request was unusual and no provision for it had been made in the regulations, and Indians are so afraid of using their own initiative and going a tiny bit beyond the rules ~ unless some 'oil' is applied to the wheels. Back at Ajanta, I circumvented the restrictions and at night went to sit just upstream from the caves, beside a large, calm pool fed by a waterfall; it's really an amazing place, especially when no-one is there. This basin is in a canyon with towering walls, and the whole has been carved from the rock by the action of the waterfall over ages. The caves and surroundings ~ like most ancient places in India ~ are inhabited by large grey *langurs* with long tails and huge canines; they are known as *Hanuman* monkeys, after the Hindu monkey-god of that name; unlike the smaller brown *rhesus* monkeys, they are generally not aggressive. There are also tigers in this region, but I never saw any, but I was careful when outside at night.

One afternoon, while sitting quietly at the top end of the caves, not bothering anyone, some people came and began to berate me. I sat and endured their insults, and when they'd gone, a man standing by told me not to worry, as his brother, who was also a monk, often had to put up with this sort of thing. I noticed this about Indians many times; they are arrogant and rude, but when they want something, they will kiss your butt! Edgar Cayce once said that the national sin of India was pride, and *he'd* never been there! I've often wondered why this should be; has it something to do with the caste-system, perhaps?

Humne told me of another group of caves some distance from Ajanta, and offered to take me, although he had not been there himself. We went by bus as far as we could, then had to walk for two hours uphill through jungle. Because they were so off the beaten-track, the caves were practically concealed by vegetation, and full of bats, with their ammoniac smell. There are many caves in this part of India (*Maharashtra*), and every now and then, new ones are discovered after being lost and forgotten for centuries. He also took me to visit his superior in Aurangabad, who'd just bought a second-hand TV, and although it was not working, his family and some neighbors were all sitting around it gazing at the blank screen, waiting for images to appear.

Humne accompanied me to Ellora for a leisurely look around, and then we went back to Aurangabad, he to return to Ajanta, and I to get a bus to Bhopal where I went to Sanchi for a couple of days, and had a pleasant time there, maybe expecting something to happen like during my first visit, but nothing did. The weather was perfect, and I took some good photos there.

Continuing north from there, I went to Gwalior and Agra, spending a few days there to revisit places, my bike was really a boon, enabling me to zip through the traffic and get to places that otherwise it would have taken me a long time to reach, if at all.

From Agra to Jaipur, and on from there to Ajmer, Jodhpur and Jaisalmer; all these places are in Rajasthan (*Land of Kings*). This is a particularly attractive part of India.

And next to Delhi, where I searched for Ven. Dhammika and his tiny temple, going backwards and forwards by taxi, bike, and on foot. I had in mind an ancient monument near the temple, and although Delhi had changed a lot since 1970, that building would still have been there. I could find neither it nor the temple, in spite of my keen sense of direction. I came upon another temple, and asked the monk there about Dhammika, and he said he'd died years before, but I doubted this as he did not seem sure, so resumed my search, until finally, I gave up. Of course, I took the opportunity to see much more of Delhi than I'd seen during my several previous visits, and really enjoyed it there.

Then, feeling like a taste of a British hill-station, I went up to Mussoorie, and found many of the old English-style bungalows and cottages crumbling into ruin, but there was a distinct atmosphere there, as if the ghosts of the long-gone Brits had lingered. Many *sahibs* and *memsahibs* had loved India and were so reluctant to leave and drag their feet away from a land that had become more home to them than home that some of them stayed after Independence; the thought of returning to Britain was just too much for them! I've felt like this about India myself at times.

Back in Delhi, I was approached by someone wanting to buy my bike, and as my path would soon lead me to the main Buddhist places, where I didn't want a repeat of my Buddharakkhita experience over it, I agreed to sell, and then set off for Lucknow, where I visited the old Residency that had withstood many hor-

rific months of siege during the mutiny of 1857. I explored it from top to bottom, even going up the flag-tower, and was amazed at the thickness of the walls! It seems to have been built with the expectation of siege! I wandered around the cemetery there, reading the pathetic inscriptions on the grave-stones.

Lucknow had been famous for its culture and arts, but after the Brits had regained control, they exacted a terrible revenge for what they'd undergone and destroyed much of it, leaving it a shell of what it had been.

On from Lucknow, I went to *Shravasti*, where the remains of the famous Jetavana Monastery are found. The Buddha spent many Rains here and gave some of his most-memorable teachings. Here, He is said to have subdued the blood-thirsty murderer, *Angulimala*, and his evil cousin, *Devadatta*, met his end. I stayed in the Sri Lankan temple, with the friendly monk and his dog, which chewed up my sandals.

Next stop was Kusinara, the place of the Buddha's demise. It was here that He lay on his death-bed in the forest, surrounded by a multitude who had come from far and wide to see their beloved teacher for the last time; word had spread that, at the age of 80, he was about to pass away. Many ~ including monks and nuns ~ were grief-stricken, but those who had understood his teachings and attained realization, were calm and composed. The Buddha continued to teach until the very end, even though He was in great bodily pain. Then, looking around, he noticed that Ananda, his favorite disciple and personal attendant of many years, was absent, and asked, "Where is Ananda?"

"Over yonder, Lord, with his head against a tree, weeping and saying, '*Too soon is the Light of the World going out. Too soon is my beloved master leaving me, he who was so kind to me, and I am still a learner, yet to find my own deliverance.*' "

The Buddha sent someone to call him, and when he came, consoled and comforted him: "Do not weep, Ananda; do not be sad. Have I not told you so many times and in so many ways that all that is near and dear to us will perish? How could it be that this body of mine, having been born, should not die? For many years, Ananda, you have served me faithfully in thought, word

and deed. Great good have you gathered, Ananda. Now you must put forth effort, and soon, you too will be free!”

The Buddha passed away, and within three months, Ananda *did* attain Enlightenment.

And so, to *Vaishali*, from where the Buddha had set out on his final journey, predicting his demise three months later. It is not far from here to *Nalanda*, where the ruins of the once-great Buddhist University stand. There were 10,000 monks studying here under 2000 teachers when it was over-run by marauding Muslim invaders in 1199. Hating Buddhism because it acknowledges no God, the barbarians proceeded to slaughter everyone they could and turned the whole campus into a smoldering ruin. Here and in other places, Buddhism was virtually destroyed and driven from the land of its birth, not to return until the 19th century, when efforts were made to revive it, but with meager results.

Rajgir was my next stop, where I climbed the steps up to Vultures' Peak, a place beloved by the Buddha, and where he often stayed, preaching to large crowds of disciples. Alone at night, he would pace up and down in meditation along the flat rock or sit in contemplation beneath the stars. Down below, nearer the town, there are hot springs, and people come to bathe there, oblivious of how dirty the water becomes.



Hot springs at Rajgir

Onwards from there to Budh-Gaya, where I got a room in one of the Japanese temples. Now, while I was in Australia, I'd heard that there was a Vietnamese temple under construction in Budh-Gaya, so I asked the Japanese monk if he could tell me where it was. He directed me down the road away from the Mahabodhi Shrine, and I saw what looked like a hotel across the fields, so went there to ask a monk I met, "Is this the Vietnamese temple?" "Yes," he answered. (He was Burmese, not Vietnamese).

“Is there a Vietnamese monk here?”

“Yes, he’s over there.”

Thus, I met *Lam Trung Quoc* (otherwise known as *Thay Huynh Dieu*), who wasn’t at all surprised to see me, and in fact said, “I’ve been expecting you. I know of you, you see, and a few nights ago, during my meditation, I heard a voice saying you were coming.” Huh? He then asked where I was staying, and when I told him, invited me to come and stay there, which I did. Then he said that he would soon be going to Delhi to meet a group of Vietnamese from the US and guide them around the Buddhist holy places. “I think some of them know you,” he said; “there is a nun from San Jose, and a monk from Hawaii with them.” As soon as he said ‘Hawaii,’ I knew he meant Thich Thong Hai, and the nun’s name was Dam Luu, who I’d met in ’85, and I immediately said, “Okay, I’ll go with you”, even though I was about to return to the south and fly out from Madras. I joined him for the train-journey to Delhi and accompanied him to the airport to receive the visitors. I was pleased to see Thong Hai again after so many years, and he was very surprised to see me there. I accompanied them around in the coach that Huynh Dieu had organized for them; it was quite different for me to travel this way with other people, as my travels until then had been carried out alone. We hadn’t gone far before people needed to *go*, and asked, “Where’s the toilet?”

“That is not the question to ask in India,” I said, “On the contrary, the question is, Where is *not* the toilet? They soon understood, and were able to adapt to conditions there, *going* in the fields and beside the road when the bus stopped for them.

It was fun going with this group, but also quite tiring, as their time was limited and so we sometimes had to travel through the night, sleeping in the bus; the roads of India are such that you can average no more than 40 kms per hour, and the distances are very great. We made the round-trip in less than two weeks, which was really pushing it. After I’d seen them off at the airport, I parted with Huynh Dieu and caught a train to Jalgaon, in order to visit Ajanta again and stock up on ‘thunder-eggs,’ which I’d come to see as good teaching-aids, illustrating the difference

between appearance and reality. Since then, I've given them to many people in different parts of the world, saying: "What we are looking for is not outside of ourselves." Some people *got it* and were thrilled, while others were not touched at all.

Boarding another train in Jalgaon, I returned to Madras and caught a plane back to Malaysia, another trip in India over.

Since his resettlement in the US, Thong Hai had been to many countries around the world, but never went to any of the Camps, as he could have done had he wished. Later, after meeting him in India, he sent word requesting me to resume my work in the Refugee Camps, and offered to support me financially, with the help of Su Ba Dam Luu and Huynh Dieu. "Why me?" I thought. I did not accept his offer, because after spending a total of five years in the Camps, I'd had enough.

Just A Few Leaves had been printed in Malacca during my absence, but I was disappointed, as it wasn't well-done; it was like a baby born deformed; but what could we do but learn something from it and send it off anyway? Unfortunately, it was not to be the last of its kind.

Among the many talks I gave in various places in Malaysia, was one at the Buddhist Society in Muar, a small town near Malacca. There, I met a lady by the name of Mrs. Tan, who requested me to visit her terminally-ill husband. When I got to her home and went up the stairs, her husband greeted me with a very warm smile. The cancer carried him off several weeks later.

In Singapore, I went to stay with Dhammika ~ *Aussie* Dhammika, not the *Indian D.* ~ in his flat above the *Buddhist Library*, instead of at Phor Kark See. There was a Malaysian named Yew staying with him at that time, and he was shortly to return to Melbourne, where he was resident.



During my stay in Singapore, I got another tourist-visa for Oz, and flew out to Adelaide. Sheila and Frank were about to visit their daughter in Melbourne (where she'd moved with her army-husband), so I went with them and was dropped at Yew's place, staying with him for a couple of weeks until Liem insisted I move to his place as more convenient, saying his wife could cook for me. More convenient? Far from it, as his little daughter, Diana, was such a pest and didn't give me a minute's peace; I had to barricade myself in my room to get away from her! One night, he took me to a talk by Thich Huynh Ton, and there I met *Nguyen Van Cam*, who was pleased to see me again, and I him, especially when he invited me to stay with him, providing me with an excuse to escape from Liem and his whirlwind daughter. I was with him for two weeks, then returned to Adelaide. I bought a second-hand *Brother* electronic typewriter which I needed for my writing; immediately, it became my pride-and-joy; after using that, I could never have gone back to a manual machine.

Unwilling to let me escape so easily, Liem contacted me to say he'd arranged for me to stay at the Vietnamese temple in Springvale (one of Melbourne's eastern suburbs where there is a large concentration of Vietnamese), so back I went. The monk-in-charge didn't know much English and wasn't very hospitable, but I'd long-since given up expecting much of monks. It was at this temple that I met *Nguyen Phi Tuan*, who was to become my main translator over the next few years. He was working as a translator in one of Melbourne's largest hospitals, but called himself an interpreter; I insisted that what he should be doing was translating rather than interpreting, as a translator ~ well, the word 'translate' means, 'to tell across' ~ must tell accurately what is being said by others, while interpretation is often a matter of giving one's own ideas of what is said; there's a great deal of difference. He was still single at that time, but had a girlfriend whom he loved, and apparently, she loved him, but she was a Catholic and wanted him to convert. Well, although he wasn't more than a nominal Buddhist at that time, he was reluctant to change, and finally, after he'd brought her to see me and

she realized I didn't believe in God, she dumped him, leaving him free to look for someone else.

During the three months I was in that temple, Liem persuaded me to apply for a change-of-status in my visa so I could get Permanent Residence, in order to work with the Vietnamese Buddhists. With sponsorship of the temple, my application was duly lodged, and I was told to await consideration; meanwhile, I could stay in the country. (To fast-forward a bit here: It was a lengthy process, and at one point, it looked as if my application would be rejected, but eventually, it was approved, and I got P.R. In 1993, I was eligible for citizenship, and duly underwent the ceremony. Not long afterwards, I got my first Aussie passport). I have Liem to thank, therefore, for all this.

I went to Sydney again for a short visit, and stayed with Dao Cong Tam at the Cao Dai temple-house. While there, during lunch one day, I reached for the bottle of chilli-sauce, and not knowing that he'd not screwed the cap on firmly, gave it a vigorous shake, but the cap came off and the sauce went all over the place, including me; I was covered with the stuff! Needless to say, we had a good laugh over this!

Baker Vo visited me and took me to stay overnight in his new place ~ a bakery he and his family were operating. I was pleased to see that they were doing well. Other people drove me out to visit Khantipalo at a center he'd established in a national park north of Sydney, near a place called 'Wiseman's Ferry.' It was in the middle of a forest and really lovely; it was good to see him again after an interval of so many years. Actually, it would have been good to stay with him, as I think we would have benefited from each other's company. Looking back later on, I could see that even then, he was in a period of transition.

Back in Melbourne, at a big Buddhist ceremony held in a town-hall, I bumped into someone I'd met in Galang two years earlier ~ *Thuy*, a lady and her two young sons, *Tuan* and *Huy*. She had been kind to me in Galang, and her kindness would continue. She introduced me to her sister and some of her friends, who would also soon help me.

While there, Liem ~ who had his own agenda concerning me, and wanted to use me for his own ends, always wanting to be

someone special ~ and others decided to rent a place for me; Liem brought a lot of old junk for my use: a refrigerator that didn't work, a saucepan with a hole in the bottom, and a kettle that leaked; perhaps he thought they'd work for me and not for him because I'm a monk; people have such unrealistic expectations of monks. Then, just two weeks after I'd moved in, he came to me and said, "I don't know what we're going to do; the money is almost finished." I told him he should have thought carefully before getting into this thing, and that they would have to give notice on the place, which they did. Just before I left there, he came to me one evening and quite cheerfully told me that he'd argued with his wife and hit her in the face, knocking her down, and she was just two weeks away from giving birth to their second child! Now, she wasn't a nice woman, but that was beside the point.

"You're mad!" I said, "Get out of here and never come to see me again!" I meant it and kept to it. This was a person who used to drink so much that he boasted he could drink twelve cans of beer and not get drunk! He'd been a monk for a short time in Vietnam, had a de facto wife there and a child by her, and hadn't married the one in Melbourne either. He told me that he didn't love her, and that he'd *had* so many other women. He was a driving-instructor, and proudly used to tell people that he could earn \$2,000 per week and was richer than the doctors in Springvale. *Earned?* No; what he would do was take three or four people in the car with him at the same time, and charge them all for the time they were with him, so what should have been just one fee for each hour became four! Also, just before taking his students for their test, he would tell them, "Look, you have to pay another \$100 or \$150, otherwise you won't pass." He was in cahoots with the examiners. From me, he earned an extra name: *Dien*, which is Vietnamese for crazy so, *Liem Dien*. Of course, my chasing him off caused him to get mad with me, and he told someone, "Okay, I will stop being vegetarian."

"What," I responded, "Was he vegetarian for me?" This was just another example of his scrambled ideas. Some years later, he decided to become a monk again, so left his de-facto and moved to Sydney, where he was unknown. His 'wife' got half of

his assets, which came to ~ I was told ~ \$480,000, *just her half!* By this time, she had three children.

Somehow, Thanh Pham Hung found me staying in Richmond; he was living not far away, and came to visit; we were to keep in touch after that.

Because I had no-where else to stay in Melbourne, I moved back to Adelaide; it's 800 kms between the two cities, and I used to travel by overnight bus; it took ten hours. Back in Melbourne, some of the other supporters had got together and found another place for me to stay ~ a small flat in Springvale ~ and invited me to return, and after 6 weeks in Adelaide, I did, but stayed for a while with friends of Thuy in the western suburbs until the flat was ready for me to move in. This family was very kind to me, but I observed that when the father ~ a bit younger than me ~ came home from work, the first thing he did was tell his 7-year-old son to bring him a glass of whiskey; this was a daily routine, but not, in my opinion, a very good example for the boy. Years later, the father died of a sudden heart attack, and the boy turned to drugs.

At the end of '89, I moved into the flat in Springvale and cleaned it up, making it quite livable. We met every Sunday, and I gave a talk, followed by a questions-and-answers session, and ending up eating the food people had brought. At first, we set the starting-time at one o'clock, but because some people came late, we changed it to 1:30. Still people came late, so we set it further back, but with no better effect, and I used to say, "How do you people manage to get to work on time? You *do* manage, otherwise you'd lose your jobs; but how do you do it? You can do it if you want, so why don't you?" This is really a very bad Asian habit, and I came to the conclusion that it's either consciously or unconsciously done, in order to show how important they are and that others must wait for them. My efforts to correct the late-comers was in vain. Translator Tuan was one of the consistently late comers.

I settled down to my writing, and was persuaded by Nguyen Van Cam to make a book of talks I'd given in VRC in '83, and which he had transcribed from tapes, I wrote my third book, and called it *LOTUS PETALS*. Mdm Leung of HK helped me get it printed

there, but when it arrived, I was shocked. The title on the cover had been spelled *LOUTS PETALS*. I immediately had to type labels to be stuck over and correct this, and sent them to those who parcels of the book had been sent to. It took quite a while to type the thousand labels, one-by-one. It's hard to have to depend upon others to do things these days. Some people might call me fussy ~ I've even been called a perfectionist, but that was by someone who had no idea of perfection, if there is such a thing ~ but I feel that something like this should be well-done or not at all.

Following *Lotus Petals* came the second version of *Keys For Refugees*; I called it *DOWN TO EARTH*, and it was printed in Malaysia, and sent by sea-mail. Then came *TURNING THE WHEEL*, which included most of the articles from *Just A Few Leaves*, and *LET ME SEE*, a book of short poems and proverbs with accompanying comments or explanations. Helped by one or two others, Tuan assisted me in translating some of them; I typed out the translation from his hand-written notes, and found quite a few errors while doing so; I read Vietnamese, even if I do not understand very much, but there are several ways by which I can tell if a translation is accurate or not even so. The diacritical marks were added afterwards. My time in that flat was quite productive in this way, but otherwise quiet and uneventful.

Tuan, by this time, had met someone in the hospital where he worked ~ a young woman who'd been through hell at the hands of Thai pirates when she escaped from Vietnam; they'd attacked her boat ~ as they had so many others ~ killed several people, and abducted her and some other women; you can guess her fate until she managed to escape and get to Bangkok. When she finally got to Australia, she was extremely traumatized and responded to Tuan's kindness and concern while she was in hospital for a check-up; he mistook her response for love, and things went on from there, and the next thing you know, she was pregnant. I wouldn't write about them like this if I thought they might read this later on, but since they're not great readers, there is little chance they will. Tuan is not much of a catch, almost bald, suffering from psoriasis and looking older than he is; moreover, he is her senior by sixteen years; and while he might

have loved her, she didn't love him, or at least, her affection for him soon faded. I regret having pressured them to marry officially instead of living de facto; my reason for doing so was to prevent them from following one of the prevailing scams and claiming child-support as an unmarried mother. Over the years, several times I had to intercede on his behalf and calm her down when she was threatening to tear up their marriage-certificate, saying she didn't love him and wanted a divorce; I explained that although he wasn't the world's most-handsome or best man, he was a good man even so. This wasn't enough to prevent her from actually carrying out her threats, and twice, she took the kids ~ by then, they had two, a boy and a girl ~ and left him, but he followed and persuaded her to return. Imagine how he felt to be under such a cloud! More than once, he said to me, "You are so wise to remain single."

"Look here," I replied, "no-one made you get married; you were desperate to do so, and now you've got what you desired so much, you are not happy. No-one has everything," I went on; "You have things that I don't have, and I have things that you don't have, but would you change places with me if you could?"

It was in this flat that I met *Ho Van Nhi*, a young guy who'd been in VRC in '82, but we'd not met there; he was introduced to me by someone who had been his teacher in Vietnam. Then there was Mai ('Maisy'), although I don't recall how we met. She was in her early thirties, still single, and on the look-out; Nhi soon caught her eye, and they started going out together.

At this time, too, I began visiting a dentist-friend for treatment. His name was Jamie Robertson, a remarkable person. I'd come to know him through Hoa in Brisbane, who had met him when he visited VRC in Palawan in '83 for a month (I didn't meet him there, as our visits didn't coincide). He'd also been to India and set up a clinic in Dharamsala for Tibetans, and trained several people there, even sponsoring some to come to Melbourne to study. And all this on his own expense! Later, he would start to visit Vietnam on a yearly basis, spending a month each time in the clinic he'd established there. This was really Buddhism in action! Over the following years, I would be his patient many times, and he always treated me without charge.

While watching the TV news one night, I saw a flash about a Buddhist gathering in Melbourne, and noticed a familiar face among the monks involved: *Santitthito*, who I'd not seen since 1973! I managed to track him down and requested him to give a talk the next Sunday in my place. I notified people and many more than usual came on that day so we held it on the lawn beside the flat. We kept him supplied with lemonade as he spoke, but he was like a camel, and drank so many glasses that he had to get up halfway to go to the toilet. He had remained within the monastic system, and meeting him again assured me that I had not done the wrong thing in going off on my own, even though I lacked the safety-net, so to speak, that he had.

At one point, Thanh came from Florida to visit me and stayed for two weeks, but being the overly-romantic guy he was, soon fell in love with one of our Aussie friends, a married woman quite a bit older than him; I don't know if his feelings were reciprocated, but I wasn't very pleased with him.

During a visit back to Gawler, a letter arrived from England for mum, and she couldn't imagine who it was from; she asked me to read it for her, and I hadn't gone far when she realized it was from someone who'd been her first boy-friend when she was working as a house-maid in Wallasey; that was over 60 years before! She'd been very fond of him ~ his name was Jim ~ but they drifted apart because as a plumber's apprentice, he had to work odd hours and wasn't always able to meet her when she had time off. She'd then met my dad, but had never forgotten Jim. He had also not forgotten her. He told her that he'd raised a family, but had never really been happy with his wife, and some time after she died, he tried to trace my mother, going to Burwardsley and making inquiries there. Eventually, he met someone who told him she'd gone to Australia, and gave him the phone-number of Bob in Tattenhall, and from him got mum's address in Gawler. Well, she was over-the-moon for the rest of the day and the next; she always said that she'd married the wrong man. But poor dad didn't share her joy, and said to her, "You're not going to go to him, are you?"

"Of course not!" she said, but the idea of doing so if dad died first stemmed from that letter. Meanwhile, she started to corre-

spond with him, and he sent her chocolates and other gifts, and even offered to pay for her ticket if she would visit him.



"It is important that we reflect upon the kindness of others. This realization is a fruit of cultivating empathy. We must recognize how our fortune is really dependent upon the cooperation and contributions of others. Every aspect of our present well-being is due to hard work on the part of others. As we look around us at the buildings we live and work in, the roads we travel, the clothes we wear, or the food we eat, we must acknowledge that all are provided by others. None of these would exist for us to enjoy and make use of were it not for the kindness of so many people unknown to us. As we contemplate in this manner, our appreciation for others grows, as does our empathy and closeness to them."

~ The Dalai Lama: *An Open Heart* ~

It is a peculiar conceit of many so-called religious people that they think they know everything to be known; this is probably because, feeling insecure and miniscule in the immensity of the universe, they grasp at things that give them a much-needed feeling of security, hence the continuation of untenable doctrines and beliefs that should have been discarded long ago.

10AGAIN IN MALAYSIA

In '91, I felt the urge to travel, so took leave of my supporters and flew to Singapore, where I spent a few days before going to Muar. At the bus-station there, while waiting for someone to pick me up and take me to the Buddhist Society, a young woman came up to me and asked if I were a Buddhist. I told her that, in order to answer her, she must first tell me what she understood by the term 'Buddhist,' as it might be different from my understanding of it. She said she didn't know much about Buddhism, so couldn't really tell me. However, it was an opening that led to other things. She went on to tell me that her father ~ who she'd loved dearly ~ had died not long before, and she was very distressed by this, and, far from finding solace in anyone, had lost her faith in humanity; she complained that people were hypocrites. At this, I had a flash of insight, and interrupted her, saying: "Yes, we are, aren't we?" and explained that we are all hypocrites, not because we want or try to be, but just because it is part of the condition of unenlightened life.

Just then, my ride came, and I went off, but met this woman again on several occasions, and explained a little more to her in a way she could understand, thus putting her mind more at ease. Meeting her was an auspicious beginning of what was to be an overall good trip in Malaysia; it was not planned or predestined, but neither do I consider it an accident, as things don't happen just by themselves, but as the result of causes ripening together at certain points in time; all things have causes ~ *countless* causes ~ and are therefore not accidents but incidents or events. And although we often say that things go wrong when they don't turn out as we would like, this is not so; things *don't* go wrong, they *happen*, and it's up to us to see what we can do about or with them.

During one talk in the Buddhist Society, I spoke of Siddhartha seeing the Four Startling Sights ~ an old person, a sick person, a corpse, and an ascetic ~ and said that, contrary to what the

books say about this, I could not accept that he was seeing such things for the first time in his life, but that, on this occasion, his mind must have been particularly sensitive, and it was *as if* he were seeing them for the first time.

At this, the president of the Buddhist Society stood up rather irately, and practically threatened me with damnation, saying that people who distort the scriptures will go to Hell! *Echoes of medieval Christianity!* I had visions of witch-hunts and people being stretched on the rack or burnt at the stake, merely because they were slightly different in some way, or didn't conform to the prevailing norm!

Well, that man and I obviously see things in different ways, but I can't imagine the Buddha, who gave us the *Kalama Sutta*, and urged us to investigate things and find out for ourselves, saying things like that. I will quote here from a book called, *Insights For The Age of Aquarius*, by *Gina Cerminara*, published in 1973, a book which I would like to see become required reading in all high schools, as it is full of practical wisdom. She includes a quote from another book, *An American Bible*, by *Elbert Hubbard*:

"In courts of law, the phrase, 'I believe' has no standing. Never a witness gives testimony but that he is cautioned thus: 'Tell us what you know, not what you believe.'

"In theology, belief has always been regarded as more important than that which our senses say is so. Almost without exception, 'belief' is a legacy, an importation ~ something borrowed, an echo, and often an echo of an echo.

"The creed of the future will begin, 'I know,' not 'I believe.' And this creed will not be forced upon the people.

"It will carry with it no coercion, no blackmail, no promise of an eter-

nal life of idleness and ease if you accept it, and no threat of hell if you don't.

"It will have no paid, professional priesthood, claiming honors, rebates and exemptions, nor will it hold estates free from taxation. It will not organize itself into a system, marry itself to the State, and call on the police for support. It will be so reasonable, so in the line of self-preservation, that no sane man or woman will reject it.

"As a suggestion and first rough draft, we submit this:

"I know that I am here in a world where nothing is permanent but change, and that in degree, I myself can change the form of things and influence a few people; and that I am influenced by the example and by the work of men who are no longer alive.

"And that the work I now do will in degree influence people who may live after my life has changed into other forms..."

Mrs. Tan ~ whose husband I'd visited before he died of cancer ~ knowing I was working on a new book, invited me to stay in her home so I would have more peace. I accepted, thinking her sincere, and moved into her large house, where indeed, the conditions were more conducive. I was able to get on well with my book there, and after some weeks, it was ready for printing in a nearby press. This was the first edition of *BECAUSE I CARE*.

During this trip in Malaysia, I visited the refugee-camp at Sungai Besi near K.L. several times to give talks and encourage the

people, and thinking to help them, put out a call in Malacca and Muar for used clothes. The response was such that two truckloads were collected, and someone offered to deliver them to the Camp, where they were unloaded at the temple under the supervision of the Camp security personnel. It is true that some of the clothes were not very good (some people had even put in old and not-too-clean underwear!), but many were.

Years before, Wong had told someone that if he reached the age of 40 and was still single, he would become a monk and follow me. Now, here he was at 38, about to get married, and invited me to the wedding. I attended, and gave him and his wife my heartfelt blessings, but I was sorry, really, to see him go.

I set off on an extensive speaking-tour which took me all over West Malaysia, and during it, developed a cough which became progressively worse and defied all the medicines, syrups and lozenges that people loaded me up with. It came to a head at the casino-resort at *Genting Highlands*, just outside of Kuala Lumpur. I'd gone there to give a talk to the Buddhists who worked there, and they'd put me ~ together with another monk ~ to stay overnight in the hotel. Early the next morning, I awoke with a terrible pain in my chest, and thought I was having a heart-attack. I didn't say anything, as the other monk was still asleep, but lay there for a while trying to suppress the pain. When I managed to get up, I sneezed, and almost collapsed from the pain. Still, I said nothing, and after breakfast, someone came to take me to a nearby town for a talk in the temple there. We arrived before lunch, and people were preparing food for me, but I felt so bad that I slumped to the floor with my back against a wall. They were unconcerned, and didn't show me to my room. I told them I didn't want to eat anything, and they went off. By evening, I pulled myself together enough to give my talk, and then Wong ~ who I'd called earlier to ask if he would come out and pick me up ~ arrived to take me back to K.L. I stayed with him for a few days, and he could see I was unwell; he later said that I wasn't my usual cheery self, and it was true. Anyway, someone else insisted on taking me to see a doctor, and I credit him ~ *Dr. Joseph Soo* ~ with saving my life, because, after examining me, he sent me for a chest x-ray at a Seventh Day Adventist hospital, and paid for it himself; the results showed a

shadow on my left lung; I was diagnosed with pneumonia! Dr. Soo put me on antibiotics, and I slowly began to recover, without the need for hospitalization.

I had quite a rough time; but didn't let it interrupt my appointments. I returned to Malacca, where D.V. arranged for me to stay with some of his friends, as he was unable to offer me accommodation at the time. One night, when he came to pick me up and take me for a talk, I was coughing so badly that I could hardly stand up.

"You can't go like this," he said; "You'll have to cancel!"

"I'm going," I said, "Even if I die. Come on." I'd been to this particular place before, you see, and always got a good hearing; the people were receptive and attentive; had it been a place where people were not interested, I might have cancelled, but this place was special. When we got there, as soon as I entered the door, my cough stopped. Halfway through my talk, I realized I was feeling great, and afterwards, on the way home, D.V. said, "I couldn't believe it ~ before and after: what a difference!"

"That is the power of the Dharma," I said, "It works through the mind on the body."

But it was a temporary reprieve; I still had far to go in my recovery. A few days later, back in Muar, a talk had been arranged in Mrs. Tan's house. Aware of my condition, some people tried to persuade me to rest and not talk. I told them not to feel sorry for me because I was sick, but to be attentive to what I would say, as I would be speaking from the *center of the storm*, from direct experience, with authority, and not from mere theory. I said that I didn't feel sad because my body was sick, and therefore was not suffering, and actually, they should feel happy for me.

"Happy? But you are sick!"

"Yes, I'm sick, but I'm lucky; lucky because it is the worst sickness I've ever had; however, instead of feeling sad about it, I use it to compare and measure how fortunate I'd been to remain healthy and free from serious sickness for so long until now; this sickness reminds me about this and about how everything is impermanent. The Dharma enables me to turn it around."

Back in Malacca, there was a water-shortage, as the local reservoir had been polluted and had to be drained. It went on for several weeks, and was very inconvenient for most people, but as the saying goes, "It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good." Now, D.V. worked for his father in the pump-business he'd set up years before, and they had a great increase in sales.

For the first time, I visited a Buddhist Society in *Johor Bharu* named *Metta Lodge*, where there was so much emphasis on 'making merit,' that breakfast consisted of about 50 dishes, which was overdoing it a bit. I wondered what they would have said ~ all the people who came to offer this food ~ if I'd somehow managed to eat it all. Many of them clearly had such high expectations of monks that disappointment was unavoidable. Like moths to a candle-flame, they were fascinated at this time by a Thai superstar-monk who had been *discovered* and introduced to Malaysia by Mahinda, and was already well-known as charismatic and handsome; I wasn't impressed, however, as his books were full of photos of him posing like a movie-star, clearly aware of his good looks and the effects he had upon others. I recall thinking then that he was too handsome for his own good. His fame went to his head, and he was later brought down by a scandal that blew up around him. Whether he was guilty of the things he was accused of or not, I cannot say. He denied the charges, but his adamant refusal to submit to a DNA-test cast doubts upon his integrity.

Until then, he had many followers in Malaysia, Singapore, Australia and other countries, and was regarded and received as an *arahant* in many places ~ including MBMC in Penang ~ and white cloths spread before him to walk on and 'consecrate'; some folks then took these cloths home and treated them as objects of veneration, like holy relics; he was rapidly becoming a cult-figure, and did nothing to discourage this unhealthy trend, and he must surely have been aware of it; in fact, by *not* discouraging it, he tacitly *encouraged* it and caused people to become dependent upon him. In my opinion, this was his biggest mistake; he allowed people to worship him, and eventually, many people became confused and lost their faith. Of course, they lost their faith because it was misplaced, but he, in his position, should have used his influence to correct this and teach

that a Buddhist's faith should be in the Dharma, so that nothing can shake it. He should have explained that personality is insubstantial, hollow and empty, and will only let us down; like sand, it's not a good foundation, and will crumble when troubles arise. Instead of doing this, however, he allowed people to become addicted to him ~ quite the opposite of the Buddhist Way.

Sadly, this kind of thing is not uncommon; numerous teachers and gurus are more concerned with promoting themselves than with helping people to understand Dharma; in reality, they are not teachers but cheaters!

So often I have seen how the excessive respect paid by lay-Buddhists to monks and nuns has a corruptive effect, and can become more intoxicating than whiskey. One must be on guard against it. It happens, in the case of the laity, when there is more faith than wisdom, and in the case of the monks, when there is more self-esteem than wisdom; in both cases it happens because the central place of the Dharma is neglected or forgotten. Consequently, when scandals like this arise, many people lose their faith, whereas if it had been solidly rooted in the Dharma, they would not have been so shaken, and would still have been able to carry on.

Long ago, I rejected the personality-cult of Christianity, and now, free from belief in Jesus as a savior, regard him as a teacher. I do not mind that he was not free from imperfections; a person doesn't need to be perfect in order for me to learn from him something useful to me in my own life; in fact, it's maybe better that I see his imperfections, as it is easier to relate to him than it would be to someone perfect, if there is such a thing. Christians are not allowed, or refuse to see, the imperfections of Jesus; the Church has glossed over and explained them away, and made him into an unrealistic figure. The image it has projected of him is of someone so far beyond us as to be impossible of emulation; this is what comes of deification, of regarding a person as divine instead of human. Rather than being an elevation, it is really a degradation, and renders meaningless the attempts of a teacher to lead people to higher things than they have hitherto been aware of, and to indicate the potential of being human.

Milarepa, Tibet's most famous and respected yogi, was once requested by the people of a certain village to stay with them as their guru. Gratefully declining, however, he said that if he were to stay with them, there would soon come a time when they would focus critically on his manners and behavior, and no longer listen to him when he explained the Dharma, and that would be to their detriment. It would be far better, he said, if he kept himself at a distance. What was he saying? That the Dharma is most important, and should not be confused with personality. If only we would realize and remember this, it would be so much easier for us to understand the Dharma.

I spent 6 months in Malaysia this time, during which Piyasilo made the news big-time, but not in a way he wished (and oh, did he crave power and fame!) Since his downfall and expulsion from Seck Kia Eenh in '78, he'd moved to a Thai temple in K.L., but soon wore out his welcome there. He then went to London, to join Sangharakkshita's organization, *Friends of the Western Buddhist Order* (FWBO), but they also soon saw through him, and he was sent packing. He next went to California, trying to get a toehold, but people there faxed KL to ask about him and when informed of his character, rejected him. Back to Malaysia he came again and set up an organization ~ I mentioned earlier about his organizational ability ~ called *FOBM: Friends of Buddhism Malaysia*. But, instead of acknowledging the source of his ideas for this, he bad-mouthed Sangharakkshita and the FWBO. Then, as time passed and he attracted people to him, he started to attack everyone, including the self-styled *Chief High Priest of Malaysia and Singapore*, Dhammada. He was so paranoid and insecure, that he had to strive to be Number One, and of course, in this, he failed. His attacks were always veiled and without names, but everyone could tell who his targets were.

Finally, unable to take any more, some of his disciples ~ oh yes, he considered he had *disciples*, this foolish idea! ~ exposed him and his misdeeds became public knowledge, and appeared on the front pages of Malaysia's newspapers. Confronted by some Thai monks, he promised to disrobe, but not surprisingly, didn't keep his word; his word meant nothing at all; everything about him was a lie. He tried to blackmail his supporters into staying with him, saying that if they deserted him, he would become a

Christian and attack Buddhism, but it didn't work. Only after some months was he prevailed upon to disrobe. His place was closed, and he went into hiding, with one or two of his die-hard supporters. A snake is always a snake, however, and he continued to work his mischief.

In K.L., someone by the name of Charles ~ who I'd known since 1986 ~ introduced me to a couple who were visiting from Australia; thus I came to know Bok and Pearl, who were themselves Malaysians, but living in Sydney, where I saw them whenever I was there over the years until now as I write this. They are gracious people, and have been very supportive of me, organizing talks for me whenever I'm there.

Also, at this time, I was told Khantipalo had disrobed. "How can it be?" I said, "He's been a monk for over 30 years!" I knew, of course, that he had turned from Theravada towards Vajrayana and had become more flexible, and some people were upset about this, but I found it hard to believe he would disrobe. It was true, however, as I was later to find out.

My trip in Malaysia almost over, I stayed at Mrs. Tan's again, but she was quite different towards me this time. Other people could see the change in her, too. I racked my brain to see what I might have done to cause her change of attitude towards me, but could find nothing; it wasn't as if I'd made a pass at her or anything like that. I later asked other people if they knew what had caused it, but they either didn't know or wouldn't say, and my several letters to her from Melbourne went unanswered. The only thing I could think of that might explain it was the US-based Tibetan Rinpoche she was quite close to; she was a wealthy woman, and he might have felt threatened by me, and said something to her. It remains a mystery until now.

Back in Singapore, I stayed with Dhammika again in a new place he and his supporters had set up, and which they'd called *Buddha-Dhamma Mandala Society*, but he is like me in several ways, one of which is that he is difficult to stay with. One day, unable to use a typewriter, he asked me to type a letter for him, which I willingly did. While doing it, I said, "Why don't you learn to type? If I can, you can" (I type with just three fingers, pecking

at the keyboard with my right index finger, my left index finger on the space-bar, and my next-to-last left finger on the shift, but I manage alright and am quite fast). Sarcastically, as if I were criticizing him, he said: "*That's for sure!*" Now, why did he feel a need to say this? He never learned to type well, and as late as 2004, when I read through a new book he'd written, I knew he'd typed it, although he never admitted it; there were so many typing and spelling errors, and throughout it, he'd spelled 'alms-bowl' 'alms-bowe'! Not only is his hand-writing childish scrawl, and his typing horrible, but I think he must be dyslexic, which is not his fault, of course, but he ought not to be so arrogant!

Some students of Singapore's Polytechnic invited me to give a talk, and afterwards, one of them asked me what was rather an impertinent question (Piyasilo had been active here, and I got the feeling she was one of his followers, and probably thought he was 'the best'). She said: "What have you achieved in your life?" ~ a question to 'measure' me.' I thought for a few moments, then said: "I survived." Whether she understood my reply or not was immaterial, but to survive day-by-day, when we might die of a thousand-and-one causes ~ as many people do ~ is something to ponder on and appreciate.

Like most people, I guess, at times I get frustrated and depressed, and wonder where I'm going; sometimes, I cannot see the next step ahead of me, and it seems like I've come to a dead end; sometimes, when things are difficult, and there seem to be no results ~ or I get results other than what I want ~ I wish I had never gotten into this line of things; and sometimes, death would not be unwelcome ~ would be a release. But whenever I feel like this, I turn around and look back on the way by which I reached the present. Do you think it was as straight as an arrow? Of course it wasn't, not for more than a short distance at a time, but twisted and turned, climbed and fell and sometimes even disappeared below ground, only to reappear elsewhere. Often, there were obstacles, which, at the time, seemed insurmountable; the road was often pitted with pot-holes of despair; there was suffering and sickness, lethargy and blues, times when I was depressed and stuck in the doldrums, and didn't know what to do; there were times when I was lonely and sad, times of danger and fear, and times when the road ran near to madness and

hell. It is a miracle I survived, yet survive I did and survive I do at the time of writing this, and usually, I'm happy about this.



"Talk sense to a fool and he calls you foolish."

~ Euripides - Greek Dramatist, 480 - 406 B.C.E. ~

No-one can please everyone. Abide by your principles, and if people agree, so much the good; if they disagree, don't change your mind just to suit them.

11

MY FATHER DIES

My mother's 80th birthday was coming up, so I flew back to visit her; I'd not told her I was coming, so she got a surprise. Glen and Harold had also come from England to visit. Meanwhile, over in Melbourne, some people from the old group had got together and decided to rent another place for me so we could continue our meetings. In late November, one of them drove over to collect me and my stuff, and put me up at his home until a place had been found. *Khanh* was a newcomer to the group, and must have seen I had to use the toilet like everyone else or something, and realized I was just an ordinary mortal, and started to behave quite irrationally. I was glad to get away from him to the flat that had been found for me. We resumed our Sunday meetings, with Tuan translating when he could make it.

It was while I was in Hawthorne that I met Mrs. Cam Nguyen, a lady prominent in the Vietnamese community; she used to attend our Sunday sessions. So, too, I made contact with a woman in Adelaide named Joy, who had got my address from one of my books. We began to correspond frequently.

Then, one day, Khantipalo ~ or I should say, ex-Khantipalo, who had reverted to his old name, Lawrence Mills ~ came to visit me. Dressed in ordinary clothes and sporting a pony-tail ~ as favored by followers of the particular form of Tibetan Buddhism he'd adopted, *Dzog-Chen*, though why a pony-tail should be considered *de rigueur* I really don't know. It had been some years since we'd last met, and it was good to see him again; he was much more human than he'd been before, and I admired him for the step he'd taken, because at his age, it must have been very difficult, as there was no chance of him entering the work-force again. I got the impression that he had no particular direction in his mind; that was to come later, and he eventually established a meditation-center in Northern Queensland, where he settled down with the Sri Lankan lady he'd married.

At the end of March '92, we participated in the annual *Clean-up Australia Day*, when people go out to pick up rubbish. This campaign was initiated a few years earlier by a man named *Ian Kiernan*. While sailing his yacht solo around the world, he was so appalled by the amount of garbage floating in the seas that when he returned to Sydney, he informed some friends of his observations, and asked them to join him in doing something about it on a practical level. And so, because he cared enough, instead of just thinking: "Oh, it's terrible, but I didn't do it, so it's not my responsibility," it has had a ripple-effect to the extent that an estimated 400,000 people took part in the clean-up nationwide, and every year since there have been more.

More kudos to Ian Kiernan for his courage and determination, for striking a match and lighting the lamps of others waiting by, unaware of the matches in their own hands! Many of us wait for others to make the first move and will then follow, hesitantly at first, perhaps, and often glancing around to make sure we are not alone, but with increasing confidence as we go on, so that later, even if we do find ourselves alone at times, it won't matter.

Now, I don't know Ian Kiernan, or anything of his religious affiliations (if any), but I doubt if he calls himself a Buddhist and burns incense to an image of the Buddha or Avalokitesvara for help or salvation. I do know this, however: in doing what he did, he was practicing what Buddhists call *Dharma* or the *Way*, even if he was not aware of it; and in that sense, he is a Buddhist, much

moreso, in fact, than people who call themselves 'Buddhists' but who do not live by the Dharma. You see, contrary to what many people think, Dharma is not something mysterious, esoteric or airy-fairy, that can be understood by only very few highly-intellectual or learned people; nor is it something to believe in and pray to for salvation, but something of ordinary everyday life, by following which we can help to make this world ~ *our* world, not *mine* or *yours* ~ a little bit better. Scattering garbage not only pollutes, destroys and causes problems for others, but is also an indication of the mental state of those who do it: careless, dull and stupid. Cleaning up where others have despoiled, however, signifies caring, thoughtful and responsive minds. What we do is a reflection of what and how we think. And it is almost certain that those who go out to pick up garbage one day of the year, will not scatter garbage themselves throughout the year. And not only does this activity have a ripple-effect, spreading outwards from the man who started the campaign, but also has a spill-over-effect in those who get involved, for it probably will not stop at just garbage, if it began there; it will affect other areas of their lives, too. It is nothing less than a spiritual activity!

From my Sunday-school days ~ which weren't a waste of time after all ~ I recall a little song about foundations, based upon one of Jesus' parables; it is sound Dharma:

The foolish man built his house upon the sand
 And the rain came tumbling down.
 The rain came down and the floods came up
 And the house on the sand went *c-r-a-s-h!*

The wise man built his house upon the rock
 And the rain came tumbling down.
 The rain came down and the floods came up,
 But the house of the rock stood firm.

If we would examine our motives for what we do, and try to replace belief, fear, greed, compulsion and external authority with understanding and responsibility, our lives would rest on much firmer foundations than they do. We would then do what is right simply because it is right, and for no other reason.

I spent almost a year in that flat, and then accepted the invitation of someone over in Springvale to stay with him; His name was Quy, and he was single at that time and lived alone in his house; he was also vegetarian, which made things easier for me. While I was there, a lady brought her teenage son to me, and asked me to help him, saying he had a terrible temper. So entered my life Trung, and would remain with me for some years, causing me many headaches. I often wanted to chase him off, and sometimes did so; he also got mad with me on many occasions, but we were somehow reconciled. I guess there was some karmic-connection with him from the past.

It was alright at Quy's for a while, but when he announced his intention to go to Vietnam in order to get married, I realized that he'd invited me there so I would take care of the place while he was away. I didn't mind this, but upon his return a month later, he wasn't the same person, and made it quite clear that it was time I left. When one door closes, another door opens, however, and while I was there, I'd been introduced to a Chinese temple not far away known as *Bright Moon Buddhist Society*. I gave a talk there, and it was later arranged that I should go to stay there. But first, I availed myself of a ride back to Adelaide on a coach-trip organized by Mrs. Cam Nguyen, who often arranged trips to different parts. I had arranged with Joy to stay with her for a while, even though she was a widow and lived alone, not a very wise thing to do, but as with the people in Manila jail, I knew my own mind.

Reaching Adelaide, I left the coach and Joy met me in her car and took me to her place. I spent two weeks there, and did some jobs around the place for her; she treated me kindly, but was the possessive-type and wanted to control me, not knowing that this was impossible. She drove me out to Gawler and left me there, and after a while, I returned to Melbourne yet again, to take up residence in Bright Moon.

Now, this place was in an ideal location, beside a busy road, and people would see the sign outside and stop by out of curiosity. But it was run more like a business than a Buddhist center, and there were things going on that suggested a cooking of the books. I wasn't aware of this until I'd been there for some time, of course. Something I did notice almost as soon as I went to

stay there, however, was a *presence*, and I said to a volunteer named Lam, "There's something here, you know."

"How can there be," he said, "with Buddha here?"

"That's not Buddha," I said, "but only an image." There really was something there, and I felt and heard it so many times. The place was very large, set in a big block of land, and had been built as a sports-complex, so there was a gym, a sauna, squash-courts, and even a swimming-pool, all unused now. It was then used for some time as a restaurant before being bought and turned into a temple. A caretaker would stay overnight there, but apart from him, I was alone in the place when everyone went home. Now, I've mentioned earlier in my story that I am rather sensitive to spirits or ghosts, and I was no less so here. I often sensed something outside my tiny room, and when I used the bathroom and toilet at the rear in the early morning, there was so much inexplicable noise at times that I thought the roof might fall in on me! I began to call the presence *Jeffrey*. One night, when I was getting water from the drinking-fountain, something pushed me from behind and almost knocked me down, but I was alone in the place at the time; could it have been Jeffrey, seeking attention? I tried to do something for him, meditating and sending positive thoughts, but had no success in exorcizing him.

Months after I went to stay there, the temple sponsored a monk from China, and prepared a nice room for him at the rear of the temple, sparing no expense. It wasn't long after *Miao Chin* got there that he also sensed something; he heard doors opening and closing in the night.

I gave very few talks during my stay there, not because I didn't want, but because people there didn't request any; the few that I did give were to outsiders, like members of the Buddhist groups from various universities. What I had to give, the Dull Moonies didn't want; what they wanted, I either didn't have or wouldn't give. Like in so many Chinese temples where I'd stayed before, they were concerned only with ceremonies and making money. Interest in or desire for Dharma was noticeably lacking.

A Dutch nun once came to give a talk there ~ a dogmatic and forceful woman who had a speech impediment; she was unable

to pronounce the letter 's' correctly; it always came out as 'sh,' so you can imagine how it sounded when she spoke about 'sitting in meditation'!

One day, a young woman in her thirties named *Loi* came to talk with me. She was Vietnamese-Chinese ~ that is, ethnic Chinese from Vietnam ~ and said she was interested in Buddhism, being from a nominally-Buddhist family. I had no idea what this first meeting would lead to, but before long, she brought her teenage nephew, *Phong*, and younger niece, Liz, to meet me. Loi's marriage was in the middle of breaking up; I don't really know why; she hadn't been married long, but I think she really hadn't tried to make it work; her husband was a nice-enough guy. Anyway, she became very supportive of me, and often took me for Sunday-drives, with Phong and Trung; it was so nice to get away from the silliness in the temple; anything was better than that! Phong was pretty bright, and seemed genuinely interested in Dharma, much more so than Trung. More about them all later.

In October 1993, I'd had enough of Dull Moon and felt the urge to travel again, so got a ticket to Malaysia, and just as I was about to leave, I came down with 'flu, so decided to delay my departure for a week, preferring to be sick in Australia than overseas. Two days after I did so, my father, who'd been very ill for over a year, and in and out of hospital quite frequently, died. For him, it was a release as he was 84 and had suffered a lot through his illness; moreover, there was clearly little chance of him recovering. It was not a shock for me to learn of his death, therefore, as I had been expecting it. Mum left it several hours before calling me to tell me he'd gone, which was a bit late, but I immediately meditated for him.

At first, I didn't intend to go for the funeral, feeling there was nothing I could do for him that I couldn't do where I was, but the Dull Moonies were a bit shocked at this, and insisted I go, even getting the round-trip plane-ticket for me. It was good that they did so, because when I got home, I felt his presence around the place as if he were still there, as he might well have been, even though his body was in the funeral-parlor. I lay on his bed and meditated, trying to tune in to him and send him positive thoughts; at night, I sat outside his work-shed where he used to

potter around, and sang his favorite song: "English Country Garden". I got a lot of energy coming through, and felt good.

I was displeased, however, by mum's decision to go to England; she'd already bought a ticket and started packing, and disposing of things she didn't want or wouldn't need any more. I remonstrated with her, saying it was too soon, that it was winter there and she'd suffer from the cold; also that her friends would not be impressed, but she was adamant. I knew she wanted to see her old boyfriend, and I lost a lot of respect for her because of that.

Because she was a Christian, she had the funeral conducted accordingly, with a minister of the Salvation Army presiding; about thirty people attended. I stated my intention to speak, too. The minister spoke first, and said quite a lot about God, Jesus, life-after-death, Heaven, and so on. Then it was my turn to speak, and although I'd prepared some notes beforehand, I spoke extemporaneously. The gist of my talk was as follows:

"It is not a strange thing that we should grow old and die. The strange thing, on the contrary, is that we should live as long as we do! And who would wish to live forever? We get bored with our limited lives as it is!

"My father couldn't complain that life had short-changed him; he lived for 84 years and witnessed many momentous changes in the world in this most-momentous century of all. And it is appropriate that the father should precede the son into the Unknown; this is the natural order of things; it would be more sad if it were the other way around.

"It is my opinion, after many years of experience, that a funeral-ceremony is more for the living than for the dead, as the dead have left us to follow their destiny, while the living remain ~ hopefully to learn more about the life that is ours for just a while. At a funeral-ceremony, we are faced with the stark reality of life: that we will all go the same way as the one who has just gone. And death, strangely enough, is the key to life; instead of being something morbid to think about, it provides us with an incentive to live life more fully, while we have the opportunity to do so.

"Where we came from before we came into this world, and where we will go when we leave it, no-one knows. There are

many concepts and beliefs about this matter, but they often conflict with and contradict each other. We may believe this or that, but to be honest, we simply do not know.

“**B**uddhism, too, has its concept about what happens after we die, but since I, as a monk, have had no direct personal experience of it, I am not qualified to say anything about it; were I to do so, I would merely be repeating what I have read or heard from others, and to me, that is not good enough. I prefer what Confucius is reported to have said when someone asked him: “Master, what happens after we die?” He replied: “Why do you want to know about that? You don’t even know how to live now!”

“**B**ut, although I know nothing about life-after-death, I *have* had some experience of *this* life, and am therefore somewhat qualified to speak about it.

“**M**y father was nominally a Christian, as that was the only religion he knew about. But names mean very little, and sometimes less than nothing. However, he belonged to the religion that we all belong to, and cannot get away from, but which very few of us know much about, as it is so ordinary and every-day: the Religion of Life and Living. There are differences between us, of course ~ differences in race, nationality, religion, politics, culture, language and so on ~ but they are not nearly as important as we make them out to be. The similarities, the *common denominators*, are more numerous and much more important: people everywhere wish to be happy and free from suffering; all have hopes, fears and aspirations. And if we understand our own feelings, hopes and desires, we will also understand others, and know what to do in our relationships and dealings with them, for they feel basically the same as us. The practice of the Religion of Life and Living, therefore, necessarily begins with ourselves, but should not end there. From understanding ourselves, we must extend our understanding outwards and expand our horizons to embrace an ever-greater portion of the world we live in.

“**L**ife is precious, but the only place and time we have for living is **HERE** and **NOW**, for in reality, the past and the future do not exist. As far as we are concerned ~ each one of us ~ there is only the Here and Now; we cannot live anywhere else. Just try to live anywhere other than where you are: you will find that,

wherever you are, it is always HERE. And whatever stage of life you might be in ~ infancy, youth, maturity or old age ~ it is always NOW. It is therefore of great importance to live as close to the present as possible.

“Science has shown that nothing can be completely destroyed without trace; things are merely transformed into other things. So, we should consider death as a transformation; the life which informs our bodies here will flow on into other forms.

“So now, I hope and pray ~ and I’m sure you will join with me in this ~ that the person, force or energy which was my father in this life will go on into a higher and better life, will go on fearlessly and with a light heart. May he be well, courageous and safe now, wherever, however and whatever he might be”.

After the service almost everyone there came up to me and said things like, “You gave us so much to think about!” The best part about it all, however, was that both Sheila and Frank ~ who have never been at all religious (I am from a family of ‘heathens’ ~ apart from my mother ~ who have not the slightest interest in things of the spirit) ~ both had tears in their eyes, and Frank was so stuck for words that his handshake was followed by a hug! I was amazed, as he is an unemotional person and we had never been close. I thought: “If *only* Dad could see this now! It would almost have been worth dying for!”

Where my father had gone, I don’t know, but *do* know that I could not think badly about him; such thoughts did not come into my mind any more, and I was happy about this, for he had his negativities, as we all do. I must confess that there were many times when I thought badly about him, but these burdens had been put down and I must express my gratitude to him for all the help he gave me, directly and indirectly. He wasn’t the best father in the world, perhaps, but neither was he the worst. He was, simply, *my Dad*. And from him, perhaps, I got my love of books.

At the funeral-service, Sheila introduced me to one of her neighbors, a Malaysian lady by the name of *Annie*, who told me she’d heard about me from a friend of hers in Penang. I asked who it was, but the name she gave ~ *Yeap Tor Hor* ~ didn’t ring

a bell, and I have a good memory for names. It turned out that we had never met, but more about him in a while.

That afternoon, the phone rang. It was Wilanie, the Sri Lankan lady in Adelaide, wanting to know my number in Melbourne, as some friends of hers wished to invite me to preside at a memorial service for their late mother the following Saturday; she was very pleased, therefore, to learn that I was there in Gawler. I told her I intended to return to Melbourne on the Friday as I was booked to fly out to Malaysia on the Sunday. She requested me to delay my departure yet again, assuring me that her friends would pay any cancellation fees. To accommodate them, and also because I saw an opportunity to share something of the Dharma, I agreed to her request, and made a further postponement of my trip.

That Saturday, I was picked up and taken to the house where the ceremony was to be. Many people had assembled, and after a sumptuous lunch, I began my talk, which went on for about two hours. At the end of it, someone whom I didn't at first recognize came up to me and said that he had enjoyed my talk. Recognition then dawned: it was a man with whom I'd had some disagreement way back in 1975 and had not seen since. How good it is to resolve old conflicts and allow the wounds to finally heal!

This was yet another spin-off or follow-up of my dad's death; but there were others, and I recount some of them here to show how one thing leads to another in chain-like sequence. There is really no beginning or end to anything; everything has causes. Dad's death was not an accident but an effect, and led ~ like everything does ~ to other things. After this talk, there was a request for another talk that evening, also to Sri Lankans. There was no Sri Lankan monk in Adelaide at that time, nor, it seemed, any monk who spoke English well, and so, whenever I was back there and the Sri Lankans knew it, they invited me to give talks. They were concerned ~ and rightly so ~ that their young people, who have grown up there and whose first language is English, do not understand their religion well, and might lose touch with it. Some of my talks there went on for almost five hours!

Between the talks in the afternoon and evening, Wilanie discovered I was suffering from pains in my chest and left arm, so

called a Sri Lankan doctor to come over and check me. Now, for the sake of anyone else who might be suffering from similar pains, I'd like to say that I'd had these pains, on and off, since 1976, but all the tests I'd undergone in various places, revealed nothing; all I was ever told was that it was not my heart at fault; I was never told what it was. The pain was so bad at times that it felt as if I were being stabbed or having a heart-attack. And earlier that year, in Melbourne, I had a prolonged bout of this pain that spread from my chest down my left arm into my hand, where it had never been before, and so concerned was I by this that I went, late one night, to the emergency-ward of a large hospital nearby and had an ECG, but again, it showed my heart to be normal. The pain, this time, lasted for several months and was quite debilitating; I could neither sit, stand nor walk for long without the pain increasing; the only position that I felt reasonably comfortable in was lying down; it quite curtailed my activities. The numerous acupuncture sessions I underwent, far from bringing any relief, only exacerbated the pain, and caused considerable bruising; the copious draughts of bitter Chinese medicine and Western analgesics also had no effect.

Dr. Karunaratna ~ for such was the name of the doctor who came to check me ~ asked if I'd ever had a neck x-ray, and suggested I get one done, as he felt the trouble might be from pinched nerves in my neck. That was strange, because not long before, I'd thought that the pains might be caused by nerves. Over the years, I'd been given various 'diagnoses,' including a blockage of the vital-energy (*'chi'*), inflammation of the rib-cartilage, and even *spirit-possession!* Dr Karu's explanation made more sense than even the sanest-sounding of the others, and I resolved to follow it up on my return to Melbourne.

When I got back to Melbourne the next day, I was met at the airport by Trung and his dad, and on the way back to the temple, was asked if I'd like to visit a friend on the route. "Why not?" I said, and so we went. Upon arriving there, I was told that Tuan's father was near to death in hospital. I asked the Trung's dad if we might stop at the hospital next, so we went directly there. Making our way to the ward where he was confined, we found all his family gathered around his bed, on which he was lying in

a coma, connected to life-support apparatus, with tubes running in and out of him in all directions; it looked as if he had already gone. His family was standing numbly and quietly, and I said to Tuan that this was an appropriate time for a Dharma-talk; he agreed, and asked everyone to listen. I spoke of the need at that time for everyone to control their grief, which would not help the departing person in any way and might even impede him, and to think with one mind in sending him positive thoughts. He loved you, I said, just as you loved him, and if he is still aware of us now, he would wish you to be happy, not sad. We cannot bring him back but must let him go, and in doing so, you should now focus on the good times you shared with him, and think positively, in order to speed him on his way. As I spoke, Tuan noticed tears coming from his father's eyes; had he understood what I was saying? He died soon afterwards, and I was requested to speak at his funeral, which I did.

I couldn't get an appointment to see a neurologist in Melbourne before I flew out to Malaysia a few days later, as the waiting-list was too long, and by the time I did, my mother had already gone to England, instructing Sheila to sell all her furniture and other stuff, as she wouldn't be coming back. So she thought.

Wong met me at the airport with his wife and young daughter, and took me to stay in his new house, while I prepared to make another trip to India. The same friends who had taken me to see Dr. Soo in '91, knowing of my pains, took me to see him again. I told him what Dr Karunaratna had said, and he immediately made an appointment for me to see Malaysia's leading neurosurgeon, who was a personal friend of his. Dr Bala's clinic was crowded and I had to wait for several hours before being called into his examining-room, by which time, the x-rays that had been taken on my neck while I was waiting, were ready. Again, I was lucky to meet a kind and sympathetic doctor ~ the third in a row ~ and he showed me from the x-rays and explained in layman's terms, the cause of the pains that had troubled me on and off for so long. Not only this, but he told me it was quite a common complaint ~ known as *cervical spondylosis* ~ and that, in fact, he'd had it himself some years before, but it had responded to medication without requiring surgery. He said that a minor operation could fix it permanently but advised against it at my age,

as it might cause complications. He gave me some medication and I was happy to pay the bill of M\$150; it was such a relief to finally know the cause of the pains, as not-knowing was just as bad as the pains themselves! If anyone else has been suffering from this ailment, without knowing what it is, and reads this and gets some insight into it, my pain will not have been in vain; I have told of it here in case there are other sufferers of the same thing who might get some relief.

The medication worked and some weeks later, the pain subsided to such a degree that I no longer needed it. I've not had it badly since then, but if they return, I'll know better how to deal with them, and there will not be the fear that it is life-threatening.



"The book has been man's greatest triumph. Seated in my library, I live in a time-machine. In an instant I can be transmitted to any era, any part of the world, even to outer space.

"I have lived in every period of history. I have listened to the Buddha speak, marched with Alexander, sailed with the Vikings, ridden in canoes with Polynesians. I have been at the courts of Queen Elizabeth and Louis XIV; I have been a friend to Captain Nemo and have sailed with Captain Bligh on the *Bounty*. I have walked in the agora with Socrates and Plato, and listened to Jesus deliver the Sermon on the Mount. "Best of all, I can do it all again, at any moment. The books are there. I have only to reach up to the

shelves and take them down to relive the moments I have loved."

- Louis L'Amour: *The Sackett Companion*

"The hardest part about gaining any new idea is sweeping out the false idea occupying that niche. As long as that niche is occupied, evidence and proof and logical demonstration get nowhere. But once the niche is emptied of the wrong idea that has been filling it ~ once you can honestly say, "I don't know," then it becomes possible to get at the truth."

~ Robert A. Heinlein ~

12

STOLEN-STUFF SAGA

I bought a mountain-bike to take to India with me, but it was quite a heavy one, and I'd not ridden a bike for years, so my first long ride from Madras south to Mahaballipuram ~ a distance of about 65 kms ~ was hard-going, and I was quite worn out by the time I got there. I spent several days wandering around the ruins and stupendous rock-carvings, then went back to Madras. From there I took a train to Hyderabad, and had some difficulty finding a cheap hotel. I set off to visit the massive Golconda Fort a few kms away. I explored the lower ruins and climbed to the highest point. This had been the seat of a Muslim dynasty, which derived its wealth from nearby diamond-mines, and had long resisted the Moghul armies led by Aurangzeb; with ring after ring of fortifications, I could see how. The number of forts across the land, and museums bursting with weapons, are mute witness that Indians have been a martial race throughout history, and not just recently; war is strongly in

their blood, and peace not dear to their hearts, despite their claims to the contrary, and Gandhi's call to non-violence. Nor is it surprising, when Hinduism's main scriptures, certainly as understood by most Hindus ~ the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* ~ strongly seem to extol war and violence; all the heroes are warriors, and even their god, Krishna, instructs Arjuna to kill his relatives in the course of duty; there's no need to speak of Islam, as it's not an indigenous Indian religion, and its own history speaks for it anyway.

I made my way around Hyderabad, visiting mosques, museums, and of course, the famous Char Minar, but I could only guess at the former splendor of this city. Until today, although it is far from the sea, Hyderabad is renowned for its pearl-trade.

The great Buddha-image in the middle of an artificial lake between Hyderabad and its sister-city of Secunderabad was either still under construction when I was there or had fallen into the lake and had yet to be salvaged, so I didn't get to see it.

From Secunderabad, I went to Aurangabad, and visited Ajanta and Ellora again; it is always good to be there. I bought several kgs of geodes and crystals, and sent them off by sea-mail from Bombay, which was my next stop. Having seen little of this city during my earlier visits, I hired a guide to show me some of the sights by taxi, visiting the Parsee *Towers of Silence*, where the dead are exposed for the vultures to eat, a magnificent Jain temple, the *Hanging Gardens* (so called not because they hang, but because in the time of the British, criminals were hanged there), the world's largest open-air laundry, where they have such an efficient system that clothes seldom get lost or mixed up. Bombay was very hot at this time, and quite trying for me. Even so, I made an effort to visit *Kanheri*, a group of Buddhist caves north of the city; it wasn't easy to get there, as it was a Sunday, and by the time I did and had a look around, I was drenched in sweat.

It was at this time that I was told that Bombay now had a population of about 16 million people, one million of which were beggars! Near the *Gateway of India* ~ a monument built by the British to commemorate the visit of the King-Emperor George V in

1911, but not completed until 1924 (it earned its name because it was often the first sight beheld by visitors as they arrived in India by way of the country's busiest port) ~ I met a street-kid, and was appalled by his story: Aged about 12, he'd come to Bombay from a village somewhere, as do countless people, and lived on the streets with other kids, sustaining his life by begging. One night, while he was asleep, some kids had grabbed him and cut off one of his ears! He was a pleasant little kid, not rude or greedy, and was delighted with the few rupees I gave him, immediately ordering tea for himself; I wish I'd given him more.

The name of Bombay has been changed, but I refuse to use its new name, *Mumbai*, because it shows nationalistic chauvinism; in several states, all road-signs in English have been replaced by Marathi or Hindi, making it hard to get around. English used to be the official language of this polyglot nation, and to a large extent still is, but years ago there were riots in the south when the Federal Government tried to make Hindi ~ a northern tongue ~ the national language. Tamil ~ a *Dravidian* language ~ is much older than Hindi.

I wasn't sorry to leave Bombay, and make my way north to Udaipur, a city on a lake in Rajasthan, where I stayed for a few days. While there, I came down with bronchitis, a sickness that afflicted me quite often, brought on by the pollution and dust in the air; it responded only to antibiotics, the alternative being to go on suffering for months. I see now that antibiotics have weakened my system.

My memory fails me again here, and I don't recall how I got from Udaipur to Agra, where I stayed in a hotel near the Taj Mahal. It was run by a shrewd old Haji, who persuaded me to exchange my bike for a small inlaid marble table-top and some gemstones, he getting the better part of the bargain; I didn't really want these things, but he refused to pay with money. I'd had enough of my bike by then anyway, so it didn't matter.

Now, because Agra was for a long time the Mughal Emperors' capital, it is still very much a Muslim city. It was at this time that I had a discussion with a Muslim I met outside the Taj Mahal, and among the things he said to me was "Right hand is good, left hand is bad." I knew what he meant, of course, but wanted to

play with him, so asked him why this should be, and he replied, "Because the *Holy Koran* says it is." Upon my request for further elucidation, he explained: "Well, the right hand is for eating with, and the left hand is for toilet purposes."

Unwilling to let such gross unreason go unchallenged, I then said: "But if you wash both hands with soap and water after answering the calls of nature, they will both be clean, and there will be no question about one hand being better than the other."

With this conversation fresh in my mind, I went into a restaurant and ordered right-handed *chapatties* (Indian unleavened bread). The waiter looked puzzled and asked what I meant. I said: "Chapatties made with just the right hand."

"No such thing!" he retorted; "we must use both hands to make chapatties!"

"Ah, but I thought the left hand was bad and only to be used for toilet purposes," I said. "We wash both hands," he said sullenly. Having provoked him, I decided not to eat chapattis there in case he spit on them or something, and went out.

I went to another restaurant nearby and sat on the verandah, and while waiting for the food I'd ordered, I observed an old man pull down his pants, in full view of everyone, and squat over an open drain across the narrow street from where I was sitting, and calmly and unconcernedly *do his thing*, using a can of water that he had brought with him to clean himself afterwards! This must have been his regular spot! And people were passing by within arms-reach of him! But this is not unusual in India; in fact, the whole country is just one big open toilet, where people *do it* anywhere and everywhere: on the streets and in the fields, just wherever and whenever ~ so it seems ~ the mood comes upon them. Beautiful beaches and other scenic spots are befouled, and you really must watch your step! I got the impression they consider themselves invisible while doing it, as they seem oblivious to everything going on around them. You see rows of men and boys along busy highways and railway-lines at dawn, separated from each other by a few meters, hard at it, with traffic streaming past (women and girls must work night-shift, as they are seldom seen); indeed, some of them gaze up at the buses

and trucks as they go by, and smile! It's remarkable to anyone unfamiliar with such habits, but normal to the natives, of course. Maybe they feel claustrophobia inside enclosed toilets, or like to be close to nature and see the sky and hear the birds sing while doing it. Gandhi's exhortations to dig latrines obviously went unheeded. Even in big cities, people pee wherever they feel like, and attempts to rectify this by building urinals have been in vain. Never, anywhere, have I seen so many public urinals as in Delhi, and never have I seen so many people peeing anywhere ~ anywhere except in the proper places. Consequently, many people associate the odor of urine with Delhi; it is omnipresent, even in the tourist areas! Not just this, but many urinals are avoided because they have been used to defecate in!

Indians seem to have a fixation with *shit*, leaving it around for all to see, as if it's something lovely. Cow-dung is at least useful and forms an important item of their home economy, collected while still fresh, and put to numerous uses, like plastering walls and floors; much of it is mixed by hand with grass or straw and cakes of it are then stuck onto any available surface to dry, with a handprint visible in every cake. It is then used as fuel for heating and cooking and burns without much smoke or smell while giving off quite a bit of heat. Cow-dung also forms part of their traditional pharmacopoeia ~ another reason why cows are so highly prized in India. If only they would find use for their own excrement instead of leaving it lying around; someone could make a fortune from it. India really is a shitty country!



Cow-cake-covered wall

Most people in the West would not remember ~ or only dimly ~ the days when many houses had no flush-toilets but only an *outhouse* in the back garden, with a bucket that had to be emptied

into a pit periodically. Now we just press a button or pull a chain and our waste-matter goes gurgling out of sight so conveniently. We've come a long way.

Now, the whole world ~ or most of it, anyway ~ is convinced that right is somehow better than the left. Why do I say this? Well, just look at how we shake hands: except for the Boy Scouts (although why *they* should be contrary, I don't know), everyone offers their right hand for others to shake, and some would take offence if they were offered the left hand. But I can think of no good or logical reason why the right should be regarded as in any way better than the left; it is just a matter of convention and we are stuck with it, because to change it now would be almost impossible, and what would we change it to that would not also be ~ or soon become ~ a thing of convention? There are so many things we are stuck with that have no foundations in reality, but to change them would be very difficult. Another example is our dating-system, which is really relevant only to Christians, yet the whole world conforms to it. Such things should be regarded as what Buddhism terms 'relative truth' and as useful for the purposes of communication; but they have nothing to do with 'ultimate truth' ~ that is, to things that are as they are, or to the principles of life, that do not change. There is no need to change them; rather, we should understand them as what they are: just social conventions, which are useful as such. We have lived with them for a long time already and can continue to do so, as long as they don't cause inconvenience or trouble.

Buddhists *also* think of the right as better than the left, as evinced in the way Buddhist monks dress, with the right shoulder bared in the case of Theravada monks (monks of other sects also dress with something distinctive about the right shoulder); then there is the way they circumambulate stupas or holy places: always clockwise, with their right side towards the object of veneration. Once, in Budh-Gaya ~ where there are always people circumambulating the stupa, chanting, reciting mantras, prostrating, telling their rosaries, or sitting quietly in meditation ~ I saw a Western monk going in the *opposite* direction. When I asked why, he said that you don't always have to do what everyone else is doing, but can do whatever you want.

Well, in principle I agree with this, of course, but feel that to *try* to be different, instead of letting your natural differences out, is an expression of ego, and therefore defeats the whole purpose. He knew the custom, but while he didn't see anything intrinsically wrong with it, just wanted to be different; or maybe just wanted to see what would happen if he went the other way around. I don't know what ~ if anything ~ *did* happen, but while I was there, nothing extraordinary took place, and he wasn't struck by a thunderbolt for his 'impiety'.

There is nothing wrong with convention if we understand it and it is useful, or at least, not harmful. If we decided to shake hands with the left instead of the right merely to defy convention and demonstrate our 'independent thinking', we wouldn't be arrested and charged with committing a crime, but it would create unnecessary confusion and serve no useful purpose.

We can be ~ as many of us are ~ bound by convention, or we can understand and follow accordingly. To offer our right hand to someone to shake rather than our left means we're being mindful to some extent, and mindfulness is always good. To make a point of giving with our right hand instead of the left might mean we are aware of what we are doing, whereas to give with either hand, not much caring which, would indicate unawareness or even sloppiness. Better still if we would give with both hands as that would indicate much more awareness of what we are doing, and the person to whom we are giving might feel honored to be made the object of such special attention.

Manners are another convention, and though there are certain manners which not everyone would agree upon or share ~ for example, the custom, in some countries, of belching loudly after meals to show satisfaction over the food ~ many things are generally accepted without question, and courtesy and politeness would facilitate our passage in most parts of the world, whereas roughness and rudeness would cause doors to close in our face.

Back to India, though, it is a place to really tax your patience, and though we do, at times, meet friendly people, I've found myself becoming suspicious and thinking, "What does he want?" as you meet so many people who are not friendly. And very often, it turns out that your suspicions are justified. It is not good to feel

like this, I know, but what is the alternative? If you didn't, you'd be ripped-off on every side. Then ~ you may ask ~ why do I keep on going there? I don't know; sometimes I think I must be mad, or masochistic, or maybe I have to pay some ancient debt to that land and its people.

Passing on from Agra to Delhi, I again made a search for Ven. Dhammika's small temple, even checking a city-guide for the street name ~ I remembered it was Church Street or Church Road ~ but had no more success than the last time. I accepted the fact that I would never see him again.

I'd never been to the old British summer-capital of Simla before, so decided to make a visit. Boarding a train for the steep climb on the narrow-gauge line, I got to this formerly-prestigious town perched high on the ridges of several hills. It was cold, with patches of snow still around. I went to the old Viceroy's lodge ~ the administration-center of the Raj during the hot season, and built of the finest materials at great cost in the form of a Scottish castle ~ and wandered right through it, even into parts normally off-limits like the Viceroy's bedroom, which would have been the height of luxury at that time, but which we would probably complain about today ~ especially the plumbing! I felt a very strong presence, as of old ghosts, much stronger than at Mussoorie; the Brits had never really left there; much of them remained. I went along the Mall, past the English tea-shops and the Anglican Church, and even climbed the steep hill overlooking the town, and from where there is a good view of the Himalayas.

Back in Delhi, eating in a restaurant near the Red Fort one day, I was served by a Nepalese waiter, and was glad to see a non-Aryan face again after such a long time. I admit to having racial preferences. After numerous times in India, there is not even one person I can call a real friend. Unable to find work in Nepal, many people leave to find work in other places, where they are often exploited, made to stay in crowded quarters, and paid a pittance. Many Indians look down on Nepalese and consider them uncivilized; the highly reprehensible Hindu caste-system is largely to blame for this and other ways of looking at others.

I went on to Benares again, and stayed at the Chinese temple in Sarnath for a day or two; there was a young Malaysian monk in charge at this time, and he was quite friendly; pity he didn't stay long. From there, I went to Budh-Gaya to stay in the Vietnamese temple again. Thay Huynh Dieu was away in France, so I didn't get to meet him.

Just as I was about to head south again and return to Malaysia, I met three Vietnamese ~ an elderly lady, a younger woman and a young guy ~ from the US, who had rented a car and driver, and were on their way to visit the other Buddhist places; they invited me to go with them. As a guide, they had an Indian monk named *Nanda*, but he was a rogue, only concerned with money. I sat with him and the driver in the front, and we set off along the Grand Trunk Road to Benares and Sarnath, where the Buddha preached His first sermon, known as *The Turning of the Wheel of the Law*. We stayed in the Chinese temple, but the Malaysian monk had left and his replacement was of a different temperament. Now, temples at the Buddhist holy places are dependent on the donations of visitors and pilgrims, who visit during the cooler months from October to March, after which it gets too hot until June or July, and then the monsoon breaks. I mentioned before that there are no Buddhists in these areas, the population being mainly Hindu or Muslim, and of course, they don't support the Buddhist temples. Accommodation is available for visitors in most temples, and the Chinese temple in Sarnath is particularly large, with many guest-rooms. Monks from overseas volunteer to stay in temples to run them for a while, and probably go there with good intentions, but it is not long before they are faced with the necessity of making ends meet; it is an unenviable position, and soon they look at the visitors in a calculating way, wondering how much they will receive. Now, most visitors, having come all this way, are not stingy with donations, and would offer more than they would pay for a hotel. Well, we got a warm welcome here, and were given nice rooms, and when we left, the Vietnamese people made their offerings.

After seeing something of Benares and the shrines of Sarnath, we went to Kusinara, where we got rooms in another Chinese temple, which, since my last visit, had somehow been taken over by a prominent Vietnamese monk from France, named

Thich Huyen Vi (who had studied in India years before, and knew about the situation of the Chinese temples there: how the Chinese Buddhists of India are hard-put to find monks to run their temples); he had sent one of his nuns to take care of this temple, and again, we were warmly received. She was in the middle of extending the temple and told us she was transforming it into a meditation-center. More about her later.

Traveling by car like this was quite convenient, even if we were a bit cramped, as we could stop where we wanted, and make any detours. Our next stop was Shravasti, after which we backtracked to cross the border of Nepal and check into a hotel at *Bhairava*, and from there drove to Lumbini, but didn't stay. Then, paying off the driver, and giving Nanda a handsome tip, they dispensed with the car, and invited me to fly to Kathmandu with them. Arriving, we got a taxi to the city, pre-paying the fare at the airport. Getting down, we offered the driver a tip, and were astonished at his reluctance to accept it; had it been in India, he would have snatched it from us and asked for more!

I led the way to a monastery near the river, where I knew the abbot, Ven. *Ashvagoshā*, from twenty years before. We were welcomed, but the rooms were spartan and it was very cold, so showers were out of the question. We then proceeded to see the sights, and at one point stayed overnight at *Nagarkot*, a hill place from where there is a good view of the Himalayan peaks as the sun rises.

After a few days, my benefactors flew to Delhi, and I got a night-bus back to the border, and from there, another bus to Benares. I went to the Chinese temple in Sarnath again, but because I was alone this time, the monk-in-charge was not so welcoming, and gave me a very dark and dirty little room, although there were many other empty rooms; he probably thought he wouldn't receive much from me. Anyway, I've stayed in worse places over the years, and made the most of it.

I was looking forward to spending time in this generally-peaceful place, but the next day, when I returned from a brief visit to nearby Benares, I found it very *unpeaceful*, as ~ being January 1st, and a public holiday ~ it was crowded. People were every-

where, sprawled on the grass around the central *stupa* and among the ruins, picnicking, playing football and cricket ~ some young people even dancing to music from their tape-players! ~ in spite of signs around the place forbidding such activities. Rules like this are seldom respected or enforced in India. At one side of the main stupa a Tibetan lama was giving a Dharma-talk to quite a large group of people, mainly Westerners, many of them monks and nuns. I only wanted to be quiet, so didn't join them, but how to be quiet with so much noise and harsh music blaring from the ubiquitous loud-speakers outside the grounds? I felt sad at the irreverence of the local people, although I'd seen so much of it before in other places that it should have caused me no surprise and I should even have expected it.

I passed through the park and went over to the Burmese monastery on the far side, hoping to find some quiet there. Well, it *was* quieter, to be sure, but none of the monks I met or saw showed much friendliness, and I was either ignored or met with quizzical looks, probably because of my dress, which is different from theirs. It has been my experience, over the years, that Theravada monks, especially, find it very hard to deal with monks who do not follow or subscribe to their type of Buddhism (once, at the Great Stupa at Bodnath, I greeted a Nepalese Theravada monk with *anjali* ~ the traditional form of greeting with joined palms ~ and the word "Namaste". Getting no response, I said: "No Namaste?" He then hurriedly mumbled "Namaste"). Sadly, sectarianism is widespread among Buddhists, although it never gave rise to violence, as it did among followers of other religions.

Preferring the noise of the crowds to the non-friendliness of the Burmese monastery, I went back to the Deer Park to find a place to sit, feeling that something was about to happen. I sat cross-legged beneath a tree, on the low wall of a ruined monastery, my eyes half-closed and downcast; my mind soon became focused and calm. Although people kept coming by to look at me and make fun and silly remarks, I ignored them and it didn't disturb me. After a while, someone came and stood at one side, looking intently at me; I could feel his gaze; but I didn't move or acknowledge him in any way. After some more minutes, he sat down nearby, and I thought: "He wants something. Well, let him wait; I'll test him to see how long he's prepared to wait." Continu-

ing to sit there, unmoving, for maybe another 20 minutes, I then stirred, at which he stood up and came over to me with his hands in *anjali*. Respectfully, he said: "I saw you sitting there and was impressed, so asked my friends to leave me here for a while and come back later. I'm interested in meditation," he said, "and wonder if you would explain something about it for me."

I asked if he knew the significance of the place we were in, but he said, "Not really." I found this a bit hard to believe, as he had already said he was studying philosophy in Varanasi University, so how could he know nothing about this Buddhist holy place? Maybe he just said it to see what I would say. Anyway, I told him it was here that the Buddha gave His first sermon to the five ascetics who had formerly been his companions, and related to him the reason they had left Him. Before his Enlightenment, they had followed him in his austere and extreme practices, waiting for him to make the breakthrough, and feeling that he would then show them the way. But when he failed to achieve his goal by fasting so much that he was reduced to just skin and bones and almost died as a result, he realized this was the wrong way and that, just as a life of luxury and pleasure, such as he had lived in the palace, was ignoble and unprofitable, so was a life of self-mortification and deprivation, which he had been following; both ways make the mind dull and incapable of seeing things clearly. He felt there had to be a middle way which avoided these extremes, and that it would be the way of meditation such as he'd experienced in his boyhood when he had been taken out to the countryside and left in the shade of a tree while his father and courtiers went off to lead the *Spring Plowing Festival*.

Gradually, the young prince became aware of the suffering all around him: how the oxen pulling the plows were beaten and goaded to make them pull harder, how the plowmen sweated and strained under the hot sun, how worms and insects were exposed and died as the plow-shares turned the earth, and how birds came down to eat them, big birds attacking small birds; he noted how life lived on life, from the smallest of its forms to the largest, and how man was also a predator. His observations moved him so profoundly that, seating himself cross-legged and upright, his mind became calm and clear. It was the memory of

this incident so many years before that now showed him the way to go: not by torturing and starving the body shall I find liberation, he thought, but by observing how things are.

When he began to eat again, however, the yogis attending him thought he'd given up his search to return to a life of pleasure, so left him in disgust. Undeterred, he continued, and slowly, his strength returned. After some weeks, recovered and refreshed, while seated under a tree respected by Buddhists ever since as the 'Bodhi-tree' or 'Tree of Awakening', he became a Buddha, Enlightened, an Awakened One. He had achieved His goal, had clearly understood Suffering, the Cause of Suffering, the Ceasing of Suffering, and the Way that leads to its Ceasing.

After His Enlightenment, He was at first inclined to remain alone in the forest, thinking that what He'd discovered was very hard to comprehend, and that if He tried to share it with others, no-one would understand, and it would only be needlessly troublesome for Him. But He eventually decided to go forth and teach, and then He considered *who* He should teach. He recalled His former companions. "They were intelligent and good, even if a little misguided," He thought; "They might understand."

So He set off to join them just outside Benares, about 200 kms from where He had become Enlightened. It would have taken Him several weeks to walk there as He was in no hurry. When He arrived, the five saw Him coming in the distance, and said to each other: "See who's coming: Siddhartha! Ignore him; we lost our respect for him when he abandoned his search for truth." But as He got nearer, so impressive was His appearance and bearing that they forgot their resolve to ignore Him, and spontaneously rose to receive Him respectfully. They gave Him water to drink and wash His face and feet, and prepared a seat for Him. Then, refreshed and seated, He addressed them thus: "Open is the Gate to the Deathless. I have found that which I sought! Pay attention and I will explain," and He told them of the Middle Way, which avoids the extremes of a life of pleasure and luxury on the one hand, and a life of self-mortification and deprivation on the other, and which leads to Enlightenment. He explained what He had realized about Suffering. As He spoke about these things, one of them ~ Kondanya, by name ~ became enlightened, and the Buddha saw it on his face, because

when a person understands something very deeply and clearly, it *does* show on his face, like a light radiating outwards through the skin. The Buddha exclaimed: "Kondanya has understood! Kondanya has understood!"

At this point in my narrative ~ and I must confess I have fleshed it out a bit in writing here for the sake of further clarification for my readers ~ I asked the young man to visualize the scene of the Buddha speaking to the five yogis; it is most important to do so. What the Buddha looked like, we really don't know, but He certainly did not look like the images we have made to represent Him. If He had not yet shaved His head at that time, as an example of what He later asked His monks to do, He probably looked like a yogi Himself, with long, matted hair and beard. And if *He* didn't look like that, the five almost certainly did, and not as most Buddhist art since then has shown them, *as Buddhist monks*, with shaven heads and faces, clad in typical Buddhist robes; we must keep it in mind that, at this point, there *were* no Buddhist monks; they were about to *become* the first; and it was some time after this that the *uniform* of the monks was decided upon. They ~ and the Buddha Himself ~ would have looked weather-beaten and not overly-clean, living the life they did.

We have idealized the Buddha so much that it is hard to imagine Him as a normal-looking human-being, yet such He was, behind all the deification of Him that has gone on since. Indeed, there are still Buddhists who believe that He was about five metres tall! In Thailand, there is a beautiful temple built around a depression in the rock that is believed to be a footprint made by the Buddha, but it is so big that a person could get into it and lie down! This is not realistic and merely increases superstition and ignorance instead of diminishing them! Buddhists are often guilty of idolatry ~ as we are sometimes accused of being ~ but we are by no means the only ones; it is quite common, and comes about through mistaking the form for the essence. (Besides, the Buddha never left India, and probably never went beyond the Ganges river-valley, or even saw the sea, although he often used the ocean as a metaphor in His teachings).

Continuing, I asked the young man if he imagined the five yogis to all be sitting in the same position ~ the posture we associate

with meditation: cross-legged, upright, hands in lap and eyes down-cast ~ like statues, or photo-copies of each other, as they appear in Thai or Indian pictures of this scene? Would they not probably ~ I went on ~ have been sitting in various postures, maybe with elbow on knee, chin in hand, and so on, relaxed, yet perfectly attentive? We can be attentive without sitting cross-legged, can we not? And in that attentive state, they would not have been thinking about the past, the future, or even the present; nor would they have been thinking about or *practicing* meditation, as do so many 'meditators'; they would have been rapt, paying complete attention; they were *in* the present, *in* meditation. Have we not all known this kind of meditation at times? Of course we have, but probably didn't realize what it was, and so we ask around about meditation, thinking it must be something exotic and special instead of something we have known ~ in one way ~ for most of our lives.

It is because we have not understood what we have known that we continue to jump around, seeking teachers, doing meditation-courses and retreats, and so on, looking, but not seeing, and in the end we have to come back to ourselves, having gone a long, circuitous way around, when a little intelligent thought would have saved us much time and trouble. It's rather like rubbing two sticks together ~ and *wet* sticks, at that! ~ to produce fire, when there are matches and other means of ignition at hand. Why insist on doing things the hard way? What are we aiming for with our pious and strenuous practices? What kind of race are we running ~ a marathon or something? If the aim of our meditation-practice is insight ~ insight into how things are ~ can it be 'attained' by sitting cross-legged for hours and hours? Obviously, we think insight can be *made* to arise, and that it is within our capacity to *do* it ~ to 'storm the gates of heaven', as it were. The corollary of this is to conclude that people who don't practice such things are incapable of experiencing insight, which is a great misconception and reveals our greed and desire to get something in return for our efforts, instead of seeing things as they are and what we've already got. There is so much fearful self-concern behind our efforts. Thus, our religious practices become materialistic ~ what the late *Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche*

~ a well-known Tibetan lama ~ referred to as 'spiritual materialism': the craving for and attachment to results.

Still with my young inquirer: I asked if he'd seen the Tibetan monk over near the main stupa, speaking to a large group of Westerners. These people, I went on, had left the comfort and luxury of their homes on the far side of the world, to come to dirty and smelly India where one must undergo so many hassles as a matter of routine, in search of Dharma. And all around them are Indians oblivious to this, just whiling away their time with picnics and games. Why should this be? And why are *you* different? Why do *you* want to know about these things? Why aren't *you* enjoying yourself instead, like your people here? Don't even try to answer, I told him, because you don't know, as the roots of the present ~ and of any situation and thing ~ are hidden in the past, and very few of them can be perceived. There are no accidents in life, but neither is everything pre-ordained; all things arise from causes, and there are so many contributory causes to each effect that it is simply impossible to imagine or perceive them all. You must accept the fact that you are different, even though it is often difficult to be different and 'odd'. And try to keep the flame of your inquiry burning steadily ~ not high one minute and low the next. Ask questions, yes ~ ask questions of anyone and leave no stone unturned ~ but don't accept their answers unthinkingly, as *their* answers will not be *your* answers, and in such matters, second-hand answers will never completely satisfy you; at most, they can reassure you somewhat and help you check and confirm your experiences; we must find our own answers; there is no substitute for this.

The young man seemed satisfied with my explanation and went away with a light step; and as for me, I knew that this was why I'd felt the need to sit down; my feeling had been vindicated.

Our desire and search for results from our efforts often blinds us to what is here. Moreover, there is often a fearful self-concern in our search. The Buddhist scriptures tell of many cases of people becoming enlightened just by listening to the Buddha, and some of them had no conscious knowledge of meditation and had never 'practiced' it. So, to claim that "meditation is the *only way*" ~ as a well-known Buddhist figure in Malaysia said ~ is not cor-

rect, unless we consider meditation in a much broader way than most 'meditators' do: that there is nothing outside of it, that it is all-inclusive. Enlightenment arises as a result of seeing things clearly ~ not with our *physical* eyes, but with the 'third eye' or 'eye of understanding'. Understanding plays such a big part in our lives ~ from very basic things like how to tie our shoelaces or make tea, to perception of reality. So, we might say meditation concerns understanding, but understanding is not something we *do*; instead, it happens to or in us, something, in fact, that *does us!* In this way, who *doesn't* meditate? Who has *not* known meditation? Away with foolish and elitist questions of "Do you meditate?" "What kind of meditation do you practice?" "Who is your meditation-teacher?" etc. Come on; wake up!

The Pali word 'bhavana' is usually translated 'mental development,' and includes what we generally mean by words like concentration, meditation, contemplation and mindfulness. What is it *but* bhavana, then, when we learn how to read and write? This is also mental-development, is it not? Moreover, as a healthy kind of mental-development, it is in line with the Buddha's Teachings.

If you wish to 'practice' meditation, by all means do; do whatever you like, as long as it doesn't harm anyone or anything and you are prepared to accept the consequences without complaining or blaming others for them. Whatever you do, however, whether it be chanting, praying, meditating, keeping precepts, giving, abstaining from meat-eating, etc., take care not to become proud of it, as that would only defeat the purpose, and you'd become like a dog running round and round in circles, chasing its own tail. It is not rare to come across people who are proud of their practices, feeling better than those who don't do such things; but *they* should be regarded as our teachers, too, in that they show us, by example, what not to do or how not to do it.

Care should be taken about our motives for 'practicing' meditation, and what we expect to get from it. *We should know why we are doing what we are doing.* Some people, overly concerned with getting results from their efforts, not only become blind to what is right in front of them, but sometimes become mentally unhinged or disturbed. If one is not careful, and in a great hurry for results, *meditation* easily becomes *maditation!* It is not un-

common. Approach life with Dharma and everything becomes meditation; anytime, anywhere, insight might arise.

Meditation is more about seeing than with looking. Looking is active, something we do, while seeing is passive, something that happens.

From Benares, I entrained for Jalgaon and visited Ajanta again, leaving my bags in Jalgaon station. Returning for my bags afterwards, I went to Bhusawal, and it was there that misfortune ~ or what might be considered such ~ overtook me, in the following way: To get to Madras meant a journey of 24 hours, and I did not want to travel without a reservation, as Indian trains are usually unpleasantly crowded. I bought a ticket at *Bhusawal* junction, but was unable to get a reservation for that evening's train and had to settle for one the next evening; this meant I had to stay overnight in Bhusawal. Inquiring about accommodation, I was told I might get a place in the first-class air-conditioned retiring-rooms of the station itself, but when I went there, I was told that there was only one place left, and that I'd have to share a room with someone else. Well, since it was for only one night, and the rate not excessive, I agreed to do so. This was my first mistake; I should have sought out a room for myself. But if we knew, in advance, that we were about to make mistakes, we would not make any; it's always easy to be wise after the event.

I was taken up to the room, but the other occupant was out. When he returned, we introduced ourselves; he seemed to be well-educated, decent and friendly, and gave me one of his business-cards, saying that he'd traveled overseas on business, and had even stayed in the famous *Raffles* Hotel in Singapore. He said he had to meet a business-associate the next morning, and would not be leaving until the afternoon. Other than small-talk, however, we did not have much to say to each other.

The next morning, I rose at my usual early time and went into the bathroom, careful to take with me the small bag containing my passport, camera and Indian currency; my travelers' checks were in a waist-pouch, and my other bags were locked beside my bed. Later, when I went for breakfast, he must have noticed that I took my small bag with me, and waited for a chance to get

his hands on it. This came later, when I went into the bathroom for some water and carelessly left my bag on my bed. No sooner had the door closed behind me on its spring-hinges than he jumped up, bolted the door from the outside, and made off with my bag and his own stuff, ripping out the phone before he went.

By the time my shouts brought someone to let me out it was too late for pursuit, and I could do nothing but make a report at the nearby police-station. When I finally completed this lengthy and slow process, I asked where I might change money, as all my rupees ~ enough, I'd thought, for my few remaining days in India ~ had gone in my bag; I had not a single rupee left. One plain-clothes policeman offered to drive me to a bank on his scooter, which was very kind of him as it was not part of his duty. The bank, however, wouldn't cash a travelers' check for me, and told me I'd have to go to the next town for this, but I didn't want to do so. The policeman then dropped me back at the station, but came running after me and pressed 40 rupees into my hand, knowing I had none; then, without waiting for me to get his name and address so I might send him back the money, he went off.

I then went to the reservations-office to report my lost ticket, and while there, met someone who was willing to change \$50 for me, though at a very low rate. I was sent back to the ticket-counter to get a replacement ticket, for which I had to pay a 25% fee. I also went back to the police-station, but the officer who had helped me had already gone home, so I left a sum of money for him with other officers, trusting them to pass it to him.

All this time, I had not been very happy, of course, but consoled myself with the thought that whatever *can* be lost *will* be lost, sometime or other. I also reminded myself that I was lucky, as it was my eighth trip in India and this was the first time anything like this had happened to me. It could have been much worse, I reasoned; I could have lost everything, too, and even been wounded or killed, instead of losing just one small bag and its contents. I've heard of people going there for the first time and losing everything except the clothes they were wearing!

My train was 5 hours late, and I got on for the long journey to Madras, thinking there would be an Aussie Consulate where I might get a new passport, but there wasn't, so I had to return to

Delhi. To save time, I reluctantly paid US\$170 for a plane-ticket, and flew out the next day. In Delhi, I went through the usual hassles of finding a taxi and a hotel, but finally managed, and the next morning, went to the Australian High Commission where I was told a new passport couldn't be issued then, and that I should come back for it the next day. I was greatly relieved to hear this, plus being surprised at the friendliness of the staff there, as I fully expected to have to wait at least a week for it.

I went to see the Nepalese waiter in the restaurant near the Red Fort again; he was surprised to see me and gave me his address, asking me to write to him; I said I would, and I did. His name was *Yam Bahadur*.

Going for my new passport the next day, I met a guy from Tasmania who was there for exactly the same thing; *his* passport had been stolen in Madras airport, just as he was about to leave for Australia! With so much in common, therefore, we decided to travel back to Madras by train together, so we obtained tickets for that evening's express, at about \$10, with sleeper reservations for the 36 hours' trip south. We arrived in Madras tired and dirty from the journey, and found a hotel before setting about getting new Indian visas in our new passports, without which we would not have been allowed to leave the country.

Some days later, new visa in new passport, I got a flight back to Malaysia, it was perhaps the happiest part of my trip in India; it was so good to get back to friendly faces in Malaysia!

This was not the end of the stolen-stuff saga however; there was a sequel to it: Three months later, while I was still in Malaysia, I received a letter from Sheila in Adelaide saying that a big envelope ~ containing my old passport, address-book and some other papers ~ had arrived for me from the Aussie High Comm in Delhi. They had received these things from the police-station in Bhusawal. How the police-station had got them, I don't know, but I presume the thief had felt some remorse at stealing my stuff and somehow handed them in to the police, because if he had simply discarded them at the roadside or somewhere, they would never all have come back to me like that. I was very happy, therefore, because although the old passport had been

cancelled, and I had back-up copies of most of the addresses in my address-book anyway, it indicated to me that the thief had learned something from it all; had he not stolen my stuff, maybe he would not have learned what I think he did. My loss appeared quite differently, and I am, after all, in the business of trying to help others understand things like this, am I not? Can I expect any success without any outlay or expenditure?



“The best way to cheer yourself up is to try to cheer somebody else up”. ~ Mark Twain ~

13

BITS AND PIECES

While I was in India, I got a letter from Sheila, telling that mum was back in Australia; things had not worked out in England. She'd gone to see Jim almost as soon as she'd got there, but he was in hospital, with gangrene, and although their initial meeting was cordial, they'd been living with images of each other that were out of date by over 50 years. His daughter instant disliked her, thinking she was a gold-digger, and turned Jim against her. Needless to say, mum was bitterly disappointed, and decided to return to Australia, with all the hassle that involved, as she'd had her pension made payable to her in England, and had nothing to go back to; her granny-flat had been emptied. Back she went, and had to start all over again; lots of trouble for Sheila.

I'd also received a letter from someone in Malaysia telling me she'd met a person I'd long been looking for: *Teoh Bee Huat*, someone I'd met in Taiping in '73. She'd given me his address and phone-number in K.L., and so upon landing there, I called and asked if he could pick me up. He did, and it was good to see him again after such a long time. He was unable to take me to his home to stay for lack of space, so drove me to Wong's,

where I stayed for a while until I noticed a funny atmosphere, and asked him, "What's wrong?"

"I think you know," he said.

"Well, I have an idea, but don't want to say in case it's wrong."

"It's my wife," he said, "she thinks I'm neglecting her for you."

"Oh, if it's like that, I'll leave and go to stay in the temple again," I said. So he drove me there, and when I saw him again, he told me he had said to his wife: "If you're not happy with me, you can go!" If only she had! I'm sure he regretted marrying this woman, as she was petulant, possessive and jealous, and really not what he deserved. By this time, however, they had a little daughter; the knot was firmly tied.

He visited me often while I was in K.L., taking me out for lunch in Indian restaurants and so on; he was fond of Indian food, too.

I made contact with Yeap Tor Hor in Penang, who invited me to go there for a while. I accepted, and he met me off the bus after the trip from K.L. This was the first of many times I would meet him, and he was always very kind, arranging talks for me, taking me wherever I needed to go, bringing me to my favored restaurants (I was lucky that he also liked Indian food), and generously supporting me in the printing of my books.

I visited the Brickfield's Vihara in K.L., and Dhammananda said to me, "We got your letter."

"What letter?" I said, "I didn't write to you."

"Yes you did," he said, "I'll show you it."

I wondered if I was losing my mind. As soon as I saw it, however, even without reading it, I knew it wasn't mine, because I don't write like that, with just a few lines at the top of the page, and the rest blank; I space mine out. The name on it, though, was 'Abhinyano,' and it was from Melbourne. The name was different from mine by just the last letter.

At this time, too, I got an anonymous letter from a woman in Melbourne, saying that she'd got my address from one of my books, and telling of her problems with her husband. Well, I couldn't reply, of course, as she hadn't given an address either. I forgot about it for a while.

After 16 years, I was to meet Luang Pau again. Hearing he was in K.L., teaching in a meditation-centre, I went to visit him, but not having a number, couldn't call before going, so he was a bit surprised. He'd disrobed since we last met; I don't know why, and when people started to tell me, I stopped them, saying I did not want to know. It was good to see him looking well, dressed in white as an eight-preceptor, but even then, he could not resist commenting on my dress. *I* didn't say anything about *his*, but wondered what he'd learned from all his years as a monk and meditation-teacher. I said goodbye, but worse was to come.

As usual, I gave many talks in Malaysia before returning to Melbourne, to stay in Dull Moon for what would be the last time. I hadn't been there long, when an Aussie monk, accompanied by a woman, came to see me. *This* was Abhinyano, and I was later to learn that the woman with him ~ *Betty* ~ was the one who had written to me anonymously. He was living in a caravan in her back-garden, but perhaps I should explain a little about how he came to be there.

He was from Melbourne, and had ordained in a monastery in Perth, if I'm not mistaken, but had made himself unpopular there, and had been shipped off to another monastery in England. Here, again, he was out of place. While there, he met a woman named Jean, who, learning he wanted to return to Melbourne but didn't know where he would stay when he got there (his family were not very sympathetic towards him), she arranged for him to stay with her friend Betty and her husband, Charles, neither of whom were Buddhists as such. How to get back to Australia, though, without money? Well, it seemed that one of the monks there had a spare ticket to Taiwan, and somehow transferred it to his name, so off to Taiwan he went, but without knowing anyone there. Arriving, with nowhere to stay, he went to a hotel, and began going out with his alms-bowl in a nearby market, and received so much this way, that he was not only able to cover his costs there, but also accumulated a substantial sum within two months, before returning to Australia. Now, this was an anomaly, as he otherwise refused to even touch money, let alone use it, making it difficult for those who supported him; also, he insisted upon food being served to him, and when Betty and Charles went anywhere, she had to ask one

of the neighbors to come in and serve him the food that she'd left in the freezer for him; the neighbor probably thought he was nuts; what purpose did it serve?

He imagined himself as a meditation-teacher, and perhaps because of his short stature, felt the need to prove himself and be recognized. Anyway, he decided to do a retreat, and persuaded Betty to do it, too, but he must have pushed her so hard that she cracked, and an argument with Charles ensued, during which he hit her and she bit him, and when the monk ~ I'll refer to him as Tony, which was the name he later reverted to using ~ intervened, Charles promptly ordered him to leave. But where could he go? I came in at this juncture and arranged for him to stay in a Vietnamese temple, but even here, he tried to assert himself.

The story is more complicated than this. Betty had been married twice, and had a daughter by her first marriage, but no children with Charles. I don't know how far into the second marriage it was that she discovered that Charles had been having sex with the daughter (from when she was just 12-years old!), and when she became pregnant, he sent her for an abortion! Betty was devastated when she found out, and why the heck she continued living with the ratbag ~ though not cohabiting; she told me she'd not lived with him as wife and husband for many years ~ I can't imagine. Then Tony came into the picture, and stayed there for two or three years before being kicked out.

His stay in the Vietnamese temple wasn't long before he went to Malaysia, trying to do what I'd been doing there, but again, he upset people so much that he practically became a fugitive, and his behavior had its repercussions on me because of the almost-identical name. He went to Taiwan again, and apparently, while there, had asked Betty to marry him, and she had accepted, so he returned to Melbourne. At this point I discontinued writing to Betty, so I don't know if he disrobed in Taiwan or in Melbourne.

Back to Dull Moon, where I was feeling frustrated, as my hands were tied. I would have plastered the walls and windows with Dharma-posters in various languages, so that people might read and get something to think about when they came, instead of leaving empty, but my ideas were not appreciated, and while I'd

given about seventy talks during my recent trip in Malaysia, over the months I was in DM this time, I gave only seven, and those were to uni-students who came in for this.

One day, when I was feeling a bit down, an Aussie lady stopped by and was brought through to me, as no-one else could answer her questions. We had a nice conversation, and I told her I felt better and that she'd made my day. "*I've made your day?*" she said, "*You've made my life!*" Apparently, she'd been feeling much more depressed than I had. She offered me \$50!

One evening, someone came and asked me to visit his aged mother in a nearby nursing-home. Of course, I went, and sat quietly beside her bed. There was no point in saying anything, as she was in a coma and couldn't understand English anyway. I asked the son for a moist face-towel, and concentrated on it for a while, then told him to wipe his mother's face with it. When he did so, her mouth ~ which had been open for some days ~ closed. That night, he got a call to say she'd gone, peacefully.

During this stay in DM, I visited a Chinese family who lived near the temple, and on their living-room wall was a large picture of storks perched on a pine-tree. Now, storks, to Chinese people, signify long-life (like lots of other people, they are very concerned with living as long as possible; the quantity of life is often more important than the quality). I told the family that the artist who'd painted this picture was painting only from an idea and not from direct observation. "How do you know?" they asked.

"Because storks habitually perch in the same place, and there are no droppings on the limb, as there would have been if the artist had painted from observation," I said. "A camera doesn't pick and choose like this, but leaves nothing out, faithfully recording just what is there."

This brought to mind what I'd been thinking about perspective. We know from young, without being told or taught, that people and things in the distance are not as small as they appear to be; in fact, we know many things that we've never been taught, or we soon learn them. Centuries ago ~ as we can tell from pre-Renaissance paintings ~ although people knew what we know about people and things in the distance, artists didn't understand about perspective, or didn't incorporate it into their paintings.

Giotto, an Italian artist of the 13th - 14th centuries, was among the first to begin painting people in a less-flat way than had previously been the custom, but even he showed parallel lines ~ as in tiled floors ~ remaining parallel instead of converging inwards to give the impression of distance. He was painting from ideas rather than direct observation. Now, it's important to understand this when we set out to follow Dharma, as we must learn to see things as are they *are* instead of as we would *like* them to be; we must learn to put aside our preferences, recognizing them as the cause of many problems, and try to discover *what* is right or wrong rather than thinking in terms of *who* is right or wrong.

An Aussie guy came to DM one day, to collect a large Buddha-image he'd stored there. Seeing me, he said, "*I'm* a Pratchekka Buddha" (according to the scriptures, there are two kinds of Buddhas: one, like Gotama, who devotes his life to teaching, and another who doesn't teach; he is known as a 'Silent Buddha.') "Oh," I said, unimpressed, "One of those, are you? Go on, get your Buddha!" Our capacity to delude ourselves is seemingly without limits. These nuts do quite a lot of harm to Buddhism.

One of the Malaysian students who attended some of my talks in BM, by the name of Lee Yong Chern, introduced his parents to me when they came to visit him, and his father asked me if I'd like to visit his hometown, Kuching, in East Malaysia. I told him that if I were invited, I would go; I'd never been to East Malaysia ~ Sarawak and Sabah ~ not knowing anyone there. He said he would speak to the committee of the Kuching Buddhist Society where he and his wife were members. I later got a letter from them inviting me to visit and give talks there.

Having left the land of my birth many years ago to travel around the world, I am a stranger there, and know countries like India and Malaysia much better than I do England. The place where I was born and grew up, however, was really quite beautiful, being in the countryside, and for many years, feeling the urge to trace my roots, I'd wanted to go back for a visit. This was my purpose when I left Australia in January '95, but first, I made another trip in Malaysia, and even went to Thailand to pay a brief visit to Dhammaviro and Khemadassi in their mountain-hermitage near Phang-nga. Another German monk had joined

them, so now they were three. It was good to see them again, but they were having problems with some Thai monks who had come to reside at the monastery in front of the canyon, and although Dhammaviro was senior in rank, he was still a foreigner. The Thais had turned the local people against the Germans by spreading false rumors about them, and their food-supply dried up. Fortunately, a school-teacher-couple from Phang-nga had become firm supporters, and visited them regularly, bringing enough food to last until their next visit. Eventually, however, they had to move away and settle somewhere else.

Back in Malaysia, I had to go into damage-control mode in several places because of *Bhikkhu Hye*, the person I'd met in Kuantan in '78, and who'd gone to California to become a monk in the *City of Ten-Thousand Buddhas*. We'd kept in touch over the years, but gradually, he had become disillusioned with the place and saw things he didn't like. He decided to return to Malaysia, but was told he would have to disrobe first. When he refused, they forcibly disrobed him, which made him very angry. He returned to Malaysia violently anti-Mahayana, and went to Thailand to take Theravada ordination. Then he began to rampage up and down Malaysia denouncing Kwan Yin and saying there was no such being, upsetting lots of people who believe implicitly in Kwan Yin; he also turned on vegetarianism.

I went to see him in Penang, where he was staying in a Chinese temple, and told him that although I understood how he felt (I didn't remind him I'd been against him going to California in the first place), he shouldn't expect other people to think as he did. If the Buddha didn't agree with something of the prevailing culture, instead of rejecting it, He turned it around and gave it a different meaning, as He did with the Hindu gods; if He'd denied their existence, people would have been offended and might not have listened to Him. Instead, He used a 'skillful means', and said that yes, there are gods, and that they are protectors of the Dharma. In this way, He incorporated the Hindu gods into His system, and thereby didn't alienate people. How wise He was. Bhikkhu Hye obviously didn't agree with what I said, as he continued his campaign. Some people are impressed because, during his talks and in his writings, he often quotes from the scriptures, but this is mere parrotry ~ and not of his own experience. He is con-

vinced that because a thing is found in the scriptures, it must therefore be true. From a passage in the sutras, which tells that when *Sakka-Devaraja* (king of the gods), was being chased in his chariot by demons, he almost crashed into a grove of trees in which a colony of *garudas* were perched, he had come to believe that there were animals in heaven. But since when has anything in the scriptures constituted proof of anything? Unless and until we have experienced a thing by and for ourselves, we are not in a position to say it's true.

News reached me that Jagaro, who had ordained in Bangkok in 1972, had disrobed, sending shock-waves through the Buddhist community of Australia. He'd been the abbot of a monastery in Perth for many years. My reaction to this was, well, it's his life, and up to him to decide what he's going to do with it; we take no life-long vows, and may disrobe whenever we wish to, if that's what we want. We'd last met in Perth in 1986, and since then, I'd read some of his writings, and found them remarkably open.

I accepted the invitation from Kuching Buddhist Association, and before going, was requested to give talks on four consecutive evenings, with set topics. Now, normally, I don't plan my talks, but speak impromptu according to the situation. This time, however, I complied, and the first talk went so well that I wondered how I'd be able to follow it up, and expected smaller audiences. I was surprised, therefore, when even more people turned up for the second talk, and this one went equally well, as did the third and fourth. But I was not too pleased that the English-speaking group that had invited me made no provision for translation into Chinese, and so any non-English speakers who might have been interested had no chance. Nor did they make an effort to arrange talks for me in other temples or Buddhist societies in Kuching, but kept me just to themselves.



"What lies before us and what lies behind us are small matters compared to what lies within us. And when we bring

what is within us out into the world,
miracles happen."

~ Henry David Thoreau, American Philosopher, 1817 - 1862 ~

Indeed. We may travel the world-wide but must still come back
to ourselves in the end, to find what can only be found inside.

"Worry gives a small thing a big shadow."

~ Swedish proverb ~

14

ENGLAND AND GERMANY AND BACK

Soon after visiting Kuching, I left Malaysia for England in April, on the same plane with Ganeshan Chitty, who I'd known from SKE, Malacca, and who was a steward with Malaysian Airlines (MAS). He happened to be flying that route, and took me to have a look at the cockpit, a thing I'd never done before, and there's no chance of doing it again after 9/11. It was fascinating!

Arriving at Heathrow airport next morning and unwilling to face the hassle of the Underground, I caught a bus to Manchester, but oh, wished I'd braved the Tube after all, as it took many hours, and from Manchester, I had to get a train to Crewe anyway, as there were no buses; living in Australia and other countries had spoiled me, and I expected too much.

Before going to England, I knew Harold had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's, but I'd never been close-up to anyone with this terrible disease before; I was soon to learn what it was like. Glen welcomed me warmly, but he couldn't remember who I was, and soon took an active dislike towards me. All attempts to explain were in vain; he'd made up his mind that I was Glen's 'toy-boy.' He was not yet violent, at this time, but still in and out of lucidity.

It was still very cold when I got there, so I postponed my plans to retrace my footsteps, and in the meantime started doing various jobs around the place for Glen, and once started, there really

was no end, as one thing led to another, as it always does. Glen was happy about this, and worked with me on many of the projects, including leveling out parts of the lawns, which sloped down towards the railway lines at the bottom of their garden, across from which was the Rolls-Royce plant. She kept a few hens for their eggs, but her hen-shed, right down at the bottom, had become almost buried by the slippage of the soil, and was like a fall-out shelter, so that she had to crouch to get inside for the eggs. I couldn't allow her to go on using this, so suggested building a new one; she eagerly agreed and we set about it. The finished result was a great improvement.

We had a glorious summer, quite unusual for Britain; in fact, there was virtually a drought, and I don't remember any rain at all. This was great for our jobs outside.

Glen's eldest daughter, Deena, had married some years before, but both she and her farmer-husband treated Glen very rudely. They had two children, a boy and a girl, Wilky and Emma, aged about 7 and 5 at the time. Karin, Glen's second daughter, was living at home, and at 23, was still single but promiscuous. Glen had always spoiled her kids, and so, not surprisingly, Karin did not know the value of things and was very wasteful. Much more about her later, but let me just say here that she had a dog ~ or rather, a bitch ~ who she called *Ella*. Needless to say, I renamed her several times, until finally, she became '*Sniffy*,' which was quite appropriate because of her sniffing-habit. I became very fond of her, and she was fond of me, too.

From Crewe, I made forays to the scenes of my childhood, 25 kms away. My home-village, Burwardsley, had changed quite a bit, and wasn't as well-kept as I remember it; the grass verges at the roadsides ~ which used to be so neat ~ were overgrown with weeds and briars.

Wandering around the village, I saw some new houses, and gaps where others ~ like ours ~ had been. I met several people who remembered me; some had even heard that I'd become a monk; looking back now, I guess I was always odd; whoever would have thought that a village-boy like me would wander the world and return as a monk? But I didn't find the hospitality I'd

grown used to in S.E. Asia; no-one invited me to stay with them. Again, Philip Benson talked to me outside his gate without asking if I'd like a cup of tea! Would I have done that to him, if it were he coming back after almost thirty years away? Maybe his home was so messy that he was ashamed to ask me in.

In the church-yard, I came upon the grave of Mr. Ravenscroft and his wife; thinking thoughts of "Thanks for your efforts with me; even the canings were good!" I moved on. Names of other people I'd known stared up at me from the stones; I read their epitaphs. "Rest in Peace," David Dodd and Eric Chesters.

Because the slope on which the chapel was built was subsiding, it was closed until funds were raised to strengthen and make it safe; meanwhile, the church, had offered to share their premises with the chapel-goers, until their own were again usable ~ quite a development, considering how at odds they used to be.

The forest surrounding my rocky eminence had become a game-reserve to breed pheasants (for shooting in the autumn; cruel sport!), and was out-of-bounds. Having come so far to revisit it, however, I wasn't going to allow a few signs to deter me; early one morning, therefore, before the game-wardens were around, I went there and sat pondering on how my life has been like a river, twisting, turning and meandering its way into the distance, but to no perceivable end. My name was still there, scratched into the rock.

Our castle had been opened to the public as a tourist-attraction, so this time, I paid to go in, but it was so many years since I'd last been there that it seemed different, somehow. But maybe the difference was more in me than in the place, as I was seeing it with different eyes this time ~ eyes that had seen so many other castles and things since then.

I was never very close to our relatives ~ aunts, uncles, cousins, but when one cousin ~ Ann ~ discovered I was back, she set about organizing a family get-together (she's very much into such things, and together with another cousin, was engaged in tracing back our family-tree). Not having seen these relatives for almost thirty years, I thought it would be interesting, but the actual event was disappointing, to say the least. While I did not expect or want to be the center of attention, I found their topics

of conversation banal; no-one asked me anything about my travels. Nor was it because they were Christians, either; although they might call themselves so, they are not practicing Christians, or religious in the real sense, at all. Maybe my lifestyle and the things I've done are so different and removed from their routine world that they considered me a threat to their security. Their reaction ~ or non-reaction ~ to me was quite different than had been that of those other relatives in the US, who I've told about earlier. It's probably the last time we will meet.

A visit to England for this purpose would not have been complete without going to our holiday beach. I went alone, by bike, as I had done to our village. What a change! The shacks among the dunes had vanished, as if they'd never existed; only when I searched did I discover a pathway to one of them, overgrown with weeds. I was told that the area had been bought by a consortium years before, but the plans they had to develop it into a resort had come to nothing. What a pity. Many people had happy times there. Now, those same people ~ or their children ~ probably jet off to the *Costa del Sol*, but are they happier there than they were in the rustic shacks among the sand-hills?

Nearby was a caravan-park, but as it wasn't yet holiday-season, there weren't many people about. The beach was deserted, so I was able to wander and muse undisturbed. The dunes looked much the same, although some had disappeared altogether ~ trucked away to glass-factories, perhaps. The lighthouse still stood, solitary, lonely, unused.

Apart from the cries of a few gulls and the faint sound of the sea far out, it was very quiet. I sat on the sand to eat the lunch Glen had packed for me. There, along the beach, I 'saw' my father with his inner-tube, and two young boys beside him; I 'heard' a black dog barking, happy to join in the fun (he was so faithful, the black dog we had so long ago). Of that small group along the sand, only one remains, and he is no longer young. I have come a long way since then.

As I sat there, suddenly, a sound I'd been waiting for came from far up in the sky: the song of a sky-lark. I lay back and closed my eyes, not even bothering to search for the bird. Memories

welled up in my mind, of things long not thought of, that if told of here might mean nothing to others. It's amazing how much is stored away in the files of the mind.

Sheila had shown no interest in my desire to trace my roots, saying, "You can never go back to the past," which is true, of course; we can only go forwards. But the past hasn't really gone as we think it has; it is still here, and we carry it with us; in fact, we *are* the past; the present is the past with a bit more added to it. And we can make sense of the present only by understanding the past. Without the past, the present doesn't exist. So, the more we understand of the past, the more sense we'll be able to make of the present. This is why I wanted to return to England: to take stock of my life before going any further. I'm glad I went; I think I understand myself a bit better than I did before.

While there, without a typewriter, I considered my resistance to learning to use a computer; several times in Melbourne, people had lent me one and tried to teach me, but it wouldn't register, and in frustration, I said to them, "Come on, get this thing out of here," and stayed with my typewriter. But now I decided to make an effort, otherwise I'd become like a dinosaur, so I bought a word-processor, and managed to figure out how to use it, which was an event in itself, as I find the manuals that go with such things so hard to understand that I need a manual to read them! Anyway, there was no-one there to assist me with it, so it was a matter of doing it myself. Eventually, I wrote two books with it before graduating to a second-hand laptop two years later.

One day, about to go into a post-office downtown, I saw someone looking at me in a strange way. He was still there when I came out, and approaching me, asked if I were Mike Houghton; he'd recognized me from the photo that had appeared in the local paper 10 years before. This was someone I used to hang around with in 1964, before I made my first trip overseas. He was living with his wife and young son not far from Glen's; I saw him a number of times after that.

In the mail one day were some tapes of Bhikkhu Hye's talks, and a note saying: "If you meet anyone who would like to listen to pure, unadulterated Dhamma, you may give them these". I was astounded, and couldn't bring myself to listen to them for

quite some time, afraid the earth might quake or something, as it was supposed to have done when the Buddha gave His first sermon! When I finally plucked up the courage to play them, and nothing extraordinary happened, I was not surprised to find them dry, scholastic and hair-splitting, overflowing with scriptural references: “*Sutta* number so-and-so; this *Nikaya*, that *Nikaya*,” and so on. I could not, in all conscience, have given them to anyone; I don’t want to scare people off!

Through Betty, I had been in touch with her friend, Jean, near London, and she invited me to visit, so I did, but had no idea about her relationship with her husband, John. They picked me up at the train-station, and almost the first thing John said was: “I see you haven’t lost your northern accent.” I was stunned by his rudeness, but later understood it when Jean informed me that he was illiterate; at 48, *he didn’t know how to read or write, and he was concerned about my accent!* He was Jean’s second husband, and younger than her, but he really didn’t love her and treated her abominably, and didn’t care at all that she was a very sick woman; moreover, he had a mistress in London. While I was there, Jean came down one morning and told me that he’d kicked her out of bed as she was disturbing his sleep. I suggested she lie on the sofa, but she said she couldn’t do that as it was John’s! Later, she needed medicine from the pharmacy, but was unable to go herself, nor would he go for her, so I went to get it. Why the heck didn’t she leave him, I wondered? Eventually, many years later, she did, and was alright living alone.

Now, I’d kept in touch, intermittently, with Michael over the years. He had inherited \$700,000 when his mother died, and with this he took his family and moved to Portugal with the intention of establishing a Buddhist center there. His wife was as hopelessly impractical as he was, however, and soon all the money had gone and they had to return to Germany, destitute. Knowing I was in England, he wrote, asking me to visit him and telling of a friend who was in the middle of renovating a farmhouse to use as a Buddhist retreat-place. I agreed to go, and inquired about the train-fare to Munich, but it was actually more, one-way, than a round-trip air-fare ~ £140 as against £127, so of

course, I bought the plane-ticket. Saying goodbye to Glen, but without telling Harold, I left Manchester for Munich in September, and was met at the airport by Michael and his friend, Ludwig. Michael took me to his home south of the city, where I met *Jutta*, his wife, and *Korby*, their 15-year-old-son, who smoked dope every day; their daughter, Julia, had left home just before I got there and was living on the streets of Berlin, with her hair dyed green; I never met her.

It was good to see him again, but he just didn't know how to manage, maybe because of his upbringing. His father had been a successful movie-director, and always had servants in his large house to do everything for them; Michael had never learned to do things for himself, and in turn, had spoiled his own kids, indulging their every desire as long as his money lasted. Now, with his money gone, he was in a fix, even though he and Jutta both had jobs. They were renting a house, where I stayed with them for 6 weeks, with several short stays with Ludwig. Jutta often gave Michael a hard time, and one evening, over dinner, she was nagging him severely, and he was just sitting there taking it all. Then she got up and went out, and I thought she'd gone upstairs, so said to him: "If *only* you hadn't disrobed! We could have had so many good wanderings together!"

At this, her head came in at the door, and she said, "*What* did you say?" Well, she had clearly heard, and I couldn't deny it.

In spite of this, he still had his droll sense-of-humor. Another time, there was a sort of cream-dish for dinner, and I asked what it was called; he told me, "Quark."

"**O**h," I said, "the only quark I know of is the smallest particle of matter in the universe."

With a straight face, he said, "You are wrong, you know. The smallest particle of matter in the universe is the brain of a Jehovah's Witness!" Poor Michael; he'd really tied himself up. Several times Jutta told me that he was still a monk at heart, and he told me that never a day passed without him thinking of Dharma.

Ludwig was much more practical than Michael, and had not only built his own house ~ and a nice one at that ~ but owned and operated his own cinema, which was his source of income. He'd bought a dilapidated farmhouse, and hired workmen to renovate

it; he also worked on it himself, too, when he had time. His idea was to get a monk to reside at his center, but I wasn't prepared to be the one; moreover, it was already cold with snow falling, and I felt the need to leave and return to Malaysia.



15

THE LAST LINK IS CUT

I had no onward ticket, but there were no discount fares, and the cheapest I could get was with Kuwaiti Airlines, but it was a hefty sum. Nor was it a very comfortable flight. We had to transit via Kuwait, and spend several hours there before flying on. I was glad to get to K.L. Bee Huat was waiting for me, and on the way to the temple, he picked up someone who would become the best translator I'd ever had in Malaysia, Wong Ching Wei, better than the most well-known translators there, but he wasn't yet well-known for his abilities.

In Penang, I visited Amigo and his family, and was sad to learn that his wife had been in and out of hospital with breast-cancer; the prognosis was not good. I gave him my hand-phone number, and told him to call if they needed me, but he didn't. I went over to the East Coast, and in Kuantan found that two weeks earlier, Tan Ngoh Yong had passed away, asking, on his death-bed, for monks; I was sorry that I'd not been there to render him some assistance. I decided to return to Penang as soon as I could, and so, after completing my trip up the East Coast, I did so.

I called Amigo when I got there, to ask about his wife. He told me the hospital had discharged her, unable to do anything else for her. She was at home on oxygen and morphine. I said I would come the next morning, and when I got there, found her propped up on a bed downstairs, with oxygen cylinders beside her. She was still conscious, but very weak and unable to say much; she'd asked for the oxygen and morphine to be disconnected, although she must have been in great pain. Sonny and

his family were there, but Eddie hadn't yet come. I sat beside her bed and held her hand; she knew I was there and squeezed my hand in return. I called for a moist face-towel and concentrated over it, then gave it to Amigo to wipe her forehead with. Sonny was giving her water from a pipette. A family-friend came while I was there, and sat beside the bed, holding her hand and speaking kindly to her.

When Eddie arrived, I called them all to control their grief, as their wife and mother was going, and they could only help her by thinking with one mind and sending positive thoughts. I exhorted them to think of all the good times they'd spent with her, and all the sacrifices she'd made on their behalf, all she had done for them, suffering with them when they were sick or sad or in danger. Such is the love of a mother for her children, I said, that when her child is sick, she actually suffers more than it, even though she's not sick herself, and would willingly take upon herself the sickness of the child if it could be free of it, but this she cannot do. She suffered giving birth, suffered through the growing years and the years of uncertainty; truly, the love of a mother for her children is long-suffering.

They all cried as I spoke, and then I left and returned to my place. Shortly afterwards, Amigo called to say she had gone, peacefully, and her last words had been, "*Mana Abhinyana?*" ("Where's Abhinyana?") I was glad that I'd got back just in time to see her and help her in her hour of need.

The family requested me to perform the funeral-service. On the appointed day, someone picked me up and also picked up Luang Pau, who was in MBMC at the time. Before we got to the house, referring to my vegetarianism, he said that I should eat meat that day. I didn't bother replying. He'd also been close to the family, and they'd asked him to do the chanting, as he was good at that, whereas my chanting was (and still is) rudimentary; I'd not learned much more of that after becoming a monk, because I wasn't impressed with what it was used for. I was there to give the Dharma-talk.

Chanting, talk and lunch over, the coffin was carried outside and placed on trestles on the road before being put into the hearse; there was a small table at the foot of it for offerings like flowers,

fruit, candles and incense, but there was no burning of joss-papers and such that are usually part of a Chinese funeral; they had deliberately kept it simple. Even so, Luang Pau stood at one side, speaking in Hokkien (their dialect) ridiculing their offerings as superstitious. I was amazed at his bad manners, and thought how insensitive he was!

At the crematorium, out of respect, people were placing their last sticks of incense in a pot at the foot of the coffin. I stood beside it, with Luang Pau behind me, and decided I also wanted to offer one to someone who had always been kind to me, but as I moved to do so, Luang Pau tugged my robe, as if to say that monks don't offer incense to lay-people. Slowly turning, I looked him in the eye in such a way that he could not help understand that if he continued, I would let him pull the robe off my shoulder. He let go, and I offered my incense, thinking as I did so, "Well; the last link has been severed. I will not see him again."

Once again, I made a big trip to give talks, and went to many places I'd never been before. And, while making this round, did my longest-ever fast of almost a month (I'd fasted for varying periods before ~ a week, two weeks, and so on ~ and felt good at the end of it. I even went to Kuching again, and this time, asked them to select a panel of people to interview me on stage before the audience as something new, but they were not flexible enough and didn't comply. That was the last time I went there.

I bought a second-hand laptop from someone who wanted a newer one, and of course, it took me quite a while to learn how to use it; it came with a second-hand printer, too.

Charles, in K.L. ~ who I mentioned before ~ was from a wealthy family and had set up a small temple an hour or so outside the city in the middle of a rubber-estate and gathered a group of followers. He invited me to give talks there on a number of occasions, until I finally realized he was only using me. In the meantime, he introduced me to a Tibetan trader named *Kalu* he'd become close to. Kalu was soon to return to Nepal, where he lived with his family.

One day, having lunch in a restaurant in K.L. with a group of people, a lady who I'd never met before asked me, "Are you

happier now as a monk than you were before?" I don't know why she asked this question, and suppose most people would assume that I am happier as a monk. I thought about it for a few moments before replying,

"Well, actually, no, I'm not. I don't mean that I'm unhappy now ~ sometimes I am, and sometimes I'm not ~ but before I became aware of Dharma, I lived a carefree ~ or rather, careless ~ life, thinking primarily of myself, and not doing a very good job of that, either. When my eyes were opened, however, I couldn't live like that any more, but had to become more responsible, considering the rights and feelings of others, and not just my own. Life became harder. But at the same time, I found something more important than personal happiness: Joy. And joy is a quality that lifts you up, like a balloon, and enables you to see things from a different viewpoint, enables you to look at the problems and difficulties of life in a different way, to see through and beyond them, as it were. If we make happiness ~ certainly, *personal* happiness ~ our goal in life, not only will it evade us, but we will suffer more as a result. Give up the frantic search for happiness, and let it find you (actually, it does, quite often).

As we go along this Path, we often find that life doesn't become easier but harder; the way of self-improvement is as if we are climbing a mountain; to fall down is easy, while to climb is hard. This is not the only thing we find, however; at the same time, we find that we grow correspondingly stronger, and are able not only to carry our own burdens, but to reach out to others now and then, and help them with theirs.

In April, I flew back to Adelaide, and could see two female customs-officers, waiting, like vultures, to tear into me; it was in their eyes; they wanted blood, and would have found something to tax me on, even if I'd not had my laptop. They charged me \$150 on it, and would probably have taxed me on the printer, too, had I not said it came with the laptop.

After some time at Gawler, I returned to Melbourne to stay in a caravan at the back of Trung's house; he'd written to invite me, but it turned out he hadn't really cleared it with his dad, who was not very pleased with the idea. Anyway, I spent six cold weeks there ~ it was winter ~ before going to Sydney, to be met by

Baker Vo and his family and conveyed to their new home. I was amazed! They were living in a mansion with a swimming-pool! No more ramshackle quarters for them! They had done so well in their bakery that they'd taken over a second one; I asked them what they were putting in their bread! They took me to visit the huge new Chinese temple at Wollongong, one of the many that Ven. Hsing Yun had established all over the world. This one ~ *Tien Hao* ~ was reported to have cost between 50 to 60 million Australian dollars. Needless to say, it was magnificent, but was already being run as a business, with charges for everything; they had to recoup their outlay.

Back, then, to Adelaide, to keep an eye on mum while Sheila and Frank made an extended visit to their daughter in Brisbane. They intended to sell up in Adelaide and move to Queensland to be near her. I should have recognized that mum was already failing at this time, but only saw this when I looked back later. She'd become incontinent, but was ashamed to tell anyone of this and tried to hide it; she never wanted to cause trouble to anyone. I set about cleaning up around the place, ready for it to be put on the market as soon as Frank had managed to sell his business, a car-wrecker's yard; it took me four days to mow the extensive lawns and roadside verges, and they were amazed when they returned; it had added value to it. Ah, but while they were away, Frank, struck by chest-pains, had to be hospitalized and a *stent* inserted into one of his almost-blocked arteries. Sheila was really shaken, as if she'd never thought anything could happen to them; she was quite unprepared, having no workable philosophy of life.

I must try to weave in something of the ongoing sad saga of Tran Cong Nam here. His wife and remaining daughter had joined him in L.A., and I thought everything would be alright with him now. Several years later, his daughter had married; Mr. Nam was fond of his new son-in-law, and very happy for his daughter, but just one month after the wedding, her husband died of a heart-attack. More suffering for this poor man.

Back in Melbourne, I told of my intention to go to India again, and Trung, Phong and Loi signed up to go with me. I left before

them in October to make another trip in Malaysia and flew out to K.L., agreeing to meet them in Kathmandu the next month.

While in Malaysia this time, I had dizzy-spells, with the room spinning around me. I didn't know the cause, and still don't, but guess they were symptoms of diabetes. I went to a Chinese physician ~ a quack, though I didn't know this until afterwards ~ who didn't diagnose what was wrong, but merely gave me some ginseng-extract, which was of no use at all. Fortunately, the dizziness passed, but it was quite uncomfortable while it lasted.

I made a brief visit to Singapore, where I spent a couple of days with Freddy Khong, who'd disrobed years before and had a wife and two sons and a successful carpet-business. He drove me back over the Causeway to Skudai, where I spent a while with some Buddhist students, and with them watched the handover of Hong Kong to China on TV. I was a bit surprised when one of them excitedly said, "Yeah, we got it back!" *We?* Although ethnic Chinese, he had been born and brought up in Malaysia, and probably wasn't aware that he was thinking racially, and I wondered where his loyalties lay. Damn lucky he didn't live through the madness of the Cultural Revolution!



In the Nineteenth Century, Victor Hugo, French Poet
and Novelist, 1802 - 1885 wrote:

"In the Twentieth Century, war will be
dead, the scaffold will be dead, hatred
will be dead, frontier boundaries will
be dead, dogmas will be dead; Man will
live. He will possess something higher
than all these ~ a great country, the
whole earth, and a great hope, the
whole heaven."

Alas, if only that dream had come true! As it was, the 20th Century was the bloodiest of them all, and the 21st got off to a bad start. But we should not lose hope, and should still strive, you and I, for a better world.

16

A TRIP WITH HEADACHES

By this time, Loi, Phong and Trung had flown into Singapore and staying with some of Loi's relatives; I spoke with them on the phone and was assured that everything was on course. They flew out to Kathmandu a day before me in mid-November. Kalu met me at the airport, having been notified by Charles that I was coming. He took me to a hotel in the city.

It wasn't long before I ran into Trung in Thamel, the tourist-belt, and he took me to their hotel, which was cheaper than mine, so I moved there. I then set about showing them around, but this wasn't easy, especially with Phong, who didn't want to get up early to go places, and complained that he thought this was to be a holiday where he'd be able to relax, and that he needed ten hours' sleep a day! He hadn't brought anything with him in the way of provisions, but greedily ate whatever I'd given them money to bring for me; he behaved like a spoiled brat! Trung was alright for a while, and wasn't like Phong.

We met Raju, a thanka-shop owner, who appeared quite friendly and trustworthy; we sometimes used to drop in to talk with him when we were passing.

I applied for an India visa, but because it takes the embassy so long to issue one ~ up to a week ~ I decided to go to Pokhara for a few days and then return to collect it. I'd earlier contacted Yam Bahadur to ask if he'd like to accompany us around India as our translator; he'd agreed. Consequently, we set out, break-

ing the trip in *Dumre* to pick him up. We met his large family in their one-roomed home which had neither electricity nor running water, and gave them some money and clothes. He was soon ready to go with us.

I met an Australian Christian missionary in Dumre, who was busy trying to catch fish. Years before, the government had prohibited such people from entering the country, but now they were flooding in, doing their utmost, by whatever means they could think of, to convert the 'heathens' and 'save their souls.' Although most Nepalese call themselves Hindus or Buddhists, they are quite ignorant about their religions, and are very superstitious, and many are illiterate, so this was a 'happy hunting-ground' for the missionaries; Christianity always flourishes in such conditions. You don't need a brain to be a Christian; all you need is to believe the simplistic nonsense that is fed to you.

In Pokhara, we found a cheaper hotel than in Kathmandu, and spent a few days there, taking a row-boat out on the lake, and climbing up to the stupa. Then, with Trung and Yam Bahadur ~ who from hereon, I'll refer to as 'Ashok,' which is the name I gave him to make it easier for the others ~ I returned to Kathmandu for my visa, arranging to meet Loi and Phong at Lumbini; Loi had made a short trip in Nepal and India the year before; they would make their own way there.

Visa obtained, we took a night-bus from Kathmandu to Bhairava, and met the others in Lumbini as planned. We visited the new Vietnamese temple; it was one of several coming up there. Thay Huynh Hieu had achieved wonders there, as it is by no means easy to get things done in these parts where corruption and indolence prevail.

We pressed on to Gorakhpur and caught a bus to Kusinara, but Phong seemed unhappy that Trung should help me with my bags, though I never ascertained why; *he* never offered. At Kusinara, our troubles began. At the Chinese temple, the Vietnamese nun I'd met there before very rudely wanted to put us all to stay in one room, but I wasn't having this, of course, and we got several of the many empty rooms there.

We went to the other main Buddhist places, staying in the Vietnamese temple in Budh-Gaya. From here, we went to Rajgir,

where we climbed to Vulture's Peak and the Shanti-Stupa on the hill above, we also went to the *Saptaparna* Cave behind some other hills. Supposedly, this was the place where the *First Council* was held, three months after the Buddha's Demise, when a great number of monks met to codify the Teachings while they were still fresh in mind and before they forgot. I had never been there before, but failed to understand how a great number of people could have got inside, as the cave is such that it's not possible even to stand up in it; the flat place outside is also not very spacious.

We returned to Benares to get a train to Madras. It was night by then, and the train was there, but in darkness, as there was still an hour or so before departure. We got in to put our bags down, but must have been followed by someone else ~ probably someone with a well-rehearsed *modus operandi* ~ and in the confusion, one of our bags disappeared; it contained my camera, our *Lonely Planet Guide for India*, and some other useful stuff. I later learned that Benares station is notorious for this.

The trip to Madras was long and tiring, and it took a while to find a hotel once we got there. The others were not interested when I showed them around, and when I pointed out the Courts ~ an attractive Raj-era building in the Indo-Saracenic style ~ and asked if they would like a closer look, Phong asked, "What is it?" and passed on. Loi complained about the food, saying she wanted something more substantial than what the locals ate (later on in the trip, she was quite happy with it, though). Trung got sick with fever or something and became rather scared, the little boy in him showing through. I took him to a hospital where I bought a new syringe for him to be given a shot in his butt (very unwise to trust hospitals in India; they recycle everything).

Loi and Ashok accompanied me to the Theosophical Society headquarters at Adyar, just outside Madras, while Trung and Phong went off on their own somewhere. We had quite a nice time. But by this time, Trung was fed-up; the cultural aspects of this trip were nothing to him, and decided to return to Kathmandu, so got a train back to Gorakhpur, alone, and buses on from there. And Phong was more interested in watching cricket on TV than in anything else.

We went to Ajanta and Ellora, and also to some caves I'd never been to before, known as *Pithalkora*, which were remote and hard to reach; they were even older than the other caves; the sculpture showed unmistakable Persian influence, with winged bulls and so on. It was quiet and peaceful, when we arrived, with no-one there. Suddenly, we were aware of a group of Japanese visitors, who were on us almost as soon as we knew it, as they came quietly and respectfully. Not long after they'd gone, we heard a group of Indians coming, long before they appeared; what a difference in the behavior of the two groups! Indians are such noisy people, and screech and yell so much; is it to scare away any ghosts that might be around, perhaps?

The excavation of caves as monasteries began about two thousand years ago. As Buddhism spread and became firmly rooted, wealthy patrons showed their devotion by financing the building of monasteries and cutting of caves, and supporting the monks who came to reside therein. Artists were employed to carve images and paint frescoes. The areas around would have been fertile and cultivated, with villages where monks could obtain alms-food. For some reason, it was decided to excavate caves in Central India, rather than construct monasteries, and these fared better than the temples and monasteries in the Gangetic Plain, which were easier to destroy. I mentioned earlier the destruction of Nalanda by marauding Muslims.

On from there to Agra, to endure the hassle with the rickshaw pests in and around the station; they are little short of violent in their solicitations for customers. We negotiated with one of the less-vociferous, and were taken to a cheap hotel in the Taj area. Here, Phong decided he'd had enough of this trip and would return to Oz to watch cricket on TV. Consequently, he got a train-ticket to Gorakhpur and went off on his way back to Kathmandu; I didn't try to dissuade him, even though, if something had happened to him ~ as it might have done ~ his family would have held me responsible. Before he left, I took them to places in Agra that they would probably not have gone on their own.

Leaving some of our baggage in Delhi, we went to Dharamsala, but it was snowing when we arrived in *Macleod Ganj* and very cold. We stayed in a hotel, and next day hiked up to Dharamsala, as there were no vehicles running. Along the way, people

on rooftops were bombarding passersby with huge snow-balls which, if they didn't directly hit them, otherwise soaked them by splashing in the slush; I did not appreciate these games. Dharamsala is where the Dalai Lama resides, and people could still, at that time, request an audience with him; he was quite accessible. We did not seek one, however, figuring that he had better things to do with his time. After walking around up there a while, we descended to our hotel the way we had come, and tried to get warm. We took a night-bus back to Delhi, but it was the worst bus-ride I'd ever had, as all the windows were either broken or wouldn't close; it was damn cold and draughty, and the seats were most uncomfortable as we bumped along; it was such a relief to finally get there.

After more days in Delhi, we got a train to Bikaner in Rajasthan to the west. It was my first time there. We saw the fort, which doubled as the maharaja's palace, and visited several Jain temples. I'd read something of Jainism, and of what the Buddha thought of it, but had never met any Jain monks before. Jainism began at the same time and in the same area as Buddhism, and is also non-theistic. Inside the monastery, I wasn't surprised to find the white-robed monks wearing face-masks, as I'd heard that this was one of their customs. One monk spoke English quite well, so I was able to converse with them. I was invited to sit ~ on the floor, of course ~ but on a lower level than the Jain monks; I noted the distinction, but didn't object (many Buddhist monks also subject other people to this kind of treatment); I was also asked not to sit too close to them in case I came into physical contact with them, because ~ one of them said ~ I was wearing a watch, the battery of which was alive! (?).

Saying that I knew something of the Buddha's opinion of Jainism, in order not to be one-sided, I wished to know how Jains thought of the Buddha. They said they agreed with most of what He taught, but not with His meat-eating, which they found unacceptable as they are fastidious vegetarians, avoiding not only things like onions and garlic (as do many Buddhist vegetarians), but even vegetables that grow in the ground and which have to be uprooted, as that might cause the death of worms and insects in the soil. Many Jains ~ not only monks, but laity, too ~

also refrain from eating at night, in case any insects get into their food in the dim light. It is a religion of so many restrictions.

Unlike Buddhism, Jainism didn't spread beyond India to become an international religion, as Jain monks eschew any kind of transport and walk wherever they want to go. They carry a soft broom to sweep the way before them, in case they accidentally tread on any insects and cause their death, and also go barefoot for the same reason (feet being softer than shoes). And instead of shaving their heads as Buddhist monks do, they pluck out their hair by the roots, though why they do this, I didn't discover.

When I asked what they expected to get from their extreme practices, they seemed taken aback and didn't know what to say. Out of politeness, I didn't pursue this, but it is a thing I ask Buddhists, too, and could be asked of anyone: What do you expect to get from your practices, and are your expectations realistic? Do your practices make you better than people who don't do such things, or do they make you proud and feel superior? Does shaving your head ~ or plucking out your hair by the roots ~ for example, make you a better person? How? It is without moral value, and cannot be considered good or bad; it is simply amoral, and we lose our way if we think of it as good merely because it is something different. The search for goodness can easily lead to conceit and hypocrisy, which is definitely not good.

While talking with the Jain monks, a Hindu scholar and his entourage joined us, and the situation changed. I didn't understand much of the dialogue between Hindus and Jains, but caught a word here and there, and because I knew something of Hinduism, could tell that the Hindu was trying to prove his way superior to Jainism. He was talking about Maya ~ a central Hindu idea ~ maintaining that everything is illusive and unreal. I found myself siding with the Jains, and joined in the debate by saying that things are real in context, at the moment, but because they change, ultimately are unreal. "But can you say pain is unreal if I pinch you?" I said, leaning over and pinching the Hindu's leg.

We must resist the tendency to think ourselves better than other people because of our practices, and not elevate ourselves; if others elevate us we must be even more careful, because if they can put us up, they can also put us down. "Be humble, if wisdom

you would attain; be humbler still when wisdom you have attained," says *The Voice of the Silence*. Sit on a high place and you may fall down; sit on the floor and you cannot.

There is no question about being better or worse; we only torment ourselves with our comparisons, when in reality, we are in competition with no-one or nothing but our own lower urges. So, if we are not better or worse, what are we? Simply *humans* at a particular stage of evolution, and as such have come a long way in a relatively short time. According to anthropology, humans have existed about 4 or 5 million years, which isn't very long at all, geologically speaking; we are new-comers. Early humans, however, were more like apes than we of today, but even so, they were our ancestors, and we have good reason to be grateful, for without them, we wouldn't be here; if the chain of generations had broken, humans would have followed the dinosaurs into extinction. How did we survive? How did the chain hold? It's really quite amazing, and means that, as human beings, just as we are, we are incredibly successful. It is essential to try to understand this. We haven't *descended*, as is claimed, but on the contrary, *ascended*, and should think of ourselves as *ascendants* rather than *descendants*. There never was a state of perfection from which we fell ~ a *Garden of Eden* ~ as the Bible says; we evolved from primitive beginnings, and will continue to do so if we can avoid destroying ourselves and Spaceship Earth.

Outside Bikaner, we visited a temple dedicated to *rats*, thousands of them, worshipped and fed, and it is said that, contrary to what you would expect of them, their numbers never increase. Nor is there a characteristic smell of dead rats.

Travelling further through the desert, we reached Jaisalmer, where there is a remarkable fort on a hill, with scores of towers, and still inhabited. The town round-about has many mansions known as *havelis*, the sandstone facades of which are ornate and intricately carved. Jaisalmer owed its wealth and status to its position on the trade-routes of former centuries; its revenue now comes from tourism.

We got rooms in a hotel on the edge of town, but soon discovered why the rates were quite cheap: they expected us to sign up for a camel-safari into the desert, but when we declined, they told us we would have to leave. We went elsewhere for a couple of days, and continued our explorations from there. It was a peaceful place, with few motor-vehicles, as most of the streets are too narrow.

From Jaisalmer, we went to Jodhpur, the *blue* city, its houses blue-washed. The massive fortress on its rocky outcrop is a *must* to see, of course. As we were walking up, someone came out of his house and insisted we go in for a cup of tea; it was hard to refuse and we succumbed to his wiles, but only that far. Inside, tea was served, and then he came on with his spiel, which might or might not have been true: how he needed money for the treatment of his handicapped son. We didn't give anything, feeling we'd already been conned, and knowing all too well about scams like this in India, and not only how babies are for hire, but are deliberately mutilated to be used for begging-purposes. I'm sure this fellow tried this with every foreigner he saw coming up or down the road to the fort; in fact, we'd seen some coming out as we approached.

It is not uncommon to see cripples on the streets of India, so badly malformed that they can't even walk or stand, but crawl around like crabs; they are cynically used, by their 'owners,' to generate income, and couldn't possibly survive without them. These 'owners' probably think of themselves as Hindus, and I'm sure they would tell you, if asked, that they believe in karma, but their actions show they have not begun to understand.

There were other interesting sights to see around Jodhpur, including the new and still-used palace of the maharaja, and a group of ornate cenotaphs of former rulers. The British shrewdly allowed most of India's princes to rule as they had long done, and in fact, had their support. In the 1970's, however, Indira Gandhi shook them from their thrones and they lost most of their vast wealth. Hard-put, many of them turned their palaces into hotels for the increasing numbers of foreign tourists.

Pushkar was our next stop. Built in a valley surrounded on three sides by mountains, first-and-foremost it is a holy Hindu town,

built around a small lake which is considered the most-sacred in India, with ritual bathing-ghats and scores of temples. Countless pilgrims come here to begin a journey which takes many of them all over India to visit other holy sites. And while temples to Shiva, Vishnu, Rama, Hanuman, Ganesh and so on are common throughout the country, here is the only-and-only temple in the world to Brahma ~ the Creator-God of Hinduism ~ modest as temples go, but with a good atmosphere; I went there often to meditate. Then, apart from its religious significance, an annual camel-fair takes place here, attracting people from all over. To accommodate the great number of visitors, many cheap hotels have sprung up ~ and I mean about \$3 per room, with bathroom and toilet; there were even buffet restaurants with an amazing variety and amount of good food, both Indian and western ~ including whole-grain bread, such as one seldom comes across in India; Indian western bread is awful, dry and gritty ~ all-you-can-eat for about \$1. Nowhere else in India have I come across such places, but there is only so much one can eat at one sitting.

We climbed two steep hills near the town, to get a good view looking down. We also went into Ajmer to visit the small fort of Akbar the Great, and a famous Sufi shrine, with the largest cauldrons I've ever seen; on certain occasions they cook and serve food to thousands here.

We moved on to Jaipur, the *Pink City*, and joined a tour for once, and this was quite good, as it took us to many places all in one day. It was maybe our best day together; we had fun exploring the great fort of Amber north of the city. Then, in the backstreets of Jaipur, Loi was amazed at my ability to find my way around, and was convinced I'd been there before; well, I *had*, but not in all the labyrinthine alleys we found ourselves in. I've wandered all over India on my own, and never felt afraid. I don't feel this way in the West, where many people are aggressive and violent on a whim.

Anyway, back in Delhi, we got reservations on a train to Patna, which is an awful place, being the capital of the poorest and most lawless state of India, Bihar. Very few of the budget hotels will take foreigners, and we had to hunt around for quite a while before finding one; remember, we had lost our *Lonely Planet*

guide-book, which would have helped us a lot. We took a boat-ride on the Ganges, which here is very wide, and visited the Patna Museum, but this is musty, dusty and poorly-maintained.

Getting train-reservations in Patna for our next journey was such a hassle ~ India really is *Hassleland!* ~ that we settled for the long and tiring overnight bus-trip to Silugiri, having decided to go up to Darjeeling. It was such a relief to get off, and immediately, we were bundled into a crowded jeep for the ride up the twisting and hair-raising road to Darjeeling, which straddles ridges covered with tea-plantations, and from where ~ weather permitting ~ you can see the Himalayas. We were not so fortunate, however, as it was raining and cloudy when we arrived; our hotel rooms were damp and very cold, and I thought I would die if we stayed there long. The next day, the rain had ceased, and we were able to see something of the town, visiting the Tibetan refugee-camp, some tea-gardens, the Shanti-stupa on a hill, and the monastery at *Ghoom*. We wanted to visit Sikkim, but it was Saturday, and the office that issued passes was closed, and we were not willing to wait until Monday.

We returned to Silugiri, and caught a bus to the Nepalese border-crossing at Karkabitta, but ran into a problem: there was a transport-strike, and nothing was running, so we had to spend a day there. I didn't know at the time that it was Maoist-imposed; it was the first of many of their blockades I was to experience; their insurgency was just beginning in earnest, and they could paralyze whole areas of the country with threats of bombings; people were afraid to defy them, as they were not empty threats, either.

Anway, the next day, we parted from Ashok, seeing him off on a bus bound for Pokhara, while we got one to Kathmandu, arriving there late in the night fourteen hours later. At the bus-station, as we were getting our dust-covered bags from the locker, we were approached by a hotel-tout, who offered us rooms at Rs150; we were tired and needed little persuasion to accompany him, and were soon asleep in Snow-Lion Guest House.

Our trip together was almost over, but we couldn't get flights out for some days, so had time enough to shop for souvenirs. We went to see Raju, who told us that Trung had visited him when

he returned from India, and he'd invited him to stay in his home instead of spending money on a hotel. This was lucky for Trung, as he was treated well, and given food, too. Then, before he left, he had persuaded Raju to help him buy a quantity of bags on credit, thinking he could sell these back in Melbourne (just a fantasy; he sold very few); he promised to send the money for them soon, but had not done so, and in fact, had not even written to thank him. Raju was understandably apprehensive. I could have paid the debt for him, but didn't; sometime of other, he must learn to honor his word without being bailed out by others.

Overlooking Swayambhu and the whole valley, is a hill known as *Nagarjuna*, after the great Buddhist philosopher. I'd never been up it before, so Loi and I decided to go, but it was quite a climb, and we were unaware of how long it would take and had brought no food or water with us. At the top, many Tibetans were performing a puja at a Buddhist shrine, with a fire of juniper-branches giving off aromatic smoke; into this they tossed papers printed with mantras, which were carried far aloft. Unfortunately, what should have been a good view was not, as Kathmandu is more often than not enshrouded in a thick haze of smog; you can see it hanging like a blanket over the whole valley when you fly in. The influx of people from the countryside has caused Kathmandu to burst at the seams, and the resulting pollution is horrendous. There is no viable system of garbage- or sewage-disposal; it is simply dumped into the rivers that run through! However will they manage to clean it all up, even if they finally decide to do something about it?

For some reason, Loi decided to shave her head, and got one of the nuns at a nunnery to do it for her; she looked alright, but better with hair. I was booked to fly out first, but on the day of my departure, there was another 'strike,' and no taxis were running; Kalu and his brother, Tashi, came to my rescue and took me to the airport on motorbikes; I left Loi at the hotel, and that was the last time I saw her. I had known, for a long time, that she'd been in love with me, but I had never reciprocated, and we always had separate rooms; nothing went on between us.

INDONESIA AND TURKEY

Back in Malaysia, I made another extensive trip, and was again requested to give talks at the Genting Highlands casino-complex outside K.L. While in a restaurant there, I was approached by a Singaporean named Charlie; I told him I'd been invited to give talks in Indonesia during the Wesak month in May, but didn't know where I would stay in Singapore before flying out from there to Jakarta. He said he'd arrange something, if it was only a hotel, and gave me his number to call before going there. I did, and he met me off the bus, taking me to a hotel beside a vegetarian restaurant, where he told the people to charge my food to him. He introduced me to his wife, Susan. After two days there, I flew to Jakarta, and was met by Onfat and Ros, who I'd first come to know in '78, and who'd organized my visit. They had set up a program for me, and took me first to a large temple in central Jakarta named *Ekayana Vihara*, which was to be my base for the next month. It had been established by a disciple of *Ashin Jinarakkhita*, who I mentioned earlier. I was surprised at the large number of people who attended the services, but this was largely because religion was strongly encouraged to counter any communist inclinations.

The heat and humidity were awful, but what to do except endure as best I could? I didn't have to like it. Apart from giving talks in several places in Jakarta itself, I was sent to other cities in Java, including Semarang, where Vajira met me at the airport and took me to her home, where I would stay. Now, I knew she'd taken over her parents' business when they died, but wasn't sure what this consisted of. I was in for a surprise. Arriving there, I was struck by what ~ to me, as a long-time vegetarian ~ was an aw-

ful smell, that of meat being cooked! This was her business: cooking meat for sale. I thought, "However am I going to stay here? Shall I go to stay in a temple after all?" This was immediately followed by, "No, Vajira has been a good friend to me for many years, and would be unhappy if I moved," so I stayed, and tolerated the smell; there are many things we can do for the sake of friendship. It was good to see her again, and she took good care of me, making my stay very pleasant. Later, when I wrote to her about this, she was very apologetic and said she hadn't realized she was inviting me 'into her hell,' as she put it.

From Semarang, then, to Jogja, and between my talks there, I was taken to visit not only Borobudur, Mendut and Prambanan temples ~ where I'd been before ~ but also to other ancient ruins in the area; I was surprised at how many there were. Most had been destroyed by earthquakes long ago, but were impressive even so. I was also taken to visit some villages in the mountains where the people had remained Buddhists since the collapse of the *Majapahit* Empire over five centuries before. How they had held out against the tremendous pressure to convert to Islam I don't know, but I was full of admiration for them.

After a month in Indonesia, I returned to Singapore and Malaysia again, with the idea of making a trip to Turkey. For many years I'd wanted to do this, feeling I'd missed something during my trips through there before. When I told people of my intention, some of them were surprised and said things like: "Why do you want to go to there? Turkey is a Muslim country. There are no Buddhists there!"

"Yes, I know it's a Muslim country," I replied, "and no Buddhists there ~ I've *been* there ~ but Turks are also human beings, are they not? If we are concerned only about people who call themselves 'Buddhists,' what kind of Buddhists are we? How many people do you know who say they are 'Buddhists' but who know nothing ~ and in fact, *mis*-know ~ about Buddhism? The name doesn't make one a Buddhist. Also, I don't care what people call themselves; it's more important what they are. Nor is it my aim or hope to convert people to Buddhism. I'm only concerned with people as people; in fact, I want to help Buddhists become free

of Buddhism and discover their human-ness, for this ~ to me ~ is what it's all about. A name is not enough.”

So, in August '97, I flew from K.L. to Istanbul, and was thrilled to see the marvelous city again, and for the first time from the air. Nor was it long before I had a completely different impression of the Turks than before. To overcome prejudice is always good, as it makes the mind so much lighter, which is what enlightenment is all about. I would like to tell of some of my experiences there, but for my story to make sense, I must start by saying that I went in ordinary clothes, not dressed as a monk. There were reasons for this: Firstly, had I gone in robes, they would only have attracted unnecessary attention and served no useful purpose. In Malaysia ~ and in other countries with large Buddhist communities ~ many people are very respectful towards monks, often without knowing anything at all about them; they react to their appearance. Knowing this, certain persons have dressed as monks and gone begging on the streets, and because this has become quite common (a number of such fake 'monks' have been arrested), there was a call for monks to carry special identity-cards.

On the other hand, in some countries, I've been subjected to abuse with obscene language on the street because of my appearance: same appearance, different reactions, and in both cases, by people who knew nothing about me personally.

I decided to go incognito, not as a monk, but as a human-being, and relate to people on that level, to communicate with them by my own merit, if you will, to make it on my own, without the robe. I'd never done this before, but in retrospect, this was clearly the right decision. In Malaysia, no-one ever mistook me for a Malaysian, nor for an Indian in India, but I was able to blend in so well in Turkey that people often spoke to me in Turkish, thinking I was a Turk! And whereas I've quite often been verbally abused in India, I was never once hassled there, but experienced much kindness and helpfulness. People would willingly leave whatever they were doing ~ their work, shops, and so on ~ and go out of their way to direct me, often without knowing any English and without expecting anything in return. Turks also smile easily. It made me feel good! I do not remember that about them from before; had they changed so much over the years, or was the

change more in me? Maybe it was both. Or maybe it was just a case of beauty being in the eye of the beholder.

It was very hot when I got there in August, and upon passing a travel-agency one day and noticing ads for cheap flights, I decided to go to England for a month, and bought a round-trip ticket. I called Glen, and she got Karin to drive her to the airport to meet me.

(At the end of '86, feeling the strain of caring for her husband, and wanting to visit mum in Australia, she'd asked the doctor if he would admit Harold to a care-center while she went, and he agreed to do so, although it was not normal practice; "You go," he said, "You deserve a break." While there, however, her neighbor called to say that Harold had rapidly deteriorated and so she had better return quick, which she did, just in time to see him before he died; he'd become like a vegetable, knowing nothing; he didn't recognize her, and she could hardly recognize him. She told me she didn't grieve when he died, as she'd already done her grieving before; it was a release for both him and her. She had loved him so much, but just had to let go).

Apart from doing various jobs around the place for her, I made several trips with her, one to Chester, and another to York, where I'd never been before but had long wanted to go. Glen was not interested in history ~ in fact, she wasn't at all intellectually inclined ~ but went to please me. I greatly enjoyed visiting the marvelous *York Minster* and walking around the old city-walls; we also went into the old castle-tower, where I came upon this inscription:

"Richard I, the Lion-heart, became king in the summer of 1189. Richard was fighting the Crusades in the Holy Land and came home briefly for his coronation, but returned to the war almost immediately.

"Across Europe there were massacres and murders, and in an atmosphere charged with religious passion, anti-

semitic riots broke out up and down England.

"In York, the Jewish community became so frightened that they asked the royal constable for help. He allowed some 150 men, women and children to shelter within the castle while an angry mob gathered outside. The Jews began to mistrust the constable and refused to let him back in when he went out on business. The constable asked the Sheriff of York for permission to eject the Jews, which he granted. The unruly crowd laid siege to the terrified Jews, who courageously defended themselves for several days.

"When siege-engines were brought to knock down the gates, many of the Jews decided upon suicide rather than submit to the mob. A fire was started, but rapidly got out of hand and burned the wooden buildings, forcing the surviving families out into the crowd where they were massacred.

"The ringleaders of the mob were a group of noblemen who were heavily in debt to the Jewish moneylenders, and wanted to avoid paying. They went to York Minster and forced the custodians to hand over the details of the debts. They gathered these together and burned them in the middle of the church to destroy any evidence.

"The Jews probably first came to York early in the 12th century as scholars attached to the Christian community. The small Jewish population grew to in-

clude physicians and landlords. The Christian creed forbade lending for profit, so the Jews undertook money-lending and dealing in bonds, providing private credit for major landowners, and even the great religious houses of Yorkshire. "

It seems that Jews first arrived in England itself following the Norman Invasion in 1066. England has a horrible record regarding its treatment of the Jews; in fact, the persecution of the Jews of the *Diaspora* began in England. Following are some details from the Internet, in chronological order:

In the course of a generation, Jews establish communities in London, York, Bristol, Canterbury, and begin to prosper by trading, lending money to the baronage, and by advancing money to the Crown in order to secure the revenues of the Government. In this way, the Jewish community serves a vital role for the State treasury. As a result, the Crown protects the Jewish financiers and their assets.

In order to finance the tremendous expense of the Crusade, the Jews were assessed higher rate of taxation than rest of England: i.e. Jews were taxed 1/4 of their moveable property while rest of England was assessed 1/14.

Although Jews constituted less than 0.4% of English population, the Jews contributed 8% of the total income to the Royal treasury.

1194. This is the year in which the Crown establishes Exchequer of the Jews.

The Exchequer of the Jews is a catalogue of all Jewish holdings in England. This registry allowed the Crown to systematically exploit Jewish resources by arbi-

trarily collecting taxes upon the revenues that the Jewish community collected from those resources.

The Jews responded to this tax upon their revenues by charging higher and higher rates of interest on the loans that they extended to their customers. This hike in interest rates only increased the unpopularity of Jewish money-lenders in general.

The Jews effectively became pawns of the Crown in a kind of perverted "trickle-down economics" whereby the Jews indirectly collected taxes for the Crown: by selectively taxing the Jewish financial wealth at higher and higher rates, Jews were forced to charge more and more interest, and the borrowers were forced to pay more and more money. This structure of exploitation inevitably propped up the coffers of the Crown.

1217. This is the year that English Jews were made to wear yellow badges to identify them as Jews.

It is perhaps inevitable that this yellow badge, which functions as an obvious marker of the status of the Jew as an alien within English society, will bring to mind the yellow stars that Jews of Europe were forced to wear during Nazi occupation in World War II.

The fact that Jews were set apart from the rest of English society with this visible marker sets the stage for their increasing segregation and persecution.

1255. This is the year in which Jews were once again accused of a case of "blood libel"

This case involves the death of Hugh of Lincoln. The facts of the case are that

Hugh, a young Christian boy, ran after a ball and fell into a Jewish cesspool. He drowned there and his body was found 26 days later, during the Jewish wedding of a prominent Rabbi.

The fact that a large congregation of Jews had come to Lincoln to celebrate the Rabbi's marriage fueled Christian speculation that the Jews had killed the boy as part of some bizarre ritual ceremony.

As a result of the accusations of "blood libel" that arose in the wake of the death of Hugh of Lincoln, 100 Jews were executed.

The story of Hugh of Lincoln is celebrated in *The Canterbury Tales* of Chaucer. "The Prioress's Tale" tells of a young Christian innocent who is singing some Christian hymn while walking through the Jewish section of town. The Jews, presumably outraged at the boy's Christian piety, slit his throat and dispose of the body. But the boy keeps singing even after death, which allows his body to be discovered. The supernatural nature of the boy's singing ensures his eventual canonization as a saint.

1265. This is the year in which the rising influence of Italian bankers begins to make the financial services of the English Jews superfluous.

The fact that the English Crown now turned away from the English Jews and sought financial aid from the Italian bankers paved the way for the waning influence and importance of the Jews in English society. The Jews, in effect, were of less use to the Crown, so that

Crown had less interest in maintaining and protecting Jewish rights.

1269. This is the year in which Jewish rights are gradually restricted.

The Crown no longer allowed Jews to hold land, nor were Jews allowed to bequeath money to an heir: Jewish children could no longer inherit the money of their parents. In effect, a Jew was a royal serf whose money was absorbed by the Crown upon death.

1290. This is the year, under reign of Edward I, that all Jews are expelled from England.

Although some Jews managed to stay in England by hiding their identity and religion, the overwhelming majority of Jews - about 16,000 altogether - were forced from England. Many made their way to France and settled there.

But this expulsion led to three and a half centuries - 350 years - of Jewish exile from England.

This fact is vitally important to understanding the relationship between Shakespeare, Elizabethan society, and anti-semitism, because Shakespeare and his contemporaries, who lived roughly between 1580 - 1620, had never seen a Jew in their lives. All the Jews had been expelled about 300 years before Shakespeare was born!

Although much wisdom and perspicacity shine through in Shakespeare's works, if they were written today, they would be branded ~ and rightly so ~ as racist, because some are horribly anti-semitic; he was a product of his society, however, and we can gauge the tenor of his times from his plays.

These things were forcibly brought to my mind by that visit to York; it was a real eye-opener, and throws a strong light on the situation of today!

Returning to Istanbul in September it was cooler, and pleasant to move around unhindered, and not to stand out in the crowd. I would often meditate in the marvelous mosques, wherein there is a very special atmosphere; their lofty minarets and soaring domes lift the mind to spontaneous calm and quiet. I met several interesting people this way.

One of my favorite places for meditation was the *Sultan Ahmet Mosque* ~ otherwise called the *Blue Mosque*, because of the blue tiles on the interior ~ even though it was often crowded. I would sit under the portico in the courtyard, eyes downcast and half-open. One time, some boys came and tried to disturb me, but I didn't respond; they waved their hands before my eyes, and bent down to look into them, but still I didn't move. Only when I stirred did I look at them and answer some of their questions. We can, if we want, be still and quiet in any conditions.

Once, after my meditation in *Fetiyah Mosque* ~ established by *Mehmet*, the Conqueror of Constantinople ~ I was approached by an elderly man who spoke to me in fluent English and said he was curious, as he had never seen anyone sitting like this before; he asked if he might talk with me. "Certainly," I said, so we sat on the carpet in that tranquil setting and had a nice conversation. We introduced ourselves, and he told me his name was *Ali*, saying he was a retired school-headmaster. When I told him I was a monk, he said: "Oh, I've read something of Buddhism; but the Buddha was not a prophet, like Mohammed; he was only a philosopher."

"You are right," I said; "he wasn't a prophet," but did not add that he was not only a philosopher. He then spoke to me at some length about Islam and tried to convince me of its superiority. I listened without interrupting, and when he had finished, I told him something about *Anicca* ~ Impermanence, or Change ~ and how we can hold on to nothing and claim it as a possession. I also told him that by ourselves, we know very little, that most of what we think we know is not our knowledge at all, but has

come from other people or books. And, because he had spoken a lot about God, I asked him about that word: "Where have you got it from? Is it something of your own experience? Did it suddenly come into your mind one day when you didn't know it before? And do you have only the word, *God*, or do you know what it represents, what it symbolizes, what lies behind it, if anything? A word is not a thing, not the thing it stands for."

It caused him to think, and he did not really know what to say. Instead, he took from his pocket a rosary, and presented it to me, and I, in turn, took from my bag one of the *geodes* I carry with me. I explained the meaning ~ or rather, *my* meaning ~ before giving it to him: "What we are looking for is not outside of ourselves." He was surprised at the difference between the outside and the inside of this stone. He then invited me to a coffee-shop nearby where he introduced me to some of his friends and we spoke more before going our different ways.

The next day, I visited him again, although I hadn't intended to do so and he wasn't expecting me. He was pleased to see me, but was different from the previous day ~ not so assured or pushy; in fact, he was almost abject, and said to me, in a choking voice: "I am a bad man. I've done so many bad things and made so many mistakes; I will go to Hell forever; there is no hope for me!"

Of course, I did not agree with this, and said to him: "I don't think it matters if you do not pray five times a day" (as Muslims are supposed to do, but which many do not, and of those who do, many pray mechanically and as something expected of them, rather than because they want to do it. In this, they are not unlike followers of other religions, most of whom do not really understand why they are performing the things their religions require of them); "our right actions are our prayers." Then I told him a story from *The Hadith*, which is a book recording tales of and about the Prophet Mohammed:

It is about a prostitute who had lived an immoral life and had been in no way religious. One day, however, she came upon a cat lying beside the road, dying of thirst. Feeling pity for this cat, she took off one of her shoes and scooped some water from a well in it, and gave it to the cat to drink, thereby saving its life.

The book says that because of this kind action, when she died, the woman went immediately to Paradise.

Telling this tale cheered Ali up. He had been feeling so sorry for himself, and here I come ~ a Buddhist monk ~ and tell him a Muslim story to restore his spirits! We parted friends.

(The story I told him, however, contrasts and contradicts something found earlier in *The Hadith*: how, four months after the moment of conception, an angel is sent to appoint the destiny of the foetus in the womb: what kind of person it would become, what kind of actions he or she would perform, the livelihood he/she would engage in, and whether, after death, he/she would go to Paradise forever, or to Hell. The person would have no choice about it, as everything had already been divinely appointed for it. [St. Augustine, and John Calvin, the founder of Calvinism, said much the same thing]. This, surely, presents Muslims with a problem as to what to believe here. On one hand, they are told that everything is predetermined, and on the other hand, the story of the woman and the cat indicates that destiny can be changed. Buddhists do not have this problem, as Buddhism teaches that everything happens because of causes, and though the past has conditioned the present, here, in the present, we have some choice, and can change the conditions; it does not hold that things are predestined). And here's an example of this:

One day, while buying postcards in a small shop, someone asked if I were a doctor. I don't know why he asked me this; do I look like a doctor? I answered, "Well, yes, I suppose I am."

What kind of doctor are you?" he then asked.

A doctor of the mind," I said.

Oh, then maybe you can help me," he said. "You see, for the past few months I have been having terrible headaches, and although I've been to many doctors and even specialists, none of them were able to do anything for me."

Alright, do this," I said. "Sit down and take a paper and pen, and starting with your headaches, make a list of all your ail-

ments, sicknesses and pains; it won't take you very long. Then, taking another paper or *papers*, make a list of all the things you could have, but which you don't. This list will go on and on and take you a long time. And then, compare your two lists; they will make you happy that you only have headaches!" I went to see him again some weeks later, and asked him how his headaches were; "No more," he said.

You see, we can change things, and are not bound to receive the results of everything we have done. New causes can change things considerably. Consider the case of a lady I met in Muar, who suffered badly from stomach-ulcers, but refused to undergo treatment for them ~ even though they can be simply treated today ~ as she took them as things of karma, to be worked out that way. I told her that was fatalism, and following that line of thinking, we shouldn't take any kind of medication whatsoever, but just accept whatever happens to us.

I retraced my old footsteps in Istanbul and explored this history-soaked city. I took an enjoyable cruise up the Bosphorus, and tours around various palaces, before setting off on a long trip in the provinces, visiting places I'd been and not been before. The easternmost point was Erzerum, where I'd had several unpleasant experiences years before. It is a very old town, with ruins dating back to Roman times; however, my purpose there was not sight-seeing, but to finally lay those experiences ~ like old ghosts ~ to rest; I did this, and now feel peaceful about Erzerum. While there, I had an encounter which, though neither good nor bad, holds a lesson. Someone came up to me and tried to sell me a carpet (this often happens in Turkey, famous for its hand-made carpets). I told him I didn't need a carpet, and that if he could sell me one, he would be the best salesman in the world.

"But everyone needs carpets," he said, and when I repeated that I didn't, he asked why not.

"Because I have no home," I said.

"Then where do you live?" he asked.

"I live here," I replied.

"Here, in Erzerum?" he asked, puzzled.

“No, here,” I said, stamping my feet on the ground, meaning that I live just where I am and nowhere else (in fact, we *all* do; it’s impossible to live elsewhere and other than Now).

Unprepared for such an answer and not understanding me, he said: “You’re crazy!” and walked off, giving up all hope of selling me a carpet. But does it mean I’m crazy because he didn’t understand me? Maybe I *am* crazy, but not because of that!

I went to Cappadocia in central Turkey, where people had long ago built underground cities for defense against enemies; with air-shafts and store-rooms for whatever was needed, they extend downwards for up to seven or eight levels. They had also hollowed out rocky outcrops above ground as homes, and people still live in them ~ many are now used as budget hotels; I stayed in one myself, and they are remarkably comfortable.

In Konya, I visited the tomb of *Jallaludin Rumi* (whom Turks call *Mevlana*), Sufism’s most well-known saint, of the 13th century. Sufism is the mystic branch of Islam, and is regarded by many Muslims as heretical, as it is so open, flexible and accommodating of other religions and paths. This inscription from Rumi’s tomb may show why:

“Come, come again, whoever, whatever
you may be, come; heathen, fire-
worshiper, sinful of idolatry, come.
Come, even if you broke your penitence
a hundred times; ours is not the portal
of despair and misery, come.”

It was in Konya, too, that I was arrested! I’d boarded a tram for the first time in Turkey, and had bought my ticket before getting in, as is the way there, but not knowing that I should enter by the front door, I went in by the middle door, expecting a conductor to take my ticket inside, but there was none. No-one paid me much attention. I got down at my stop and was walking away, when I felt a hand on my shoulder. Turning, I found myself face-to-face with the driver! He thought I had ridden without a ticket! I opened my hands in a gesture of helplessness, saying “I don’t know!” then fumbled in my pocket for the ticket, at which he realized I

was a foreigner and said: "*Oh, tamam, tamam*" ~ "Okay; never mind!" I walked away smiling, at having been taken for a Turk.

Turkey is full of ancient places from Hittite, Greek, Roman and Byzantine times, not to mention those of the Turks who came much later; it is a veritable historian's paradise! In Ephesus, the amphitheatre could seat 25,000 and had splendid acoustics. For a long time it was the second most important city of the Roman empire, and tremendously wealthy. The *Temple of Artemis*, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, was situated near here, but was destroyed and rebuilt several times, once by a madman who set fire to it in order that posterity would remember him; in the 3rd century, the Goths destroyed it for the final time, and that was it. Gradually, the nearby river silted up the estuary and destroyed Ephesus as a port; its source of income gone, it was abandoned in the 14th century and fell into ruin.

The best part of my trip in Turkey was towards the end, when I arrived in *Canakkale*, a small town situated at the entrance to the narrow strait that separates Europe from Asia known, from ancient times, as the *Dardanelles*. It is from Canakkale that most people visit the ancient city of Troy and the WW1 battlesite of *Gallipoli*. I'd also come for this, and had been advised by other travellers I'd met along the way to join a tour-group rather than doing it alone. This, therefore, is what I did, and found myself in the company of mainly young Aussies.

The tour began at 9 a.m. with a visit to Troy. Our guide was a retired submarine-commander named Ali, whose manner of narrating facts and stories was quite endearing; he clearly loved his work, and I can hear his voice now, as he began: "Ladies and gentlemen." He made Troy come alive for me; I 'saw' scenes described by Homer in *The Iliad*: of King *Priam* and his son *Paris*, whose abduction of Helen had precipitated the war with the Greeks; of the fierce combat between *Achilles* and *Hector*, in which the latter was slain; of the death of Achilles himself, caused by an arrow in the only vulnerable part of his anatomy: his heel, hence the term for a person's weak point: his *Achilles heel*. Finally, there was the *Wooden Horse*, by which subterfuge the Greeks finally gained entrance to Troy and destroyed it.

Always interested in history, I asked Ali a number of questions about Troy. We returned to Canakkale and crossed the *Dardanelles* to *Gallipoli*. I'd heard of Gallipoli before, of course, but until going there, knew little about it. Now I know more, and would like to tell something of it before going further.

The First World War was precipitated by the assassination of an Austrian noble in Sarajevo in 1914 by a Serb. Austria declared war on Serbia, and Russia ~ Serbia's ally ~ declared war on Austria; Germany took Austria's side, and Britain and France came in against Germany. Turkey, because of some stupidity on the part of London, found itself on Germany's side (European alliances were so complex and fickle, that this year's enemy might be next year's friend).

Britain, then, had the largest empire the world has ever known, and could call upon almost-unlimited manpower. Many Aussies and Kiwis ~ either from patriotism or desire for adventure ~ enlisted to serve in places that most of them had never even heard of. From cities and farms they came to fight for the Empire, knowing nothing of those they would face. They were then shipped off to places like Egypt, given basic training in military discipline and the use of arms, and then boarded other ships for the invasion of Turkey, the aim being to capture Istanbul, thus knocking Turkey out of the war, and opening the Bosphorus to Russian shipping.

Had these plans succeeded, Istanbul ~ which consisted mainly of wooden buildings at that time ~ would have undergone a fire-storm. But the Turks were anticipating invasion, and heeding their German advisors, had mined the Dardanelles, so when a combined French-and-British fleet ~ the *vaunted* British fleet that controlled the oceans to the anthem of *Rule Britannia* ~ tried to enter, several of its ships were sunk by mines in the first day, forcing withdrawal and reconsideration.

The powers in far-off London then decided to land troops on a peninsula not far from the entrance to the Dardanelles, at a place known as *Gallipoli*. But again, the Turks were prepared, and although the Allied ships launched a tremendous bombardment of the Turkish positions, the invaders were unable to ad-

vance very far and were pinned down by Turkish fire. To shelter from enemy fire, both sides dug trenches, but were so close to each other that in places the distance separating them was only about 10 meters. The battle went on for 8 months, during which British, Australian, New Zealand, Canadian, Indian and Gurkha casualties (killed and wounded) were 205,000 out of 410,000, French casualties 47,000 out of 79,000, and Turkish 250,000 to 300,000 out of 500,000. The suffering was incalculable, but the stories of courage and heroism that emerged from it have become legendary, and made of the Battle of Gallipoli something unique in military history. (It is not my intention to glorify war and fighting, and I hope it doesn't seem so; my purpose in writing this is to point out that even on a battlefield, with death and suffering all around, people are still able to see beyond).

Following military custom, orders were given for bayonet-charges to be made. The men, though naturally afraid and wanting to live, obeyed without question and went *over the top* to almost certain death. They didn't say, "*I don't want to go! I don't want to die!*" but climbed out of their trenches and faced the withering fire of the enemy's machine-guns. The carnage during these futile and stupid charges was horrific!

After one such British charge, when the survivors had withdrawn to their trenches and the gunfire had ceased, from the blood-stained and corpse-strewn ground between the trenches came the cries of a badly-wounded British officer. No-one dared go to his assistance as they would have been immediately cut down. But then something amazing happened: A white flag appeared from the Turkish trenches, and a burly soldier climbed out, went over to the wounded British officer, picked him up and carried him to the British trenches, where he gently put him down and unhurriedly went back to his own position. No-one knows the name of this valiant and compassionate Turk, but such acts ~ it wasn't the only one; there were others, on both sides ~ gave rise to deep respect in each for the other.

The night before the tour, together with others, I watched a video about Gallipoli, showing survivors from both sides, now very old men. Almost invariably, they said that although they'd fought and killed their opponents, they never hated them, but

merely followed orders. They spoke, too, of the respect and admiration of the courage shown by their erstwhile enemies.

With such background information, we trod the hills and dunes of Gallipoli with awe and reverence. It has become a sacred place, a place of pilgrimage, visited by millions from both sides with homage in their hearts. Young Aussies especially (I met so many of them in Turkey that half of Melbourne seemed to be there!), are drawn to this place, as it has a special place in Australian history. Every year, on ANZAC Day, people march down the streets of towns and cities of Australia and New Zealand in remembrance of those who died in such battles. The years have carried off the remaining few who fought at Gallipoli, but before, when there were still some survivors from those days, they marched if they could, in their old faded uniforms with medals on their chests, tears in their eyes and thoughts of fallen comrades, heads held high; some went by wheelchair.

In the trenches, unable to advance and the battle a stalemate, some men resorted to making hand-grenades from tin-cans filled with stones, glass, lead-shot and so on; but the fuses on them were so long that they would take up to 30 seconds to burn down and explode ~ ample time to pick them up and toss them back to where they'd come from; the deadly missiles would go to and fro like ping-pong balls before exploding, and no-one knew where they would go off; sometimes they would explode in their places of origin! It was soon realized this was too risky; they were killing themselves as often as their opponents!

Then, someone must have seen the irony and stupidity of the whole situation ~ maybe someone with some understanding or feeling for Universal Dharma ~ and from the Australian trenches, instead of bombs, chocolate-bars began to fly across no-man's land! The Brits and Aussies ~ unlike the Turks ~ had supplies of chocolate. When the Turks ~ who I came to see have a good sense of humor ~ recovered from their surprise at such strange weapons, they expressed their appreciation and reciprocated by tossing back fresh fruit, which, being on home-ground, they had in abundance, while their enemies lacked this.

One day, from a Turkish trench, a packet of tobacco came flying over, with a note on a scrap of cloth in broken English: "Me, you, tobacco. You, me, paper. Okay?" They had tobacco but lacked paper to make cigarettes; the Brits and Aussies had paper, but were short of tobacco. So, from the allies' side, magazines and newspapers started to fly. Each side got what they needed.

I don't know if these tales were true or apocryphal, but, told by Ali ~ one of whose grand-fathers had been killed at Gallipoli ~ they brought tears to my eyes, and I could see that many of the young Aussies in the tour-group were similarly moved. But there was more:

When the powers in London finally realized they had made a huge blunder and couldn't win this battle, they reluctantly decided to evacuate their forces from Gallipoli. But how to get out? The Commander-in-Chief of the invasion force was asked how many casualties must be expected during the evacuation. His casual reply of 50% caused outrage; he seemed to regard the troops as 'throw-aways,' with plenty more to fill the places of those lost. He was replaced by someone less callous and more efficient ~ someone to whom men were not so expendable. Plans were made to withdraw during the dark phase of the moon, and orders given to make no sound that might alert the Turks to what was going on; elaborate devices were rigged up to create the illusion that life in the trenches was as normal.

But it is impossible to move an army quietly, the Turks *knew* what was happening, but their C-in-C, Mustafa Kemal ~ who was later to become the first President of the Turkish Republic, and honored with the title of *Ataturk*, i.e., *Father of the Turks* ~ had given an order of just three words: "Follow your tradition," which was taken to mean: Don't shoot a retreating enemy in the back. So, whereas the Brits had expected to lose many thousands of men, they lost none at all, only two men being wounded. So deeply had the Turks grown to respect their valiant enemies that they allowed them to leave peacefully. What honor! Where can we find another such example of it?

Wandering around the Allied cemeteries at Gallipoli, reading the epitaphs on the stones, I was stunned that a high proportion of those who took part in this deadly conflict were just boys in their

late teens and early twenties. Most of them had enlisted to go and fight for king and empire in places many had never heard of. **B**ecause I'd asked Ali some questions during *this* tour, too, near the end, he took me to one side and pulled from his pocket a tiny box containing some bullets and shrapnel from the battlesite and presented it to me. I was very touched by his gift, but not more than he when, in turn, I presented him with one of my 'thunder-eggs,' saying: "What we are looking for is not outside of ourselves." He was so moved when he opened it that he said: "I will keep it in my pocket always!" A few words had affected him so much! I then told him that I am a monk ~ the word in Turkish for monk (it's actually Arabic), is *rahib* ~ and he said: "I *knew* there was something different about you!"



Ali and I at Lone Pine, Gallipoli, '97

At the end of the tour, I thanked Ali, and told him that although I'd had a good trip in Turkey and visited many wonderful places, this had been the best part, and I would surely write something about it in my next book (I kept my word about it). He shook my hand very firmly and warmly, and raised it to his lips and kissed it saying, "You are my teacher!" I had made a new friend.

Over the years, I have given such stones to people in many places, with differing effects. Some merely said "How nice!" and promptly forgot about it. But others, like Ali, the Turkish tour-guide, were deeply touched.

A few days later, before I left Turkey, I wrote to Ali from Istanbul, but because I knew neither his full name or address, I sent my letter to the hotel in Canakkale ~ *ANZAC HOUSE* ~ that had arranged the tour, not sure it would reach him, but hoping it would.

It was early November when I returned to Malaysia, and two weeks later, I received a heart-warming post-card from Ali; this is what he wrote:

My respected teacher Abhinyana,

thank you very much for your kind letter. Actually, I was expecting to hear from you one day. I really appreciate the teaching you gave me and the secret truth in it will lead me all the time. I've learned a lot from you. My kindest regards to you.

Your very faithful student, Ali Efe.

I spent three months in Malaysia this time, during which time I visited Teluk Intan, a small town near Ipoh, and spent a few days in the Buddhist Society there; I'd been there before, and was invited to give talks at their Holiday Youth Camp; this was fun, and I enjoyed it.



"Do not say you have no time, for you have plenty of time; it is not a matter of lack of time, but is disregard or disinclination."

~ J. Krishnamurti, 1895 - 1986 ~

"I have learned silence from the talkative, toleration from the intolerant, and kindness from the unkind; yet strange, I am ungrateful to these teachers."

~ Kahlil Gibran, Lebanese Author and Poet, 1883 – 1931 ~

18

NEPAL, INDIA, PAKISTAN AND KASHMIR

Then, because I intended to go to Nepal and India again, I wrote to Raju in Kathmandu, asking if he would like me to bring anything for him. He asked for a camera, so I duly bought one, expecting him to pay me for it when I got there. I got a visa from the Indian High Commission in K.L. ~ what a rigmarole that was! ~ and flew out to Kathmandu in February '98. There, I took a room in the Snow-Lion Guest House, and passed the camera to Raju, but he didn't offer to pay me for it, or even ask how much it had cost; my mistake, perhaps; he probably thought I'd brought it as a gift. But I later learned from someone else that he had done this with others, asking them to bring things for him, but not offering to pay. *He* didn't offer me a *thangka* from his shop when I returned to Malaysia later on.

The reason I came to Nepal this time was to follow the steps of the Buddha on His first journey after becoming Enlightened, from Budh-Gaya to Sarnath, but I had heard there were many *dacoits* ~ bandits or robbers ~ in this area, so decided it would be better to get someone to accompany me as a translator and also to watch my back, as it were; I preferred a Nepalese for this. It wasn't easy to find someone, but eventually, Raju came up with a trekking-guide to go with me; we negotiated, and I agreed to pay all costs and give him \$5 per day, as this is what he asked for. I forget his name, so let's call him *Prabu* for the sake of convenience.

We got a bus to the border-crossing at Raxaul, where we spent the night, and the next day, went on to Patna, but there was no direct bus to Gaya from there, so we had to go in stages, getting to Gaya at night. Now, the road from there to Budh-Gaya itself is notorious for night-time hold-ups ~ bus-loads of foreigners have been robbed of everything by armed dacoits along its 15 kms length, and such acts have increased in recent years because

more people *and* a lot of money have been coming in; some people have even been shot in temples there! ~ so we spent the night in a hotel and went on the next morning by taxi.

In Budh-Gaya, I directed the taxi-driver to the Japanese temple, where I'd stayed before, thinking we might get accommodation there, but when I went in and spoke to the monk, he said, "Sorry, it is only for Japanese people."

"**B**ut the sign over your gate says 'International Buddhist Brotherhood,'" I said.

"**O**h, that is only a name," he said.

"**T**oo right," I thought. We went next to the Bhutanese temple nearby, but the monk there said, "This room costs this much; that room costs this much." I said nothing, but walked away thinking, "Just like a hotel."

I went into the Chinese temple, leaving Prabu outside. When I told the monk there of my plan to walk to Benares, he asked where I would stay until I started, and I said I didn't know. "You may stay *here*," he said.

"**B**ut I have a guide outside," I said.

"**T**hat's alright; he can also stay." I thanked him and went out to bring Prabu in. We were assigned a room and told the time of lunch. There was enough time to visit the Mahabodhi temple in the meantime, and when we returned and sat down for lunch, there was a strained feeling. Back in our room, a Chinese visitor from Calcutta came to me with a message from the monk: it was alright for me to stay, as I was a monk, but Prabu would have to find somewhere else. I was stunned, and was sure it was a matter of racism, but said, "He is my responsibility, so if he must go, I also don't want to stay." I told the man what I thought of racist Buddhists, and we went to stay in a hotel. I knew, from previous visits, that there have been the foundations of an Indian Buddhist temple there, but it never got any further because, no sooner was money collected to resume construction, than someone would abscond with it. Because of this, the various other temples in Budh-Gaya won't allow Indians to stay, as they just don't trust them. And Nepalese look like Indians.

At the Mahabodhi temple one day, I met two Vietnamese monks who were studying in India; one of them ~ *Thich Hanh Thanh* ~ gave me his address in Delhi and invited me to stay with him when I got there. I said I would contact him.

One afternoon, I got talking to a Muslim money-changer, who, learning I was from Australia, told me he had met an Australian monk the year before, and when he described him, I knew he was referring to no-one else but Liem Dien. He'd been there making a big show, distributing alms to beggars and being filmed while doing so. And he'd told the man of his intention to walk from Budh-Gaya to Delhi carrying a large Buddhist flag in order to show people along the way that Buddhism was returning to the land of its origin. Poor Liem; always wanting to make a show! He was fond of showing people the burns on his body from napalm during the war, and after settling in Australia, had gone to America to try to get compensation from the government for his injuries; he didn't succeed.

Getting what we'd need for the journey ~ rush-mats, blankets and sturdy bamboo staffs ~ we waited until the weather cleared then set off early one morning. It was my aim to go cross-country, through the villages, as the Buddha would have done, and where life hasn't changed very much over the centuries; people still till the fields with ox-drawn plows, draw water from wells, and cook over cow-dung fires; most villages still have no electricity, telephones or TV's; life there is simple.

Falling into an easy gait, we made good time until we came to a large village where the festival of *Holi* ~ a Hindu Spring Festival ~ was in full-swing; I'd not taken this into account, and we soon had to deal with inebriated revelers who wanted to throw colored powder over us or squirt us with water; we passed through as quickly as we could, and stopped at the other side for tea and a snack. I told Prabu to ask directions (Hindi and Nepali are similar, so he had no problems with this), and he came back reporting what he'd variously been told: "Don't go that way; there's a Muslim village; dangerous." "There's a river ahead; you won't get across." "You won't be able to find food along the way."

I said to him, "The people who told you must have been Hindus; if you'd asked Muslims, they might have said there's a dangerous Hindu village up ahead. And if there's a river, there will be boats. And where there are people, there will be food. Come on." We passed through the Muslim village without any trouble, and when we got to the river ~ oh yes, there was a river ~ it was very wide, but also very shallow ~ about 20 cms at its deepest ~ so we simply waded across. And food? Well, as we passed through villages, people ran out inviting us to come to their homes and eat! At the end of the day, we accepted one such invitation, but soon regretted it, because although I appreciated their hospitality, and the food they served was quite good, the whole village gathered around to watch us eat, and I could see that Prabu was as uncomfortable about this as me. Later, when people drifted away and went home, our host showed us to a room he'd prepared for us, but although we were tired after walking all day, we couldn't sleep because some guy insisted on accompanying us and playing his transistor-radio ~ oh yes, they had those alright, drat! ~ to/for us! Finally, I had to ask him to leave us alone, otherwise he might have stayed there all night!

Now, the type of sandals I was wearing, without socks, had already caused blisters ~ my old bane ~ on my feet, so starting off the next day was not easy. Also, I had miscalculated, and left it too late, as it was already quite hot in the middle of the day, and Prabu, being a mountain-man, was even less used to it than me, and although he didn't say so, I could tell he wasn't very happy. We continued, however, but by the third day, I decided to swing back to the Grand Trunk Road and walk along it. We slept that night in a school-room somewhere, and on the fourth day, set out to walk on. We hadn't gone far, however, when a truck-driver stopped just ahead of us and asked if we'd like a ride. I looked at Prabu and he at me, and we climbed in. It would have taken us all the way to Benares had we wanted, but I chose to get off at a town called *Sasaram*, where there is the tomb of a famous ruler ~ *Sher Shah* ~ that I wanted to see. We took a hotel-room, saw the tomb, and the next day, got another ride to the Ganges. I meant to take a boat over the river instead of crossing the bridge, as there was no bridge at the time of the Buddha, and I imagine He had crossed by boat, too. We sought accommoda-

tion in an ashram near the river-bank, and were given room and board. Early the next day, we negotiated with a boat-man to take us across, and at the other side, walked the rest of the way to the Deer Park at Sarnath. Our destination achieved, after some time, we went into Benares to find a hotel.

Now, we didn't walk all the way as I'd intended, but I did get some feeling of what it might have been like at the time of the Buddha, and later wrote an article called "The Buddha's First Journey," which I will copy below. The story of the *Last Journey* of the Buddha is well-known: how, almost 80, He had said to Ananda, "I am old now, Ananda, and full of years; this body of mine is like a worn-out cart which can only be kept going by constant attention. Three months from now, Ananda, I will enter *Parinirvana*." They then set off from Vaishali to Kusinara, where indeed, three months later, He passed away. As far as I know, however, there is no account of His equally-important ~ and maybe moreso ~ *First Journey*, so I took the liberty of writing an account of it; it is not from the scriptures, but from my own imagination. I wrote it because the scriptures say nothing about this journey of 200 kilometers. It is unquestioningly accepted that He gave His First Sermon to the Five Ascetics in the Deer Park, but what about all the people He must have met along the way ~ did He have nothing to say to them? I imagine He was bursting with joy to share what He had found with others, and His words would have been full of Dharma. A sermon need not be long and wordy, but can be something short, pithy, and to the point. I purposely left out elements of the miraculous that are to be found in the scriptures and which should be understood in the context of that time; people were superstitious and what they didn't understand they explained in other ways. Here, then, is my story of The Buddha's First Journey:

"Don't forget he's a king's son, and always lived in luxury before. Maybe we expected more from him than he was capable of. But come, let's go to him!"

“We’re leaving, *Rajaputra*”, said the stern-faced spokesman of the Five, *Kondanya*. “We can stay with you no longer, since you abandoned your search and started to eat again!”

“But I *haven’t* abandoned my search. *That* was the wrong way, don’t you see? It brought me nothing but exhaustion, and I almost died! There has to be a better way, an intelligent way that avoids extremes like that!”

“No! If you had persisted, you would have found that which you sought. We never saw or heard of anyone else who went as far as you. We followed you for years, thinking that if anyone could make the breakthrough, it would be you. All our hopes were pinned on you. And now you’ve let us down. We’ve lost our respect for you!”

“And where will you go?”

“What is that to you? We can go wherever we like; it doesn’t matter. But we’ve heard of a park near *Varanasi*, where many *yogis* and seekers stay. Perhaps we’ll go there.”

With that, they left Siddhartha in the forest, to carry on his quest alone. But he soon recovered from his disappointment, because, having seen the futility of the way he had been on, he felt confident now of finding the right one.

Some weeks later:

“What peace, what clarity! Everything seems to be different and vibrant, though it’s still the same! It was here ~ all along ~ what I sought, only I did not see it before. I feel light, as if a great burden has been put down! Done is what needed to be done. My search is at an end. I am liberated from ignorance and the bonds of desire. I see the past, the way by which I have come. Whoever would have thought it would be like this, and that even the bad things, the suffering, the pain, had parts to play?”

“But who will believe me? How to explain to others what I have found? How can words convey it? To try explaining it will only be needlessly troublesome for me. Better stay here in the forest, enjoying the peace and bliss of realization until I die.”

So He thought at first, but as the days passed and His joy continued unabated, He felt that His great discovery should not ~ *could* not ~ be kept to Himself; He would have to share it with

others. "But who would understand? It is so profound, and beyond the comprehension of people lost in the world of sense-pleasures, seeking happiness and trying to escape pain. Yet, like lotus flowers in a pond ~ some below the surface, some at the surface, some above the surface but not yet open, and others in full bloom ~ so there are people at different levels. There are those completely lost in ignorance, others with little intelligence, and some with greater intelligence, people who are not completely ignorant and blind, with not much dust clouding their vision. The two teachers I spent time with before ~ noble-minded, selfless men ~ who taught me all they could, are no longer alive; the news of their deaths reached me just the other day. And the five who were with me before were deluded and convinced that the only way to Enlightenment was through self-mortification, but they were not stupid. *They* might understand if I were to explain to them. But would they listen? They abandoned me before; maybe they would only harden their hearts and turn away again. Then again, they might not; it is possible they might listen and understand. It is worth the risk. I will go."

Having made up His mind, He set out towards the west, but had not gone far when He met *Upaka*, a wandering ascetic, who said to Him: "Your appearance, friend, is pleasing, your countenance radiant and clear. You must have found something extraordinary. Might I ask who is your teacher and what he teaches?"

"I have no teacher. By my own efforts have I attained Enlightenment and become a Buddha."

Upaka was unimpressed, and thought He was boasting ~ a thing not rare in those days. "It may be so," he said, "It may be so," and went off on his own way. The Buddha realized it was a mistake to be so forthright, and decided that different approaches should be used with different people.

Traveling by day until the searing heat made Him seek the shade of a tree, He would resume His journey in the late afternoon, when it was cooler. He slept wherever He happened to be at nightfall ~ usually outside, but sometimes in a village meeting-hall or hut ~ and ate whatever food He was able to obtain along the way. He met many people in the villages and countryside

through which He passed, some of whom greeted Him politely and offered Him what food they could spare; but some were rude and either ignored Him completely or rebuked Him for living off others instead of earning his living by His own labor. Some came to Him with problems and tales of sorrow, and He listened sympathetically, saying little; people would leave Him feeling calmer and clearer in mind. Always, when He spoke, He used words and examples suited to His listeners; mostly, because He was traveling in the countryside, He used the language of the peasants and farmers, speaking of the changing seasons, plowing, sowing, reaping, seeds and fruit. He spoke of the simple joys of life, and the need to do what is right. Most people who listened to Him were impressed and inspired by the sincerity and warmth of His speech.

“We have seen many wandering ascetics like this, with matted hair and beards, almost naked and carrying only bowl and staff,” said one man to those around him; “But this one is different; he’s so calm and dignified! Can this be the one we’ve heard of ~ the one they call the *Sakyamuni* ~ he who was a prince but gave up everything to go forth in search of Truth? It is said that our good king, *Bimbisara*, offered him half the kingdom of *Magadha*, but he declined, saying that he had already given up one kingdom and was not in search of another. Our king was amazed at his determination, but respected it, and requested the *rishi* to return when he had found what he was seeking, and share it with him. It *must* be him. It can be no other. Let us also pay our respects to him, and ask him to speak to us.”

The Buddha consented, happy to share something of what He had found with people eager to learn. Where He saw that people were not interested, however, He kept quiet. “I cannot make people understand,” He thought; “When they are ready, only then will they learn.”

One day, He came upon a party of hunters who, knowing that such yogis were vegetarian, greeted Him with derision. The Buddha remained silent and did not respond. “Come, *sadhu*, and eat with us what we have caught,” one hunter jeered. Another restrained his companion, saying: “Each to his choice, brother; each to his choice. This *sadhu* said nothing to us. Why do you taunt him like this?” Chastened, the first admitted his

mistake and apologized to the Buddha, and He, seeing an opening, said: "While I lived the family life, I also ate the flesh of animals. But, having gone forth, I abandoned this, and now nothing lives in fear of me. All beings love their lives and none desires pain. I restrain myself from causing pain to even the lowest being. I may still have enemies, but no-one's enemy am I."

Often, He saw people at their religious devotions in their homes or at their temples, making offerings and beseeching the gods for help and favors, but He heard no answers. Twice along the way, He chanced upon bodies being cremated, and felt the sorrow of the mourners.

Eventually, He reached the Ganges, which He would have to cross. There were men who earned a living by ferrying people over, but He had no money and could not pay. This did not worry him, however, and He did not ask to be taken across. Instead, He sat on the bank, quietly contemplating the river flowing silently past, thinking of how it began as a tiny stream high up in the snow-clad mountains far away, and merged eventually with the sea, losing its separate identity but not its substance therein. "Life is a process, like this river," He thought, "never still for a moment, but always changing. Nothing stands still, nothing stays the same; nothing can be grasped, possessed, and called ours. If we understand this, we can help others understand that while living here, we should avoid doing evil as far as possible and do as much good as we can. In this way, we may give life a meaning, so that it doesn't just flow on purposelessly, like this river, which knows not where it came from, where it is, nor where it is going."

His musings were interrupted by one of the boatmen. "I know you have no money to pay me with," he said, "but if you will wait until I have other passengers, I will take you across." The Buddha smiled, inclined His head and said: "You are very kind."

Soon, other people came, and took places in the boat. The man beckoned to the Buddha, and asked Him to sit near him. Then, with strong arms, and quick, sure strokes of his oars, he launched the craft from the bank, out onto the broad river. The current wasn't strong, as the rains had yet to come, so he didn't

need to exert himself much. The passengers chatted among themselves, most returning home from various errands; the boatman knew them all, and spoke to them by name. But the Buddha was clearly someone special, and in mid-stream, he turned to Him and said: "I know you are a homeless one, but may I know where you have just come from, and where you are going?"

Courteously, the Buddha replied: "I came recently from Gaya in Magadha, and am bound for the park known as *Isipatana*. Perhaps you have heard of this place?"

"Indeed I have," said the ferryman. "It is a pleasant place frequented by *sadhus* and *rishis* like yourself, and is about two hours' walk from here, going west.

"I always take *sadhus*, knowing they have no money. Some are grateful, and others not, feeling it their right to be taken across. Some say they are holy men, and that I can make merit by taking them across. But I never see this merit they talk about, and sometimes feel I'm being cheated. These other people have to pay for my service, which is my way of earning a living and supporting my family. I cannot live on nothing."

"Well said," replied the Buddha. "You perform a useful service by which you earn an honest living. How else would people cross the river if there were no-one like your good self to take them? There is no bridge or ford. Now, just as *you* provide a useful service to others, do you benefit from others in any way?"

"Of course I do," said the ferryman, "We all depend on others for many things. While I am ferrying people across the river, I can't be working in the fields, and consequently, I get my food from others. And my clothes. And medicine when I or anyone of my family need it. And whatever else I need."

"Quite true," said the Buddha. "You are perceptive. We all depend upon others, and it is fortunate for us that different people do different things. If all men were boatmen like yourself, for example, how would they get their food? If all were farmers and produced food, how would they get their clothes and other necessities? How would they cross the river?"

"But life is not merely a matter of exchanging goods and services; there are other things that people need, things that can't be bought and sold. We need friends. We need love. We need

kindness. Now and then, we need someone to listen to us. We are not complete in ourselves; we need others; *everyone* does. And just as we like others to be kind to us and help us in various ways, so others like it if we are kind to them. We should not always count the cost, and think of what we can get in return."

"I understand," the ferryman said, with tears of joy in his eyes. "What you are saying is that we should feel happy at the time of helping others, without thinking of gaining anything from it; that doing good or right is all the result we need. Thankyou. You have given me something that will help me for many a long day; I am well-paid for taking you across. If ever you need to cross again, please look for me. My home is over there, among those trees. I will be honored to see you and serve you again."

"May you and yours be well and happy," said the Buddha as He got out of the boat. "If I pass this way again, I will look for you." The boatman watched Him with admiration as He made His way up the bank and disappeared from sight. Later, when he got home, his wife could see his eyes shining, and asked him what had happened. He said: "I took a very special person across the river today ~ one of these wandering ascetics we see now and then, with long hair and beard and clad only in rags. But he was different; there was something about him that made me feel good; meeting him has given me hope and a great feeling of self-worth. I have been blessed, and will never forget him." His wife felt his happiness as if it were her own.

The sun was beginning to set and the Buddha didn't want to reach the Deer Park in the dark, so in the remaining light, He bathed in a pond covered with lotuses, and selected a tree beneath which to spend the night. There was a village nearby where He might get some food in the morning.

As was His custom, He sat and reviewed the day just gone, and the people He had met and spoken with. "Each has his or her own story," He thought; "each sees the world in his own way; each has his hopes, fears and aspirations; each wishes to be happy and avoid suffering. We do not need to suffer as much as we do. If only people would open their minds and hearts and live considering others, the world would be a much better place. I

can help people see this, but only if they are ready to see; if they are not ready, or refuse to see, no-one can help them.”

The next morning, after He had been to the houses nearby for alms and had eaten what people there had kindly put into His bowl, He set off for the Deer Park of *Isipatana*. Upon arriving, He asked two yogis He met if they knew of a group of five others who might be staying there. They told Him that there was such a group in the park, and directed Him to the place they’d chosen as their abode. Thanking them, He followed the way indicated, and saw the five in the distance. They also saw him coming.

“Look who’s coming!” said one of them; “It’s Siddhartha! What can *he* want? Maybe he’s on his way back to Kapilavastu, to inherit his kingdom, and is just stopping by to show off!” Another said: “Why should *we* care? He abandoned his search and reverted to a life of sense-pleasure. We don’t respect him anymore, remember? That’s why we left him. Look how sleek and well-fed he is! He’s obviously been stuffing himself since we left!” Yet another said: “Ignore him, and if he comes here, well, we can’t stop him, but don’t get up to welcome him!”

As He came closer, however, they were so impressed with His bearing and dignity, that they forgot their resolutions to ignore Him and rose from their seats as one to receive Him. “We respected him before,” said one, quietly, “but there’s something different about him now; something has *happened!* He *shines!*”

“Welcome, Friend Gotama,” said one, “It is good to see you again. How have you been? How did you know where to find us?” One took His bowl, one took his upper robe, one gave Him water to drink, and another water to wash his face and feet, while the fifth prepared a seat for Him.

“Do you not recall saying, when you left, that you might come here? I took a chance on finding you. But it is inappropriate for you to address me by name or as friend,” said the Buddha. “I am not now as I was then. I have found what I sought. I am now a Buddha”. Remembering His encounter with Upaka, He knew He was taking a risk in saying this, but felt there was no other way.

“But how can that be?” said one of the Five. “You tried everything in your search, and went further in your practice than anyone had ever gone, and became known as *Sakyamuni* as a re-

sult. But still you didn't find it, and now you expect us to believe you when you've gone back to a life of sense-pleasure?"

"The ways I tried before were useless," said the Buddha, "and led nowhere. When I saw they were wrong, I turned from them. But I did not give up my search, and I eat only to sustain my life; I have not gone back to a life of sense-pleasures as you think. I have found a Middle Way that avoids useless extremes."

"It is hard to believe, and yet there is something about you that was not there before."

"When we were together earlier," said the Buddha, "did you ever hear me make such a claim?"

"No; we always knew you as one who spoke only the truth."

"Come, then, and pay attention. Open are the gates to the Deathless. I will explain to you what I have found."

Convinced, the Five sat, listening attentively as He spoke about Suffering, the Cause of Suffering, the End of Suffering, and the Way to the End of Suffering. His voice carried authority, wisdom and compassion. And, as He spoke, the light of understanding appeared on the face of Kondanya, and the Buddha saw it and said: "Kondanya has understood! Kondanya has understood!"

Thus was the Buddha's message proclaimed. He uttered His 'Lion's Roar,' which has not ceased to reverberate until now.

During the next few days, while speaking to them again, they all became enlightened and free from ignorance. And with these Five as the nucleus, the Buddha started His Order of Monks that until today, we call the *Sangha*, or more specifically, the *Bhikkhu Sangha*. It is the oldest continuous organization in the world.

What Siddhartha achieved was not for Himself alone, but for countless others. The impact the Buddha made on the world cannot be measured.



In Benares, I showed Prabu around a little, and even managed to get inside the Golden Temple dedicated to Shiva, which is off-

limits to non-Hindus. Knowing that Hindus regard the Buddha as an avatar of Vishnu, I used this to persuade the police at the gate to let me in. Of course, there is nothing secret inside, but lots of ritual and ceremony whereby the faithful are fleeced. Prabu was a Hindu, so I told him to buy some flowers to offer. As we were leaving, however, a priest followed me demanding money, but since I'd not asked for any puja or prayers, I refused. "Give me money. I am a priest," he persisted. I replied, "That's your problem." They are so avaricious!

In the bazaar, I suddenly got the feeling to call mum and ask how she was, so went into an IDD station to dial up. Sheila answered the phone and said, "Mum's gone to England."

"What, *again*?"

"Yes, she suddenly decided to go and stay with Glen for the rest of her life, and instructed me to sell all her stuff again."

Well, I was surprised, but what could I do? I wrote to her in England saying that her decision was maybe best, as Glen would take good care of her. I forget what else I said in that letter, but was later to rue it.

It was at this time, too, that I thought about going to the US again; "Why not? I can go to hell and come out again."

I paid Prabu and saw him off on a bus back to the border. I then caught a bus back to Budh-Gaya to pick up a bag I'd left at the Vietnamese temple, and went on to Calcutta by train. My previous perception of this city *as the end of the world* was about to change. I stayed in a hotel near *Chowringee*, and had a great time visiting places I'd never taken the trouble to visit before, places like the museum, with its wonderful collection of Buddhist artifacts, the *Victoria Memorial*, which was designed to rival the Taj Mahal (it didn't succeed, although it is rather stupendous), the *Park Street Cemetery*, with its poignant ex-pat British grave-stones, the site of the *Black Hole*, and other memorable places. Walking along one day, a whore came up beside me and said, "Hello, darling; how are you?" It sounded so funny, and I had to laugh, but I'm sure her story was not amusing.

Taking a train down the east coast, I stopped at Guntur, to visit the ruins of Amaravati stupa again. During the twenty years since the first time I was here, however, many houses and other

buildings had sprung up around, and it took me some time to find it. I circumambulated the stupa and sat for a while meditating before returning to Guntur to catch a train to Nasik, many hours to the north-west. There, I visited a group of Buddhist caves known as *Pandulena* which, like other caves in this region, had been carved from the solid rock about 2000 years ago; they are situated in a hillside overlooking the town. Again, I felt good here, as I did whenever I'd visited other caves. Some hours south of there, near the small town of *Shivneri*, there are more caves, and having heard of them, I just had to visit; it was well-worth the effort needed to get there. I'm sure there are lots more caves that have not yet come to light. I could easily be convinced that I'd lived as a monk in such caves long ago. Here it was that the feeling, "Look what they've done to *my* India!" welled-up from inside me. And again, later on, I told someone that I was more Indian than him, as he had only been born there, and over that he'd had no choice at all, and if he could choose, he would probably leave and go somewhere else, as so many Indians have done. I, on the other hand, chose to come to India, again and again, when I didn't have to. He didn't disagree.

Being so near, I couldn't leave the area without visiting Ajanta again. And there I met a French guy who was traveling around by motor-bike; he told me it was his 19th time in India. His name was *Francois*, and we had lots to talk about, and when I mentioned my time in Goa and meeting Hussaid El Jabri, he said he knew him well, and that *he* also came to India frequently; he gave me the name of the hotel in Delhi where Hussaid usually stayed. He himself was heading for Almora in the mountains, and told me where to find him if I got there; I assured him I would, as it was on my itinerary, too.

Then, one of the stall-holders ~ *Bhagwan* by name ~ took me by motorbike to a place in the mountains where geodes are found, and I walked over the rocky soil trying to find some myself; he showed me how to *weigh* them in my hand, a light stone indicating it might be hollow; I got several that way. I was also shown how they were split open: a sharp tap with a hammer on a strategic spot resulted in a clean break, but slightly off, the stone would shatter; the proportion of shattered stones was much

higher than clean breaks. At the Caves again, I stocked up on my 'thunder-eggs' and sent them off by post to Malaysia.

North, then, to Delhi. At first, I stayed in a hotel in *Paharganj*, an area popular with back-packers, near New Delhi railway-station, but there was a water-shortage in the capital, and it was hard to shower in the hotel. Recalling Hanh Thanh's invitation to stay with him, I called and arranged to go over. He welcomed me and I stayed with him some days and left one of my bags there when I set off for Amritsar. There, I got a bus to the one-and-only crossing-point between India and Pakistan, *Wagah*. With the Pakistan-visa I'd obtained in Kathmandu in my passport, I waited for it to open, then began the process of leaving India and entering Pakistan, with all the red-tape it involved; it's a wonder my passport didn't disintegrate from all the handling! Eventually, I was over, and on a bus to Lahore, where I checked into a cheapie and set out to explore. The day was half-gone, so I didn't go far, but got my bearings ready for the next day, when I went first to the *Shalimar Gardens*, laid out in the traditional Mughal geometrical style by Shah Jehan in 1642, and quite well-cared for, even if not in its former glory. At the Raj-era museum, among many Buddhist exhibits discovered and brought there by the British, is the famous *Gandhara*-period image of Sakyamuni fasting; I was enthralled, gazing at it for several minutes; the details carved in stone are fantastic.

Then there was the huge fort built by Emperor Akbar in the 16th century, and the tomb of his son, Jehangir, both of which I enjoyed visiting over two days. And thrice in the same day, I was pleasantly surprised when, traveling around the city by crowded buses, people got up and offered me their seats! This had never happened to me even once in India during all my times there! It boded well for the rest of my trip in Pakistan. I felt good.

The journey north from Lahore to Peshawar by comfortable bus ~ better than in India ~ took about 6 hours, along the excellent highway built by the Americans to facilitate transport of war-materiel to the Afghan *mujahideen* in their struggle against the occupying Soviets in the '80's. Peshawar is in the heart of tribal-territory, where the law of Pakistan doesn't really hold; it wasn't rare to see fierce-looking characters walking around with semi-automatic weapons; tangle with them, and you're finished. But

as I had observed years before, if you walk without fear, minding your own business and not acting strangely, you should be alright. Desert- or tribal-people are not as sophisticated as city-people, but more instinctive; like dogs, they can tell if you're afraid, and that will not be in your own interest. As elsewhere, I wandered around, going to more-or-less anywhere I wanted, making friends with people in the bazaar, where someone obviously felt so at ease with me that he invited me to watch a porno-movie with him, but I declined. They're clearly selective about things of Western culture that they admire or despise.

With the needed permit to go up the Khyber Pass, and an armed policeman-escort in my taxi, I rode up that historical road to stand looking into Afghanistan from the top. Halfway up a ruined stupa stands in mute reminder that not only armed invaders passed this way, and that this was a Buddhist area 2000 years ago. I hired another taxi to take me to the beautiful *Swat Valley*, crossing the mighty Indus River and the *Malakand Pass* on the way, and visiting several ancient ruined stupas; according to one of the Chinese pilgrim-monks who passed this way in the 5th century, there were thousands of monasteries here.

Back over the pass, I visited *Takht-i-Bahi*, a large monastery-complex on a hillside. One of the *chowkidars* (watchmen) there tried to sell me a small image; finds from such places are for sale illegally. Even so, I was heartened that the government of Muslim Pakistan should be doing something to preserve these ancient places, when the fanatical Taliban in Afghanistan were soon to demonstrate its misguided beliefs by destroying the great Buddha-images of Bamiyan, and any other Buddhist artifacts they could get their hands on.

I enjoyed Peshawar so much that I was reluctant to leave, but my visa was limited, and I had other places to go. I moved on to *Rawalpindi*, just south of the capital, *Islamabad*. Now, 'Pindi was what the British called a '*cantonment*' ~ a permanent military encampment, such as they needed to maintain some kind of order in the NWFP ~ *North-West Frontier Province* ~ known as such until now. I went there in order to visit the ruins of *Taxila*, and was in for another treat. About 35 kms from Islamabad, Taxila is one of the subcontinent's most important archaeological sites,

with the remains of three great cities and dozens of monasteries dating from 400 BC to 600 AD. Alexander the Great visited there in 326 BC. It was the principal university town of Gandhara, a kingdom of the north from the 6th century BC to the 11th century AD. I spent a day wandering around there, not half long enough, but enough to get a long-lasting impression of it, and the wish to go again sometime. Unlike Nalanda, which was destroyed during the waves of Muslim invasion, Taxila was destroyed much earlier by marauders known as the *White Huns*, who originated in Mongolia; they stormed through the passes into India in the 5th century; Taxila ~ and Gandhara in general ~ never recovered from their depredations.

I returned to Lahore for two more days, then crossed the border and went to Amritsar, intending to stay and have a better look around than I'd done in 1970, but it was such a hassle finding a hotel that I got on a bus to Jammu, the winter-capital of Kashmir. Next morning, I bought a ticket to Srinagar, and while waiting for the bus to move, was approached by someone asking if I wanted to stay on a house-boat when I got there. I did, but told him I would find one for myself, thanks. His sharp eyes had seen my name on the ticket, however, and he must have called ahead. As we were nearing Srinagar after a tiring trip of 14 hours, the bus stopped on an unlit stretch of road, and someone got in with a flashlight, came to where I was sitting, and asked if I were the person on the paper he showed me.

Before I realized what was going on, he'd taken my bags off the bus and into a waiting car, and I followed. It could easily have been a kidnapping, such as had happened to four other Westerners several years before, one of whom was beheaded, one escaped, and I forget what happened to the others ~ maybe still missing. (Although there was a lull in the fighting when I went, there were still many militants around). I was lucky, as these were house-boat agents, and on the way into the city, I negotiated about the price of the house-boat, and was surprised at how low it was ~ just like a budget-hotel; tourism had fallen, so they were happy to get a customer. At the lakeside, there was a *shikara* ~ sampan ~ waiting to take me to the boat. I relaxed when we pulled up at the steps, climbed aboard, and saw the luxurious interior ~ fully-carpeted and with carved walnut furni-

ture. It had four bedrooms, each with bathroom and toilet, but none of them occupied. Now, during the time of the Raj, the rulers of Kashmir ~ which was never part of the Raj ~ barred foreigners from buying and owning land there, so some enterprising Brits got around this by building house-boats on the lake. There are now hundreds of them, self-contained and capacious.

I slept well, and the next day, over breakfast of *naan*, butter and tea included in my rent, the owner's son persuaded me to sign-up for several tours, showing me his record-book of others who had paid much more than what he was charging me. The owner himself then accompanied me around, first, on a shikara-ride over the lake to the *Shalimar Gardens* and then back through the floating-gardens where flowers and vegetables are grown on islands of weed dredged from the lake; then through the old town to visit mosques and papier-mache factories where I saw the artisans at work. He also escorted me to outlying places. Everything was alright until I saw a sign outside a tourist-office giving the rates for the tours I'd signed up for, and I understood why the old man had insisted on taking me everywhere instead of letting me find my own way around: the difference in prices was staggering! I used some pretext to shake off my 'minder' and went to the tourist-office to complain; there, I met someone who knew my boat-owner, and told me that this was his usual scam. He advised me to pack my stuff and check out, telling the owner that I wanted a refund, and that if he refused, I would go to the police. I did this, and after an initial refusal, they gave me back a reasonable amount, and I moved to a hotel. But, thinking to prevent these cheats doing it to other travelers, I lodged a written detailed complaint at the tourist-office; they thanked me and assured me they would take action.

It was so lovely there and cool while India to the south was hot. I remained in Srinagar another week, waiting for the pass between there and Ladakh to open, so I could go; in the meantime, I visited Gulmarg, a famous alpine place to the north. As the days passed, however, it became clear that the snows on the pass were not going to melt for me, and I was unable to get a place on a plane in, so I returned by the way I had come in, to Jammu, and was in time to catch the night-train to Delhi.

I stayed with Hanh Thanh for a few more days, and made an effort to visit the site of the Coronation-*darbar* of Emperor-King George V in 1911 (I'd tried to find it before but failed). It is in a surprisingly out-of-the-way place on the edge of Delhi. Here it was that the most fantastic pageant had unfolded, choreographed down to the smallest detail (both British and Indians loving the theatrical). All India's maharajas were there, dressed like peacocks and resplendent in jewels on their caparisoned elephants and with uniformed retinues, each trying to outdo the others, cannons fired in their honor according to their rank, twenty-one being the highest. This spectacle had been designed to awe the Raj's subjects. The culmination was the announcement of a well-kept secret: that a new city would be built at Delhi, and the capital shifted from Calcutta. The British must have known about the legend that whoever set up a new city here on the ruins of so many others before them would not last long; they would have done well to consider this carefully, as it came to pass less than forty years later.

Old statues of Queen Victoria and her successors, along with the various viceroys, had unceremoniously been brought from around the city and dumped here, bedecked now by creepers instead of garlands; an obelisk with steps leading up to it on all sides stands on the actual coronation-spot. The whole place ~ like other Raj-era places I'd visited ~ had a melancholy air about it (or was it just my imagination?).

Near Connaught Place one day, I met the same Sikh fortune-teller I'd met there years before; this was his pitch, but he didn't recognize me, and said exactly the same thing he'd said before: "You are very lucky, you know."

"Yes, I know," I replied, playing him along and wobbling my head.

"Do you know why you are lucky?" he then asked.

"Yes, I know," I said. "I'm lucky because I can come to India and leave whenever I like; I don't have to stay here. If I had to stay here, it would be terrible!" I told him he was a cheater, saying the same thing to everyone in order to catch them. Bystanders hearing this laughed, as they knew it was true.

I went to the hotel Francois had told me of, and inquired about Hussaid, but no-one there remembered him, and though they showed me their register, and I checked back several years, I did not find his name there.

I went to Almora, stopping off in *Nainital* for two days on the way; like Almora, this is a popular holiday-resort for Delhi-ites, being much cooler than the capital during the summer. Almora, to my disappointment, was very dusty, even though it is at quite an altitude. I found Francois, and spent some time with him, telling him of my futile search for Hussaid. After a few days in the hills, I returned to Delhi, to finally discover the location of *Barhut Stupa* (I had long been looking for it); I knew it was somewhere in Madhya Pradesh, but now knew exactly where. Thanking Hanh Thanh for his hospitality, I got a train to *Allahabad*. It was a hot and stuffy ride through the night. From Allahabad, I had first to get to *Satna*, so bought a ticket and waited on the platform for the train that was supposed to arrive at 11 o'clock.

It didn't come until one o'clock; but it wasn't just *two* hours late; it was *twenty-six* hours late! This was the train that should have arrived at eleven o'clock the day before; where it had been all this time, I had no idea, but it was crowded, and I didn't have a reservation, as I wasn't going very far. I had to force my way into the carriage, and squeeze onto the edge of someone's seat. Some of the ceiling-fans weren't working, it was dirty and smelly, and I was sitting there feeling miserable, waiting for the train to move. When it finally did, it went so slowly, and kept stopping for whatever reason I didn't know; the wind was blowing through the open windows like the air from a blast-furnace, and I was sweating like mad and silently cursing, hating this journey, when suddenly, I remembered some *magic* words: '*Boleh Tahan*'. This is a Malay expression, and means, literally, '*Can Stand*' or '*Can Bear*'. Upon this, everything seemed to change. I looked at the folks around me, and they were also sweating, and when you see Indians sweating, it means it is very hot. Usually, it's just me, and everyone around me looks cool and I feel like a fool, but when everyone is in the same condition, you don't feel so bad. I said to myself: "I have no right to complain. No-one made me come here; I *chose* to come, and paid to do so, and anytime

I want, I can leave. These people have no such choice; they must stay here.” This was followed by an insight: *It doesn't have to be nice, and I don't have to like it.* If we make it a condition about everything we experience that it has to be nice and we must like it, we will suffer so much! Thinking like this, I began to enjoy the rest of the five-hour journey, and started to smile, and when I started to smile, other people did, too, and became friendly towards me.

Arriving in Satna, I found a hotel, but the walls had absorbed the heat during the day, and radiated it back in the night, and even with the fan full-on over my bed, it was impossible to sleep. The only way I could get some sleep was by lying on the bathroom-floor with a bucket of water beside me, and every now and then dowsing myself from it! Of course, I didn't sleep much, but it was better than nothing. This was another first; I'd never done anything like that before, and hope I never have to do it again. The outside temperature at that time was almost 50 Celcius!

The next day, I asked some auto-rickshaw drivers about Barhut Stupa, but none of them had even heard of it. Finally, I met someone who knew, and he directed a driver how to get there, so off we went, using back roads through small villages, until we got there, but it was disappointing, as almost nothing remained; I'd seen the best parts of it in Calcutta Museum. But at least I'd made it, having wanted to go there for years. I returned to Satna and Allahabad, staying long enough to get a reservation in an air-conditioned carriage to Gorakhpur (I'd never traveled in such a carriage before, but decided to splurge); my long and interesting trip in India was almost at an end.

Arriving in Gorakhpur early the next morning, I immediately got a bus to the border, and was back in Nepal again. I reached Pokhara that evening, and took it easy for a while. Then, rested and refreshed, I returned to Kathmandu.

I don't *have* to tell anyone about this, and I'm not trying to show off, but I want to 'confess' here something I did that has bothered me since. In doing so, it might be useful in helping some others avoid doing the same kind of thing.

While waiting to fly back to Malaysia, I went to a second-hand book-shop. In keeping with the custom, I haggled about the

price of a book, and got it for Rs300, instead of the marked-price of Rs400, the understanding at such shops being that one may get a 50% refund later. Some days later, having read the book, I went to return it, expecting to recover Rs150, but there was a different assistant in the shop. When he opened the book and saw Rs400 written there, he asked if that was what I had paid for it. I regret to say I replied "Yes," just one word. He therefore gave me back Rs200, when I should actually, according to our agreement, have received only 150. I walked out thinking, "Well, he made Rs100 profit anyway, and didn't really lose on me." Yes, he made a clear profit and didn't lose. It was *I* who lost. I caused suffering to no-one but myself; I was stupid! Thinking I'd gained Rs50 (about US\$0.80), I really lost much more, and wish I could rewind the tape and undo what I did; it has bothered me, and I'm ashamed of it. Telling of this incident, most people understood and agreed with me, but one woman was aghast, and said: "But you are a monk! How could you do such a thing?!"

"Yes, I am a monk," I replied, "but that doesn't prevent me from doing wrong. And I told this story to illustrate to you how *this* side of Enlightenment, we are subject to doing wrong. Moreover, I want even my weaknesses ~ not to mention my strong points ~ to be a source of strength to others. It is my gift to you, but if you regard it that way, you will benefit nothing from it!"

I'm not in the habit of doing such things; I try to practice what I preach. The very fact that I said *try*, however, means that I don't always succeed, which is why I wrote an article in one of my books called "DON'T FOLLOW ME." I'm aware of my limitations, and don't want others to get involved with them, as they have enough of their own to deal with. But I *do* feel it helps to know that we are all in the same boat, and not in a position to point fingers at others and feel superior. If we are weak, it is from weakness that strength comes. I don't want to boast of my successes, but I *have* had some; indeed, if I had had nothing but failures, I would not be here now talking of it. I'm confessing my lapses, not boasting of my successes.

We often expect too much of others, and often too much of ourselves; consequently, we become faint-hearted. This does not mean, however, that we shouldn't have ideals to aim for, but that

we should accept the likelihood of failure, and not be too disappointed when it happens. It may be seen as an opportunity for further striving and eventual success, instead of an excuse for giving way to self-pity and despair. We should be capable of introspection and self-criticism, but objectively and fairly, without exaggeration, self-debasement or self-flagellation.

If only someone had explained to me when I was young the kind of things that I now explain to others, I might have understood and saved myself so much time and trouble! But it's not too late to atone for things that I now regret, and I can try to turn my mistakes and stupidity around, and make something positive of them. Perhaps some others can learn from *my* experience, and if they do, then my mistakes will not have been in vain.

Following the Way is often an uphill battle, as we must face and come to grips with our mental defilements. Most people don't even want to know of this and prefer to live carelessly, wasting what Tibetans term our *precious human rebirth* and sliding backwards. But although it often *is* difficult, something in our mental make-up is on our side and helps us on our journey upwards; we call it our *Conscience*, or inner voice. It makes us feel uncomfortable at times, but is in our own interests.

Because we have set out upon the Way does not mean that we are incapable of doing wrong; we've only just begun, so of course we can do wrong, like people who know nothing of the Way. The difference between us is that *we* cannot forget; our wrong-doing bothers us and won't let us live in peace. We either feel remorse and try to correct our mistakes, or confess them to someone else, and in this way, put them behind us and try to see it as part of our learning-process. It may be taken as an indication of our progress in Dharma: that we can do wrong, but not feel good about it.



We speak of Truth, as people have always done. We pick up their words, their ideas, and repeat them as if they are our own. We 'search for Truth', entangled in words, without bothering to ask what they mean, or if they mean anything at all. Are we not very much like parrots?

Let us examine:

Is there such a thing as Truth, or is it only a figment of our imagination, of our fears, our hopes, our ignorance? Is it an '*it*' at all ~ something 'out there', a self-existent, independent entity or quality, to be found, stumbled upon, realized? A little thought about this ~ provided we are sincere, that is, and not playing hide-and-seek like children, a game of make-believe ~ might save us a lot of time and trouble.

Long, long ago, in the prehistory of our race, when we understood very little about the laws of nature and lived in ignorance and fear, we imagined spirits and gods all around us; every tribe had its own gods. These gods ~ projections of hope and fear ~ came and went in people's minds, were changed, modified, transmuted, refined, and gradually reduced into fewer and fewer, until finally, some thousands of years ago, in Egypt, there remained, for a brief time, but one, represented by the sun-disk. As far as we know, this was the first instance of it, and though the worship of it did not last long before it was destroyed by the priests of the old religion, the seed had been sown, and what became of it remains with us until now, but with no more substance or reality than the gods of our primitive ancestors. We are the victims of their ignorance and will remain so as long as we choose to believe instead of to doubt and question.

Where shall we find this 'Truth' that we've heard about and believed in for so long? *How* shall we find it? What would happen if we began to think, "Hold on a minute. Maybe there is no truth. Maybe it's been an illusion all along, like so many other hand-me-downs?" Are we brave enough to so doubt? Or do we have too much invested in this word, this idea, this belief? Would the strength in our legs fail? Would our world ~ our mental world ~ quake and fall into ruin if we were to doubt? Religions, through-

out the ages, have threatened their flocks with damnation if they presumed to question their dogmas. They ~ or at least Christianity ~ no longer burn people at the stake for having slightly different ideas than the *party-line*, but still express their disapproval: "How dare you question what we teach!" In the Middle Ages, and for centuries afterwards, the Church had such power that heretics or apostates ~ as it called people who questioned and rejected what it taught, were subject to torture and capital punishment. This no longer holds, and people are free to discard Christianity completely, as I did, without fear of censure or re-cremations. And I will state quite clearly that if I get no further along my way in this life, I will consider it enough to have escaped from the appalling shadow of Christianity; I feel so already, and have done for a long time; it is already liberation! It will probably take some more long centuries for people of a certain other religion ~ and we all know which one ~ to reach this point. It's a matter of evolution; you can't keep people in darkness forever.

Perhaps we need to look at it in a completely new way. Perhaps we've got the semantics of it wrong, and a small adjustment would make an immense difference.

Countless people hold firmly to the idea that this or that book contains truth, and in some cases, *all* truth, and the *only* truth. But is there really truth in a book? What *is* a book but an assembly of paper and ink? Moses Maimonides, a Jewish philosopher of the 12th century, wrote this on the matter:

"Do not consider a thing as proof because you find it written in books, for just as a liar will deceive with his tongue, he will not be deterred from doing the same with his pen. They are utter fools who accept a thing as convincing truth simply because it is in writing."

We cannot say there is truth in a book unless and until we have experienced and verified it ourselves. And yet, here and now, putting aside belief, however fondly held, we can see the truth *about* a book, *about* this, *about* that, *about* anything and every-

thing. We can see and understand *how* things are. And in so seeing and understanding, the book, this thing, that thing, anything and everything, dissolves and disappears before our eyes, and we realize that appearances are deceptive and illusory; things are not at all what they seem to be, but quite, quite different. What is the nature, the reality, the truth about this thing that, by common consent, we call a book?

Carl Sagan, American Astrophysicist and Science Writer (1934 – 1996), wrote this:

"If you want to make an apple-pie from scratch, you must first create the universe."

This is a way of saying that everything depends upon everything else, and that there is no such thing as independence whatsoever. This is a basis for co-operation instead of competition, and our propensity for violence and war will wither away.

And so, where is the book? Maybe we should say: Where *isn't* the book? Or, *what* isn't the book? To understand things as they are, however, requires insight, again and again, because insight doesn't stay with us, but comes and goes. Sometimes, we may understand very clearly, but our clear-seeing passes, and the darkness closes in again. However, if we have once seen, we never forget.

"Truth is living, not static, and the mind that would discover truth must also be living, not burdened with knowledge or experience."

~ J. Krishnamurti - Sage, 1895 - 1986 ~



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The below-named donors have made this book possible through their kind support, and I hereby acknowledge their generosity. May they be well and always safe.

Sue and Aaron Elliot, Adelaide	A\$200
Jimmy and Marcus Wong, Malacca	RM100
Raymond Yeo, Malacca	RM100
Michael Khaw & Yvonne Pang, Malacca	RM50
Regan Khau Yee Sing, Malacca	RM50
Harold Khaw Chyan Tih, Malacca,	RM50
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Robert Chua, Malacca	RM500
Wu Lan De & Wu Xiu Feng, Malacca	RM500
Goh Hock Gin, Malacca	RM780
Goh Koon Huat Press, Malacca,	RM1000



Printed in Malaysia, 2006, as a follow-on from
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A fish once went to the King Fish and said: "Your Majesty, I have always heard about the Sea, but what is this Sea, and where is it?"

The King Fish replied:
"You live, move and have your being in the Sea. The Sea is within you and without you; you were born in the Sea, are made of Sea and will end in the Sea. The Sea surrounds you as your whole being. And yet you ask, 'What is the sea?'"

~ Zen Parable ~

We spend a great deal of our lives looking for things, but seldom seeing what is right, in front of us. Is it because we've never been taught or shown how to see?
Why don't we learn, by ourselves?

