

SO MANY ROADS

JOURNAL OF A WANDERER



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Abhinyana



INTRODUCTION

When I began work on my memoirs early last year, it was primarily for my own edification, and at first I didn't think about getting them printed, but as they unfolded, and unexpected things came out, as they have a way of doing, I thought parts might be of some interest to others, even though *they* might not have traveled as widely as me. They became so voluminous, however, that to print them as one book would have been cumbersome, as few people have time for such, and so I decided to cut it into parts. This, therefore, is the first part, telling of events from my first quarter-century ~ the formative years, as it were. Subsequent parts will hopefully follow in due course.

The main inspiration came from a book called "A Single Night's Shelter," the autobiography of an American monk named *Yogacara Rahula*, which I came upon in the library of a Vietnamese temple in Virginia. Glancing through it I recognized his story as very similar to my own, in that we had stumbled across Buddhism in much the same way; he'd *also* traveled overland from Europe to India along the *Hippie Trail*, through Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. I excitedly read it very quickly, and realized that we'd been to many of the same places, done similar things, and even met some of the same people. I admired his frankness and honesty, and before going further, must express my indebtedness to him, as otherwise I might never have settled down to write my own account.

There was no address in it whereby I might have contacted him, and I presumed he was still in Sri Lanka, where he had ordained. Later, however, I met a Sri Lankan monk in Detroit, who told me he was in Virginia, not far from the place where I'd found the book. I got an address and wrote, and not long afterwards got a reply by email.

It wasn't easy for me to set about writing this, and I'd put off doing so for years, and then got the idea of writing it in bits

and pieces in no particular order, thinking of calling it: *JOIN THE DOTS*, as that's what anyone reading it would have had to do, jumping back and forth trying to make sense of it all. Then, when I did make a start, I found myself more-or-less at the beginning and going on from there, but even so, some dislocation was unavoidable, as many things happen at the same time, while we can tell of them only one-by-one. So, reading this will require some concentration and imagination, not to say *interest*. I invite you to join me on my journey, and in so doing, you may realize that your own journey is interesting, too, and something to be treasured.

Years ago, in one of my books, I wrote that if asked to tell the story of our life without mentioning anyone else, we could say almost nothing, as our lives are made up ~ like a tapestry ~ of innumerable threads that are *not-us*; they are not simply *ours*, but in fact, mostly *not-ours*. Anyone and *anything* we meet, who crosses our path or impinges upon us in any way, becomes part of our experience, or what we think of as 'our life'. In reality, there is no such thing as 'my life,' but an extremely rich and varied composition. See how it happens: just by reading these words, I am becoming part of your life and, in an equally subtle way, you are becoming part of mine. There is very little about us that is really 'I'. This is why I've mentioned so many people in this account, each and every one of them having their own story, which is just like mine, and yours, and everyone else's, being made up of countless other stories. How fascinating it all is, this tangled skein of life!

None of us, except the least imaginative, can do everything we want to do in the brief time we live, but we all do many things ~ either directly, ourselves, or indirectly, through others ~ and should feel happy at having done and witnessed so many things. By the time it comes to die, instead of feeling regret at having missed certain things, we might think of all the things we did, and to say, "*I lived!*"

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1

EARLY YEARS

“Listen to the rhythm of the falling
rain,
Telling me just what a fool I’ve
been.”

Nice song. But rain always reminds me of the many times during my hitch-hiking years long ago, when I stood out in the rain ~ drizzle, steady, downpours ~ beside the road, waiting for a lift; but when you’re wet and bedraggled, few people are willing to stop and take you.

That was long ago, but I traveled in many countries that way, on the kindness and generosity of others. And really, when you think about it, it is a form of begging, as we did not pay for rides ~ rides in all kinds of vehicles, from luxurious to bone-rattlingly uncomfortable and dirty ~ anything to get us where we wanted to go in the cheapest way possible. It was relatively easy in those days, although I’ve stood for long hours waiting for a ride. My record-wait was 43 hours, on the Turkish-Bulgarian border, but I had more patience then than now, and didn’t really mind, because being September, the weather was fine, and there was the shell of a building where I could sleep at night, and a simple shop nearby where I could get bread and cheese; also, I had a good book to keep me occupied: Mitchener’s *The Source*, that I’d bought from another traveler when he’d done with it.

Finally, I got a ride to *Plovdiv*, Bulgaria’s second-largest city, but like the rest of that country during its long years under communism ~ and it was the only communist country I went to ~ it seemed gray, drab and anemic. How I went on from there I do not recall, as my treks around Europe were so numerous ~ back and forth in my search that wasn’t yet a conscious search but almost aimless.

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But how come I'd set out and found myself living the life of a rover? I am not of a family of gypsies, or diplomats who are posted to various parts and find themselves in unusual places without having much choice in the matter. It's a strange story, and if someone had told me, as a boy, that this is the life-style I would take up and see the world like the young men of the fairy-tales who set out to seek their fortunes, I wouldn't have believed it. Was it my destiny? Perhaps it was, as looking back, I can see that I was always different, not because I wanted or tried to be ~ I *didn't*, and it was damned hard at times, and still is, to be different ~ but because the pattern seemed to be set, the die cast.

I decided to call my memoirs *SO MANY ROADS*, answering the first question posed by Bob Dylan in his famous protest-song, *Blowin' in the Wind*, the full text of which I will reproduce here. Dylan had a great influence on me, and I still like his old songs.

“How many roads must a man walk down,
Before you call him a man?
How many seas must the white dove sail,
Before she can sleep in the sand?
How many times must the cannonballs fly
Before they're forever banned?
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the
wind;

The answer is blowin' in the wind.

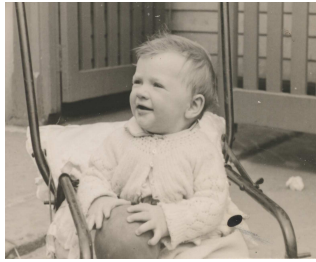
How many years can a mountain exist,
Before it is washed to the sea?
How many years can some people exist,
Before they're allowed to be free?
How many times can a man turn his head,
And pretend that he just doesn't see?
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the
wind'

The answer is blowin' in the wind.

How many times must a man look up,
Before he can see the sky?
How many ears must one man have,
Before he can hear people cry?

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How many deaths will it take till he knows,
That too many people have died?
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the
wind;
The answer is blowin' in the wind.



(Earliest picture of me)

Why I was born where and when I was born, I cannot say, as no-one knows these things; and it wasn't until many years later that I began to question them, with some surprising insights. From an early age, however, I was always an avid reader, following my father in this and in other ways; he was an inveterate patron of sales-rooms and used-book-stores, and would come home with all kinds of treasures ~ boxes of books, antique furniture, inlaid tables and cabinets, tools, machines, and so on ~ because after WW2, when Britain was virtually bankrupt, estates were being broken up and sold; he would get things for next to nothing, and space to store them was no problem, as we lived in an old farm-house with its out-buildings, although we were not farmers ourselves, and it had long ceased to be a farm.

My mother was born in that village ~ a lovely place called Burwardsley, in Cheshire, with hills, forests, fields, streams and ponds ~ but dad was from Derby. While he was a child, his family had moved to Liverpool; he never lost his Merseyside accent; nor did he ever become a country person, although he moved from city to countryside after marrying my mother (they'd met while she was working as a house-maid in Wallasey); his gardening extended to just weeding, which he was pretty good at, but he didn't grow things as did my mother; *she* was green-fingered, not dad. He was good at

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mechanics and woodwork, and indeed, by profession, if you can call it that, he followed *his* dad, and was what he liked to call a 'saw-doctor,' making, sharpening and setting saws ~ a handy man to know if you had a saw that wouldn't cut.

His workshop ~ one of the old farm-buildings ~ was huge, with an upstairs we used to call *the loft*, reached by a ladder through a trap-door, and which, with all his cheaply-acquired stuff, was a veritable Aladdin's Cave. I used to love going up there as a boy and looking at his latest finds ~ and his earlier ones, too ~ and when, later on, he used to lock it to keep me and my younger brother, George, out when he was at work, we found a way in anyway, circumventing his locks.

Believe it or not, our house ~ like many others in the village (and no doubt many other villages in Britain) ~ was without electricity; we used kerosene lamps for lighting, and cooked on a wood-burning stove which was later replaced by a coke-burning 'range,' that not only heated the living-room but also a boiler that dad had fixed up; it was very efficient. It heated only one room, however, and in winter, the rest were bitterly cold, and we used hot-water-bottles in bed at night to mitigate this. Parts of the house were over 150 years old, with low and sagging ceilings that creaked a lot, and small bedroom-windows that let in little light. Nowadays, such houses ~ those that remain and which have not been demolished, as ours later was ~ have been bought up and renovated by people moving out of the towns, and are hardly recognizable.

I was the fourth of five children. The eldest was Sheila, 12 years older than me; then came twins, Bob and Glen, two years after Sheila. Then me, followed by George.

Before going on, I should say that this house was haunted. Often, even in the daytime, we heard footsteps going up the stairs and in and out of the three bedrooms; in the daytime, I dared to go and look, but there was no-one ~ although I won't say *nothing* ~ there; our cats and dogs (we always had pets), would hide somewhere when they heard such sounds. One night, I was in bed but not yet asleep, with the door of my room open, when suddenly, in the doorway, appeared this *thing*. It was man-sized and man-shaped, but like smoke. It

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did not do anything, but I was petrified, and couldn't even shout or scream. How long this lasted, I can't say, until it disappeared, and I returned to normal. I did not know, then, that Glen (short for Glenda, which was so formal, like my own name, Michael, which I never liked), ten years older than me, had seen it in the same room years before; she'd heard it coming, until it came into the room, but she had the presence of mind to get under the bedclothes and almost stopped breathing, until she plucked up enough courage to peep out, and it had gone. We never found out anything about this apparition, but apparently, the previous tenant of this house had been a miser and had died there; had he got stuck there because of that? Several other houses in the vicinity were reputedly haunted, and I could understand it. Belief in ghosts is world-wide, but for some reason, England is well-known ~ more than any other country I've been to ~ for its ghosts; I wonder why?

At weekends and other holidays ~ weather permitting (and I don't recall it raining as much then as it seems to do now) ~ my younger brother and I would leave home in the morning, with sandwiches packed by our mother, and cover many miles before coming home in the evening, tired but happy from the day's adventures, with something or other in our pockets or over our shoulders. Our parents didn't worry about us; it was just the way things were; there was almost no crime in our area then.

There was one spot in the woods that I particularly loved: a rocky outcrop that soared like the bow of a ship above the waves of the tree-tops. I would sit there, dreaming away, and even scratched my name in the rock. Far below was a farmhouse among the trees and patchwork fields; I used to call and wave to the people there, and they would wave back. In the forest, on the other side was a castle ~ a mock-Norman fortress, built only 150 years before ~ and on the far side of that another, *Beeston* Castle, which had undergone siege by the Parliamentarians during the Civil War in the 17th century.

Although I don't remember it, Britain was under food-rationing after the War (until now, it's still spoken of as 'the war', as if

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there was only one! It shows how, when we are involved with something directly, it becomes ours, subjectively, whereas other things ~ even though similar ~ are remote from us and somehow not-so-real) for a number of years, and not just during it; people couldn't just go out and buy whatever they wanted, even if they had the money and food and other things were available. It was an exhausted and impoverished nation I was born into, but I'd known nothing else, of course, and didn't question it. Almost bankrupt, and with its empire gone, it was years before Britain got on its feet again. I have just seen this from the *Irish Times* on the Net, dated Tuesday, 25th January, 2005:

"Lord Laird today received a parliamentary answer indicating that \$4,368 billion is still owed from the First World War. The United States has not written off these debts despite canceling the debt owed by Germany."

And that was from the *First World War*!

Nevertheless, we managed, and once a week, our parents used to take George and I to the movies (we called them *the pictures* in those days), usually on Friday evening. After five dreary days of school, it was really something to look forward to.

Chester, the nearest town to our village, had four cinemas, the names of which ~ if I recall aright ~ were *Odeon*, *Gau-mont*, *Regal* and *Tattler*. Near each was the inevitable sweet-shop, into which we were taken before going into the cinema, and given free choice. Supplied then, with a bag of sweets and chocolate, we would enter the dark womb of the cinema and join the hushed and expectant crowd waiting for the movie to begin; it was another world; we were about to embark upon adventures.

One movie we saw was about the *Yeti* (otherwise called *The Abominable Snowman*) ~ a gigantic, hairy anthropoid which legend holds lives in the snowbound fastnesses of the Himalayas. Now, yetis are supposed to be shy and elusive, so none have ever been filmed or captured, except in this par-

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ticular movie, which was only fiction and not true, of course. An expedition went in search of this legendary creature, and eventually, their *Sherpa* guides succeeded in tracking one down and trapping it. It was then trussed up and shipped off to London, to be exhibited as 'The Missing Link'.

Infuriated to the point where it could no longer bear abuse, the Yeti managed to escape from its cage and got into the London Underground (the *Tube*), where it went on the rampage, venting its fury on unfortunate commuters. Attempts to recapture it only resulted in more deaths, until finally, it was shot dead. End of movie. But not end of the effects of it on me. I was so terrified by this creature, and could not forget it. My other brother, Bob (Glen's twin), knowing this, took delight in scaring me further, by telling me, just as I was about to go to bed: "The Yeti is up there waiting for you!" This fear lasted for a long time, and I don't remember when I outgrew it. Eventually, of course, I had to face and deal with my fear of the dark and ghosts, because there were to be more experiences of them.

To *fast-forward* here: In '94, I saw this old film on Australian TV, and couldn't believe how I'd ever been scared of such a silly thing; it was ridiculous; but at the time, so many years before, the Yeti of the movie and the irrational fear of it, were as real to me as the brother who got his kicks by scaring a child in this way! Kids do not know the difference between fear of real things ~ fear that can protect us from danger and harm ~ and fear with no basis in fact; to the child, it is simply fear. To frighten kids with horror stories and tales of ghosts is not just stupid and wrong, but bad, and has a negative and sometimes long-lasting effect on their impressionable minds. We should be concerned with the cultivation of the mind, not with its destruction.

Back again: Being the somewhat 'mad-scientist' that he was ~ another aspect of his eccentricity (this is where I get mine from, no doubt, not from my mother) ~ dad decided to rectify our lack of electrification. Always fascinated by engines and motors ~ and to give credit where it is due, he was quite talented in this area, and self-taught, too ~ he bought and in-

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stalled a huge generator. Pity for the neighbors, whose house was actually nearer to dad's workshop than ours, theirs being just the other side of the workshop, while ours was separated from it by a sizeable yard; and the generator made such a damn noise that any envy they might have felt towards us because of the benefits conferred by it was surely transformed into rage by the terrible noise. They didn't complain ~ at least, not to us ~ but must have hated us for this and other things; they were sour-faced by nature ~ not just because of us ~ and we weren't on good terms.

Anyway, this generator changed our lives considerably, and opened up the possibility of electric-light, and dad, on his own ~ he knew about electricity, too, but perhaps not enough ~ wired the whole house. Needless to say, we thought it wonderful to have light at the flick of a switch instead of having to prime and light the kerosene pressure-lamps. It also enabled us to get a TV ~ one of the first in the village (it's hard to imagine this now, much further down the track, as memory fades with time). Anyway, although we were by no means wealthy, we were always among the privileged in the village, because as far back as I remember, we always had some kind of car, when not many other people did ~ and this *wasn't* Rip Van Winkle country! Our first TV was very small, and black-and-white, of course ~ no such thing as color TV then ~ but it worked only when the generator was running, until dad figured how to run it from car-batteries that he'd charge, but they wouldn't last long before becoming flat, often in the middle of a program that we particularly wanted to watch, it seemed, leaving us frustrated and urging dad to go out and start the generator, which he wasn't always happy to do; like he himself, it was temperamental and wouldn't always start when he wanted it to, and required much swinging on the crank-handle, accompanied by quite a bit of cursing ~ "Damn thing! Blast it! Bloody Hell!" and so on. We soon forgot the wonder of having things we'd not had before, and came to expect them to be there whenever we wanted them, and of course, this was not the case; sometimes they *were* there, and at other times not; it's so easy to become addicted to things ~ *dependent* upon them ~ and take them for granted.

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We managed before having a TV, but suffered more after having it when it wouldn't work; like this, having things is a mixed blessing; suffering is inherent in having things, because often it turns out that the things *have* us!

Next in line, after electric lights and TV, were electric-blankets, making our hot-water-bottles obsolete. But dad's know-how was a bit deficient here, and talk about execution by electric-chair, we were nearly executed by electric *bed*! Lucky, too, that the house wasn't set on fire, as the voltage produced by this massive generator was far in excess of that required by the electric-blankets, and before long, they began to show burn-marks.

There were down-sides to dad's inventiveness, and as I got older, I began to notice and focus on them. At first, I thought he could do anything, and idolized him, so that when, in primary school, our teacher once asked us if anyone knew what a hero was, I immediately raised my hand and said: "*I do, sir. My dad's a hero. He killed a gorgon!*" (One of the tales our fabulously-yarn-spinning dad had told us, you see, was that, during his military-service in Greece or Italy during the War, with a grenade he had killed this 'gorgon', which I had taken to be some kind of dragon, unacquainted as I yet was with the creatures from Greek mythology with snakes instead of hair, and whose fearsome visage was so awful that anyone looking upon it was straightaway turned to stone). Well, the teacher was diplomatic and didn't disillusion me or make fun of me, and the other kids in the class were just as ignorant and naïve as me, so nobody laughed, and I was left with my illusions intact for a while. Later, when I became more discerning and critical, I began to see that my dad couldn't do everything and wasn't a hero, and I was bitterly disappointed, feeling that he'd let me down and betrayed me, as I so wanted him to live up to my unrealistic expectations, not realizing that it was these expectations that had let me down rather than him. But a child doesn't understand such things, especially when no-one explains to him in a way both simple and clear. These new perceptions ~ or rather, *misperceptions*, just as erroneous as the previous set ~ were to determine the way I thought of my dad for a number of years to come, in a negative, dep-

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recating light. What a pity, what a waste of time/life! Only later, much, much later, when I was living far away from him, did I realize that my dad had never been a hero, but that he was my dad, and although I have called several people 'mother' during my travels, I have never called anyone else 'dad'. In 1981, while in the Philippines, I began to reflect about my relationship with him, and made a cassette-tape of my thoughts, and sent it to him; when they received it, both dad and mum cried.

The primary school I attended was about a mile from home, and we walked there, or later on went by bike; those were days when people had no need to worry about their kids being abducted or molested, and did not accompany them there or back. There were only two classes in the school, one for the elder kids, conducted by the headmaster, *Mr. Ravenscroft* [who we referred to as 'Noggy,' though I forget why, as it bore no resemblance to his name], and the other for the younger ones by a teacher ~ usually a lady ~ who generally didn't stay very long, and whose names, except for a Miss *Solomon* and a Mrs. *Laign*, I no longer remember. Well, I never liked school, and in fact, on the whole, hated the experience, not because I was dull and slow to learn, but because I didn't like being made to learn, and wanted to learn in my own good time and way; the streak of stubbornness and anti-authority was in me even then, and has persisted until now. I was somewhat like Mark Twain, it seems, and preferred the open air to being confined in a class-room. At times I would think, "I've had enough of this wretched school today," and at lunch-time (I soon gave up having the subsidized school meals as I couldn't stand the stench, let alone the taste, of the meat ~ usually beef ~ that was dished up!) I would go off into the nearby woods, and when classes resumed and Noggy asked where I was, some snitch ~ of which there was no shortage; there seldom is ~ would say, "He's gone off into the woods." Now, twice that I remember, Noggy brought out the entire school to search for me (I guess it was a nice break for him, too). But I knew the woods better than they did, and moreover, was very good at hiding, so they would be all around me and not see me. After a while, the search was abandoned and

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they returned to school, and I, thinking how smart I was to outfox them, went home. The next day, however, I had to go to school again, and the teacher was waiting for me with his cane, which made me less happy than before, and left me feeling not very well-disposed towards him. It seemed to me that I was the one who got more canings than anyone else in my class.

Once, after one such escapade and they'd all given up and returned to school (I bet there were others who envied me, though), on the way home, I stopped to pick pears from a tree in a field near my home, and returned with my shirt bulging with fruit. But my parents had already been notified that I'd done a runner and were waiting for me, so as soon as I walked in the gate, dad grabbed hold of me saying, "Come on, you little bugger!", and unceremoniously bundled me into the car and took me back to school, where I was exposed to the gaze of everyone, like Louis XVI on his way to the guillotine. I was, needless to say, subdued but not deterred for some time after this.

Strangely enough, I had an inbuilt fear of being late for anything, and always went to school early, getting there before everyone else; anyone would have thought I loved the place and couldn't wait to get there, instead of the other way around! Often, I used to read a book as I walked. Well, one day, someone whose house I had to pass on my way decided to play a trick on me, and said, "You're late; they've gone in already!" I ran the rest of the way, only to find myself first there, as usual.

Many years later ~ about the same time I made the tape for my dad ~ I wrote a letter to my old teacher, and would like to reproduce it here to show that I'd learned something from him at last:

Dear Mr. Ravenscroft,

I've not

written to you for quite some time, and
there is something I would like to say.

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Would you mind if I tell it as I often tell it to the refugees in the Camp here?

When I was a boy, I hated going to school, not because I was dull and incapable of learning, but maybe because I did not like being made to learn. I was a naughty boy, and sometimes used to play truant; perhaps I was the naughtiest boy in the school ~ I cannot think of anyone who was naughtier; I was caned many times.

When I left school, I was very happy to do so, but now, after all these years, I realize that I never left, and that I am *still* in school, but that the school I am now in has a roof but no walls ~ the sky being the roof. There is a difference now, though: I enjoy learning; my life, day-by-day, is an adventure, an unfolding, a journey of discovery.

I learned many things from you, and some of the things I learned have surfaced only in recent years, so long after. And did you not explain to me that what is not in a painting is just as important as what is there? This is redolent of Eastern philosophy ~ Chinese in particular. Like the empty space between the notes of music, or between words: without the space between, there would be meaningless confusion. Did you ever study Eastern philosophy, Sir?

I'm writing this to express my belated gratitude to you for your patient efforts with me (even the *canings* were good for me ~ maybe I should say: *especially* the canings!) It takes time for a seed to germinate and grow; it does not immediately become a fruit-bearing tree. As I look back, I don't know why I didn't re-

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ceive more canings; I certainly deserved them! Now I am somewhat in the position that you were then, and I understand how difficult it is to be a teacher trying to impart knowledge to others. People call me 'Sir' now, and expect me to know things that they don't know. Well, what I feel I have to say is that we should break out of the habit of always waiting to be taught, and, in all humility, become learners ~ which is something quite different than being students, wouldn't you say? I feel that everything is trying to tell us something; should we always think that all knowledge lies in a person or persons? The nature-studies we had in school were excellent lessons; I only wish there had been more of them.

Once, I had a desire to become a history teacher, but that never came about. Now, although I realize that the present rests upon the past, like the snow-cap on a mountain-peak, I have lost interest in history as it is recorded ~ after all, it is 'his story,' and is often biased and distorted. To be sure, there are many things that we can, and should, learn from the past in living in the present, but it has gone, beyond recall, and cannot ever be changed. There is only one 6-Aug-1982; there has not been such a day before, and there will never be another. Life, with all its pain and sham, is still worth living, as long as we learn something from it; we will then not depart empty-handed.

(Bataan Refugee Camp, Philippines. 6-Aug-1982).

Since I wrote that letter in '82, there have been many changes, of course. One change in me has been a resur-

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gence of my interest in history, because, although it is no less true now than then that recorded history is *his story*, the past is an immense treasure-trove for us to enrich ourselves from. We can make sense of the present only by means of the past; otherwise, it has no meaning.

The present *is* the past, with a little added to it; without it, there would be no present. Perhaps we may compare it to a coral-reef, slowly and imperceptibly being built up by countless tiny polyps. The past has not gone, as many of us think, but is still here, speaking to and teaching us in so many ways, and we are greatly indebted to it. Whatever we achieve, it is not simply by our own efforts, but because we are enabled to do so by others before us; by ourselves, alone and in isolation, we can do nothing. Being members of the human race should inspire us to contribute whatever we can to its continuous unfolding.

Another teacher ~ a lady whose name my brain hasn't yet yielded up ~ used to take me aside after lunch and give me ~ *only* me, no-one else ~ extra tuition in reading. Why she did this, I never knew, because she didn't tell me (it wasn't because I was backwards, either, as there were greater dummies than me), but I was certainly grateful for it, and still am, as the wonderful ability to read and write opened many doors for me and continues to do so, and if I'd learned nothing more than this in school, it would have been enough. May she be well and happy wherever/however she may be now.

Something else I remember from those days was a small lump in the asphalt of the playground. As the months passed, this lump slowly got bigger, until, like a cake in the oven, it cracked, and some time later, a blade of grass appeared. This might have been my first awareness of nameless Dharma. How long the playground had been there, I don't know, but some of the grass beneath it hadn't died, and had tenaciously forced its way to the surface and the light. It obviously struck me as somehow significant for me to remark upon and remember it.

At the age of eleven or a little older, we had to sit what was known as the '11-Plus Exam,' which determined if we would

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go on from primary-school to grammar-school, or to what was called secondary-modern. Well, we were such hayseeds that only two people in our village that I knew of passed this exam ~ David Harding and William Dawson ~ but I almost did, and got a second chance. Mr. Ravenscoft was always rather proud about this, and though I failed the second time (and wasn't sad about it, either, because I know I'd have hated grammar-school even more than primary and secondary), he used to say that I was a 'borderline case,' and meant it as a compliment.

Anyway, after this, and before I transferred to the secondary-school in the next and bigger village 3 miles away named *Tattenhall*, one day every fortnight, the older boys and girls were bussed there for woodwork- and cookery-classes respectively, and the kids at that school were waiting to rag us country bumpkins unmercifully; one of the first ordeals newcomers had to face was called 'ducking' ~ having our heads pushed under the taps in the washrooms. And I, who have worn glasses from the age of ten (which was when it was discovered I was short-sighted), came in for extra teasing, as kids who are different in any way often do (not many kids wore glasses then, and though they enabled me to see better than I otherwise would have done, in some ways they were a handicap; they were broken many times, especially during the winter, when snowballs thrown with some force ~ and sometimes containing stones or lumps of coke ~ would come smashing into them).

Anyway, four months short of my 13th birthday, I started at that awful school full-time, and was assigned to a 'B' class with other dummies, but after a couple of months it was already summer holidays ~ what bliss! ~ and when we returned six weeks later, everyone's name was read out during assembly and told which class they'd be in that school-year. One by one, people left the hall until I was the last one left. I remember sitting there anxiously waiting for what seemed like forever until my name was called ~ by a process of elimination, perhaps? ~ and I was assigned to an 'A' class. I almost peed my pants!

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Without a doubt, holidays were always the best part of school for me, and anticipation of them ~ as of most good things in life ~ was almost as enjoyable, if not moreso, than the actual holidays when they came. During the summer-break, mum and dad took George ~ younger than me by almost two years ~ and I to a sea-side resort named *Talacre* for a fortnight (the others were already working by then), where we stayed in a rented chalet (or rather, shack) among the sand-dunes; in this, again, we were fortunate, as most people in our village couldn't afford such relative luxury. Most times, dad would continue his work and join us now and then, as the resort was only 40 miles from our home. We lived simply in our holiday-shack, as there was no electricity or running water; we had to get our water from taps placed at long intervals along the roads, and join the queue for it when it started to run, inching our buckets and other containers forward until it was our turn, and lugging the precious liquid home, with several rest-stops along the way.

I always loved nature, and was given to solitary musings. It was not unusual, therefore, for me to go off on my own at the beach and sit or lie quietly in the dunes. There, I would listen to the sky-larks sing high above, and strain my eyes to locate them; I could hear them, but where *were* they? Why did they fly so high to sing like that? Such a beautiful sound ~ I can hear it now!

The unspoiled beach stretched for miles and miles, and sloped gradually, so that the sea receded far out, then returned almost to the dunes; these were covered by rushes with spiky tips, which would break off in your skin and fester if you brushed against them; among the rushes, here and there, were patches of sea-holly, and black-berries with fruit and thorns. A light-house stood on the beach, alone, aloof, mysterious, unoccupied, and slowly lapsing into ruin.

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Talacre Beach and the Lighthouse

Mum led us to catch fish, and at low tide would stretch a line with baited hooks between posts embedded in the beach, then return to see if there were any unlucky fish when the tide had risen and gone out again; but we were either poor fishermen, or the fish were too smart; we never caught many.

Vans used to drive around selling various things holiday-makers might need: bread, ice-cream, milk, and so on; I can still hear the call one of them made: "Calor-gas-man *caw*-ling."

We had many happy times at Talacre. Dad had a huge air-plane inner-tube obtained from one of the junkyards he used to visit, and would inflate it for our fun on the beach; we used it for some years, until one of us nearly got carried out to sea on it, and that was the end of it.

I got a job in ~ believe it or not! ~ a butcher's shop in Tattenhall, accompanying him on his delivery-rounds on Saturday mornings. I hated it, but it provided me with some pocket money ~ five shillings each time.

We had quite a large plot of land behind the house that we called 'the orchard,' although apart from a few fruit-trees, it really didn't deserve that name. My mother always kept hens for eggs, and for some years bees for honey (she'd have a go at anything). In my early teens, she bought a rotary hoe, and with this I plowed up not just her regular garden-patch ~ already quite large ~ but also most of 'the orchard,' and we had bumper crops of potatoes, cabbages and other things from it.

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There were two places of worship in the village: the Anglican church and the Methodist chapel. People were divided in their loyalties between them, although there was little difference in belief. My family ~ led by mum ~ went to chapel (we didn't call it 'church'; it was *chapel*, and nothing else). It was, for me at that time, rather boring; you could count on seeing the same people there week after week, and people were noticeable if they didn't turn up. Present would be David Dodd, who invariably nodded off during the sermon, grumpy old Eric Chesters, a farmer who used to yell if he saw us in his fields, though we were doing no harm, and Mary Hastle, the organist. My mother was active in the chapel, and often used to conduct the services. The whole service lasted an hour, and consisted of 2 prayers, 3 hymns, some announcements, and the sermon, which should not have gone on for longer than 20 minutes, and if it did, people would become restless, coughing and looking at the clock on the wall, wondering when it was going to end; it was a formality; the content wasn't important. Such was my religious background, and though I was later to abandon and reject it, I learned something from it, and am grateful.

To side-track a little here: One of the ministers at the Anglican church we knew as *Canon Vaughn*; he was rather a nice man, and used to visit more-or-less everyone in the village, whether they went to his church or not, which makes it all the more strange why one time, as he was passing near our house, I called out to him: "I don't like you, and I don't like that hat, and neither does my dad!" I think he was quite amused, as he told my dad what I'd said, and I don't think I got into too much trouble. We used to laugh about this in later years.

All too soon, the holidays came to an end and we had to return to that dratted school, which I had to endure for another two years, leaving there two months before my 15th birthday. Now, one boy ~ Philip Benson, by name ~ left school 6 months before me, being slightly older, and he *cried* ~ there were tears coming down his cheeks ~ and I stood looking at him and thinking, "Are you *mad*? Crying about leaving school?!" I was so happy to leave there, not a moment too

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soon, but not before my mother ~ who must have had great hopes for me, as I was the only one of us she did it for (she was financially unable to do it for the others before me, but since then, had got the job of cook in the primary-school) ~ had arranged with the headmaster, Gordon Rigby, who I actually quite liked ~ for me to go on to what was known as a '*College of Further Education*' (a glorified name for what was really a high school) in Chester, for two years, starting that September (1961). That summer passed, like all summers do, and I started College with a sense of pride in the name, as it was some prestigious establishment; I guess I needed that boost to my self-esteem, foolish though it was. I left my old friends behind ~ the few I'd had ~ and formed new associations, though none of them of any depth or duration.

By this time, Sheila had married someone from Chester and was living in a council-house in a not very salubrious area, and sometimes, so I wouldn't need to go all the way home by bus, and in order to baby-sit her children when she and her husband, *Frank*, wanted to go out, I would stay overnight with them.

Feeling the need to get another Saturday job, I went to Woolworths. "*What's your edge?*" said the fierce personnel manager. "Edge?" I repeated, timorously. "What do you mean?" "*Edge!*" he roared, in his strong Yorkshire accent; "How old are you?!" "Oh, sixteen," I hastily offered, realizing he'd meant 'age'. "You're a bright spark, aren't you?!" he said sarcastically. Thus began my relationship with this tyrant, and it didn't improve over the year I spent there, working all day for just £1. Well, Jacko; I never imagined you'd come into my life again, but there you are, still with me!

My arrangement with Sheila and Frank went on intermittently for some years, long after I'd come out of 'college' with a few bits of paper known as 'O-Level' certificates (I didn't bother going on for 'A-Levels,' let alone university), until at one point, I moved in with them full-time in a better area; but though I always got on well with Sheila, I never did with Frank, who was from a cold and emotionless family; I don't remember seeing any of them smile. I got the feeling he resented me as

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a challenge to his masculinity, funny man! But they needed me as much as I needed them, because in order to earn more money, Sheila had a part-time job in the bar of what was for Chester at that time a rather classy hotel named *Mollington Banastre* ~ classy in the sense that it was more-genteel than an ordinary pub. And because Frank often worked late at his job, they needed someone to baby-sit their kids, who were old enough to be left without their mother. But what a task this was, as they were real brats ~ boy and girl, Stuart and Anita ~ and used to play me up something awful. Granted, I wasn't the ideal person to be left in charge of kids, starting when I was just 15, with no experience of this kind of thing, but when I'd shout at them and tell them to sleep instead of playing around ~ as they did only when their parents were not there ~ the next day, they would tell their mum and dad, "Uncle Mike's been aggravating us," and Frank, who was never sympathetic towards me anyway, would naturally take their word against mine, but wouldn't say anything to me; instead, being the kind of man he was, he'd tell Sheila, but I knew, from the vibes, how it was; and the brats knew this, too; they were not nice kids, and they grew up into not-nice adults, too.

By the time I left 'college' in '63, I'd become fashion- and music-conscious. In the early 'Sixties *The Beatles* exploded into fame, and what an impact they had! They didn't start a revolution, as they got their inspiration from others before them, like Elvis Presley, Lonnie Donegan, and so on ~ people who had never and would never, do anything to me (I never liked Elvis) ~ but they certainly gave it a greater impetus than it had hitherto had, and I here acknowledge the change they brought into my life. Unable to express my thoughts or feelings (did I really have any to call my own at that time?), it was just what I needed to identify with, and I began to feel alive, as if I'd just been existing or sleeping before, and had woken up; color came into my otherwise seemingly black-and-white ~ and until then, meaningless ~ world. I'd had no interest in politics or world-affairs before, and looking back now, the first thing of prominence I remember was the assassination of JFK in November '63; after that, my world became much bigger than it had previously been. At the time, I'd just joined Sheila in the

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hotel where she worked ~ she'd got me a part-time job as a waiter, and it was there one night when the announcement came through on the radio about the event in Dallas, and a hush came over the bar. My job there didn't last long, however, as it was discovered that I was still only 17 ~ too young to work in a bar ~ and so it was with regret that I was terminated until I should come of age.

Soon after this, I moved to stay with Glen in Crewe ~ 30 miles from Chester ~ where she'd gone to live with the man she'd married from that town, a rather drab town whose only claim to fame was its railway-junction, locomotive works and beautiful park. They had two young boys by this time, Anthony and Alan, who were better behaved than Sheila's kids. I always got on well with Glen, too, and in fact, she'd been like a surrogate mother to me when I was small, taking care of me when mum had newly-born George on her hands. She and her husband, *Dennis*, took me in, and I got a job in a retail-clothes shop, and earned enough there to pay my keep and buy enough clothes to dress fashionably and go out dancing. I had several girlfriends at this time, but nothing serious.

That job lasted some months and then I moved to a factory that made exclusive *Saville Row* clothes, but although I earned more money there, working overtime whenever possible, I didn't like the experience, as some of the people with whom I worked in the warehouse were petty-minded, mean and malicious, and soon picked up on the fact that I was not of their kind, and began to make my life miserable.



2

I FIND MY WINGS AND FLY

The greatest enemy of Mankind is Ignorance, but there is something good about it, even so.

In the summer of '64, when I was 18, on the 18th of August, staying with Glen, whose house was also number 18 on her street, some relatives of her husband from Edinburgh came to visit for a week; they were very friendly people, and invited me to visit them sometime; whether they actually expected me to do so or not I can't say, but it was just about this time that I came to hear about hitch-hiking, and decided to give it a try ~ something really brave and daring for an introvert like myself. Soon after they'd gone home, therefore, one Friday evening, after work (it must have been a long weekend or something), I set off, and got to the M6 motorway (freeway) near Crewe, and this was the beginning of my travels, as I'd never even been on such a motorway before, where there were no speed-limits, and the first ride I got took me zooming along at the to-me-then supersonic speed of 100 mph, the *ton!* It didn't take me far, however, before dropping me at a service-stop where I had to wait a while for another ride, and in this way, I traveled through the night, arrived in Edinburgh early the next morning, and found the house without difficulty. I had a pleasant time there over the weekend before returning, in the same manner, to Crewe, where I was briefly regarded as a bit of a celebrity because of what I'd done, which no-one else had. But although this first trip was only very short, it gave me my wings, and I knew from then on that I could fly. Needless to say, the experience unsettled me, if I can speak of ever having been settled before ~ and I knew I had to go.

I was unable to leave soon, however, as I'd almost no money, and didn't want to set off without; so had to stay at my hated

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job and save as much as I could in order to go off on my adventures in places that I had no knowledge of at all. In November, I moved to stay with my parents, who in the meantime, had built themselves a little house halfway between Crewe and Chester; they had grown tired of paying rent to an avaricious old landlord ~ literally, an hereditary lord living in a castle and owning a vast estate, who did little for his tenants ~ and wanted a place they could call, for the first time, their own; but the plot of land they'd bought on which to build their first own home, was in an area that could not compare with our old home, being in low-lying flat farm-land, with no hills in sight; I did not enjoy living there, but for some time, it was home.

It was at this time that I began to paint, although I don't know why. It was only for my own, shall I say, pleasure or edification, and I noticed that, over the years, whenever I'd return from a trip, I would feel the need to express myself 'artistically' in some way; the creative-urge would build up in me and needed release. It didn't matter if no-one else appreciated what I did.

I continued working at the factory, commuting by bicycle in all weathers, including fog, rain, snow and ice; it was terrible riding along wet and cold. Sometimes, when he knew I'd be working late, dad would come to meet me in his car and put my bike on the let-down boot-door; it was so good to see him coming, and I really appreciated his thoughtfulness at such times, as he didn't *have* to venture out into the cold night when he was blind in one eye and couldn't drive well in the dark; in fact, he wasn't the world's best driver even in the daytime! One night, coming home in the dark, my battery-powered back lamp had gone out without me being aware of it, and on a narrow and dark stretch of road, I was side-swiped by a truck which was on me before the driver knew it; I was so lucky to escape being run down! It shook me up a bit, but I continued, because what choice did I have?

Eventually, feeling I had enough money and was ready, I quit my job and tried to psych myself up into the necessary state of mind to set off up the road. But it was hard to leave the

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comfort and security of home. Eventually, one day, I set off with the intention of not coming back for a long time; but I had not even reached the main road, carrying my heavy pack, before I turned back, unable to make the break and go off into the unknown. I'd not told my parents I was going, and they were out at work at the time, so they were not upset to find me gone, although they knew of my intentions.

It wasn't long before I tried again, in March, 1965. One day before dawn, before mum and dad were awake ~ and they were always early risers, so I had to go before they were up ~ I quietly left the house, leaving a note to say I'd gone, and finally went on my way. When mum got up and found my note, she broke down and cried, blaming dad for driving me off, as he and I had not long before had an argument, as fathers and sons often do.

With my new-found skill of hitch-hiking, I was soon on my way to London, though dreading getting there and wondering how on earth I would get through the teeming metropolis, where I didn't know anyone. Even in later years, when I would return to England and had to pass through London on my way home, it was an ordeal getting through the place, but the first time for me was mental anguish, such as I never want to experience again.

Somehow, however, I got through and onto the road to Dover, the ferry-point for leaving England for France and Belgium, but was unable to reach there that night, so, tired and hungry, I lay down to sleep on the heights above Dover about 10 miles out, in an improvised tent I'd made for myself from sheet-plastic; I had quite a good ex-army sleeping-bag I'd bought at a junk-shop, so wasn't cold, even though the wind was strong and chilly (I was young and hardy, and prepared to rough it), and early the next morning, I caught a ride down to the port and waited a few hours for the first ferry of the day to leave; it was to *Bologne*, if I remember aright, and there I presented my passport for its first foreign endorsement and was on the Continent, not really knowing where I was going or even why, without a friend, and with just £65 to my name. But it was good that I was so ignorant about what lay ahead of

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me, because if I'd known what I would have to face along my way, I don't think I could have made the break; I'd have been too scared, and would have stayed at home, and then what would have become of me? Facing my fear, therefore, I went, and whatever happened to me thereafter ~ and so much *did* happen ~ no matter if it was pleasant or not, whether I liked it or not, was all good, even the bad times, as everything played a part in where my way eventually led me; nor is it over yet, if it ever will be; we came from the past and are here now, but the future is unknown, and life open-ended.

Taking the road to Paris, I walked a long way without getting a ride, and when I did, it took me to *Lille*, a place that meant nothing to me, although terrible battles were fought around it in WW1; every place has its history. I then had to walk again and wait another long time for a ride. I passed a farmhouse, and my water-bottle empty, went into the yard to ask for water; the woman there, however, was unfriendly, and drove me off, saying, "*Ged nudding!*" so I had to go elsewhere, and next time was lucky and got not only water, but coffee, too. That night, I slept in a wood somewhere, and the next day reached Paris, crossing which ~ and by this time I had no desire to stay there, and wished to get to the warmer climes of Spain as soon as possible ~ was in some ways an even greater ordeal than getting through London had been, as I spoke not even school-boy French, having dropped French class in 'college' almost as soon as I'd started, scared off by the teacher, a ferocious woman named *Mdm Wozniac*, who looked like I imagined a witch would, with dyed red hair piled up on her head, scarlet-painted nails like talons, and heavily made-up face like a mask; she was far from young, and used to drench herself in so much perfume that we could smell her coming long before she hove into view, roaring as she entered the room, "*Taisez vous! Ferme la bouche!*" So, although I wasn't aware of it, *Mdm Wozniac* was with me ~ along with countless other people ~ as I traveled on French soil!

Somehow, I negotiated the Metro and got through Paris, and was on my way towards Lyons and Bordeaux. One night, it was raining so hard and I had nowhere to spend the night, so entered a caravan-park, intending to creep beneath a caravan

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and sleep there if I could have found a dry place, but I didn't, so moved on, and where I spent that night I don't recall, nor is that surprising, as I've spent so many nights in so many places, and if I slept out in the rain on that particular night, it might have been the first time, but it certainly wasn't the last.

By the time I got to Bordeaux, my feet were so sore and blistered from the hiking-boots I'd bought thinking they would protect my feet, that I had to buy some ointment for them and resort to wearing some old but more comfortable shoes I'd brought with me, and in these, was able to stagger on. It brought to mind a comedy-program called "*The Army Game*," in which one private had such sensitive feet that he couldn't wear boots, and was known as "Excused-Boots Bizley"!

I crossed the border into Spain with little formality, and continued as a virtual dumb man, but managed to buy things like bread and cheese by pointing at them and making a gesture in the universal sign-language for "How much?"

The other side of Burgos, I came upon a Norwegian girl and Danish guy hitch-hiking together; they were on their way to Madrid, so I joined them. It wasn't hard for them to get rides as the girl was young and pretty, with long blonde hair. While waiting for a ride, she suddenly felt like a change of clothes, so stepped aside and casually stripped to her underwear to do so. I was amazed, particularly because Spain was still under Franco at that time, and very conservative, but we soon got a ride! Not knowing where I'd stay when we got to Madrid, I accepted the offer of the girl to go with her to her boarding-house, where she arranged for me to sleep in a small alcove, curtained off in the hallway (not in her room), and left me on my own when she had to work. Alone, therefore, and sometimes with the Dane, who took me for the sucker I was and borrowed money from me without ever intending to repay me, I saw something of Madrid in the few days I was there; in particular, I remember visiting the *Prado Museum*, where hang such memorable works as those of *Goya*, *Velasquez* and *Hieronymous Bosch*. I also recall causing quite a stir in some of the bars, as my hair was rather long, and although I also had a beard, some Spaniards were clearly unsure if I were a

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man or a bearded lady, the fashion of long hair on guys not yet having reached Spain.

Catching a bus out of Madrid, I headed south to *Andalusia*, and that afternoon reached lemon-land; it was the first time I'd seen citrus of any kind growing. Before bedding down for the night in one such orchard, I cut and squeezed enough lemons to fill my water-bottle, adding enough glucose I had with me to sweeten it; how good it tasted! I had enough for the next day, too.

Still heading south, before I got to *Granada*, I came to orange-groves stretching in every direction as far as I could see, and without any fences around them, I was able to eat to my heart's content, but there are only so many oranges you can eat at one time, no matter how hungry you might be; I repeated my juice-squeezing, and of course, orange-juice tastes so much better than lemon!

Reaching Granada, framed against the snow-capped mountains of the *Sierra Nevada*, I found a cheap hotel where to clean up and lay my tired body. The next day, I went to see the incredible *Alhambra*, the last stronghold of the cultured Moors until the Christians, united under Ferdinand and Isabella, wrested it from them and expelled them from Spain in the same year ~ 1492 ~ that Columbus discovered the 'New World' (actually, he didn't discover it; people had been living there for thousands of years already; what he discovered was the ignorance of Europeans about these people and lands, just as I was discovering my ignorance about people and places beyond the hitherto narrow confines of my own little world back home, where I'd been living like a frog in a well).

The Alhambra was fascinating, and I had the place almost to myself, as it wasn't yet tourist-season, and Spain anyway, had not become the destination it was later to become for the hordes of northern Europeans fleeing colder climes.

History was always my best and favorite subject, but was too young and unlearned to appreciate much the beauty and art of the Alhambra; however, it was my introduction to Islamic art and architecture and over the years, my appreciation for it

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has grown and never waned; I'm glad that the Alhambra at Granada was my first taste of this lovely art-form.



The Alhambra, Granada



Court of the Lions, The Alhambra

The Moors ~ so named because they'd come from Morocco over the Straits of Gibraltar ~ developed a brilliant civilization in Spain over the 7 centuries they held sway there, preserving the classical knowledge of the Greeks and Romans which had been discarded and destroyed in Europe when the Church in Rome became the dominant power upon the collapse of the Roman Empire in the 5th Century A.D. For a thousand years, Europe languished through *The Dark Ages*, so-called not because the sun didn't shine and there was no light, but because the Church preferred to live and keep people in the darkness of ignorance, and the only people who could read and write ~ unlike the relatively cultured Greeks and Romans before them ~ were the monks in monasteries; even the kings and rulers ~ who were all thralls to the Popes, of course ~ were illiterate. And if any of the few scholars in Europe wished to avail themselves of the ancient knowledge unavailable in their own lands (where, apart from isolated pockets of persecuted Jews, everyone else was Christian and

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had no choice about it), they had to go to places like Moorish Spain, Sicily, Alexandria or Baghdad ~ places of high culture and civilization during the Dark Ages ~ and in the universities there were given free access to it, without being pressed to convert and become Muslim. Can we imagine this happening today, either in Muslim or Christian establishments? Islam then, was far more tolerant and open than it became in the 20th century. We owe so much to the Muslims of that time.

Granada was the highlight of my first trip abroad, and though I traveled back through southern France, northern Italy, Switzerland, Germany and Belgium, that's just what it was: *traveling through*, with little worthy of note about it. I just want to tell, however, of crossing the border of Italy into Switzerland in the region of Lugarno late at night. It was so cold, and there was snow on the ground; I was very tired and had nowhere to stay, so crept into someone's front garden to spread my sleeping-bag under a fir-tree, and there spent the night; when you're really tired, you can sleep anywhere, not really caring if you wake up or not.

I recrossed the English Channel and before I got to London, was picked up by a young couple from the City, and invited to spend the night at their place, and in the morning, they took me to the motorway where I could hitch my way north, so I didn't have to struggle my way through London. I reached home late at night, just three weeks after setting out. My parents were very surprised and pleased to see me, as they'd not been expecting me (the postcards I'd sent from various places along my way had said nothing of my intended return), and my mother soon had hot food ready for me (it was the first thing she did whenever I returned from my subsequent trips). And when I took off my shoes and socks, she cried when she saw the blisters on my feet; I pricked one with a needle, and a small fountain shot out!

Of course, with my adventures behind me for the time being, and my meager resources almost gone, I had to find a job, and got one in a rather high-quality family-bakery about six miles from home. The pay was not high-quality, however, but what could I expect? It was a job, and I worked there for six

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months, starting very early in the morning until about 5:30 in the evening, thirteen hours a day, 5-and-½ days a week, going by bicycle for some time. Now, the owner had a strategy by which he tried to bind people to him when he saw they were good workers ~ and I was quite a good worker, operating various machines skillfully ~ he offered to lend me money to buy a motorbike, the cost of which he would deduct from my wages in small amounts until it was paid off. I fell for his ploy, and got a motorbike, and when I got tired of that job and wanted to leave, my parents lent me enough money to pay off my debt in full, and I foolishly decided to return to my old job in the tailoring-factory, instead of searching for other work. Soon after I resumed there, the management decided to implement a new system that directly affected me.

My job was to issue cloth to the cutting-room, and until then, had just sent out rolls of cloth for the cutters to take what they needed and then return them to me for checking back into the store, after marking off what they had cut. And it was noticed that, while the cloth was in the cutting-room, some of it 'disappeared' ~ and we are talking about very expensive cloth here. The new system was devised to obviate the losses, and I was to issue only the exact lengths required, and so, I carefully measured and cut the lengths off and sent them out. But this wasn't popular 'out there,' as there was no longer any 'extra' cloth to go elsewhere, and so began a movement to sabotage the system and indirectly discredit me. What they ~ and by 'they' I mean some of the cutters; I didn't find out who ~ began to do was to cut a few inches off the lengths I had carefully measured and return them to me as 'too short,' and so, what seemed to be my mistakes, and which I innocently took to be so rather than an effort to destroy the new system, reflected badly upon me in the management's eyes; I became a scapegoat. Well, what was quite uncomfortable for me at the time, I later came to appreciate, as I began to look at the people I worked with and ask myself if I was going to be like them, working all my life at a job I hated, with little prospect for improvement; and knew I wasn't; my first trip had broadened my horizons and made me even more different; I

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couldn't stay, nor did I want to, but didn't leave there immediately, as I needed more money for the next trip.

Somehow, I got through that winter ~ always my least-favorite season ~ and with what money I'd saved, set off on my second trip. This time, I traveled again through France, where I met two English girls, and soon got a ride together with them from a friendly young Moroccan guy driving down to southern Spain. Willing to take us as far as he was going; how could we miss the chance? And how could we know he was on a drug-smuggling mission? So, all unsuspecting, right down through Spain we went with him; he treated us kindly and bought us meals, until, at Malaga, he began to act suspiciously and ran out on us, fortunately leaving us our baggage, and not implicating us in his nefarious activities. By this time, we'd had enough, and turned to head back to England, but not before revisiting Granada again. We then traveled together until southern France, and then split up; I don't know what became of them, but I got home alright after being away for a month this time.

I went to stay with Sheila and Frank again, and got a part-time job in the hotel-bar, old enough for this now. It didn't pay much, but with the tips I received, it was enough for my needs. I bought a racing bike (I'd sold my motor-bike to finance the last trip), and applied to join the art-school of the 'college' where I'd formerly studied. I took some of my paintings and drawings to the interview with the principal, and was accepted, to start that September. I was even able to get a small grant from the education-department to supplement my uncertain income, and bought the necessary beginner's gear ~ paints, brushes, portfolio, smock, etc., ready for the first day. Art-school had a certain aura about it, and I used to consider the students thereof as somehow superior to students of other things, probably because they were more bohemian and 'beat'.

The principal ~ Jack Shaw ~ was a small man, and a bit of a tyrant, as short men in positions often are ~ and I didn't like him; but there were other teachers who were easy to get along with. Jack once put on an exhibition of some of his

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work, but I wasn't impressed with most of it; among it was a meaningless piece called "*Nineteen Lines*," which was just that ~ nineteen pencil-lines of various lengths, criss-crossing the paper in no apparent order; it meant something only to him.

During the first week, we were introduced to our two models, both female, who proceeded to undress before us in such a casual and unembarrassed manner that it put us at ease; of course, as art-students, though we were just beginning, we had to be cool. One of the models was very fat, and the other just the opposite, very thin.

A young teacher-couple, *Tom* and *Sandra Wall*, would now and then invite some of us to their home, where we could relax informally, and call them by first names; at times, we also went to pubs with them. Over-stepping the limits, however, one day I addressed Tom by name at school, and he quietly reprimanded me, saying it was inappropriate to address him so in that situation; he was quite right, of course, and I respected him for that.

My studies began okay, but with two overseas trips behind me ~ short though they were ~ the wanderlust had taken firm hold of me, and the glamour of attending art-school soon faded. I wasn't able to settle for long, having seen that the big wide world awaited me; how could I resign myself to being confined by class-room walls? By term's end, therefore, I'd already decided to quit and make another trip, but had to wait for reasonable weather, so passed the winter working and saving money. I never saw any of my art-school associates again. Something that remained with me from that time was an understanding of perspective, which was of benefit to me later.

At the end of 1966, I read a novel, *The Satanist*. Its author, *Dennis Wheatley*, wrote a number of such books on the occult and 'black magic', and had obviously done a lot of research in these fields. At that time, I had no conscious knowledge of Dharma (*that was to come later*), but one passage in it had such an impact on me that I copied and kept it. I consider it an important introduction; it resonated with and activated dor-

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mant memories in my mind, and although I may not agree with all the sentiments therein, I'm grateful for having found it. I reproduce it here:

In its highest sense, Light symbolizes the growth of the spirit towards that perfection in which it can throw off the body and become Light itself.

But the road to perfection is long and arduous, too much to hope for in one short human life. Hence the widespread belief in Reincarnation, that we are born again and again until we begin to despise the pleasures of the flesh.

Yet it is the inner core of truth common to all religions at their inception. Consider the Teachings of Jesus Christ with that in mind, and you will be amazed that you have not realized before the true purport of His message. Did He not say that "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you"? And when He walked upon the waters, declared: "These things that I do ye shall do also; and greater things than these shall ye do, for I go unto my Father which is in Heaven", meaning, almost certainly, that He had achieved perfection, and that others had the same power within each one of them to do likewise.

Unfortunately, the hours of the night are still equal to the hours of the day, and so the power of Darkness is no less active than it was when the World was young, and no sooner does a fresh master appear to reveal the Light, than ignorance, greed and lust for power cloud the minds of his followers; the message becomes distorted, and the simplicity of the Truth submerged and forgotten in the pomp of ceremonies and the meticulous

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performance of rituals which have lost their meanings.

Yet the real Truth is never entirely lost, and through the centuries new masters are continually arising to proclaim it, or, if the time is not propitious, to pass it on in secret to the chosen few.

In early '67, I had my first 'joint' of marijuana. I'd never smoked cigarettes before, and never would, not succumbing to peer-group pressure to start. I can't say that my first joint ~ passed to me by someone else, as is usually the case ~ did anything for me, but it was another mile-stone even so. Over the next few years, I would smoke dope many times, leaving it forever in 1970, after it had served to open my mind, but by then I'd had some bad experiences on it, as well as bad trips on LSD, and even now, I have memory-blanks caused by it; I didn't become addicted to any of the substances I used, and though I don't regret trying them, would never encourage anyone else to get into them; there are better ways to open the mind than that.



3

1967, A GREAT TRIP

“Living is easy, with eyes closed,
Misunderstanding all you see.”
John Lennon, “*Strawberry Fields Forever*.”

My third and one of my best trips ~ best because it opened things up for me and gave me a glimpse of my future directions ~ began in Spring '67 when, passing through France and Switzerland, I got to Venice for the first time and fell in love with the *Sinking City*. Staying in the Youth Hostel on *Giudecca* Island, I met other travelers. There was Dutch Tom who made his living by playing flamenco-guitar on the streets. There was Erwin from Austria, with whom I became friends, and Rene, from Zurich, with whom I formed a partnership busking; he was the guitarist, and I the vocalist, with my repertoire of Beatles' songs. I had quite a good voice, and together we made enough for our daily expenses while doing it, at least.

Those were good days, until some policemen suddenly arrived and busted us; we were not jailed or anything like that, but told to leave Venice without delay. Believe it or not, we complied, not daring to defy them at that time ~ we were not tough guys ~ but a couple of days later, we returned from Trieste and resumed our busking until we decided we'd had enough and moved on.



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Group of friends in Venice in '67

Saying goodbye to beautiful Venice, with its many fond memories, therefore, we set out and got to *Ljubljana* in Slovenia (one of the republics comprising Yugoslavia at that time), and were there approached by some young guys on the street who wanted to practice their English, and invited us to stay overnight in their home; such invitations were always readily accepted, as we had nowhere to stay. We were treated very kindly, and I kept in touch with this family from thereon.

We stayed overnight with them ~ the *Kavseks* ~ then, saying goodbye to them, we resumed our journey, and got rides onwards through Croatia and Serbia until, in southern Yugoslavia, a Mercedes stopped for us; we couldn't believe our luck! It was driven by young Germans going to Beirut. We had a ride right to Istanbul, through Bulgaria. Crossing the Turkish border, we were in really different territory, in contact for the first time with living Islam. I'll never forget my entry into Istanbul a few hours later; first, we passed through the ancient Byzantine walls and drove down the main street ~ *Divan Yolu* ~ past the *Grand Covered Bazaar* and *Constantine's Column*, until we were dropped in the *Sultan Ahmet* area, where the magical domes and minarets of *Hagia Sophia* and the *Blue Mosque* dominate the skyline. We walked where the hippodrome and the fabulous palace of the Byzantine emperors had stood. Hagia Sophia was the largest Christian church in the world when built by the emperor Justinian in the 5th century, and remained so for many centuries, until it was converted to a mosque after the Ottoman Turks captured Constantinople in 1453, and when Turkey became a republic in the early 20th century, it was turned into a museum, and the wonderful mosaics that the Ottomans had whitewashed over, were uncovered. Istanbul became my favorite city, and remains so until now. The name was changed from Constantinople to Istanbul only in 1930.

We got a room in a cheap hotel; in fact, Istanbul was the cheapest place for accommodation, food and other things that I'd yet been to, and on top of this, I loved it for its tangible

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sense of history and its incomparable setting. There we met other young travelers; it was already a place where people on their way to and from the East ~ meaning Afghanistan, India and Nepal ~ would rendezvous and rest up for a few days after a tiring trip. It was also rather dangerous as hustlers would approach you on the street and hiss, "*Hashish? Hashish? Wanna buy hashish?*" You had to be very careful if you wanted to buy this commodity, as some of these guys were in hand-in-hand with the police, and no sooner had they managed to make a sale than they would signal to the police waiting nearby. Many people ended up in jail that way. The penalties for drug-use at that time were very heavy, and the conditions in Turkish jails horrible ~ and still are, by all accounts (the movie, "Midnight Express" was not an exaggeration, but it upset many Turks).



The Blue Mosque, Istanbul

Crossing the Bosphorus by ferry ~ the two bridges were things of the future ~ we set foot for the first time in Asia, a great feeling. Hitch-hiking was not well-known in Turkey but we managed, and in fact, found it not difficult at all, and within a couple of days were in the south. It was Rene's plan to go to India, but although India had called me from childhood, as I'll later explain, I didn't feel ready to make such a journey. Just how far I intended to go, I don't recall, and probably had no plans, but we crossed the border into Syria, getting the visa there without any trouble, and traveled through that land, where we found the people very friendly and hospitable; we

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were not yet aware of the rising tensions in the Middle-East, and so had a carefree passage.

It was also easy to get a visa on entering Jordan, and skirting Amman and crossing the river by the Allenby Bridge ~ British-built during WW1 ~ we rode a bus up the steep and barren hills of Judea to Jerusalem. Now, with my Christian background ~ the only other religion I'd had contact with at that time was Islam, and I was not yet mature or interested enough to make any comparisons ~ I felt quite moved to enter this 'holy' city, and during my 10 days there, it became another of my favorites.

We stayed in a small hotel, *Holy Land House*, on a narrow street inside *Herod's Gate* by the name of *Aqabat Darwish* (Street of the Dervishes), living on food we'd become accustomed to in Syria and Jordan ~ *humus* (chick-pea paste), pita-bread, and *falafel* (deep-fried chick-pea patties). Old Jerusalem was then part of Jordan, as it had been since 1948, but this was about to change. The Old City was really a place of atmosphere, and even as I write of it now, the smells of the spice-bazaar come back to me, and I can 'see' the narrow, stepped streets and arcades, and hear the cries of the yoghurt-vendors, "*Leban-leban!*". We saw the sights, of course ~ the *Dome of the Rock* (built on the site where the Jews claim their Second Temple was situated, and from where, Muslims believe Mohammed ascended to heaven by horse), the *Holy Sepulchre* (where one of the attendants said to me, "Hey, Mr. Hitch-hiker, stand in line!" to get into the tomb itself); I also went to the rival claim to the burial-place of Jesus outside the city-walls ~ the *Garden of the Tomb* ~ where there's a tomb in a pleasant and well-kept garden ~ as the name would suggest ~ against a cliff, the features of which resemble a skull, consonant with the Bible's name of the place, *Golgotha*: Place of a Skull. This garden is said to have been discovered by General Gordon (of Khartoum fame). It is a peaceful and well-kept place, and seems much more authentic, with the round stone in a groove along which to roll it up against the tomb, than the ornate Holy Sepulchre, which has been so decorated and embellished over the centuries that it is hard to imagine a body lying there. The Holy Sepulchre is said to have been

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discovered by *Helena*, mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine, when she made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem after they'd both embraced Christianity, but it was probably just a ploy. How can we know for sure?

Soon after we got to Jerusalem, we became aware that it was possible to sell blood there, and didn't hesitate to do so; I forget how much we got, but it certainly helped us out a little. I'd never done this before, otherwise I would have told of it.

We went down to the Dead Sea, into which the River Jordan drains; nothing runs out of it, however, as it is the lowest spot on earth, and there *is* no outlet; the level is maintained by evaporation, it being very hot there; because of this, salt and other minerals have accumulated and the salinity is so dense that it's impossible to sink in it, and you can float there reading a newspaper if you want. As a result of going there, I came down with sunstroke, and was quite sick for a couple of days, with fever, vomiting and diarrhea. It was not to be my last experience of this; I have little tolerance for the sun.

While we were in Jerusalem, things had been happening, and obviously, the Arab nations on three sides of Israel (on the 4th, was the Mediterranean) meant to attack this tiny land of just 2 million people. Abdul Gamel Nasser, President of Egypt, closed the Suez Canal to Israeli shipping, thereby severely restricting Israel (it had hitherto been open to ships of all nations, including Israel). Israel prepared itself for the onslaught, having always been on the alert since its establishment in 1948, after it fought a terrible war with the Palestinians.

Rene and I parted; he set off for India through Iraq, Iran and Pakistan, and I remaining in Jerusalem, wondering what to do as the storm-clouds gathered. I made friends with some Danes ~ Liz, Finn, Soren and Claus ~ who, like us, had hitchhiked through Turkey, Syria and Jordan, and we all had misgivings about retracing our route out, as Syria ~ and to a lesser extent, Jordan ~ had become verbally bellicose. Daily, we followed the news in the newspapers and on radio, on which the invective was progressively ratcheted up, until the Danes decided to run for it; I should have gone with them in-

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stead of dithering, but stayed, and eventually went to the British consulate and asked them to arrange my repatriation, chicken that I was. Well, the Danes made it back alright through Syria and Turkey and all the way home to Denmark, while I was put on a flight from Amman to London ~ my first-ever flight ~ and later billed £70 by the Home Office for the fare.

A few days later, when war broke out, Israel pre-empted its enemies' attacks by destroying the bulk of their air-forces on the ground and routing the Egyptian army as it came over the Sinai Desert, so that the Egyptians fled as fast as they could, abandoning their weapons and even their boots ~ obviously, they found it easier to run barefoot; the desert was littered by thousands of boots. The Jordanians were driven out of the Old City, back across the Allenby Bridge, leaving the Israelis in control of their greatest prize and the West Bank. The Golan Heights, which Syria had used to bombard northern Israel, were also captured. It was all over in an amazing six days. What a crushing defeat for the Arabs! Of course, having just been there, I watched these events from afar with the greatest interest, and most of the non-Muslim world at that time sympathized with Israel as here was this tiny nation surrounded by so many hostile Arab lands with a combined population of 100 million. Egypt, under Nasser, was a Soviet client-state, supplied with the latest weapons, its army trained by Soviet advisors; Syria, too; but all to no avail.

I returned to work in the bar for the next three months, and then, because I now had friends in Copenhagen, set off again. Finn had arranged with his land-lady ~ a kindly widow named *Hedda Lillethorup*, who is no doubt deceased by now ~ for me to stay there; she gave me a room of my own and very nice food, and Finn, when he wasn't working, showed me around; Copenhagen became another on my growing list of favorite cities, and I spent my 21st birthday there.

That summer saw young people set out on the roads in unprecedented lemming-like numbers, and it was generally easy to get rides; people were so kind. This is not to say there was no danger in doing what we were doing, because of course

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there was, and I've had my share of scares, but when you're young, you either don't notice it, treat it lightly, or simply take it as part of the trip. Traveling through Germany on the *autobahns* was especially easy, as German registration-plates begin with the initials of the place of registration, so vehicles from Munich, for example, would display an 'M', and those from Bonn a 'BN'. Waiting for a ride sometimes at a service-station, sometimes at the entrance to the autobahn, and other times just standing at the roadside, you'd try to choose a car with an initial of the place you wanted to go to, and would often be successful in getting long rides at high speeds. I traveled through Germany so many times in this way.

From Denmark, then, I traversed Germany and went to visit Rene in Zurich, knowing the date of his expected return from India. He had given me the address of some friends with whom he stayed, and I got there to find he'd just returned and was staying with his mother on the other side of town. His friends took me in, and Rene came to join us the next day. He was in a rather sad state, having contracted hepatitis in India, and had not fully recovered from it; he looked dreadful ~ yellow, thin, and was very weak. Nor was this the only change in him; being on home-ground, he'd already hung up his traveler's mind with his traveler's clothes, and looked at me with different eyes; he'd been only a casual traveler, making a one-off trip prior to getting married and settling down; we were like strangers to each other. But, knowing I intended to go to Istanbul again, he didn't hesitate to ask me to bring him back a *saz* ~ a Turkish stringed instrument with a long neck; I said I would.

After a few days in Zurich, I went to Austria, to visit Erwin in St. Polten. He received me better, and showed me around his town before hitch-hiking with me to Vienna, but all I remember about that was sleeping under a bridge over the Danube, with rain dripping onto us from holes above. We parted there, he to return home, and I to go on to Venice again. On the way, I was picked up by some Americans in the camper-van they'd bought to tour Europe in ~ a young guy named Fred, his sister Linda, and a black girl whose name I forget. They were going to Venice and from there to ~ guess where? ~ *Istanbul*. So

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once again, I got a long ride lasting a week or more, and had fun on the way. We split up in Istanbul to go our separate ways, Fred going off to buy hash to smuggle back to the States ~ a very risky business from beginning to end ~ and I never saw or heard from them again after that, so don't know if they made it or not.

Staying in the *Gulhane Cinar Hotel*, favored by hippies because it was cheap and central, I spent some more days in Istanbul, wandering around and buying a nice *saz*. Then I set off to return to Switzerland, and that's when I got stuck at the Bulgarian border for with my book. Getting through Bulgaria, I traveled up through Yugoslavia and went to stay with the Kavseks in Ljubljana again for a few days. Their aged grandmother was an excellent cook, and took very good care of me, preparing something different every day; I particularly remember her delicious *apfel strudel*, and there, for the first time, I tasted fried aubergines. Then, one day, we had some kind of egg-dish, which I really didn't like, but ate anyway, as not to have done so would have been rude ~ oh, how many times over the years have I had to eat things that I really didn't like! ~ (I was not then a full-vegetarian, even though I'd always been inclined to it from childhood, never having liked meat) ~ and afterwards, they asked me if I'd liked it. Now, what could I say? I had to dissemble and say yes. They then asked if I knew what it was, and I said I didn't, wondering what I'd let myself in for. To my surprise and disgust, they told me, "*Pig's mind*," meaning brains. Fortunately, I've always had quite a strong stomach and good control over it, otherwise I might have thrown up!

Leaving Ljubljana, I returned to Zurich, where Rene thanked me for his *saz*, but otherwise was still not very friendly; I felt that he considered me an embarrassment that he'd rather be without.

Anyway, he had to go to St. Moritz, where he sometimes worked as a ski-instructor, and asked me to go with him that far and go on from there alone. We had a pleasant enough train-ride until we began to argue and I decided to leave him without more ado, so got off at the next stop and hitched a

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ride on a mountain-road that led to Italy. Why I was dropped where I was by that ride, I don't know ~ there are so many things about my travels I forget now, and would undoubtedly forget more as time goes by, which is one of the reasons I've been meaning to write these memoirs for some years now ~ but I found myself in a pine-forest, at night, with again no place to stay, and nothing to eat. No problem; I unrolled my sleeping-bag under the trees, and was soon asleep. It was a cold night ~ October by then ~ and I awoke at dawn to find everything covered in frost. I lay there without moving for a while, and then noticed a full-grown deer, replete with antlers, grazing nearby, apparently not having seen me. It was a lovely sight, and I kept still and quiet, watching it, until it moved off. I took this as a signal to get up myself, and went back to the road, and before long, got a ride across the border to Italy, where I was dropped near the entrance to an *autostrada*. Now, not having eaten since the previous morning, (we'd had nothing on the train, and after leaving Rene, I'd had nothing), I was very hungry, but there was nowhere in sight where I might get buy anything. Suddenly, while waiting for another ride, I saw a brown-paper bag beside the road and went over to investigate. Imagine my surprise and delight to find, upon opening it, some fresh bread-rolls! Where they'd come from or how long they'd been there, I had no idea, but it couldn't have been long as they were still warm; oh, how good they tasted!

Just then, a Dutchman came by on his way to some business in Florence and Rome, and picked me up, glad to have a companion himself. His name was Peter, and I accompanied him until his journey's end and even returned with him as far as Zurich, 10 days later. Although this was a good ride and I got to see places I otherwise might not have seen (and he paid for most of my food and accommodation from his expense-account, refusing to let me spend my own money), it was too fast, and I regretted not spending longer in those ancient places. With him, however, I saw something of Florence ~ the *Duomo* and the *Ponte Vecchio* ~ and the Vatican, the *Coliseum* and the *Pantheon* in Rome, but not much else, and

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I never went to those cities ever again, much as I'd have loved to.

I forget if I stopped to see Rene again in Zurich, so probably didn't, and had no more contact with him. Soon afterwards, this trip also came to an end, and I returned to England and home once more; winter was coming on, and it's not much fun to be on the road in that season.

I hibernated for the winter, as it were, living on my savings from the year before, until in March '68, I headed off again, even though there was still snow in parts. There were few other hitch-hikers in Germany as I passed through this time, and it was still cold when I got to Venice once more. There, in the Youth Hostel, I met an American girl named Tracy, and we agreed to travel together since we were going the same way. She wanted to go to Klagenfurt in southern Austria for a festival there, and as it wasn't far off our route, I went with her. We had no place to stay when we got there at night, and so, with some Dutch guys we met, we went to the railway-station intending to find a stationary train and climb into one of the empty carriages. We thought this would be easy, but were not prepared for the security there, and so, while crossing the tracks, we were suddenly caught in searchlight beams, and a voice rang out of the loudspeakers, "*Achtung! Achtung!*" We felt like fugitives on the run! Retreating to the station waiting-room, we were soon approached by the police, who searched our bags and were surprised not to find any syringes, thinking we were junkies. "Where are the needles?" they demanded, but because we had none, nor drugs of any kind, they had to let us go. We remained in the waiting-room the rest of the night, where it was warm, and saw little of the festival the next day. So much for Klagenfurt!

From there Tracy and I hitch-hiked to Ljubljana, not far away, where we were warmly received by the Kavseks, and stayed with them a couple of days. I then split up with her before resuming my journey to Greece. In Thessalonika I sold blood at the blood-bank and then went to Piraeus, to catch a ferry to Haifa, Israel. I don't know why, but sadly, I didn't go into Athens, so missed the architectural treasures of that ancient city,

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and never returned again. I enjoyed the three or four-day voyage ~ my first sea-trip ~ in the company of other young travelers, stopping briefly at Limasol, Cyprus before docking at Haifa, from where I hitched to Jerusalem, reaching there in the middle of one of the fierce dust-storms that occasionally hit that area, known as *simoons*; it was also still quite cold. I went to stay in *Holy Land House* again, this time in a united Jerusalem; the wall that had divided the Old and New cities had been torn down, and we could now go anywhere.

There was a small restaurant just inside Herod's Gate in the Old City, run especially for travelers like myself by a hugely fat and friendly Arab who'd been nicknamed '*Uncle Mustache*' because of his prodigious facial appendage. I often used to eat there, even during my first visit the previous year, and he would serve us kindly, sometimes not charging us for rice-pudding or tea; and although his English was limited, he always tried, and I can hear his voice now as I write this, saying, in response to our thanks, and rolling his r's, "*Forrr Nothing!*" or "*You arrre welcome!*" I've often wondered what became of the dear old man!

In the hotel, I met an Anglo-Dane named David, who played a *saz* he had with him; I teamed up with him and became his hash-smoking partner, although his excessive use of it (he'd been in Israel quite a long time by then) has resulted in him becoming schizophrenic or exacerbated his tendency to this. From my own experience, I saw how it induced paranoia in some people, myself included, and made us very self-conscious, thinking that everyone around us was talking about and plotting against us; everything that was said and unsaid in our hearing would be interpreted as referring to us ~ a most uncomfortable feeling. Anyway, there were some good and funny times even so. One time, outside the *Damascus Gate*, we were quite stoned, watching people coming and going. Israelis could now freely shop in the Old City, where things were cheaper than in the New. We saw a man on his way home from there, with a brightly-painted ceramic pot; and ahead of him, on the sidewalk, as if deliberately waiting for him, was a stone ~ not a large one, and not a pebble, either ~ and he'd not seen it, as he was holding his pot at arms-length,

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directly in line for it; we could tell what would happen, and were unable to prevent it, as we were some distance away. The pot struck the stone and shattered, leaving him holding just the rim! He looked at it dumbfounded. We didn't hear what he said, but it could have been "Bah!" or "Oh, damn!" or "Blast it!" or maybe something stronger, as he flung it away in disgust and embarrassment. We burst into uncontrollable laughter, and laughed all the way back to our hotel. A hash-high has that effect at times, when it's a good high ~ it causes one to laugh uproariously at almost anything; another is that it makes one very hungry, especially for sweet things.

After some time in Jerusalem, we went to *Eilat* on the Gulf of Aqaba, where there was a small hippie colony in one of the *wadis* (dry gullies) outside the town. We stayed there a few days, camping under the open sky (the weather permitted this). Some hippies had jobs in the town on construction-sites and such like. There was more freedom to smoke dope in Eilat than in Jerusalem, where we always had to be on the look-out, as the Israeli police were cracking down on it, and where we suspected some of the Arab hotel-boys of acting as informers, though maybe this was just our paranoia.

Back in Jerusalem, I bumped into Tracy, who had followed me to Israel, but we'd gone our separate ways, and didn't resume our relationship, such as it had been. Easter came, and I followed the *Procession of the Cross* along the *Via Dolorosa*, and was so caught up in the emotional fervor of it that the idea of becoming a pastor came into my mind, and persisted until I returned to England yet again after another month or so. I left Israel by steamer from Haifa, but this time to Istanbul, and here's where another of my memory-blanks lies, as I remember nothing at all of the passage through the *Dardanelles* and the *Sea of Marmara*; what a loss! I was never to repeat that journey.

One day, in Istanbul, needing to change money (and at that time, there was a flourishing black-market), I followed a guy into a restaurant, where he told me to wait while he took my \$20-bill to the back. Too late, I realized that there was another way out, and that my money was on the run; off I set in pur-

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suit, but flip-flops are useless for running, so he soon lost me in the maze of alleys; I learned something from this, although not enough to prevent myself ever being cheated again.

Anyway, back home, I had the full support of my parents for my idea, especially my mother, who'd been a Methodist lay-minister for many years, conducting Sunday services in many chapels in her parish; she was quite good, and popular, too, and while I was still in school, I used to join them (dad was the driver, and went only because mum did; if she hadn't gone, he wouldn't have) with brother George, and usually, after the service, we would be invited to someone's house for supper, and had some sumptuous repasts; people were very kind and spread their best out for us; it was very nice.

My parents had devout Pentecostal friends at the sea-side resort where we used to vacation in the summer ~ indeed, that's how we met them, and strangely enough, their surname was the same as ours: Houghton, though no relation, and it's not a common name like Smith or Jones. They were good people, too, and older than my parents. Anyway, mum and dad took me to visit them, thinking they might advise me, but when we got there and told them of my experience and inspiration in Jerusalem (leaving out my dope-smoking) they were somehow not impressed or enthusiastic, and even made disparaging remarks about my long hair, as if that really mattered. And that was the end of my short-lived idea to become a pastor, so it couldn't have been very strong, and later, I came to be grateful to the old couple for not encouraging me; inadvertently, they had saved me!

It was in '68 that Glen's marriage broke up; both she and Dennis had been unfaithful ~ he more than she, but then, this is a man's world, isn't it? He got custody of the kids, and she visiting-rights only. She went to live with her new man, Harold, who she married in '72. Dennis, however, poisoned the kids' minds against her so much that she was unable to stand their rudeness and gave up seeing them. Her second son, Alan, did come round briefly, many years later, but Anthony refuses to see her until now as I write this ~ 2006. She has two

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daughters from her second marriage, Deena and Karin, who have children of their own.

That summer I went to Amsterdam, which was soon to join my list of favorite cities. I visited *Loek*, someone I'd met on the boat from Haifa to Istanbul, at his home outside the city, but his parents were not welcoming, so I had to sleep outside somewhere. I then went into town, to *Dam Square*, which had become a congregating point for hippies from all over, and there, while busking on the street with the saz I'd bought in Istanbul and had learned to pluck the strings of, I met Pete from Denmark; we had some fun in Amsterdam, spending our evenings at *Paradiso*, an old church that had been converted into a psychedelic night-club, which was really a cool place where anyone could do their own thing without feeling odd. There was another similar place called *Fantasio*, but we preferred the first, as there was no charge to go in.

The *Heineken* brewery is situated in Amsterdam, and you could join a tour around the place ~ again, free ~ at the end of which you could drink as much beer as you liked; we went several times, and came out quite foolishly drunk!

While hanging out at Dam Square, an Italian asked us if we'd like to go to a party. Thinking it might provide us an opportunity for a shower and a place to spend the night, we eagerly accepted, and he took us by bus to a place out in the suburbs, where he was staying with a divorcee named Jeanne. We had our shower, and enjoyed the party with a few other people, and afterwards slept on the floor. I kept in touch with Jeanne after that, and even went to stay with her and her two young sons in 1970.

Pete had been in Paris during the student demonstrations in '68, and was arrested by the police, driven out of town, and told not to return; it was his first trip out of Denmark. He asked me to go home with him, so off we set to hitch-hike, and while passing through Germany, took refuge in an abandoned house off the highway one night, as we had nowhere else to stay. It was dark as we crept inside, and the place was really eerie; I'd only just met him, and didn't know what he was like regarding such things, but as we lay there on the floor, we

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heard all kinds of strange noises, and I wouldn't have been surprised if a ghost had appeared! We made it through the night, however, and resumed our journey and the next night reached his home, where we were welcomed by his parents and siblings, who were really kind. Pete introduced me to some of his friends, and I had a good time there, until I left for Copenhagen, to stay for some days with a couple I'd met in Israel, before going to stay with Finn again; he was no longer living at his land-lady's place because in the meantime, he had married a friend of Liz, and ~ like Rene ~ had changed quite a lot. We had no contact after that.

Back in Germany, I met a young guy from Stuttgart who called himself *Snuffy*. I was wearing a cap at the time, with my hair stuffed into it, as it was harder to get rides with long hair than with short. I took off my cap and my hair tumbled out, to his surprise; he said, "I wondered why you had such short hair!" We hitch-hiked south together for a couple of days, and at one point got a ride with some crazy Arabs driving fast and erratically. At that time, I was writing poetry, and some verses come back to me now:

"The road unwinds beneath the wheels;
How is it to be dead, do you know how it feels?"

"We passed a few cars on the autobahn;
Yippee, Frankfurt, here we come."

"Snuffy was a friendly fellow;
He turned black to white and blue to yellow."

Silly days, but carefree and funny. I left Snuffy and returned to Amsterdam, but by then it was getting cold again, and it's no fun to be on the road in winter, so I went back to England to get ready for my next trip.



4

THE LAND OF MY DREAMS

"One may not reach the dawn except by
the path of the night."

Kahlil Gibran, Lebanese Mystic & Writer, 1883 -1931

Slowly, and usually not without pain and
hardship, do we arrive at wisdom, but
when we do, it is without regrets.

For this, I persuaded George to go with me, determined to make it to India this time. We decided to go by train as far as Istanbul, and consequently filled an old doctor's-bag ~ which we'd got from somewhere and which I'd painted in bright colors and emblazoned on one side with the words, SWAG BAG ~ with bread, butter, cheese, peanut-butter, jam and so on, enough to last us on the 3-day journey without needing to buy anything else; we took a train to London (I didn't dare take him hitch-hiking in case he might not like it and give up) and there we bought our tickets to Istanbul, £20 each, including the ferry-fare across the Channel. We had an uneventful journey, in a comfortable and warm compartment to ourselves for most of the way, so were able to stretch out and sleep whenever we wanted.

Arriving in Istanbul, I was in my element again, but although I showed George around and tried to turn him on, he displayed no interest or enthusiasm for the wonders there, and I soon came to realize that it wasn't going to work, and after a few days, I had the painful task of asking him to go back, leaving me to go on without him. He didn't object, but he must have been hurt, and I'm sorry until now that I felt I had to do that to him ~ *mea culpa!*

This brings me to my relationship with my younger brother, which I've never written of before. He was born on the 2nd of June 1948, almost 2 years after me, and as often happens, I resented his intrusion and became jealous of the attention he

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had to have, which had hitherto been mine alone; I was too young to understand this, and even as we grew older, I continued to feel so. Would an explanation that there was no need for me to feel jealous, and that our parents loved me none the less just because they loved him have had any effect upon me at a later age? I can't say for sure, but maybe it would. I don't recall anyone explaining this to me, however, so my jealousy remained, and was even fueled by his greater popularity than mine in school and in our other social circles. This problem really should have been addressed, but wasn't.

Even though I felt towards him as I did, and treated him unkindly (I still have the scar on my left leg where he bit me during one of our not-infrequent fights ~ a fight I probably initiated and which, as the bigger and stronger, otherwise won), I think he still looked up to me and would have been my friend had I let him. But I didn't, fearing his ascendancy. So I lost, and deprived myself of a lot. We did occasionally do things together even so, even if for not very long and in a sustained way. It was he who discovered how to get inside *Peckforton* Castle ~ a mock-Norman fortress that had been built on a whim by a local baron 150 years earlier with a fortune that might have come from 'shaking the pagoda-tree' in India. Whatever, in our early teens, this castle, well-preserved and locked up because no-one lived there, fascinated us; it was about two miles from our home, and we would go around and around it, gazing up at its battlements and turrets, wondering how we might get in. Finally, one day, noticing a tree growing near the walls with a limb overhanging them, at a point about 25 feet from the ground, being the bravest, he decided to climb up, and I followed, and oh, how exciting it was to stand at last on the castle walls! We hadn't gone very far, however, when we were prevented from getting down to the courtyard by a locked door, behind which were the stairs, no doubt, but we couldn't let this stop us, having come this far; and indeed, it didn't, because in a corner of a large room opening off the parapet, there was something like a wide chimney-flue ~ it wasn't a chimney-flue, but I don't know what its purpose was ~ from the room beneath, and continuing on to the room above, and George unhesitatingly led the way again; with his

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back against one side and his feet braced against the other, he 'walked' his way down; he *really* was intrepid! I then followed, finding it not as hard as I'd first thought it would be. We found ourselves in the stables, and were *really* in, and free to explore what seemed to be our very own castle! What fun it was! We went all over, into the Great Hall, with its carved furniture and wall-hangings, up into the *keep*, from where we gazed out in all directions and even see ships on the River Mersey at Liverpool far away, and the mountains of North Wales; we descended into the cellars, which we imagined as dungeons, with prisoners chained and languishing therein; our imaginations were given free rein, and of course, we felt ghosts everywhere, just as you would expect in a castle! Whether there really were any lingering around, I can't say, but it wasn't a place where I'd liked to have been after dark. The Robin Hood movie, starring Richard Gere, was shot here, as it was an ideal location. In the centre of the courtyard ~ and it really was a big place ~ grew a large, spreading oak-tree.

Well, after what seemed like hours, we decided to leave; after all, there were people in the lodge not far away, and game-keepers occasionally patrolling the surrounding woods, and we did not want to get caught (once, years later, when I'd led a bunch of friends from Crewe inside, someone came ~ I didn't know who he was, but he had a shot-gun, and must have known we were there, as he came searching around as if looking for intruders, but I cautioned the others to stay low and quiet down in the cellars until he gave up and left; we were lucky). George led the way back by which we had come, but in the upper room, he noticed some switches on the wall, and ever the curious one, pulled one down, setting off an alarm-bell! Flipping the switch upwards didn't stop it, and so we had to get out as soon as possible. He was ahead of me as we ran along the walls, and climbing along the tree-limb, was soon down on the ground, while I was still on the walls, reluctant to follow him; it was quite dangerous to climb along the limb, but I did something even more dangerous, and quite stupid: Telling him to catch me, I jumped. Fortunately, he didn't try, or he'd have been squashed, but the ground was

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quite soft with the leaf-mould and detritus of centuries, and so I sustained no injuries other than spraining both my ankles quite badly.



Peckforton Castle and the wall from which I jumped.

Somehow, I managed to hobble home and act as if nothing had happened; we didn't tell our parents what we'd been up to, otherwise we'd have been banned from going again. And as far as I know, nothing ever came of the alarm we'd set off. (Strangely enough, although my sprained ankles recovered in due course, that crazy jump left a mark that showed up in x-rays as a hairline crack 40 years later, but it wasn't a mark I regretted).

So, although we lived our separate lives, now and then we'd do things together, but when I left home and went to live with either Sheila or Glen, I saw him only occasionally, and in these years we both changed a lot. I had not been the most brilliant student in school, but he was even less so, and while I was always an avid reader, he showed no interest in books.

I've mentioned that our dad had quite a collection of books and would often read at night, and sometimes in the daytime, in the privacy of his loft, when he was not busy with his car or his tools, making something or other (being self-employed, he would finish his work by noon and then come home for lunch, to continue later). His favorite authors ~ who consequently became mine ~ were Jules Verne and H.G. Wells, and via

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their tales, I accompanied Captain Nemo *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, went to the *Centre of the Earth*, to *The Mysterious Island*, and so on; H.G. Wells took me back to the past and far into the future on his *Time Machine*, where I saw how humanity had diverged into two quite different strains ~ the gentle, herbivorous and defenseless *Eloi*, and the aggressive, cannibalistic *Morlocks*. With Wells, too, I went through the *War of the Worlds*, when Martians invaded Earth and practically took over, until they were defeated not by us but by Earth's germs and bacteria against which they had no immunity or defense. What fantastic tales they were ~ and still are!

Then, I used to buy a publication known as *Classics Illustrated* ~ well-known stories, *classics* ~ in comic-book form; they cost a shilling each back then, and there were hundreds of them; I amassed quite a collection, and thereby became somewhat acquainted with the literature of many lands.

How George went on in Tattenhall school, which he started soon after I did ~ I started late, the system of going from primary-school to secondary was a recent development ~ I really don't know, as we were in different classes, of course. He didn't dislike school as I did, however, and was probably more resigned to it and integrated than me. What I do remember was that, after I'd left there and gone on to college, during one holiday, he'd gone to stay at Glen's for a while ~ he would have been 14 or 15 at the time ~ and met a girl named Susan who lived nearby; she was a bit younger than him, and just as precocious or even moreso than he, and pretty soon, they were having sex together and somehow got caught. Well, he was reprimanded, and that was it as far as he was concerned, but poor Susan was sent off to a reform-school for wayward girls ~ such was the attitude of the authorities towards juvenile sex 40 years ago ~ where she had to stay, with occasional visits home, for 2 years!

George went straight from school to work, at the age of 15 ~ no college for him ~ and our lives took quite different tracks. Anyway, to return to Istanbul, where I asked him to go home and leave me free of the responsibility of having him with me: actually, although it wasn't a nice thing to do, I had not much

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choice, as he wouldn't have enjoyed the trip further east. Really, I should not have brought him with me in the first place, but should have left him at home to continue the lifestyle he was familiar with ~ going to pubs with his friends ~ a lifestyle which, although I'd worked in a bar, I didn't enjoy or didn't feel part of, having seen it from the other side of the fence, as it were, and considered it a great waste of money.

During our stay in Istanbul, our dorm-room was shared by a Turk (we were unwise, and should have known better), and one day, while we were out, this guy took the opportunity to ransack our bags, and we got back to find him and my camera gone; it was probably a trick he'd employed before. My impression of the Turks did not improve over time; there was more to come.

Before we parted, George met some Danes and arranged to go to Denmark with them before returning to England, but they took advantage of his gullibility and cheated him of his money.

And I'd met a French guy named Xavier Tonneau who was heading to Afghanistan in order to buy hash and smuggle it back to France; his plans were already made, and I had no objection to them, so we agreed to travel together. That must have been in November '68, and it was already cold, so we took a train as far as Erzerum in eastern Turkey, about 100 miles from the border with Iran, for which we got visas before leaving Istanbul. We were joined by an English guy who, for some reason, I called *Ori*. We got a compartment almost to ourselves except for an elderly Turk by the name of *Ishmail*, who spoke no English at all, but who was friendly-enough anyway; he was going home somewhere in the east, but not as far as us. The journey was very long, and the train moved slowly; it took two days and nights, I think. Now, Xavier had bought some alabaster eggs in Istanbul, and loved them for their smoothness and shape; he often held and caressed them. Because of this, I ~ who always had a knack of coming up with nick-names for people ~ called him '*Oeuf*' (the French for 'egg'). Well, one morning on our seemingly-interminable train-ride, Oeuf, who'd been sleeping with his boots off, dis-

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covered egg-yolk on his socks, and we couldn't imagine where it had come from ~ quite a coincidence, *Oeuf*, and no-one else with egg on his socks! ~ until later, the mystery was solved when Ishmael produced an egg from somewhere and proceeded to suck it! We laughed so much!

He got off in quite literally the middle of nowhere, as there was no station or any other building in sight, and as he was walking off and the train pulled slowly away, we waved our farewells to him and sang a song we'd made up with his name in it; he grinned broadly as we left him behind on the steppes.

There was snow on the ground when we arrived in Erzerum, and it was very cold. We found a hotel and settled in for the night, having bought tickets for a bus to Tabriz ~ the first big city over the border in Iran ~ for the next day. Now, it is true that we smoked dope in our room, and then *Oeuf* went to the toilet and came back only after a long time, with blood streaming from a cut on his head. "What happened?" Ori and I both said, jumping up. He told us he'd slipped on the toilet-floor, banged his head, and must have lost consciousness. As he was bleeding quite badly, I bandaged him up as best I could, and we had to get him to a doctor, but it was already late at night. Down in the lobby, people became excited and accused us of having been smoking dope (we denied it, as it was a serious offence, and we could have been jailed) They refused to help us, so we went outside to try to find a doctor, but this was futile. *Oeuf* was quite groggy by this time from the effects of the hash and the severe knock on his head, and blood had seeped through his bandage. But, far from finding a doctor, we were attacked on the street by some ruffians, and had to fight them off in order to retreat to the hotel. Anyway, we somehow made it through the night, but I kept *Oeuf* awake and didn't allow him to sleep in case he went into concussion, in which case we would have been in much deeper trouble. The hotel-people regarded us with scowling faces as we checked out to catch our bus.

We spent only long enough in Iran to get through that land, where we had our first encounter with very strict Islam, and

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where most women wore the long cover-alls known as *chadors*, but sans the face-covering with just a slit or some mesh for the eyes; we got our visa for Afghanistan in the eastern city of *Meshed*. Oeuf had recovered by this time, and kept us entertained in the hotel room with the guitar he had with him; he was really quite talented. Meshed is famous for turquoise, and we'd been advised by other travelers to buy some to sell elsewhere at a large profit, so into a turquoise-factory we went, and while buying some small stones, a larger stone *fell* into my pocket ~ one of many things I regret. (Not being much of a salesman, I was unable to sell any, and lost on my investment).

We crossed the border to *Herat* and found ourselves in a time-warp; our dope-smoking ~ and it was not yet illegal in Afghanistan ~ enhanced the impression that it was straight out of the '*Arabian Nights*', and we wouldn't have been surprised to come across Sinbad the Sailor preparing the merchandise for his next voyage, or Aladdin rubbing his magic lamp, or Ali Baba muttering '*Open Sesame*' so as not to forget the password to the door to the treasure-cave he'd come across. Afghan men wore traditional baggy pants and long shirts covered by embroidered waistcoats, huge turbans, and shoes with turned-up toes; most had beards, and some carried long-barreled muskets known as 'jaziels'; they were fierce people, loyal only to Islam and their tribal leaders; mess with them and you wouldn't stand much chance, but otherwise, they'd leave you alone, not friendly, not unfriendly. The women were even more concealed than in Iran, with only hands and feet visible under their *burqas*.

We stayed in Herat overnight and left next day to *Kandahar* in the south; it took most of the day, and because of the winter rains and snow, we found it ~ like Herat ~ a sea of mud. First thing we did was find a cheap hotel, and when I say cheap, I mean about a dollar per day for a room with several beds, the covers of which were none-too-clean, and the sheets showing 'fried-egg' stains of the nocturnal emissions of previous occupants. There were no such things as attached bathrooms and toilets, and indeed, no bathrooms as such at all; Afghans seemed not to know of bathing or showering except in rivers

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when weather permitted. As for toilets, well, there was just a hole in the floor through which you let your stuff go, and beside the hole a box of stones to serve as toilet-paper, or maybe a pot of water with which to wash yourself. Oh, they *did* have toilet-paper in Afghanistan; I saw shops with great amounts of it that had been donated by some aid-agency ~ *World Relief*, perhaps ~ but it was useless to the Afghans, as they never used it for its intended purpose, and probably didn't know what it was for, like the condoms I saw kids blowing up with bike-pumps as balloons ~ also foreign aid!

Having found a place to stay and deposit our stuff, we went to eat, and were amazed to see stacks of hash in ¼ -kg slabs on the floor of the restaurant, for sale at just \$10 per kg. I saw in one place what must have been hundreds of kilos of the stuff! We were in dope-smokers' heaven!

Someone came up to me and in his smattering of English, said, "You know Mister Bob from Callipunya? Ee my friend!"

Oeuf set about implementing his plan, and I joined him. We went to a hash-dealer who someone had recommended, bought a kg each, and told him we wanted it concealed in a pair of shoes. "No problem," he said (he spoke some English, having dealt with crazies before and no doubt understood their wants). For Oeuf, he brought out some quite nice boots, proceeded to open up the soles and pack the hash inside before fixing the soles back into place; there was almost ½ kg in each, and they looked okay. And for me, he produced a huge pair of ancient brogue shoes, ripped back the soles and stuffed the hash inside, then nailed the soles back on, leaving them round and bulging, like balls; they looked and felt quite ridiculous and would have passed no-one's scrutiny. I took them anyway, thinking, "What the heck!" and we left Kandahar for Kabul, which was Oeuf's furthest point. Here, we parted, he hopefully to return to France, and me to go on to India in my rock-n-roll shoes. He had carried with him, all the way from home, many packets of *Gauloise* and *Gitane* cigarettes which he intended to offer to the Customs and Immigration officials as Xmas presents at the borders of Iran and Turkey, so they wouldn't give him a hard time, but I advised him

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against this saying it would look suss and be regarded as a bribe. I wished him well anyway, and we went our separate ways. Months later, I got a letter from him, saying he'd made it back home alright, and I breathed a sigh of relief for him. I never heard from him again after that.

For some time, I'd been passing bloody stools, and never having had piles before, was quite worried, so went to Kabul's main hospital. A young doctor examined me with a gloved finger, but didn't diagnose or prescribe anything for my ailment. I was left in ignorance, but fortunately, it wasn't about something serious, and I didn't bleed to death.

In Kabul, I bumped into a guy I'd met earlier that year in Israel ~ a red-haired Canadian named Bruce, and we decided to travel together to Goa, as we'd both made up our minds to go there for the Christmas party we'd heard would be held on the beach; Goa was already a hippie-mecca, along with Benares in northern India and Kathmandu in Nepal. Consequently, we got a bus which carried us through the rugged Khyber Pass ~ which so many invaders before us had used, including Alexander the Great and his forces ~ through the lawless town of Landikotl, where all kinds of guns were replicated using only very basic tools, and to a high degree of accuracy, too ~ to the ancient city of Peshawar. What a pity we greenhorns didn't halt here longer in our headlong rush than just to eat something and get a bus south, but there are many things in life that we look back on later ~ both done and undone ~ about which we say, "What a pity"; that was just one.

In Lahore, again, we did nothing except get a permit to cross the border into India; this wasn't a visa (we didn't need one for India, or for Pakistan; in those days, Commonwealth citizens could go to Pakistan, India *and* Sri Lanka without visas, and stay as long as they liked; it changed in the mid-'80's, and became such a hassle to get a visa for India, and to a lesser extent, for Pakistan, too), but a formality created by desk-*babus*, and there was no way around it. Then, with our permits, we set off to the border by local bus, where I rocked and rolled across ~ and it's quite a distance between the two borders ~ in my bulging brogues, just as I'd done across the Afghan-Pak

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border, quite confident, and lucky enough to pass without let-or-hindrance. The border-guards and officials had seen all kinds of weird people flooding into India by then, and so I didn't stand out as in any way abnormal; it was the time of the hippies, or '*freaks*' as they called themselves, not waiting for other people to categorize them so.

I was in the land of my dreams at last! India had called me from childhood, though I didn't know why, as there was no family-connection with it, and as far as I was aware, none of my ancestors on either of my parents' side had been there during the time of the Raj or the East India Company. But there was this inexplicable fascination with India. In my mind, for years, had been an image ~ gleaned, no doubt, from the myths and fantasies I used to read in my younger years, that India was a place where gems lay thickly on the beds of crystal-clear streams and rivers like the Ganges, there for anyone to reach in and take. How disillusioned I was soon to be!

Bruce and I caught an overnight train from *Ferozapore* to Delhi, where we spent a couple of days having a quick look around ~ though little of that remains in my mind within easy recall now ~ before boarding a Bombay-bound train. Now, we'd heard that foreigners could ride the trains of India without tickets (as did the *sadhus*, *fakirs*, or holy-men), and not be bothered by the conductors, but this was soon revealed to be a myth, because no sooner had the train reached the outskirts of Delhi than the conductor came along, and finding we didn't have tickets, unceremoniously put us off the train when it next stopped soon after, not at a station, but out in the countryside (trains stop anywhere in India ~ sometimes for long periods and for no apparent reason ~ and not just at scheduled stops). With our tails between our legs, so to speak, we hitched a ride back to Delhi, and went through the procedure of applying for a reservation on a train to Bombay, using the fraudulent *International Student Cards* we'd bought in Kabul for \$1, but which, accepted without question, entitled us to travel at half-fare on trains in India and Pakistan. What scoundrels we were; but we were just doing what so many others were doing, and saw nothing wrong with it.

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It was a journey of over 24 hours to Bombay, and during it, I was to see for the first time king-sized cockroaches running around the carriages; I'd never seen such things before and didn't know what they were, but when told, I began to stamp on them when they came within range.

Reaching Bombay, for the first time, too ~ there were so many 'first time' sounds, sights, smells, tastes and other experiences in India, and if it were possible to tell of them all, this narrative would never come to an end ~ I saw young coconuts, the kind that you drink from a hole chopped in the top, lying discarded on the streets, and didn't know what they were until I saw people drinking their juice, as the only coconuts I'd seen until then were the de-husked ones of fair-grounds and fruit-stalls back home. There was so much to learn.

Well, after finding a hotel to stay for a few days, we went out exploring, and without meaning to go there, soon found ourselves in the notorious *Street of the Cages*, the red-light district where the whores call out to prospective clients from inside barred house-fronts. Strangely, this area had been set up by the British during the Raj for the recreation of their troops, and women and girls ~ some of them very young and pretty ~ were procured from all over India and Nepal, and even beyond. Needless to say, we didn't avail ourselves of the goods on offer, but I later met a German guy who did, and who had to resort to shots of penicillin to cure what he had picked up there!

Another 'first' in Bombay: while walking along near the port to book passage on the twice-weekly steamer to *Panaji*, Goa, we were approached by two heavily-made-up husky ~ what I in my naivete, and Bruce, too, took to be ~ whores, and it was a long minute or two before we realized they were transvestites; I was so young and had lived such a sheltered life until then, in spite of my travels, that I was innocent of such things, and Bruce was even moreso. They knew this, and made fun of us when they saw we weren't going to respond to their advances, and moved off. (I later read a book called *City of Joy* about Calcutta's most-terrible slum-area, in which it is said

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that there is a sort of sub-caste of such transvestites and eunuchs, even until today; they are bought from poor families at a very young age and castrated, and later earn their living by dancing, singing and performing ceremonies at weddings, funerals and so on, and if they don't get the considerable sums they demand for these services, they become abusive and curse people with profanities. They are looked down on, but are otherwise tolerated and not beaten up or killed as they probably would be in western countries).

Our steamer-trip down the coast to Panaji took two days and nights, and it was balmy enough to sleep on deck, and enjoyable but for the bedbugs that infested the benches, and which would creep out, even in the daytime, but moreso at night, to avail themselves of any exposed flesh. This was my first encounter with these loathsome creatures, which varied from pin-head to lentil-size, depending upon their age; they smell horrible when squashed, and you'd come across them all over India in those days, even in the wooden-slatted benches in trains and post-offices, but in later years were seldom seen; I don't understand why, but it was big a plus!

Disembarking at Panaji, we got a bus to *Calangut*, the main 'scene' at Goa for hippies from all over. Many people rented thatched cottages and huts from the fisher-folk for a few dollars a month, and filled them with their friends, or shared the costs with others, like ourselves. I met and moved in with a guy from Beirut by the name of *Hussaid el Jabri* who looked like an Old Testament prophet, as he wore a potato-sack with holes cut in it for his head and arms, and was, of course ~ like a majority of hippy-guys ~ bearded. I don't know if he was originally Muslim or Christian, but he was a nice guy.

There were maybe 500 people at the Xmas party on the beach, and the setting was idyllic, with the phosphorescent sea on one side, and the full moon rising through the coconut palms on the other. There was a lot of dope-smoking going on; some people had taken LSD and other stuff. Various musical instruments were being played, and some food was shared around; some people had got together to buy a pig, which was roasting over an open fire. How long it all went on I

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don't know, as I fell into a drugged sleep on the sand, and when I awoke, cold, damp and stiff, I found few others around me, so I got up and went home.

Goa's beaches were pristine, and go on for miles and miles, which is why people were attracted there; it was idyllic, especially at the end and the beginning of the year, when it wasn't yet hot. We felt free to do our own thing, and really, anything went. India is a very conservative country, and soon, Indians were coming from all over to see naked ~ and I mean *nude* ~ hippies lying on the beach; sexually-repressed men of all ages would come to ogle the girls, and now and then, because it was news, the authorities sent police to arrest a few people for indecent exposure, but generally, we were left alone, and I regret to say that many of us took advantage of it and abused it. It's hard to say what the Goans themselves thought of it as many had benefited, financially, from this alien invasion, and must have been changed by it all. One guy appeared in Calangute market wearing nothing more than a torn-out front-pocket of his jeans tied around his genitals! And although he might have been an exception, it was not by much. Totally insensitive and inconsiderate of others, we were *mad*! Drug-abuse had caused lots of people to freak out, and their erratic behavior must have caused considerable consternation; there were not a few cases of death by overdose; some people were found dead on the beach.

Many people were into the 'hipper-than-thou' trip, playing mind-games with others, and there was no shortage of cheats and thieves; the hippie ideals of love, peace and sharing were not much in evidence; it was already a sick scene. This is not to say there were no good people there, of course, because there were. And there were two kinds of drug-users: light and heavy; by light, I mean those who smoked hash and marijuana and perhaps took LSD occasionally, and by heavy, people who had become junkies, injecting heroin and such like. The two groups usually avoided each other.

I'd met an English junkie on the boat from Bombay who appeared destitute (as many junkies were), so I paid for him a meal. In Goa, however, he ignored me and didn't speak even

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when we ran into each other, until one day, with no place to stay, he asked if he could stay at mine; I reluctantly agreed. His behavior, however, was too bad, and one morning, I heard a commotion outside, and went to see what it was all about. The locals were upset ~ understandably ~ because this fellow, instead of using the toilet like everyone else did, had gone and defecated on the sand and hadn't even bothered to cover it up, just like a dog! I threw him out!

A note here on the toilet-system there: There were, of course, no flush-toilets; the Goan-style consisted of a palm-leaf-screened-in cement platform with a slope at the back, down which fell your droppings, which were eagerly devoured by the black, bristle-backed pigs that very often were waiting to receive your offerings. It was a bit off-putting at first, to hear these animals grunting away and obviously enjoying themselves so close to one's delicate parts!

Many Goans spoke Portuguese, as Goa had been under Portugal for 500 years. Probably because Portugal was one of their long-standing allies, the Brits hadn't taken over and absorbed it into their empire as they'd done with the several tiny French enclaves in India. In 1947, when the *Raj* finally ended and India became independent, the federal government allowed Goa to remain under Portugal until it felt brave enough to liberate and incorporate it into India in 1963, not long before it was discovered by the hippies.

Most people would go to the village post-office now and then to check if they had mail at the *Poste Restante* desk. Now, *Poste Restante* was a usually-free service provided by most post-offices worldwide and still is. People would write to their families and friends and give as a return-address the *Poste Restante* ~ let's say ~ in Bombay, India, and this was enough for mail to reach them there. It was very convenient, and I often used it ~ and occasionally still do ~ in various countries around the world when I had no other address. However, I generally asked people to use only aerograms when writing to me, in order for their letters to have a better chance of reaching me; aerograms may not contain anything, you see, and so form no temptation to anyone who might otherwise feel in-

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clined to open envelopes in search of easy money. I and countless others lost letters that way. Later on, I was given a tip on how to foil the would-be post-office thieves: Put your letter and whatever else you want to send inside the envelope and seal down the flap, but before the gum has time to dry lift the flap again, and if it's a little torn or crumpled from doing so, all the better. Then, apply some gum in several points along the flap ~ but not completely ~ and stick it down again, so that it clearly appears to have been opened. Anyone looking at it thereafter might conclude, 'No point in opening this one ~ someone beat me to it'!

Goa was a 'wet state' ~ that is, manufacture, sale and consumption of alcohol was allowed, unlike in some other states where prohibition was in force, not that we cared much about alcohol as such, but as foreigners, we were allowed 'liquor-permits,' issued free at Government of India tourist offices in one's name, which we could use to legally take liquor from one state to another, and upon leaving Goa to return to Bombay in *Maharashtra* ~ a 'dry state' ~ it was quite common for people, covered by their liquor-permit, to take half-a-dozen bottles or more of *feni* (cashew-liquor) with them to sell there; it paid for the cost of the steamer, at least; anything to make a little money, as most travelers were not very wealthy, and what money they had with them had to last as long as possible; remember, most of us had come overland from Europe, hitch-hiking or by bus or train, rather than jetting in, and lived very frugally. Even the liquor-permits could be sold.

One day, in Panaji, I bought some cashew-fruits. I knew what cashew-*nuts* were, but had never seen the fruit before; I recognized them from the nut-case at the bottom of the fruit. Not knowing that the nuts had to be got at by roasting the cases over a fire, when small flames shoot out, I bit into the shell, only to get my lips burnt by strong acid therein ~ similar, apparently, to that of poison-oak or poison-ivy. I ran to a nearby soft-drinks stand and quickly drank several bottles to assuage the burning sensation; another lesson learned: never bite the shell of a cashew-nut. The fruit itself is very strange: pear-shaped, soft, and full of juice, but when eaten, it dries your mouth out; the proper way to eat it ~ I later learned from Viet-

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name when I was in the Philippines ~ is to sprinkle salt on it, and it thereby becomes sweet; this works with other sour fruit, as well.

The hash from my shoes was either smoked, given away or sold in small amounts. Hash in India cost more than in Afghanistan or Pakistan, and there was definitely a market for it in Goa.

After some weeks in Calangute, I headed out with Bruce again, and a friendly, easy-going guy from Sydney named Laurie, back to Bombay, where we sold our liquor. Laurie had been in India longer than us, and so acted as a sort of guide. He introduced us to the gastronomic pleasure of the South Indian dish known as *dosa*, which became and remains maybe my favorite food; it is a kind of pancake or crepe made of rice-flour, served with a thin spicy sauce and coconut chutney; I often think of Laurie when I eat dosa). From Bombay, we went north to Agra, where a visit to the Taj Mahal was a must, and in fact, the main reason for going there, and though I've been back several times since, I'll never forget that time.



The Incomparable Taj Mahal, Agra

The gleaming domes and minarets are visible from afar, but awe and suspense mounted as we got nearer to the vast walled compound. Entering the gate ~ itself a marvel ~ I gasped, for there, beyond the symmetry of the reflecting pool

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and geometrical gardens, shimmered the pearly vision we'd come to see. It seemed so near that I felt I could reach out and touch the smooth white marble, but the tiny figures up against it reminded me that it was actually still some distance away.

Walking reverently down the path, we reached the terrace and removed our sandals; the marble was so cool; did it not, like other stone, absorb the sun's heat? With heightened rapture, we approached the shrine, its walls inset with arabesques and floral motifs done in gem-stones ~ agate, jade, turquoise, lapis lazuli, carnelian ~ 28 kinds all told. Through the massive doorway we passed into the shaded interior of the tomb, where two magnificent but empty sarcophagi stand; the bones of Shah Jahan, and those of his beloved wife, *Mumtaz*, in memory of whom he had raised the mausoleum, lie in exact replicas of these in a crypt directly below; his wife's grave occupies central place, while his is alongside hers. The dome is so immense and lofty that the slightest sound causes an echo. There were few tourists at the time, so we were able to enjoy this wonder in peace (it is different now, sad to say). I recall the thrill I felt to play a flute inside; the silvery sounds reverberated and lingered on the still, cool air!

There were many birds and animals in the Taj gardens. Green parrots screeched their zig-zag way between the trees, halting abruptly against trunk or limb; ubiquitous crows cawed hungrily, eyes keen for food-scrap; palm-squirrels scampered hither and thither, tails a-twitch; the occasional mongoose could also be seen, alert for snakes. Soaring on high, vultures effortlessly rose on the thermal currents, scanning the earth beneath for signs of death; on land, their ungainly bodies are repulsive, but in the air they are graceful masters of flight; the turn of a feather or twist of a wing-tip sends them spiraling higher, or plunging swiftly; it was fascinating to watch them until they were just tiny dots against the boundless blue. Nor were they alone in their airy realm; it was shared by birds of prey: eagles, hawks and kites.

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Security wasn't as tight as it later became, so we remained inside the gardens after closing-time, though we knew it was forbidden (nice to break the law sometimes, isn't it? We did no harm). Spreading our sleeping-kit on the lawns, we settled down to watch, and within the space of twelve hours, we were privileged to see the Taj change in different lights: sunset, rain, full-moon, and sunrise ~ a pleasure few can have had.

While standing on the platform of the Taj, overlooking the muddy and polluted River Jumna that flows sluggishly behind it, we saw a human corpse come floating slowly past, with a vulture perched on it, pecking and tearing away. It was a fascinating if macabre sight, but nothing out of the ordinary in India, where life is lived in the raw. We'd already seen shacks on the streets of Bombay ~ if they could be called shacks: old tarpaulins, cardboard boxes, jute sacks and odds and ends of various other materials thrown up against walls and fences to screen and shelter the occupants from view and weather, wherein they lived their lives, made love, gave birth, raised their families, and faced death; such was home to many people who'd been drawn to the city from villages hoping for a better life than they'd left behind.

Laurie had been to Agra before, so was again our guide, taking us to places like the immense *Red Fort*, which had been built by Emperor *Akbar* in the 16th century, and the tomb of *Itimad-ud-Daulah* ~ father of Emperor *Jehagir's* powerful, influential and ruthless wife, Nur Jehan ~ the rich inlays of semi-precious stones of which inspired the building of the Taj years later.

Then on to Delhi, where we split up; Bruce went to Benares, to learn how to play sitar before returning to Canada; I forget where Laurie went, and never saw either of them again. I went back to Pakistan, with the idea of buying more hash to take back to sell in Goa. I crossed the border to Lahore, but thinking it would not be easy to find the stuff there, I took the train to *Quetta*, a long ride through the desert and the famed *Bolan Pass*. It was so cold when I got there, and I slept on a table in the station waiting-room with just a thin cotton sheet to cover me (my old sleeping bag had long gone, sold for

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next-to-nothing to someone on the boat from Haifa to Istanbul, in an attempt to lighten my load), and the next day ventured forth in search of hash. How vulnerable I was hardly bears thinking of now, as Quetta is the capital of *Baluchistan*, a wild province where tribal law holds. Anyway, unable to find what I wanted, I returned to Lahore and soon got 3 kgs for \$30 with no trouble at all. In my hotel-room, I carefully wrapped it in strong plastic, sealed it with scotch-tape and, having acquired the necessary road-permit, set out for the border with it hanging down my back in three packages, concealed ~ I hopefully thought ~ by a voluminous shirt, but probably looking like the Hunchback of Notre Dame. Once again, my luck held, and I passed undetected, and with a sense of relief, was soon on the long journey back to Goa, my packages now in my bag. I stopped in Bombay again, and before boarding the steamer, bought three carved wooden elephants, some red velvet, sticks of sealing-wax, and a chisel.

Back in Calangute, I entrusted some of my haul to an old English hippie to sell for me, but he ripped me off; my mistake, but there was little I could do about it. I went into Panaji one day and found a machine-shop where I had 3-cm holes drilled deep into my elephants' backs; the guys who did it suspected that I intended to smuggle gold inside; if only they'd known! Back at my beach-house ~ and this time, I'd taken over Hussaid's place ~ with the chisel, I further hollowed out the elephants ~ which were about 5 inches tall, and 3 inches wide ~ until there was a sizeable cavity, and then tightly packed the hash inside, rammed it down, and melted sealing-wax over it to make it as air-tight as possible to contain the strong smell; and over this, glued a piece of the velvet to appear as a traditional '*howdah*-cloth'. Satisfied that my handiwork looked quite professional, I mailed 2 of them to my home-address and the third to Jeanne's home in Amsterdam, and they were all awaiting me when I got back from India. Nor did I have any qualms about my drug-dealing and smuggling, telling myself it was only a 'soft' drug that didn't cause addiction ~ so I had heard and believed ~ unlike 'hard' drugs such as heroin or cocaine; my conscience had been dulled by the lifestyle I'd been living and the company I'd kept. Much later, I

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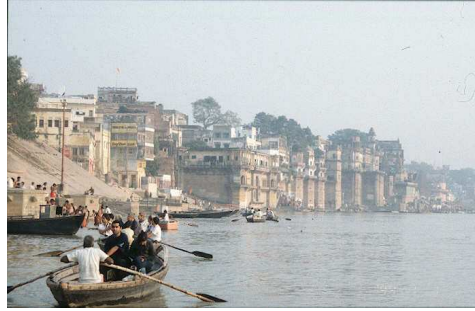
realized that addiction is more in the mind than the body, and we may become addicted to practically anything; indeed, because of our proclivity to addiction ~ grasping and becoming attached to things ~ most of us are addicted to something or other, and unless we understand the mechanisms of the mind, there won't be much we can do about it.

I remained in Goa some more weeks until I thought it time to head back to Europe; before doing so, I hollowed out a tablet of *Lifebuoy* (strong-smelling carbolic soap), inserted a piece of hash in it, then dropped it in the sand to make it look as if it had been used; I intended to carry this back to England with me. Then, bidding farewell to the friends I was leaving, once again boarded the steamer for Bombay, where ~ alone, this time ~ I caught a train at the Raj-era *Victoria Terminal* to Benares; I couldn't leave India without seeing this ancient and holiest-of-holy Hindu city on a bend of the Ganges, where many 'firsts' awaited me. I passed through the crowded streets to the *ghats* ~ banks of steps leading down to the river ~ where I saw people worshipping, bathing in the filthy water, and even drinking it, blissfully engrossed in their activities; under palm-leaf parasols, Brahmin priests sat cross-legged, chanting mantras and performing *pujas* for those willing to pay their fees; beggars and lepers missing fingers, toes and sometimes noses, mingled with the pious, asking alms and receiving small coins, as means of making merit, and what better place to do this? Elderly and sick people come from all over India to Benares, hoping to spend their remaining time here, as this is one of several *thirtas* or fords, from where it is easy to cross from this world to heaven; it is considered that to die in this holy place is a great blessing. Corpses, too, are brought here from far and wide, to be cremated at the *Burning Ghats*; there are always processions wending through the narrow streets and lanes leading to these ghats, with shrouded bodies carried high on stretchers; coffins are not used. I followed people through the maze of lanes and alleys to the place of fire and smoke and odor of burning flesh, where, day and night, cremations are always going on.

Standing aside, I watched in stunned silence. The people in charge of the pyres are so used to their grisly tasks that they

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perform them nonchalantly, raking the still-smoking ash of one fire into the river a few feet away in order to stack up the wood for the next; of a particularly low sub-caste known as *Doms*, these men are looked down upon by higher-borns, as handling the dead is defiling work; but, knowing their work indispensable, they charge what they like, and many of them are very wealthy, especially their mafia-like godfathers.



Benares (Varanasi) on the River Ganges

Watching the cremations, I stared in horror as a leg of one corpse suddenly bent at the knee, and thought, "*Damn, it's still alive!*" but it was only the tendons contracting with the heat. Sadhus crouched among the ashes of the dead ~ ash-smeared, emaciated, naked except for brief loincloths, long hair matted, foreheads bearing marks denoting their preferred sect of *Shivaism* or *Vishnuism* ~ contemplating the impermanence of life and the inevitability of death. Such sadhus were common sights in those days, many of them fakes and beggars who took up the lifestyle for an easy living, but some genuine and impressive; it was said there were about 9 million of them; over the years, however, I saw fewer and fewer of them and wondered what had happened, whether they had retreated to the mountains or forests, given up and 'returned to the world,' or simply died. I also noticed a change in Indian culture ~ and not for the better, either; many Indians have lost their faith and become more materialistic and less spiritual, especially in the cities and towns, and this is glaringly evident in the great number of so-called 'dowry-deaths'. Most Indians, however, don't have the opportunity to indulge their desires

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that people in the West do, but that doesn't mean the desire isn't there. Of course, there are still refined and spiritual Indians, but the common Western belief about India being a very spiritual land is just a myth. Religious superstition is common, but that is so everywhere, is it not?

“As India's own statistics show, a 'dowry death' occurs every 100 minutes, when in-laws cause the death of a new bride if they decide she has not brought a sufficiently large dowry. This is often described as a 'kitchen' death, with the unlikely story that kerosene, the most common fuel used for cooking, somehow splashed onto the daughter-in-law and burned her to death before anyone could save her. A consequence of this is that every couple wants to have a male child.” (From *Culture Smart! India*). Few of these murderers are brought to justice and convicted, and the husbands remain free to marry again and get another dowry.

The saddest thing about these awful crimes, and the hardest to understand, is that the mother-in-laws ~ who are probably the real culprits, having instigated their sons to do the dreadful deeds ~ have been brides themselves, so should know how it is to be in that sad, unenviable position and sympathize with their daughter-in-laws. It is often women themselves, therefore, who oppose and retard the lawful rights of women as a whole, when they should be in the front line! They betray their gender.

The greater value placed upon males over females, has caused the high abortion-rates of female fetuses and rampant female infanticide, with the consequence being that there are 35 million fewer females than males in this nation.



5

BACK TO EUROPE

"Some people complain that roses have thorns; I am thankful that thorns have roses."

~ Anonymous ~

Since suffering is the response of the mind to things we regard as unpleasant, if we would learn to look at things in different ways, much of our suffering would cease. This requires a willingness to change, and let go of old habits ~ easier said than done, but not impossible.

From Benares, I went to Lucknow, ignorant of its history and especially of the Great Siege of the British Residency during the *Mutiny* of 1857; it was just a break in the journey to Delhi, and I stopped long enough to watch a movie ~ "2001, A *Space-Odyssey*" ~ before getting a train to Delhi. There, I bought a few souvenirs, and then boarded an overnight train to Ferozapore, crossed the border to Lahore the next morning, and passed quickly through Pakistan and the Khyber Pass to enter Afghanistan once more; I'd got a visa before leaving Delhi. In Kabul, Ghazni, Kandahar and Herat, I bought more souvenirs, and at the Iranian border, afraid of being caught, threw the tablet of soap down the toilet before going through Customs and Immigration; I wasn't as daring as Oeuf had been!

In Teheran, I took a bus through to Istanbul, taking two days and nights and costing just \$20, which was very reasonable; we broke the journey at night to stay in hotels along the way.

Coming into Istanbul was always something of a thrill, to see the splendid skyline while crossing the Bosphorus by ferry,

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and looking forward to a few days' rest and some nice food ~ chocolate pudding in *The Pudding Shop*, for example.

How I went on from Istanbul to Ljubljana, I don't recall, but guess I hitch-hiked, and again stayed with the Kavseks for a few days, before taking the road north to Austria. That evening saw me in a small town, sheltering from the rain under the eaves of a building while eating something given by my friends for the journey; I had nowhere to stay. While I was standing there, an elderly lady came out of her house opposite and seeing me there came over and kindly invited me, in her broken English, to spend the night in her home. She was taking a risk with a complete stranger, but then, maybe I was, too; I was only too happy to accept, and after giving me something more to eat, she made up a bed for me on her lounge-room floor. She was a widow, and I still remember her name: *Annie Glantshnig*, and when I left the next day, she gave me some money to help me on my way. I wrote to her several times, and received replies, until the contact ceased. Unless she's almost a hundred now, that kind lady must have gone to another dimension. May she be well and happy wherever she now might be! Many, many people have helped me in so many ways.

Passing through Germany again, I went to Denmark, to stay awhile with David's parents (the guy I'd met in Israel the previous year); they took me to *Legoland*, near their home. Next, I went to stay with Pete again, who was pleased to see me and hear all about my trip east.

That summer, I went again to Amsterdam, where the authorities had grown tired of hippies sleeping on the streets and had made available a large hall where they could sleep and shower for a nominal sum; this was great, because the previous year it was hard to keep clean with nowhere to stay.

One day, while busking with two other guys on Dam Square (I was playing an Indian instrument I had with me, while the others had a guitar and a flute), the police came along, and because people had put coins in the lid of my instrument, they took me to the nearby police-station, where they confiscated the money, and let me go with a warning not to do it again. I

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swore at them as I went out, and then, with my friends, went to a different place to busk, and soon had more money than earlier.

I met an Austrian by the name of *Fred Haupt* (Haupt is German for 'head,' so *Fred Head*), and because we got along alright, we decided to go to Copenhagen together. I was later to regret this, as I took him to Pete's first, where we spent several days, and while there, unknown to me, he must have taken advantage of Pete's family's absence, to go through their upstairs rooms ~ I learned about this upon my return from Copenhagen, alone. This was despicable! On the way from there to the capital, I noticed he had some Danish money which he hadn't had before, but I couldn't accuse him of stealing it, as he might have got it elsewhere; but it caused me to be cautious with him. In Copenhagen, we learned that there was an empty house where we could sleep, and so we spent our nights there. In the middle of one night, I was awoken by someone whispering hoarsely: "That Austrian guy ~ he's trying to rape that girl". He was too much of a liability, and so I left him, and returned to Middelfart, where Pete told me his suspicions of him; I was deeply embarrassed to have brought such a person with me.

Retracing my route, I went back to Amsterdam for another while, then on to Rotterdam to visit the Dutch guys I'd met in Istanbul the year before; in turn, they visited me in England shortly afterwards, and stayed for a while. What I did with my smuggled hash-haul, I don't really remember, except that I never made much money from it. Pete and his younger brother visited me for a while, so I guess we smoked some and I gave them some to take with them when they left.

My money gone, I had to find a job, and got one two miles from home in a cheese-packing factory ~ anything would do for a while and the pay was somewhat better than at other jobs I'd had, and what with the occasional overtime I worked, I was able to save quite a bit. My co-workers there regarded me with something like awe because of my travels, and one of them even said: "I wish I could do what you do." I said,

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"You *can*. Go with me when I go again," but it was too much for him to make the break and go off into the unknown.



6

“THIS OLD MAN”

"The moving finger writes,
And, having writ, moves on.
Nor all thy piety nor wit,
Shall lure it back to cancel half a
line,
Nor all thy tears wash out a word of
it."

Omar Khayyam, 1050 - 1122, Persian Poet and Mathematician, *The Rubaiyat*

Life is not a dress-rehearsal; this is
it, all we've got, the real thing, at
every moment, and if we miss it, it
never comes again; we never get a second
shot at the present, and nothing is ever
repeated.

Summer of '69 passed, and I decided to go to India again. By mid-autumn, I got ready to leave before it became too cold and snow fell in eastern Turkey and other places along the way. In November, I set off, hitch-hiking to London and getting from there to Dover. The details of how I got to Istanbul evade me now, but there I saw a note in *The Pudding Shop* ~ one of the hippie-haunts ~ offering places in a van going through to Teheran for \$20 each. Looking up the driver ~ an English guy ~ I paid my money up-front; he already had other passengers, and when we'd all got visas for Iran (easy to get in those days), we started off. But it was a doomed trip, and whether or not he intended to dump us all along the way, I cannot say; however, this is what eventually happened. It was slow going, and a couple of days out of Istanbul, something went wrong with the van, so, suggesting we all stay in a hotel while he got it fixed; we made our way into the nearby town, and that's the last we saw of him. Fortunately, we'd taken most of our things from the van with us, but I'd left my favorite flute inside ~ the

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one I'd played in the Taj Mahal earlier in the year; I was really sorry to lose it.

When the guy didn't turn up again, a Dutch girl named Pauli and I went back to the place where the van had 'broken down', but needless to say, it wasn't there; he'd done a runner on us. On our way back to the town, a truck came barreling along the road heading straight for us, as if to run us down; maybe the driver was just having a bit of fun and trying to scare us, but I wouldn't bet on that; many Turks weren't very friendly towards travelers in those days, maybe because others before us had created a bad impression, or maybe they felt the influx of large numbers of hippies, being so different, were a threat to their culture and religion, and we were getting some of the backlash. What to do? We had to think fast. Bending down, I made as if to pick up a stone, and drew back my arm to throw it at his windscreen; he swerved back into his lane and rushed past us.

Anyway, we resumed our journey by bus, staying together. Apart from Pauli, there was a Dutch guy, a German, and four Canadians. We crossed the Iranian border, got through Teheran, and headed out on the southern route leading to Pakistan; we would not pass through Afghanistan this time because of the cold. I had never traveled with so many people before, and was soon to regret it. Passing through the small towns of the Iranian desert, I became aware of the suspicion of people towards us, as if afraid we might make trouble, or that some of us might cause a distraction while others stole things from shops or stalls. Well, one of us *did* make trouble, although not of that kind.

Leaving Iran, we entered Pakistan by an isolated border-checkpoint of just a few scattered buildings in the middle of the desert stretching flat in all directions as far as we could see. The bus we had come in stopped there and didn't go any further, and the next bus wouldn't leave for some hours, so after our passports had been stamped, we had to hang around waiting. Then, surrounded by a small crowd of curious locals, one of the Canadians announced his passport was missing; he searched his pockets and bags, but it wasn't there. He

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went back to the Immigration post, but it wasn't there. It would have been a big problem had it really been lost, as we were in it together and couldn't leave him, so I took things in hand. Going back to the check-post, I took hold of a border-guard ~ a towering giant of a guy with a henna'd beard and an ancient rifle ~ and dragged him to where the others were standing; amazingly, he complied, and I told him to stand there while I frisked the locals, one by one, and they allowed me to do so, too surprised to resist, perhaps, or maybe just wanting to go along with the show, having nothing else to do. But there was still no passport. Then that the damn-fool Canadian 'discovered' he hadn't lost it at all; it had been in one of his back pockets all the time! I could have knocked him down, and we were lucky not to have *all* been knocked down, as we were certainly outnumbered, and the tribesmen of Baluchistan are fierce and unpredictable, with an ingrained sense of personal honor. Luckily, none of their women ~ about whom they are zealously protective ~ were present, as that could have complicated things considerably. Anyway, the situation remained calm, and we moved off to a nearby mud-hut tea-shop and sat on the floor. A few minutes later, some of the tribesmen we had affronted came over, looking none too happy (they must have discussed what had just taken place), and one of them came to me ~ as the obvious leader ~ and challenged me to stand up and fight; I couldn't understand his words, but his gestures were clear enough. Now, I can't fight to save my life, but the situation was quite dangerous, and I had to do something, or we'd have been lost, so I called his bluff and stood up. And when I stood up and faced him, he sat down, the situation defused. *Phew!*

Finally, the bus ready to go, we got in with locals of all ages; it was crowded, and there were a number of people on the roof, too. We started off, rumbling along the desert-track towards far-away Quetta, with a huge cloud of dust in our wake. There were several settlements where wells had been dug that didn't dry up, and where more people climbed on the bus, but we were overtaken by night before we'd gone very far. To break the monotony, I began to sing, much to the amusement of the natives, and when I began the children's song, "*This*

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Old Man," it had an amazing effect, and soon, almost everyone on the bus ~ and those on the roof, too! ~ joined in, although they didn't know the words, of course; all they could catch was "*This Old Man*," and there they were ~ even the women in their *burqas* ~ waving or clapping their hands and singing "This Old Man. This Old Man. This Old Man," over and over again! The bus reverberated as we rolled along, and the driver wasn't very happy with our performance, and kept yelling at us to shut up, but we continued, intermittently, until dawn, and soon afterwards, we got to Quetta. And all I remember about what we did there, was getting onto a donkey-drawn cart, but there were too many of us for the poor little beast, and it was lifted off the ground by the shafts, and the driver had to sit on it to bring it down.

We must have split up in Quetta, because the next thing I recall is hitch-hiking with the Dutch people ~ Pauli and Hans ~ far away on the road to Lahore. We were picked up by a young seemingly-friendly guy who said he would take us all the way to Lahore, maybe 100 miles away; we thought we were lucky, but after an hour or so, he stopped to pick up two friends, one of whom sat in the front with the driver and the other in the back with us, next to Pauli. Before long, however, she told me this guy was rubbing up against her, so we arranged for her to sit between Hans and me. By this time it was dark, and we were on a long and lonely road, and noticed that the driver and the other guy were animatedly discussing something, and handling some kind of club; I became scared, thinking that they were planning to knock Hans and me on the head, and do what they wished with Pauli (traveling in Muslim countries with girls was quite risky). I whispered my fears to the others, saying that we had to get out, and they agreed; so I asked the driver to stop, but he refused, confirming my suspicions. I urged him, saying we needed to pee, and finally, he slowed down. By this time, I'd found the crank-handle under the front seat, and got hold of it, and when we stopped and the front passenger opened his door to let us out, I grabbed the club, too, and pushed the others out ahead of me. Just then ~ oh, what a nice sight! ~ the lights of a truck appeared on the road behind us, so, tossing the crank-handle and club

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into the car, I said to the driver and his mates, “*Go, now go!*” and lucky for us, they went without any protests or attempts on us. We flagged the truck down, got in, and were taken to Lahore, where we spent the rest of that night in the segregated station waiting-rooms, one for men and the other for women.

The next morning, we got our ‘crossing-permits’ and were soon over the border in India. But Pauli was sick with something or other, and I forgot to say that the poor kid was a junkie, although I’d never actually seen her shooting up. By the time we got to Ferozapore, she was so ill that we had to get her hospitalized, but the conditions in Indian hospitals were so bad ~ hopefully, they’ve improved a little by now ~ that you were more likely to catch something than be cured there! Hans and I stayed in the station waiting-room for a couple of days until Pauli was well-enough to travel again, and we then made our way down to Goa together, passing through Delhi and Bombay. We met the Canadians on the steamer to Panaji, and all decided to rent a big cottage on Calangute Beach and share the costs, which we proceeded to do. Later, we were joined by a German, a Dane and a French guy, and were alright for some time.

The local fishermen chanted something while they hauled in their nets, and it sounded like ‘*Hé mali dumsa.*’ There wasn’t much tune to it, but I gave it one and turned it into something of a mantra, repeated over and over again, and we would chant ourselves high on it.

In spite of this mantra, however, it wasn’t long before disharmony set in, and with some others, I left and moved to the next beach around the headland, *Anjuna*, where we made two tee-pees, using colorful second-hand sarees bought for the purpose, draped over bamboo-pole frameworks; they were good enough to protect us from the night-mists from the sea, and were visible for miles. *Michel*, the French guy, became our cook, as he had no money, and was happy to do this, having some culinary skill; there was little cooking to do anyway, as we couldn’t afford to buy more than very basic supplies. And during the weeks we were there, several other

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people joined us, one of whom ~ a Greek girl calling herself *Ma Khanti* ~ had been a Buddhist nun at Budh Gaya for some time, but had quit to come to Goa for some fun. And who should come along one day but Erwin, who I'd last seen in Vienna in '67! We were both surprised to see each other again, and he also stayed with us; but he hadn't been very careful during his travels, and was down with hepatitis; it was still not too bad, but got worse as time passed.

Not far down the beach, *Eight-Fingered Eddie* was in residence in a large house he'd rented. He was elderly and kind of like a 'beat uncle' to the people who coalesced around him, and had been doing this for years, and anyone who wished could stay with him. Those who had money and wanted to contribute to a food-fund did; those who had no money or didn't want could partake of the food that was prepared for the evening meal anyway.

Passing our camp one day, Eddie stopped by and invited us to move into his house. We thanked him, but stayed where we were; however, we did start to join them for the evening-meal, which of course became a dope-smoking party, with people sitting around ~ on the floor, of course ~ playing various instruments, singing songs and chanting mantras, etc. Eddie himself seldom smoked, but now and then, he would accept a circulating joint or *chillum*, and with an invocatory gesture such as sadhus use in their ritualistic smoking, would inhale deeply and then exhale, filling the whole room with smoke. All eyes had by then fastened on him, some knowing what would follow. Then, remaining in his seat, and with eyes closed, he would begin a hand-dance in time to the music, fascinating to watch, as he appeared to be in trance, and far away.

Later, we would disperse, and those staying elsewhere, like ourselves, would wend their way home through the palms by the light of the moon (if there was one); the sky was so clear and the moon so bright at times that I have even sat outside and written a letter by its light!

I never learned much about Eddie ~ he was a mysterious kind of guy, and I didn't ask nor was I told ~ except that he was

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from the US, and might have been in the military, which is when he'd somehow lost two fingers, and was invalidated out with a pension, enabling him to travel and live as he did. He moved between Goa, Benares (where he'd rent a house-boat on the river), and Kathmandu, and in each place, people would gather around, some in a *guru-chela* relationship. He lived very simply, and the only possession he had, apart from a few clothes, was a radio, on which he liked to listen to the news. Once, someone stole this radio, but someone else recovered it for him; he was highly respected, and many people were deeply loyal to him and would do anything for him; I could see why. He was quiet and humble, with nothing phony about him, as with so many others, and wasn't into playing mind-games with people. I never saw him again after that time in Goa, but a few years back, I heard he was still doing his thing there.

My pleasant but useless existence there was interrupted by a letter from home, saying that Frank had grown tired of the frequent strikes at the car-plant where he worked, and he and Sheila had decided to migrate to Australia under what was called 'the Assisted-Passage Scheme', whereby, having passed medical examinations and interviews, people paid only £10 each for their fare by ship ~ taking with them whatever luggage and furniture they liked ~ to the *Land Down-Under*, which needed labor, and was willing to pay dearly for it. They'd gone to see mum and dad to tell them of their decision ~ we didn't have house-phones then, let alone mobiles! ~ and mum, who had become the boss years before, immediately said: "We'll go with you," never stopping to ask if they would mind. I think Sheila and Frank would have preferred to have gone without them, but they didn't say, and so mum wrote to me, saying "You'd better come home quick and sort out your stuff; we're going to Australia!"

Well, I had only \$70 with me for the long trip back from Goa, and no way could I raise more in India, so I prepared to set out, but meanwhile, Erwin had deteriorated and was very weak, so first, I had to get him into a hospital in Panaji. I didn't want to leave him ~ and with hindsight wish I hadn't ~ but he

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assured me he would be alright, and it turned out that he was, fortunately.

I was soon in Delhi again, getting my permit to cross the border into Pakistan, where I retraced my footsteps back to Quetta, and through the desert, without singing any silly songs this time. And here, I discovered the benefits of traveling alone in such places; people know you can't make trouble on your own, and do not suspect you; I noticed, too, that if you walk without fear among them, you will be safe, whereas if they sense fear in you, it can go against you. As it was, I experienced only kindness and hospitality as I slowly crossed the desert from oasis to oasis, until I got to the border-post where we'd had the passport-trouble some months before. I was a little worried here, knowing that I'd be recognized and thinking that revenge might be exacted upon me, but nothing of the sort happened, and indeed, I experienced only friendliness.

The major festival of *Eid* was upon us, and I was stuck for a while, as there were no buses running in either direction. But where was I to stay? There were no hotels or inns. It was then that a wandering Muslim holy-man ~ a *fakir* ~ came forward and took me under his wing. He was from what was then East Pakistan, and had walked right across northern India and Pakistan, his aim being to reach Mecca; he was about half-way. He carried only a clay bowl into which whatever anyone wanted to offer him ~ and not only food ~ had to be put (and he never asked for anything because he didn't and wouldn't speak), and wore dark glasses which he never removed, so I didn't see his eyes. If anyone spoke to him, he would write his response on some paper in either Urdu or English. He was quite an educated man, although he told me little about himself except what I've narrated above, and was staying with a poor family in a one-roomed mud-hut in a small compound ~ one of several in that border settlement. They had taken him in out of the goodness of their hearts, and he treated it as his home. What this family did for a living I couldn't tell, as they had no obvious means of livelihood, and could hardly have been farmers in that environment, although they *did* have several goats and a few scrawny chickens. Anyway, my new

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friend took me to stay with him at this house, and I was welcomed without question, and given a *charpoy* (a wooden bed-frame interlaced with rope) on which to sleep in the yard. Well, I appreciated this, but didn't sleep much that night as the next day was the festival for which every family was expected to slaughter either a goat, a buffalo or a camel, according to their means, to commemorate Abraham's sacrifice, and I'd heard that, according to desert hospitality, any guest who might be staying with them would be given the choicest part, which was considered to be an eye-ball. Well, I wasn't yet vegetarian, but lay there dreading the approaching dawn, wondering how I would ever manage to eat an eye-ball, and knowing that to refuse might cause offence. Anyway, day broke, and a goat was decapitated, butchered and cooked, and some time later, a large tray piled with *pulau* and chunks of mutton was brought out, and I was invited to sit and eat. I looked at the mound but could see neither of the eyes, so thought they might be somewhere under the rice. Finally, I was served, not an eye-ball, but a kidney, and that was bad enough, but I managed to swallow it without gagging, and my kind host was not offended.

Eid over, buses started to run again, but before I left, my silent friend presented me with a book he'd come by, probably from some other traveler passing through; it was "*Narcissus and Goldmund*," the first of Herman Hesse's books I was to read ("*Siddhartha*," his best, in my opinion, was several years ahead of me), and he signed it and drew a simple picture inside of a leaf, which might have symbolized Earth, and a diagonal line leading upwards from it to what looked like a star or the sun with rays around it; I took it to be an inspirational message.

The border-post soon receded behind, and I never passed that way again. Going through the desert that night, the bus stopped at a lonely outpost and something strange happened: many guys got off and started punching and kicking each other in what seemed to be a surrealistic dance. I sat there looking at this going on and thinking I must be dreaming, but I wasn't, nor was I stoned, and after a while, they all got back in

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and we resumed our journey. I didn't learn what it was all about.

We reached *Isfahan* some hours later and I found a hotel. In the morning, I went out to explore this ancient city renowned for its culture, and enjoyed visiting some of the beautiful mosques with their domes tiled with *faience* of turquoise, blue and green. I crossed a centuries-old bridge over the river, with the *Rolling Stones' No Satisfaction* going through my head, for some reason; strange how things like this stick in your mind, isn't it? It meant that I was feeling fine and carefree. I then boarded a bus to Abadan, and there, got passage on a *dhow* to Kuwait, arriving early next morning, to the consternation of the Kuwaiti Immigration officials; I had no visa, thinking I could get one upon entry. They umh'd and ahh'd and made me wait a long time, then endorsed my passport; I was free to go

. As soon as I checked into a hotel, I went to the blood-bank to sell blood ~ as this was why I'd come to Kuwait ~ and pocketed the \$28 they paid for a pint (the most you could get anywhere), and just outside, met a Sikh, and struck up a conversation. He told me that instead of paying for a hotel, I could stay and eat free in the Sikh *gurudwara*, not far away. Early next day, therefore, I went to the temple, where I was served the customary *dahl* and *chapatties*, and shown where to sleep. I spent that night quite comfortably, having long grown used to sleeping on the floor, and the next morning, after breakfast, headed out of Kuwait city, with no reason to stay longer. I soon got a ride to the border and crossed into Iraq, getting a visa upon entry, and there, standing on a highway outside Basra, trying to hitch a ride to Baghdad, a mob of people gathering around, pointing at me and saying, "Are you American? Are you Jewish?" I wasn't worried, however, even though they were not friendly, and was taking the whole thing kind of lightly, when two Italians (who were working in a nearby oil-refinery) happened to pass by, and seeing what was going on, stopped and said to me, "You can't do this here; it's too dangerous. Come on; we'll take you to the bus-station," which they did, and put me on a bus to Baghdad. And that was in 1970! Thanks, guys!

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After this experience I stayed in Baghdad only long enough to get a visa for Iran, then headed out to the border and on to Teheran to catch the bus through to Istanbul. There, I found a restaurant that had recently been set up and run by a friendly man named *Yener*, especially for travelers. His prices were very low, and if anyone had no money, he served them free; he soon became well-known, like Uncle Mustache in Old Jerusalem had been. I spent only two days in Istanbul before hitching out to Greece, and on the way, joined up with a German guy who was also going to Thessalonika. Hitch-hiking in Greece wasn't easy, and we had to be content with what rides we could get. Between rides, we walked, and at one point came to a roadside shrine wherein, along with the image of Maria, there was a whiskey-bottle. My companion, thinking he'd got lucky, grabbed it and took a long slug. "*Uggh!*" he exclaimed, as he spat out the kerosene! You can't always judge what's in a bottle by its label!

In Thessalonika, I sold blood again ~ only ten days after doing so in Kuwait ~ as you could get the next-best rate of \$12 a pint there, and in those days that was worth much more than it is now. I felt no ill-effects from blood-loss, but did feel bolstered by the addition to my finances.

While there, I met an English guy who was also on his way home, and we decided to travel together. We got rides easily enough, and one that was going all the way to Vienna, and by the time we got to Belgrade, it had begun to snow and was very cold, as the heater in the car wasn't working. It was much worse when we reached Vienna and were dropped in the night; the snow was quite deep, but we managed to get a ride in the direction we wished to go, and then found ourselves stranded beside the highway. There was almost no traffic by that time, and it was freezing as we stood there waiting. Fortunately, there was a service-station nearby, and the attendant must have seen us standing there in the snow, and when he closed up for the night left the toilet open and the lights on. We availed ourselves of his kindness and spread what bedding we had ~ he a sleeping-bag and me a blanket ~ on the floor and went to sleep; the place was well heated, otherwise we might not have survived the night!

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The next morning, we were able to get rides alright and had no problem passing through Germany and Belgium where we caught a ferry to Dover. I had still enough money left to get a train to and from London to Crewe, and *exactly* the amount needed for a bus from there to my home 10 miles away, and while walking from the bus-stop, I found a penny on the road, so I arrived home not absolutely penny-less!

At home, I found mum and dad busy with their preparations to migrate to Oz; they'd already sold or otherwise disposed of lots of things, but still had lots to get rid of. They wouldn't leave for several months yet, however, and George had arranged to go on ahead of them, though I don't remember if he paid full-fare for his berth or also went on the assisted-passage scheme.

Anyway, I got my old job at the cheese-factory, although they knew I wouldn't stay long. I saved what I could, and slowly disposed of the things I didn't need or want, selling some for whatever I could, and giving other stuff away. I would not be going with my parents, but told them I would travel overland as far as India again, and then fly on from there to join them in Oz. After just 3 months, therefore, I cleared out of England for what ~ apart from a number of visits back in later years ~ would be for good, and didn't look back. I never saw my brother Bob after that ~ we'd never been friends anyway ~ and later, when he and his awful wife and kids treated our parents very badly, I severed all contact with them.



MY EYES OPEN

"Eternity has nothing to do with the hereafter.... This is it.... if you don't get it here, you won't get it anywhere.

The experience of eternity right here and now is the function of life. Heaven is not the place to have the experience; here's the place to have it."

Joseph Campbell, 1904 - 1987, American Mythologist

Having glimpsed it, we need to remind ourselves of it, too, as it is not an experience that stays with us, but comes and goes. Seeing it, however, leaves an indelible impression that helps sustain us through hard times.

Traversing old trails, I went by Amsterdam to stay with Jeanne and her boys for a while, then set out to Venice for a last look. South of Belgrade, a car full of French people stopped, and I was on my way to Istanbul again. Getting a visa for Iran there, I moved on. Now, being summer, there was no need to worry about being cold, so I hitch-hiked out into *Anatolia* with another guy (I forget where he was from), and on the far side of Ankara, while we were waiting for a ride, an elderly lady came out of her house and invited us in and served us food. A widow, her only son was away working in Holland. Why she invited us in, when we were unable to communicate, I don't know, but it was another case of kindness along the way.

Some friendly Austrians soon stopped for us; they were driving through to Teheran in their camper-van, so we had another good ride. We made several stops along the way, and even made a detour to the Black Sea. Also, less enjoyably, we visited some Americans in a small-town jail who had been busted with hash, and had been sentenced to 30 years. I for-

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get how we came to know of their incarceration, but there was nothing we could do for them except visit and commiserate with them. The only thing they asked us for was sleeping-pills.

After parking their van in Teheran, we all got a train to *Meshed*. On it, I met an Aussie guy named John, who joined us for the rest of the journey. In Meshed, we got visas for Afghanistan, and then crossed the border to Herat; it was my third time there, and I became a kind of guide for the others. It was so hot there, however, that I found it difficult to breath and at night could hardly sleep. Now, to drink the water in Afghanistan was highly inadvisable, and bottled mineral-water was something of the far-off future, so it was a real problem getting something to prevent dehydration. Tea was safe enough, but even that wasn't above suspicion, and was only available when you were stationary; what to drink while traveling in buses (no trains in Afghanistan; the railways never got there)? I solved the problem by buying cucumbers, figuring that the juice thereof should be alright; obviously it was, as it sufficed and I noticed no ill-effects from it.

We stopped overnight in Kandahar, with its markets of abundant fruit, and reached Kabul the next day. There, to lighten my back-pack, I went onto the street and held an auction, holding things up, saying, "How much this?" to the crowd that soon gathered around me. I took whatever was offered, not caring how little; it was fun. John gave me his address in Oz, and remained there a while. I said goodbye to my Austrian friends, who were not going any further, and went through the Khyber Pass once more to the plains of Pakistan; not lingering there, but passing on to India again, heading south as fast as I could go. I stopped in Bombay for a couple of days, then caught a train to Bangalore, and another from there to Madras, where I met three English guys who were also on the way to Australia, and, thinking it would be cheaper to fly from Sri Lanka, we decided to go there together. We got a train to *Rameshwaram* from where a ferry ran to *Talimannar* on the northern tip of Sri Lanka. How could I know something was about to happen that would change my life?

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After an overnight trip, we got to Rameshwaram only to find we'd just missed a ferry, and would have to wait some days, as they ran only twice a week, but it was a pleasant enough place, quiet and uncrowded; it was on an island, and connected to the mainland only by rail; there was no road-link, so it was motor-vehicle-free. It was also a holy town, with a huge temple dedicated to Shiva and *Rama*, hence the name. Legend holds that it was from here that Rama invaded Lanka to recover his wife, *Sita*, from the demon-king, *Ravana*, who had abducted her from the forest-hermitage where they were living in exile and taken her to his fortress on that island. Rama was aided by the monkey-king, *Hanuman*, who, together with his army of giant monkeys, built a causeway of rocks from Rameshwaram to Talimannar ~ known till now as '*Adam's Bridge*,' as a stone 'link' can still be seen beneath the sea ~ and thus Rama and his allies could cross to Lanka to defeat Ravana and his hosts and rescue Sita



The long-corridor in the temple at
Rameshwaram

I was fascinated by the immense temple there, with its soaring *gopurams* ~ gate-towers ~ sculpted with tier upon tier of gods, goddesses and fantastic beings in their various realms, and long corridors inside, lined and supported by a thousand pillars, it is said (I didn't stop to count, but there might well have been). There were also large pools of water known as tanks inside the temple, where people would bathe, considering it lucky to do so; I tried it, too, but fish nibbling at my feet soon made me come out. At times of puja, the sound of trumpets and rattle of drums echoed through the halls and corri-

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dors; I found *karnatic* music hypnotic. Then, too, there was a temple elephant ~ a baby ~ that would touch your head with its trunk in benediction if you gave it a coin; I was later allowed to mount and sit on its back when I'd become friendly with some of the priests there.

One day, near the temple, I was approached on the street and singled out from the others by a sadhu, a small, wiry man clad in just a loin-cloth, and with long hair and beard, who invited me to stay with him in a pilgrims' rest-house known as a '*dharmasala*'. Why me, I can't say, and I don't believe in predestination, nor do I believe there are such things as 'accidents'. I accepted his invitation without hesitation, leaving the English guys, who hadn't been my type anyway, being like football-hooligans, and moved in with him, sleeping on a mat on the floor, bathing at the well, and eating the food ~ vegetarian, of course ~ he provided me with. I stayed with him ~ *Jagadish Narayan* was his name ~ only a few days; he spoke no English, and my Hindi (he was from north India, not the south, and spoke Hindi rather than Tamil), was very limited, and so we couldn't communicate verbally, and although he taught me nothing I can put my finger on and say, "I learned this from him," or initiate me into any supramundane mysteries, or even give me a new name, he gave me something better: a sense of direction in my life that I'd not had before; he lit my lamp and kindled my flame; the rest was up to me.

I went to Sri Lanka and spent a week there, visiting several places and attending the annual *Pera-Hera* in *Kandy*, but it didn't do to me what India did, so I returned to Rameshwaram, hoping to spend more time with my guru ~ for so I regarded him by then ~ but he wasn't there; where he had gone, I couldn't ascertain, but to such a homeless one, everywhere is home.

No longer feeling a great urge to get to Oz quickly, I resolved to travel around and see some of the ancient and holy places with which India abounds, thinking it might be my last time there and that I shouldn't miss the chance. Consequently, I did this, going first to *Madurai*, not too far away, where there is a splendid and even larger temple than that of Ramesh-

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waram, dedicated to a goddess named *Meenakshi*. Although fascinated here, too, I didn't feel what I had at Rameshwaram, which was more significant to me than Madurai.

I returned to Madras, then passed through *Kanchipuram* (another ancient temple-town), and Bangalore (a modern nondescript place). Mysore had quite a lovely feeling about it. Using it as a hub, I made several short trips to places not far away before going on to the west coast. Then it was down through *Kerala* to the southernmost tip of that vast and fascinating country, *Kanyakumari*, where I was present at the Opening Ceremony of the shrine dedicated to *Swami Vivekhananda* that had been built on a large rock just off the coast ~ an imposing structure.

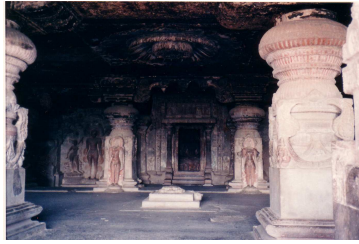
In Madras again, I asked at the Chartered Bank if I might leave some money there while making my trip up north, as I didn't want to carry it all with me. I explained my purpose to a young Brit and he very obligingly offered to put it in a safe-deposit box for me, at no charge ~ very unusual for a bank! Then, unencumbered, I caught a train heading north along the coast, but without a ticket. All went well for some hours; I sat in an open doorway with my feet hanging outside, gazing at the countryside as we passed by; India has a wonderful variety of brightly-plumaged birds which the people leave alone and in peace.

Suddenly, the train slowed as it came to a station, and because my feet had been hanging outside the train, my right foot caught against the platform and was slightly grazed; no problem I thought, just a scratch. Not long after, an inspector appeared, and was not at all happy that I had no ticket, so hauled me off the train, and gave me a real reprimand ~ and quite rightly, too! Then he let me go, with a warning not to repeat my misdemeanor. By then, I'd found that I couldn't wear my flip-flops because of the graze on my foot, which was just where the side-strap would have been, so I had to go bare-foot. Again, no problem, I thought; the soles of my feet were quite tough, and could stand it. I walked away from the station, out of the town, and got onto the highway, and soon got a ride to Hyderabad, where I had a quick look around, then

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set off for Poona. Still hitch-hiking, I reached *Ellora* the next night, and slept under some trees; this was north-east of Bombay, in rugged and arid countryside. In the morning, I went to explore the nearby cave-temples ~ or rather, monasteries. There are Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain caves here, carved out of an escarpment over a period of a thousand years, and renowned, worldwide, for their size, splendor, and art. As monasteries, they are deserted now, but preserved as national monuments, open to the public.

I'd already learned something of Hinduism, and was impressed by its scope and twin-concepts of Karma and Reincarnation; compared with what I'd been taught of Christianity, it was like standing on a mountain looking at the world below in all directions, while before, it had been like looking at the world through a key-hole; the single-life-on-Earth belief is very narrow and unsatisfying, raising more questions and doubts than it answers.



Inside one of the Buddhist Caves at Ellora

At Ellora, I felt a thrill, as if something had awoken in me. I knew nothing of Buddhism so far, had met no Buddhists, and had not read the book on Buddhism I had with me. The only thing I thought I knew about Buddhism was that the Buddha was a great fat man who sat beneath a tree, waiting for people to come along and feed him, and even this was wrong; where I got this idea, I don't recall, but there are many people with such false perceptions. So, it cannot be said I was looking for Buddhism, or that I found it; it might be better to say that it found me. At Ellora, therefore, I was first stirred by

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Buddhism, but this was not the beginning; I can trace it further back from there, as I will show.

From Ellora, I went to *Ajanta*, a group of thirty caves ~ all Buddhist, no Hindu or Jain caves here ~ 80 miles away. It was late when I reached the access-road, however, so I spread my sleeping-mat under a tree, unaware that this was tiger-country.

When I awoke, I felt a sharp pain on the sole of my right foot, and investigating in the half-light, discovered a white spot, which was hard and extremely sensitive. Because I'd been walking barefoot, I must have trodden on a thorn the day before, but I didn't recall having done so; maybe, at the time, I thought it was just a sharp stone (some days later, my left foot was pierced by a thorn, with a similar effect, so I guessed the first wound had been so-caused. Thorn-bushes are common in India, and the thorns thereon are very long and poisonous).

It was difficult to stand and walk on my pierced foot so, thinking to alleviate the pain, I cut open the spot with a sharp knife to let out the pus, applied some ointment, bandaged it with a strip of cloth, and set off to hobble the remaining distance to the Caves. But perhaps because of the pain and the effort needed to walk, when I got there, I was 'high,' and passing from cave to cave, many with images, frescoes and long-abandoned monks' cells, I had a strong feeling ~ a *conviction*, even ~ that I was coming home again after being away for a long time. Did I bring this upon myself, did the pain in my foot have anything to do with it, or was it something welling up from my subconscious? I can't say for sure, but it was a great turning-point in my life, and I felt that whatever had caused men to carve these magnificent sanctuaries out of the rock, this was it for me. From wandering around aimlessly, I now knew which way to go; I had a light to guide me. Because of this, Ajanta is of greater significance to me than Ellora.

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Partial-view of Ajanta Caves

Two days later, with my foot still bandaged and sore, I went to Sanchi, in Central India, where there are several well-preserved Buddhist *stupas*, or reliquary monuments, the largest of which was constructed to enshrine relics of the Buddha's two chief disciples, *Sariputra* and *Moggallana*. I was struck by the atmosphere that lingers at this place, but was appalled at the lack of respect of Indian visitors to the place, some of whom I saw clambering on top of the main stupa to have their photos taken. Perhaps it's because India has a super-abundance of ancient and holy places, and people have grown used to and taken them for granted, without understanding or appreciating them.



The Great Stupa at Sanchi

Walking down the road from the sacred hill, trying to catch a ride to *Bhopal*, suddenly, I 'disappeared' ~ that is, my body was there, as normal, but the ego, or the sense of 'I, me,

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mine,' was not, and my consciousness exploded or expanded. Knowing nothing, as yet, of such things, even by reading, I saw, felt, or experienced life as a whole, with no barriers or limits, and knew where the center of the Universe was/is: *HERE*. This was accompanied by an intense feeling of joy and love such as I had never known before; I felt at one with everything. It was a most illuminating experience, and I wanted so much to share it with someone, but there was no one. I am not saying or implying that I became enlightened thereby, and it shouldn't be thought so, but it was certainly a transcendental or enlightenment experience. It didn't last, of course ~ I couldn't sustain it ~ and I fell back; but it left me with an unshakable conviction about what I had seen: that we are not this small and narrow thing we call 'I', but something much, *much* more.

Soon after this, I read the book I'd been carrying with me, entitled simply: *Buddhism*, by *Christmas Humphries*, and I must here acknowledge my gratitude to the late founder-president of the London Buddhist Society, as his words and explanations made complete sense to me, and left me in no doubt whatsoever that what I had stumbled upon just a short time before was the way which I should henceforth try to follow. It wasn't a matter of belief, for I had seen and experienced it.

From there, it was not much of a choice to make to become a monk; it seemed the logical thing in order to realize what I had glimpsed.

Traveling on, in Rajasthan, I met someone who took me to an *ashram* that had coalesced around a woman called *Suttee Mata*, who, it was claimed, had not eaten or drunk even a drop of water for 28 years! Incredible though this seems, it is not the only case of its kind; I've read of a woman in Bulgaria who was supposed to be like that. Anyway, I'm only reporting what I was told, and India is a country of strange and mysterious things. Apparently, she was married at an early age, but before the marriage was consummated, her husband died, and she entered upon a period of mourning, eating nothing at all. When the mourning was over, and she came to eat, she was unable to. She was strong and fit, so fit, in fact, that when

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she went on pilgrimage in the Himalayas, her followers had difficulty keeping up with her! Her story was quite well-known, and she'd been subjected to rigorous observation by Western researchers, who concluded she wasn't cheating by eating and drinking when no-one was around, but they couldn't explain her condition. Her followers claimed that she lived on *prana*, the life-force in the air. I stayed there for 3 days, and as in most such ashrams, the people were kind and friendly; I was well looked after. I'd be more skeptical about this now, but dare not say it's impossible; I just don't know.

In Jaipur, I saw some of the sights, including the *Hawa Mahal* (Palace of Winds), the 18th century *Jantar-Mantar* astronomical observatory and the stupendous *Amber Fort*. Also, because my thorn-pierced feet were still infected and painful, I went to a government hospital to ask for a shot of penicillin, and eventually got a shot of something or other, but maybe it would have been better had I not, as you are more likely to catch something in such hospitals than get cured of anything. I can't say I did for sure, of course, but I developed what appeared to be jaundice some weeks later.

I reached Delhi soon after this, and spent a couple of days there during the festival of Dussehra. From there, I went to *Amritsar* in Punjab, and after visiting the Sikhs' Golden Temple, with its museum of gory paintings depicting the massacres and persecutions the Sikhs had undergone under Mughal rule of previous centuries, I turned south again, to be picked up by a wealthy farmer and invited to spend some days at his home. I accepted, and was treated kindly enough. He took me to visit some of his friends, and made a big thing out of the fact that I used a rush-mat for sleeping on, just as they did; he must have been surprised or shocked that a white *sahib* should lower himself so! While we were out, some members of his family could not resist going through my bag to see what it contained; privacy is a concept unknown to lots of people, it seems.

Anyway, while there, I observed someone beating a buffalo with a thick bamboo staff, so I asked the farmer to give me this staff, and he did; it probably wouldn't save the buffalo be-

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ing beaten, as I'm sure they had other staffs for that, but it was certainly useful to me, and when I left to resume my journey, I began to carve it while waiting for rides, until, some days later, it had become quite a work of art, even if I say so myself. This particular staff was solid, not hollow like most bamboo, and so was very strong. Now, a staff in India has many uses, and not just as an aid for walking; it acts as a visible deterrent, both for dogs, monkeys, and people who otherwise might disturb you; I never had to use it to defend myself, but I'm sure it was effective. And I've always liked to walk with a staff; it's like having a third leg.

Back in Delhi, I went to the Nepalese embassy for a visa, necessary before going to Nepal in those days. I got one, valid for 15 days from date-of-entry. Then, as I was making my way out of the city, to a highway to hitch a ride in the direction of Benares, a Buddhist monk (the first I'd ever met), asked me where I was going. When I told him, he said it was getting late and would soon be dark, so it might be better if I spent the night at his temple nearby, and go on the next day. I accepted, and followed him to the temple, which was a simple affair of corrugated-iron with a *bo*-tree in the compound. He introduced me to his brother-monk who, like himself, was from *Chittagong* in East Pakistan. I was received kindly and a charpoy was placed out in the yard for me beneath the stars; in October, this was quite suitable as the rainy season was over and the nights were mild. I don't recall being bothered by mosquitoes, so there probably weren't many, and those there were I was able to tolerate.

The next morning, Venerable *Dhammika* ~ for such was the friendly monk's name ~ invited me to go with him to the home of some of his supporters. I accepted, and on the way there, he told me that, a few days before, one of the children of the family we were going to visit had been knocked down by a car and killed; the funeral was already over, and he was going to give a memorial sermon.

Before going on, I should say that, Ven. Dhammika being the first Buddhist monk I had ever met, I was ignorant about the lifestyle of monks, and so I thought nothing of it when he in-

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structed the family to prepare a seat for me alongside his against the wall, and to serve food to both of us, while the people sat facing us. So I sat there and ate, unaware that monks of Theravada Buddhism ~ of which he was a follower ~ never ate together with non-monks but always apart. Maybe he thought it would be inconvenient and embarrassing to explain this to me, or maybe he placed little importance on this custom and was ready to overlook it; I do not know. Maybe he was just kind; this I know.

After we'd finished eating, and the plates had been cleared away, he took a long-handled fan that he'd brought with him (and which is used by some monks while preaching) and, holding it before him so that the people could hear him but not see his face, he began to speak. Now, I didn't understand a word of what he was saying, although it must have concerned the child's death. But, whereas the people in front of him couldn't see his face because of the fan, still sitting beside him, I could, and saw that, while speaking, he was weeping, with tears rolling down his cheeks. This moved me, for I saw that he cared so much about the people to whom he was speaking, and shared their loss and sorrow. I didn't know then that monks are not supposed to show their emotions but should restrain themselves. On the other hand, however, we are taught to consider others as ourselves, and to feel their suffering and pain as our own, for it is by identifying with others that compassion arises.

I will state clearly here that I was far more impressed with Venerable Dhammika, who couldn't hold back his tears in sympathy with the family over their loss, than with all the stony-faced monks and nuns I've seen performing ceremonies over the years ~ *far* more impressed, and favorably so! Should a monk make his heart cold and hard like a stone, which almost nothing can move? Everyone knows that no-one lives forever, and that it's only a matter of time before we all go through the portals of death; increasing detachment and equanimity result from reflection on this and insight into how things are, but have nothing to do with mere unconcern or indifference towards others.

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I spent three days with these monks, during which, the brother-monk, noting my interest, asked me if I'd like to become a monk, and if so, he would ordain me. I told him I would (I had already decided after my experience at Sanchi), but that I wasn't yet ready as I first wanted to visit my parents in Australia and tell them, in person, that I would be going back to India to become a monk. Thanking them, I left, and went on my way.

Over the years, I've thought many times of Venerable Dharmika and his kindness to me. He was the first monk I met, and without meaning to, he gave me something that has stayed with me until now: an example of humility, kindness and concern for others. I am fortunate to have met him, particularly at that stage of my life; his example has helped to sustain me through times of doubt and depression. Wherever he is now, I wish him well in every way, and am grateful to him forever!

On my way to Benares, I was picked up by some English guys, but they were on a 'hipper-than-thou' trip, and although they were going to Kathmandu, they made an excuse to drop me off after an hour or so. No problem; before long, some French guys and Norwegian girls in a camper-van stopped for me; I was lucky again, as they were also going to Kathmandu. We stopped in Benares overnight for them to get visas for Nepal, they staying in a hotel, while I slept in the van. We visited the burning-ghats and some other places, and then got moving again. At *Patna*, we had to cross the Ganges, which is very wide here. There was no bridge at that time so we had to go by an antiquated ferry, and I recall watching Indians in their white clothes getting covered in soot-spots from the black smoke belching from the funnel.

We reached the border at *Raxaul*, and entered Nepal; Kathmandu, the ultimate destination of many hippies, was still 100 miles away, behind and over the foothills of the Himalayas, sheltered and shielded in its beautiful and fertile valley. To reach it, we had to follow the steep and tortuous *Tribhuvan* Highway, the only road into Nepal at that time, built by India in the '50's at great cost and loss of life to connect Kathmandu ~

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hitherto quite inaccessible ~ to the outside world; China later built another road down from the Tibetan border.

Through *Hetauda* in the *Terai* ~ Nepal's plains ~ we took the winding road to its highest point at *Daman*, from where there is a fantastic panoramic view of the Himalayas when the weather is fine ~ as it was then in early November ~ stretching in a vast semicircle of snowy peaks from east to west (actually, the Sanskrit word, *Himalaya*, means *Abode of Snow*). It was then a long and at times hair-raising descent to *Naubise*, from where the road climbed, by a series of switchback bends, to reach the rim of Kathmandu Valley at *Nagdhunga* far above. Then it was downhill to the medieval city, with several rivers running through, and its narrow streets converging like spokes to a hub, connecting to similar-looking hubs in a confusing manner. My friends checked into a hotel in the centre of town, parking their van nearby, and I went off to explore, drawn, as if by a magnet, to *Swayambhunath*, an ancient stupa on a hill a mile or so west of the city, which has a special aura about it, as people have been worshipping there for maybe 2000 years. Hippies called it 'the Monkey Temple' because of the great number of macaque monkeys that inhabit the wooded hills and shrines there; they are ugly, vicious and quarrelsome. On my way there, I saw the van with the English guys who had given me a brief ride; they had just arrived, and seemed surprised to see me.



Swayambhu Stupa, Kathmandu

By that time it was late afternoon; after sitting in meditation for a while, night was almost upon us, and night falls quickly here, with barely any dusk. I had nowhere to stay unless I went back to the town to sleep in the van, but I wasn't worried, even though it was getting cold, and intended to sleep outside somewhere. As I was looking around for a suitable place, however, some Tibetan monks came along, and asked what I was doing. When I told them, they beckoned me to follow them, and led me to the upper room of a building nearby where they gave me a blanket and a mat on the wooden floor; I was very grateful for this. They had similar beds on the floor. I spent quite a comfortable night, and thanking them the next morning, went to meditate on a slope nearby, among the shrines and votive stupas. I hadn't been there long when monkeys began to gather around me, bent upon mischief, as is their wont; they are always on the look-out for food, and are so bold that if they see anyone holding anything edible, they are quite likely to snatch it, and sometimes bite while doing so. I had no food, however, but a little concerned that they might attack me anyway, I assumed a Buddha-like posture with one hand raised forbiddingly, figuring that they might be familiar with this *mudra* from all the images round about, and

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sure enough, they calmed down and sat quietly around me; I thought it was strange.

I returned to the town to have a look around there, and told my friends I would go to explore the valley somewhat ~ it's an extensive valley, many miles wide and long, and I wouldn't get very far. Off through the fields and villages I went, and climbed a hill some hours out, until the light started to fade, and I again had to look for a place to spend the night, under a tree, perhaps. Just then, some people came up the path from the valley below, and by signs, asked where I was going to stay and eat. I shrugged to indicate I didn't know, whereupon they gestured for me to follow them, and led me to a house perched on the edge of a steep slope, and told me to sit. Others gathered to look at me suspiciously and not in a very friendly way, as if I was some kind of ghost or demon. Some of them wanted to know if I had a camera, but I didn't; they began to look in my bag for something of value, but it contained only clothes and a few books (what little money I had I always kept on my person). I was offered rice and vegetables, and they sat around intently watching me eat, as if waiting for something to happen; I had the feeling that they might have put something in the food to drug me, but I sat cross-legged, firmly and upright, focusing my mind, and nothing happened. Afterwards, I was given a place to sleep on the verandah, with some dirty and smelly covers, but before I was allowed to settle for the night, they asked if I would like a young girl to sleep with, and when I signed 'No,' they obviously thought I might prefer a boy, and so one of the younger males started to get in with me, but I shoved him out. Only then did they give up on me and I was left alone to sleep. In the morning, when I left, they stood outside the house watching me go down the hill until I was out of sight, as if to make sure I had left their territory; I felt lucky not to have been robbed or even killed!

On the way back to Kathmandu, I passed the immense *Bod-nath* stupa, around which Tibetan refugees had settled and established monasteries and businesses; they are very enterprising.

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I made another trip out of the city, walking to *Nagarkot*, a hill of some elevation from where there is a good early-morning view of the Himalayas as the sun rises over them; Everest is also visible, but although it is the highest mountain on earth, it looks small as it is far away. I spent the cold night in a simple lodge. Descending, I passed through the third of the valley's ancient cities, *Bhaktapur*, which is perhaps the best-preserved of the three; the carved multi-tiered temples there, set on stepped plinths, are very striking.

My remaining time in Kathmandu was spent wandering around the city, and when it was time for my friends to leave and return to India, I went with them; our 15 days were almost up.

Crossing the border, I parted from them and made my way to Benares, where I walked across the Ganges bridge heading south, and by a number of rides, reached Goa and spent two weeks with friends on Anjuna Beach. I then set out for Madras, where I retrieved my funds from the bank, and bought my plane-ticket to Adelaide, because some months earlier, the migrants had arrived in Australia, been through the hostel-stage, bought a house in one of the suburbs north of Adelaide, and already had jobs; George had arrived before them, and was living in town; he'd also found work; it was easy in those days.

But I'd become sick, and was convinced I had hepatitis; I had all the symptoms ~ yellow eyes and skin, dark urine, pale feces, pain over my liver, and easily got tired, so that the daily walk to the post-office left me exhausted and I had to rest on the bug-infested benches to recover before standing at the counter to check for mail. I'd seen so many cases of hepatitis among hippies that I knew what to do to treat myself; I immediately went on a diet without oil, got some *ayurvedic* medicine for this disease, and rested a lot, and by the time I was ready to fly out ten days later, the symptoms had almost gone, but that was a hard time, and not very enjoyable. (Strangely enough, when I was tested ~ some years later ~ for the antibodies that should have been there if I'd had hep, there were none, and I found this hard to understand, be-

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cause although I'd not been officially diagnosed as having it, I'd certainly had all the symptoms, and the way I'd felt was not an illusion, nor do I think it had been psycho-somatic. Had I misdiagnosed myself? Perhaps. Or maybe the ayurvedic medicine was extremely effective.



THE LAND DOWN-UNDER

We enter the a new year as upon uncharted territory, which, of course, it is, as no-one's been here before. But is not this so with every day of our lives ~ in fact, with every *moment*? When we wake up in the morning, we cannot possibly know what awaits us in the day ahead, and this is why we need to be flexible, so that if the plans we make don't work out ~ as often happens ~ we can switch to something else without too much trouble. If we are not flexible, if we are too attached to our plans and ideas, if we liv'e our lives like a train running along its tracks, we will miss so much along the way.

I had to go first to Sydney, then fly on to Adelaide, which had no international airport at that time. At Customs, I was asked to "*Come this way, please,*" to a small room where I was told to strip down to my undies. I had just come from India, and had all kinds of exotic visas in my passport, and my hair and beard were long ~ a typical dope-smoking hippie! My bags and clothes were carefully searched, but I didn't have anything illegal so wasn't afraid; I was a bit annoyed that I'd missed my connecting flight, meaning my folks would be wondering what had happened and have to wait for the next incoming flight. The officer then took out a piece of hash and asked if I knew what it was. "Yes," I said, without hesitation, "It's Pakistani" (there are different kinds of hash from different regions, you see, identifiable by color and the shape it's compressed into; I was familiar with some of them). As soon as I'd said it, I realized that my answer could have been taken as 'smart-arse,' and he could have falsely charged me with possession had he taken a dislike to me, but I was lucky again,

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and he told me to get dressed and was free to go. As I was leaving, I said, "I suppose this is part of the price to pay for freedom of expression". He didn't respond.

Everyone was waiting at Adelaide airport to welcome me, and I was soon on the way to what should have been my new home; but I was here only to see how they'd settled in, and tell them I'd be going back to India to become a monk. I had to stay for some time, however, as my money was gone, and I needed more, which meant finding a job. But as I said above, jobs weren't hard to find; the economy was robust, and the Aussie dollar at that time was worth more than the greenback.

I got a job in a tailoring-factory not far from home, and was given a ride to and fro by Frank who was working in the *General Motors* car-plant nearby. And while I was there, I attended a rock-festival at *Myponga*, in the hills outside Adelaide. It was the last time I took LSD, and I had a bad trip, and was so disillusioned with the *so-phony* scene, that I went to a barber back in Adelaide and had my long hair cut, as a mark of dropping out of it all; that was the last time I paid for hair-cut.

I soon got tired of working inside walls, and left the factory to work in a vineyard south of the city; I enjoyed my three months there, but of course, it came to an end, and I returned to Adelaide, with what I thought was enough money, then made plans to hitch-hike to Darwin, as the nearest point to Asia. It was then that I came upon the address of John, who I'd met in Iran and traveled with as far as Kabul, and was surprised to find it was just down the road from where I was, less than half-a-mile away! I immediately went there ~ it was the house of a friend with whom he stayed ~ and was told that he was in hospital, recovering from the malaria he'd picked up in India, but that if I cared to wait, he was expected home any time. And sure enough, he came within a few minutes, surprised to see me there, of course. How strange!

Well, he was also unsettled, and funnily enough, was also planning to go to Darwin, where he'd arranged to meet the girl he'd married in England the year before, so, needless to say, I had a companion for the 2000 mile trip through the desert. It

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was April, coming to the end of Autumn, when, saying good-bye to my parents, we set out, taking the train ~ the only time I was ever to do so in Oz, as it turned out ~ for the first 200 miles, then getting off at *Port Augusta* to hitch-hike. It wasn't long before a huge semi-trailer stopped and picked us up; the driver, a friendly Cornishman by the name of *Ted Timms*, was going right through to Darwin and was willing to take us all the way, without charge. We settled down for the long ride, but it was rather slow, and by the time we'd passed through the opal-mining town of *Cooper Pedy*, with mounds of earth thrown up by men in their eager search for gems, and arrived at the way-station of *Woomera* (near the American-built rocket-base), we were only too keen to accept the offer of a ride in a Land-rover driven by a young American. Thanking Ted, we transferred our stuff and moved off down the track at a much-faster speed.

We were soon to regret our change of ride, however, as this American was clearly mad. He had earlier picked up a guy from Yugoslavia whose company he was probably quite glad of, but now he had others, he began to make fun of him quite unmercifully; he was also very drunk by then, as he'd downed, alone, almost a full bottle of whiskey since Woomera. John and I looked at each other, and I was rather scared. Then, this fellow decided to stop, far from anywhere, and you can drive for hours along that thin dusty trail through the heart of Australia without seeing a single habitation, and there was almost no traffic, so he just pulled off the track, and lit a fire. He then took from the Rover a high-powered rifle and started firing aimlessly into the air, and no doubt feeling brave with this in his hands, he turned on the Yugoslav, who ran, terrified, into the bush; fortunately, he didn't shoot after him, as he might have done. He then decided to drive on, and told John and I to get in (we'd been standing uneasily by during all this), but I protested, saying that he couldn't leave the Yugoslav out there, and that if he did, I would stay, too. Well, he didn't relent and call the guy back, so I took my bag from the car, and they drove off, leaving me to call out to the Yugoslav, but he must have gone far away by this time, and there was no reply;

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I don't know if he heard me or not, but I didn't see him again, and have no idea what happened to him.

I slept there beside the track that night, confident that if no one else came by that way before him in the morning, Ted Timms would soon be along, and sure enough, he was, and picked me up again. This time I stayed with him for the rest of the way, and reached Darwin nine days after leaving Adelaide. That was quite a trip, through the Red Heart of Australia, most of it ~ over 1400 miles ~ dry and dusty desert. Right in the center, however, a surprise awaits the weary traveler: the oasis-town of *Alice Springs*, where there is abundant never-failing water, and consequently, lots of trees; it was so refreshing to see green again after those long days of browns and grays. Of course, we halted there for a while to refresh ourselves with some cold beers before heading on. We stopped at night to sleep along the way, Ted in his cab, and me on the ground alongside; and I've never known such peace and solitude as in the Aussie desert, and such clear skies, free from haze and pollution, wherein the stars shine so brightly that I felt I could reach out and catch them.

Two hundred miles south of Darwin, the topography changes from dry and dusty desert to tropical vegetation, and in the transition-stage you come across huge clay monuments, some up to 5 meters tall; these are magnetic-termite-mounds, raised by these industrious insects which never see the light of day, along a north-south axis, replete with their own air-conditioning system which maintains an inside temperature that varies very little year-round.

Now, Darwin is a frontier-town, so to speak, and quite unlike the cities in the south ~ Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney, Perth ~ and because of the heat and humidity, what Aussies call 'laid back'. There were people from many countries ~ Islanders, South-East Asians, Chinese, Japanese, Europeans, misfits, drop-outs and people who couldn't ~ or didn't want to ~ make it elsewhere; and also quite a few hippies; there was plenty of color here.

I met John again, and he told me what had happened after we parted. Apparently, the American had displaying increasingly-

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wild behavior, and before they got to Alice Springs had wrecked his Land-Rover driving it without oil, John had taken the rifle, smashed it against a tree and had beaten the guy up, then hitched another ride to Darwin and got there soon after me; what happened to the American after that, I don't know; we didn't see him again.

Anyway, John's wife came out from England and they rented a caravan, but I don't think they stayed together very long; he wasn't the type to settle down and remain faithful to one person. And I got a job in an army-base doing odd-jobs; they employed unskilled people like me to use up the year's budget, so they could claim the same or more next year. There were some pretty weird people working there, apart from the soldiers (and myself, of course); one guy in particular, from England, who we nick-named *Bootsie* because of the boots he wore, with the soles flapping off them (we were required to wear footwear other than sandals, so we rummaged around in junk-shops for something cheap, and Bootsie had clearly got his there *extra*-cheap, or maybe found flung away somewhere). He was a really droll kind of guy who never had much to say, and didn't care what anyone thought of him, but was expert at finding his way out of work; one day, the sergeant in charge of us found him sanding something with the wrong side of the sand-paper! Then there was Old Sid, much older than the rest of us, who was kind of a hobo; we never did learn much about him, as he kept pretty much to himself; but he was inoffensive.

We were allowed to eat in the canteen (or mess) there, at 35¢ for lunch, and the amount and variety of food was staggering, and for us, so good, although some of the soldiers used to complain about it. All this while, I was camping on a beach named "Doctor's Gully" with a German guy I called Jo-Jo, who was easy-going and went along with anything I did. After work, we would shower at a public toilet-and-shower block not far away, and cooked our evening meal on the beach ~ rice, beans and various vegetables. Saturday evenings we would gather with a few other friends in a pub named '*The Vic*,' and get drunk on beer. After one such gathering, as we made our way somewhat unsteadily back to the beach, we heard the

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sounds of a party coming from a house set back a little from the road, and the song, "*Show a Little Kindness*" playing. We danced up the driveway thinking to join the party ~ how incorrigible we were! ~ but there was a bouncer at the door who came out towards us when he saw us coming, so we danced back down the path, "You've got to show a little kindness". I was never violent when I was drunk, just merry and stupid!

Then, we used to have parties on the beach ourselves, with big fires, and were joined by some of our friends like French Chris, Austrian Fred ~ the same Fred I'd traveled with from Amsterdam to Copenhagen in '69; we were surprised to bump into each other on the street one day ~ and Aussie John, who stayed in cheap hotels rather than with us on the beach, or in a house on McMinn Street known as '*the Flop-House*', where many travelers stayed and shared the rent; we used to get together there, too, at times.

Before going to work, Jo-Jo and I would stow our gear in a large wooden box we'd found on the beach and had buried up to the top in the pebbles against the cliff, and covered the lid with more pebbles to conceal it when our things were inside; we felt secure to leave it like this. It was an isolated beach of mostly stones and little sand, so few people came here. The jungle came down the slopes to it, and we sometimes saw snakes and monitor lizards; at night, too, the vegetation would come alive with small hermit-crabs, millions of them, rustling among the leaves.



9

SOUTH-EAST ASIA

"The first key to wisdom is assiduous and frequent questioning ... For by doubting, we come to inquiry, and by inquiry, we arrive at the truth."

~ Pierre Abelard, French philosopher, 1079-1142 ~

After two months of this, our spell at the army-base came to an end and, my finances bolstered somewhat, I was ready to move on, so said goodbye to Jo-Jo and Chris and flew out to Portuguese Timor, a desperately-poor place, where I couldn't see how people survived, but somehow they did. I spent a few days in a place on the beach at *Dili* that the authorities had set aside for travelers, then boarded an old prop-job Dakota for *Kupang* in Indonesian Timor, on the other end of the island, where I had my first taste of Indonesian cuisine, and liked it; there are plenty of vegetarian dishes for people like me (and after my last trip in India, I had finally become committed).

Now, Kupang ~ of Captain Bligh of the *Bounty* fame ~ is at the eastern end of the Indonesian archipelago, and we had to take whatever form of transport we could get from there, and after some inquiries, those of us who were going ~ half-a-dozen or so ~ were able to get passage on a naval cutter that was going to *Lombok*. It was a pleasant-enough and relaxing trip of two days. We had to sleep on deck, but this wasn't a problem, as it was warm, even at night, and steaming into the lagoons of *Flores* and *Ende* in the early morning, with volcanoes overshadowing the harbors and flying-fish and dolphins in the clear placid water around us, were memorable experiences. Food on board wasn't very appetizing, but I guess you can't have everything for long.

Disembarking at unspoiled *Lombok* island, we crossed to the other side by bus, and got a ferry to Bali several hours away.

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Bali at that side is dominated by the still-active ~ and at times *cataclysmically* so ~ *Gunung Agung* volcano, but at this time it was quiet. Again, we crossed the island by bus, through the palm-groves and meticulously-terraced hillsides, to reach the capital, *Denpasar*. There, I found a hotel for a few days, and hung out at *Kuta* to watch the mesmerizing dances that were staged for the tourists; I was fascinated in particular by the *Kris Dance*, in which the entranced performers staggered and fell around with krisses (wavy daggers believed to have magical properties) pressed against various parts of their anatomies, including their faces, without sustaining hurt ~ very convincing!

With a Sydney guy named *Mal* who I'd met earlier in Dili, I took off on a trek into the interior, through the artists' village of *Ubud* and up into the mountains to *Kintamani*, from where we descended to the lake at the foot of *Gunung Batur*, another active volcano. Here, there are hot springs to soak in, an always-relaxing experience. Climbing back to Kintamani on the ridge, we then returned to Denpasar via *Singharaja* in the north. During our time in Bali, we sampled various kinds of fruit that I'd never seen before, including *rambutan* and *salak* ~ pear-shaped and rather dry and astringent, with a skin like that of a snake, which was easy to peel off; there was also the rose-apple or *jambu*, from the kind of tree that Prince Siddhartha was said to have sat under as a child and had his first taste of enlightenment upon becoming aware of the suffering of life around him.

From Bali, we crossed to Java by ferry, on which we met someone named *Soeharso*, who invited us to stay with him in a hill-town named *Malang*, not too far away. We accepted his offer and on the way, at a place called *Banjuwangi*, he pointed out the site of a mass-grave of many thousands of people killed during the anti-communist fury of 1965; I was shocked, unable to visualize this. We were treated kindly at his home, and it was there that I had my last-ever beer, out in a boat on a lake where our friend had taken us; that was in August 1971. The next day, we hitch-hiked to *Jogjakarta* where we went to stay with Soeharso's younger brother, *Semsul*, who was living with some fellow-students near *Gajah*

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Mada University. They were a bit surprised when we turned up, as they were not expecting, but welcomed us anyway when we presented Soeharso's letter of introduction, and gave us one of their rooms. They also lent us a motorbike on which to visit *Borobudur* some 30 miles outside of town. This stupendous Buddhist monument in the form of a *mandala* ~ a stylized representation of the cosmos as conceived by Buddhists and Hindus ~ was built almost a thousand years ago when Java was Buddhist-Hindu, but covered and concealed by volcanic ash from an eruption some centuries ago, and thus spared desecration at Muslim hands, until ~ surprisingly enough ~ it was discovered and uncovered by the British during their brief control of Indonesia in the early 19th century.



Borobudur Stupa, Central Java

We spent some time there examining the sculpted walls of the various tiers that lead upwards to the culminating great stupa on the summit ~ so long, in fact, that our student friends became worried that we'd either got lost or made off with their bike, and came to look for us; they found us halfway back at a restaurant where we'd stopped to eat.



The next stop along our route was *Semarang*, and we got down from our ride in the middle of town where great crowds were awaiting the Independence Day procession; it was 17th of August. Well, we caused quite a stir ourselves; maybe people took us as part of the procession or even the highlight of it, because hundreds of them followed us as we made our way out of town to *Sam Poh Kong*, a large Chinese temple built centuries earlier in honor of the famous 15th century *Admiral Cheng Ho*, who was both a Muslim and a eunuch, and who apparently stopped at this port-city during his several great voyages. We requested permission to stay overnight there and were allowed to; our entourage gradually dispersed.

Next morning ~ my 25th birthday, which is how I remembered the date ~ we returned to the town for a look around, and somehow met the chairman of a local Buddhist organization, *Pak Sadono*, who, learning of my interest in Buddhism and intention to become a monk, invited us to stay in his home for a few days. He was very kind, serving us different kinds of Indonesian food every day. He also gave me letters of introduction to several other Buddhist Societies and temples on my way.

One day, while in Semarang, we went to *Batu-gong*, a Buddhist temple on a hill outside the town, and walking back ~ it was a long way and we were tired ~ we decided to get a cycle-rickshaw, but I had an idea, and said to one of the drivers, "You sit, I ride; no money; okay?" He agreed, and Mal got in with the driver in front, while I got on the saddle behind. Well, it was fun, with some of the driver's friends riding alongside us (he was so proud!), until we came to a crossroads, and the lights were red, and I didn't know how to stop the thing; I pulled on the brake-lever when I should have pushed it, and we were on the verge of going over the lights when the driver jumped down and pushed the brake, stopping us just in time! We did this again another day, when I was confident of being able to pull up ~ or *push* up!

Mal and I split up in Semarang, and with Pak Sadono's letters, I went from one place to another in Java and Sumatra,

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experiencing much hospitality and kindness. One day, outside *Bandung*, I met someone who invited me to stay with him for a few days, and during my time there, he and some other friends took me up a hill nearby, where I had my second transcendental experience, although my companions were unaware of it; again, the *I* disappeared, and was replaced by a feeling of great love and joy. It cannot have lasted long because we soon started to descend and return home, but it was another treasure along my way.

I spent some time in *Bandung* and *Bogor*, then passed through *Jakarta*, not wanting to stay and having no letter to anyone there. From the western tip of Java, I got a ferry to South Sumatra, and traveled up through that huge jungle-clad island. Again stopping in various places, I got to *Medan*, and went to stay in a temple there ~ *Vihara Borobudur*, named after the monument in Java. There, I met another beautiful person: an Indian Buddhist by the name of *Kumarasami*, who took me, a waif and stray, under his wing during the few days I spent there, making me feel like one of his sons. I recall him speaking to me of the love that develops as one follows the Path; he himself manifested it in abundance, and I have since felt it at times and know what a wonderful thing it is, but ~ like humility ~ it cannot be practiced; it must come, as a result of understanding or seeing things clearly.



Mr. Kumarasami

Before I left to go to Malaysia, *he* also gave me letters of introduction to temples in *Penang* and *Kuala Lumpur*, but sadly,

these letters were not received in the same spirit as they were given to me, as I will shortly explain.

Crossing the Straits of Malacca from Medan to Penang, I had to wait for the Malaysian Customs and Immigration officials to board the ferry and do their duty. I got talking to one of them, and when he learned I was a Buddhist, and had a letter to a Sri Lankan temple, hoping to be allowed to stay there, he said I could stay at a meditation-center, where he was a member; his name was *Amigo* ~ his nickname; his real name was *Oon Teik Leng* ~ and he gave me the address of the meditation-centre. I told him I would check it out.

Disembarking, I made my way to *Mahindarama*, the Sri Lankan temple, and presented my letter to one of the monks there, Ven. *Pemaratana*. I could see from his expression that he wasn't very impressed with my appearance ~ some of these monks have a way of looking down their noses without saying anything, but which makes it quite clear what they're thinking ~ as I was wearing shorts, and had a beard. He didn't say anything, but went off and didn't come back, leaving me sitting alone for a long time. "If they won't let me to stay," I thought, "I'll have to find somewhere else." Just then, he re-appeared, and I asked if I'd be allowed to stay, as had been requested in the letter. Only then did he say, "Well, the chief monk said you can stay for a few days, but at the weekend, we're having a festival, so you'll have to find somewhere else by then." I thanked him and he led me to a room at the back, where I bathed and put on a suit of white Indian clothes that had been made specially for me by Mr. Kumarasami as a parting gift, then went out to the shrine-hall to do some chanting, such as I had learned while staying in temples in Java and Sumatra. Now this caused a noticeable *different* impression, because in Theravada temples, only people who are in retreat and observing what is known as '*Eight Precepts*' wear white. Well, I didn't know about this then, but was just wearing my gift-clothes for the first time, unaware of their significance; having been so long in India, I thought they were just normal. The coolness the monks had shown towards me before was less cool.

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Next morning after breakfast, I went in search of the meditation-centre, and found it without difficulty, not far away. It was run by a Thai monk who spoke no English at all. Some people there were able to translate for me, by speaking *Hokkien* Chinese to him, which he understood somewhat, having been there some years already. Through them, then, I told him that I'd like to learn to meditate, and that if I could stay there, I could earn my keep, as it were, by teaching English to anyone. Without hesitation, he replied: "Yes, you are welcome to stay here, and there are some Thai students who would be glad of some help with their English." The accommodation for me wouldn't be very comfortable, upstairs in a shed used for building-materials, but I told them it would be fine. Delighted that I'd found a place so easily, I told the monk I would come back very soon.

Returning to Mahindrana, I told the monks I would be going to stay at the Meditation Centre ~ *Malaysian Buddhist Meditation Center*, known by its acronym, *MBMC* ~ but they said, "Oh, don't go yet; we'd like you to stay for the festival on Sunday, after which you may go." I was quite surprised by this about-turn, but thanked them and agreed to stay. Sunday came, and so did the people ~ great crowds of them, as this was an important ceremony to offer robes and other requisites to monks at the end of the annual 3-months Rains Retreat, more of a tradition that has largely lost its meaning than anything. And people believe ~ because that's what they've been taught ~ that offerings made at this time will bring them great merit, and so the monks are loaded with things far in excess of what they really need or can use. Well, understanding nothing of this, and being the only European among all the Asians (mainly Chinese, with some Sri Lankans and a few Indians), I felt rather spare there, and did whatever I was told to do, like a dummy. Then it was time for lunch, with the monks being served first, very respectfully, and with lots of bows and salutations, by the devotees, who had brought food in great amounts. I was standing there bewildered until summoned by Ven. Pematana, and told to sit at his table, which I did, of course, still not knowing the Theravada custom of monks always eating apart from lay-people. Now, why he waived this

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custom for me, I really don't know, but maybe it was because of the white clothes I was again wearing. It must have been conspicuous, however, but no-one said anything, either at the time or afterwards, so I just sat there and ate. Most of the dishes were of meat or fish, but a few were vegetarian, and there were plenty of cakes and fruit, so I was able to eat my fill.

The ceremony over, the people dispersed, leaving the temple quiet again. The next morning, I was packed and ready to leave, when some of the monks presented me with things, both useful ~ like an umbrella, and they had enough of those to stock a shop! ~ and useless, like a peacock-feather fan. I thanked them, and went off to the MBMC. It was only some time later that I learned there was a kind of rivalry between Mahindarama and MBMB, but that, I was to find out later still, was not uncommon, and in fact, is quite the norm.

In MBMC, I learned how to meditate ~ the so-called '*Burmese method of Vipassana*', watching the abdomen rise-and-fall with the breath. The teacher ~ *Phra Khru* (his rank, meaning, 'Venerable Guru') *Dhammabarnchanvud*, was calm and quiet and had a nice demeanor, but didn't give much instruction; he just expected his students to get on with it, and if anyone had any questions that some of the older ones might answer, that generally sufficed, but in other cases, people might approach him through a translator who spoke Thai, as his Hokkien wasn't that good, either. We addressed him as '*Luang Pau*,' which is a Thai honorific meaning something like, '*Reverend Father*.'

It wasn't long before I met Amigo there, and he introduced me to his wife and two teenaged sons; these boys, with plenty of time to themselves during school holidays, showed me around a bit, and it was from them that I learned how to use chopsticks while eating a well-known Penang dish, hot and spicy *laksa*.

In the temple, meanwhile, I spent time reading to a couple of Thai students, and getting them to read to me; in this way, I helped them improve their English a little. Other time, I spent meditating, sitting, walking and standing, mindfully observing

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my bodily sensations and watching my mind. This was not at all easy at first, and often, when I sat down, I'd fall asleep within a few minutes. I persisted, however, and struggled with my thoughts for at least 20 minutes before they would calm down enough to allow me to continue, until I could sit for an hour. My posture also gradually improved; at first, my knees would stick up, as many westerners' knees do, and later, I could sit in the half-lotus position but with the right knee still sticking up, then gradually, over another period of some days, *that* knee would get lower and lower until it was resting comfortably on the floor, and later still, I could manage the full-lotus. Of course, I needed the support of a firm cushion for this, otherwise it was hard to maintain an upright posture for long without tending to slouch; the cushion saves the expenditure of a lot of energy.

I was befriended by a young boy named Teoh Eng Soon, who I soon began to call 'Ashok.' He used to come to the temple almost every day, and became my *confidante*.

I immersed myself in Theravada Buddhism, and the Thai form of it, at that. I read various books, attended talks, and, knowing little, had ample space to be filled with terms, concepts and ideas; I was eager, like many a newcomer, and mistook such for real knowledge, thinking that because I knew the words, I also knew what they represented, a common, *all-too-common*, mistake. I saw how people there intellectualized and split hairs over silly things, clearly thinking they were getting somewhere; they refused to use the word 'reincarnation' because ~ they said ~ it was a Hindu concept, as it implied the 'passing-over' of an immortal soul from one body to another, which Buddhism denies; their *preferred* word was 'rebirth'. But just an iota of insight would have shown them that, according to the Buddhist concept, this is also incorrect, for nothing is 'reborn' ('re' = again, so born-again). How, then, is the word 'rebirth' more appropriate than 'reincarnation'? Life is a process, a movement, like the sea. The rise and fall of the waves is caused by a current of energy passing through the water; there are no waves apart from the water, and there is nothing static or permanent that passes through the waves, from one to another. So, although Buddhists, for convenience, use the

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term 'rebirth,' nothing is actually 'reborn', as nothing in our mind-body remains the same for two consecutive moments even while we are alive; how much moreso when we are dead? Of course, I didn't know this at the time.

I met someone there who spoke to me at some length about the endless suffering of *Samsara*, and in my naivete and beginner's willingness to listen, I took him to be an authority, overlooking or disregarding his arrogance and conviction of being enlightened; he'd read a lot, and had a group of sycophantic followers, known as '*The Subha Group*' ('*Subha*' is Pali for 'Beautiful' or 'Good'), which he'd inherited from his late uncle. I became scared, thinking that I'd had enough suffering in this life already, and didn't want it to go on and on forever, so I went to Luang Pau and asked him to put me on a meditation-course, imagining that I might become enlightened during it; just see how naïve I was! Well, he put me on a 2-weeks' course, of about 17 hours' meditation per day ~ one hour sitting, followed by one hour standing, and one hour walking. Meals were eaten extremely slowly (and in silence, of course); bathing too, was done in very slow-motion. The purpose of it all was to enable me to observe more of the many movements involved in each action, and to watch the mind while doing so, too; it was not a matter of doing anything different or special, but just to observe what is there, all the time. I was allowed one hour for reading per day.

It was hard-going ~ not to get up early, as I've always been an early-riser, but hard to discipline myself to the schedule. I'd start out by chanting for a while, followed by sitting; I made it through the first hour alright, and then began walking, but so slowly that it would take an hour to make one circuit of the shrine-hall measuring maybe 15 meters on each side. That wasn't so bad, but then I began the standing. It is said that the Buddha stood in one spot, unmoving, for a whole week after His enlightenment, gazing in gratitude at the tree under which he had sheltered, but really, I can't comprehend that, because as I went on, just an hour resulted in pain such as I had never known before, and when that hour was up, I had to hold onto a pillar or door-post and slowly lower myself to the floor! The sequence would then be repeated.

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Now, one afternoon, while reading a book by ~ strangely enough, Christmas Humphries, *again* ~ I had *that* experience, and 'disappeared,' for the third time! It lasted about 30 minutes, and so, maybe I'd not been so naïve after all, as it was *certainly* an enlightenment experience, and one which could not be produced or brought about. I did not try to tell anyone about it, because even though people there had been kind enough to me, I didn't feel sufficiently at ease with them to confide about such things, thinking they might not understand or might even deride them. And, because of the language-barrier, to talk with Luang Pau was not an option; therefore, I kept it to myself. Looking back on it now, I did the right thing; they wouldn't have understood; their minds were already fixed.

While in MBMC, I met some other 'outsiders'. First, there was an American named Bobby, who wandered in with her 7-year-old son, Sean. They'd been traveling around the world for several years already, Bobby teaching English where she could, to support them both. They were staying nearby, and came in, attracted to Buddhism and meditation. We became friends and were to meet again later in Bangkok. Then there was Ray Seibel, who was with the RAAF ~ Royal Australian Air Force ~ at its Butterworth base, on the mainland. He lived with his wife, Judith, and their two children, in Penang, and sometimes visited the temple with another friend, Dorothy Brimacombe. They invited me to stay with them in their home once or twice.

Now and then, a friend of Laung Pau's came to visit, a Thai-Chinese monk who stayed in a cave-temple in *Ipoh*, a town 100 miles to the south. I came to know him as Reverend Tong, and he asked me to visit him sometime, saying there was an English monk staying with him. I accepted his offer, curious to meet the Brit monk, and found his cave quite comfortable, the floor having been cemented and electricity installed. A lady from a nearby village came to cook for the three monks there, including *Lodro Thaye*, the Brit, who was a follower of Tibetan Buddhism, specifically, the *Karma Kagyu* (otherwise known as 'The Red-Hat' School because of the red hats they wear during their ceremonies, as distinct from the

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Gelugpas or 'Yellow Hats'). As a child, he'd been stricken with rickets, leaving him with short legs. But he was a friendly-enough fellow and I got on alright with him.

I soon fell into a routine, rising early, and after my morning chanting and meditation, swept out the temple, cleaned the altar, removed the old incense-sticks and offered fresh flowers from the garden. Because of this, Reverend Tong liked me, but not so the other monk there ~ a local Chinese who'd become a monk in his old age. He clearly disliked me (maybe jealous of the abbot's approval of me), and made life hard for me, criticizing and scolding me, and bad-mouthing me to others, some of whom believed he had some psychic powers that he wouldn't hesitate to use against anyone who displeased him. Whether this was so or not, I can't say, but I was quite miserable for a while, and I considered leaving and going elsewhere. I could have become angry and scolded him back, but remembering what the Buddha had said about hate not being overcome by hate, and what I'd learned in primary-school about two wrongs not making a right, I didn't do so. Instead, one morning, as I was putting fresh flowers on the altar, I thought of another way, the way of *judo*, which enables one to overcome another by using *his* strength against him, instead of one's own. So I prepared an extra dish of flowers, took it to his room, and knocked on the door. When he opened it, I offered the flowers to him, without saying anything, and he accepted them, also without a word. He was never angry with me after that, and later, when I left that temple to go elsewhere, he gave me RM50! If I had become angry and scolded him, he would have hated me more. But because I knew there are other ways, I was able to win him ~ not *defeat* him, but *win* him. I felt good, he felt good, and we both benefited.

Because no Dharma-talks were held at that temple, and because I felt hungry for such, often, on Fridays or Saturdays, I would hitch-hike to Penang to attend the Sunday-evening talk at MBMC, and the next day, return to Ipoh.

Then, Lodro-Thaye had arranged for one of his teachers ~ *Urgen Rinpoche*, a highly-respected lama from Kathmandu ~

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to visit and give teachings in Ipoh; he came to stay in the cave, with one of his assistants, *Lama Nishang Sonam*, with whom I became friends. I should say here, for those who do not know, that 'Lama' is an honorific meaning 'teacher,' not 'monk'; there are married lamas, with families, and Urgen Rinpoche was one of them. Well, the Rinpoche was very nice and kind, but I didn't feel drawn to Tibetan Buddhism. I knew, of course, that the rituals were all meaningful, but I preferred something simpler, and still do.

The Rinpoche had brought with him some relics ~ supposed to be of the Buddha ~ tiny, pearl-like objects, for distribution to the faithful. I'd never even heard of such things before, but Lodro-Thaye got his teacher to kindly give me three.

While in Ipoh, I met a wealthy businessman ~ one of Rev. Tong's supporters ~ and went with him to Kuala Lumpur, where he lived. There, he took me to the main Sri Lankan temple or *Vihara*. I greeted the incumbent monk, Ven. *Dhammananda*, and gave him the letter that Mr. Kumarasami had addressed to him, requesting him to let me stay in a corner somewhere so as to learn more about Buddhism. He refused, but gave no reason. The businessman wasn't happy at this, and took me to a Chinese temple by the name of *Ho Beng See*, in *Chow Kit*, where I was welcomed and treated kindly. I spent a few days there and then went back to Ipoh, until I felt ready for the next step: ordination. I returned to Penang, but before I could ask Luang Pau, *he* asked *me*: "Do you want to become a monk?" I had the feeling he could read my mind, and replied, "Yes, I'm ready now."



10

ORDINATION AND ON

“Ethical behavior should be based effectually on sympathy, education and social ties and needs; no religious basis is necessary. Man would indeed be in a poor way if he had to be restrained by fear of punishment and hope of reward after death.”

Albert Einstein: *Religion and Science* ~

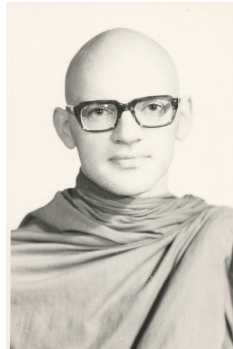
Having decided to become a monk, my ordination was arranged, and I learned the Pali formula I would have to recite during the ceremony. My hair and beard ~ which had become progressively shorter over the previous months, anyway ~ were shaved, and the next day ~ the first Sunday in May ~ I was taken to *Wat Chayamangalaram* ~ the main Thai temple in Penang ~ where the ceremony was held. Ray, Dorothy and other friends came, and I got through it and emerged in saffron robes and with a new identity ~ *Abhinyano*, which was the first part and the last part of my teacher's name: *Abhi-dhamma-pala-nyano*.

We returned to MBMC immediately afterwards; I didn't stay in that awful temple. The reason I say 'awful' is because of its blatant focus on making money; you were unlikely to get any Dharma-instruction there, and the only enlightenment would be a lightening of your pocket! I'd be very surprised if it's changed since then. It is frequented by local Buddhists, as well as being on the 'must' list for foreign tourists. Some years later, I went there to see how things were; around the huge reclining-Buddha-image were numerous other images, each with a donation-box before it bearing inscriptions like: "If you pray to this Buddha, you will be happy"; "If you pray to this Buddha, you will be lucky"; "If you pray to this Buddha, you will be wise"; "If you pray to this Buddha, God will bless you,"

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etc. ~ the very opposite of what the Buddha taught! I counted no less than forty donation-boxes (as well as 'fortune-telling' machines!) around the main image. Now, gullible people (of which there is no shortage), eager for happiness, blessings, luck, and so on, might put money in each box, and the temple-people would rub their hands. But what would *foreign* visitors think? If they went there with open minds, not unsympathetic towards Buddhism, but came away thinking of it as a thing of superstition, greed and exploitation, I would quite understand; if I had not seen any deeper than just the façade, I would have felt that way myself!

Before my ordination, I had just \$135 to my name, but thinking I wouldn't need money any longer, I sent this to my mother. I had the idea that I'd find a sense of fellowship and brotherhood in the monasteries of Thailand, but was soon to be disillusioned.



Newly ordained

Of course, I felt awkward as a monk at first, especially when people offered food and hovered over me while I ate, so solicitous of my welfare that I felt like a monkey in the zoo. I couldn't eat my fill from fear of being considered greedy, and wanted to say, "You are very kind, and I appreciate it, but would you mind leaving me to eat in peace?" I still feel this way.

Soon after ordaining, I organized a blood-donation, and persuaded a number of people from MBMC to accompany me to

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give blood; I continued to give blood on a regular basis from this time for many years ~ no more selling ~ eventually reaching 65 donations before prevented from further giving by diabetes; but I'm jumping the gun again.

My visa about to expire, I got one for Thailand, ready to leave; Luang Pau gave me 500 baht to go with. There was an Indian from Bangkok staying in MBMC at that time, though what he was doing there, I never discovered. Anyway, he wanted to return home, so Luang Pau entrusted me to his care ~ giving him money, too ~ and we set out for the border, but having crossed, he slipped away, taking 200 baht of the money Luang Pau had given me. I was stranded, but someone soon took me to the local *wat* (monastery), where I was welcomed and stayed for a couple of days before going on by train to *Chaiya*. There, the famous teacher, *Buddhadasa*, had his monastery, *Wat Suan Mokh*. Now, Luang Pau had not wanted me to go there, as some people considered *Buddhadasa* too liberal, with somewhat unorthodox views, while Luang Pau was strictly Burmese vipassana in his, but I went anyway, and although I noticed nothing extraordinary about *Buddhadasa* except his friendliness, I had quite a nice time there, joining the other monks on alms-rounds in the early morning, and sitting around in a large circle in the forest with *Buddhadasa* in a prominent place to eat afterwards.

Some other Western monks were staying there at the time, including a German, whose name was *Santithito*, a heavily-built man who was a little hard of hearing. I asked him to tell me, in Thai, how to say "I don't speak Thai" (I didn't know a word of Thai at that time); he told me, "*Pood Thai mai dai.*" I thought I'd be able to deal with any situation that arose whenever anyone spoke to me in Thai; all I'd have to do would be to retreat behind those four words. Alas, when the time came, I'd forgotten the word '*pood*,' which means 'speak,' and said just "*Thai mai dai*," which somehow ~ as Thai is a tonal language, and if you use the wrong tone, even if you get the word right, you may easily say something wrong, and sometimes disastrously so ~ meant, "I'm unable to defecate". I probably got some quizzical looks, as if to say, "Now, why is he telling us that?"

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I'd been assigned a small *kuti* ~ monk's hut ~ in the forest, and was left alone. This is how it is, I thought, so settled down to meditate as I'd been doing in Malaysia. But this was Thailand, with quite a different and unfamiliar environment; I was new as a monk and knew no-one there, as the Western monks had already left; I became quite nervous, so nervous, in fact, that I developed a stutter, which I'd never had before, and felt that if I continued to meditate alone, I would become mad; so I gave up formal meditation until I should feel more stable.

Soon afterwards, I went to Bangkok, to a well-known monastery named *Wat Cholabatthan*. I had a letter of introduction from Luang Pau to one of his friends, a senior monk there, only to find that he was away. I visited the abbot *Ven. Panyananda*, a good friend of Buddhadasa, who told me I could stay there for some days, and that there was a German monk who would help me with my needs. I thanked him ~ he spoke English well, as did Buddhadasa ~ and I was taken to a *kuti* and given the key thereof before being led to the hut of *Dhammaviro*, for such was the German monk's name. He didn't seem surprised to see me and invited me in, saying that he'd been expecting me. "Expecting me?" I said. "How did you know I was coming?"

"Oh," he said, "Good news travels fast" (Santitthito had reached Bangkok before me and told him I was on my way, it seems). Anyway, Dhammiviro was my first real friend in Thailand and remained so for many years, until, after meeting him in Munich in 1995, we lost contact, and I have grave doubts of his safety, as the last I heard of him, he was living on a beach somewhere north of Phuket; I hope he survived the tsunami.

From *Wat Cholabatthan*, I sought shelter in *Wat Pleng*, nearer the city, and was introduced to the deputy-abbot, *Phra Prasert*. But no-one told me of his rank or position, and so I didn't greet him as he was used to being greeted; he wasn't very friendly towards me because of that, and of course, I had to deal with him quite often, as he spoke English well. Nevertheless, I was assigned a *kuti*.

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A number of other foreign monks were there at that time, and so I met Bill ~ a brutal kind of American ~ and his wife, Michelle, both of whom had ordained as monk and *mae-chi* (the nearest Thais have to nuns, although on a much lower level than monks, and were treated abominably, as menials, and they accepted it, too); there was also John, from Melbourne, whose ordained name was *Jagaro, Paulos*, a Hungarian doctor, and *Michael*, a German, who was soon to become a monk, and with whom I formed a close friendship. Then, there was Bobby's young son, Sean; they had arrived in Bangkok before me, and she'd taken him to Wat Pleng with the idea of letting him ordain as a novice for a while (she was probably glad to get him off her hands, too). He was to prove a headache to many people, including myself!

From the time I arrived in Thailand, the first letter I got from home brought the terrible news that George had committed suicide. He had been found hanging from a tree in the hills outside Adelaide, still sitting on his motorbike. Apparently, he'd tried several times to end his life. He didn't leave a note telling why he'd done it, so we never knew, but it seems he was schizophrenic, although he'd not actually been diagnosed as such. For a mother to lose a child that way is enough to break her heart. Mum's hair turned white almost overnight. I was so far away, and there was nothing I could do except meditate for her and him. Poor George!

My first few months in Bangkok were not easy, and for a while I was so poor that I didn't have enough to buy a stamp or soap. But that didn't last, and whenever I received offerings, I made a point of sharing them with some of the boy-monks who had even less than me. I've never really been short from then until now.

I wasn't pleased to see some of the things that went on. Monks who had learned how to chant well ~ even if they didn't understand the meaning of what they were chanting ~ were often invited for house-blessings, funeral-ceremonies and such like, for which they received offerings in the form of money, towels, toiletries, and so on. Instead of sharing them with others who had little or nothing, some monks would now

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and then send someone to a shop to sell the things they had accumulated.

Every morning, like the others, I would go on alms-round, and really enjoyed this. It is not begging, as is commonly assumed, as we do not ask, but just receive whatever people are willing to give; people wait outside with the food they have prepared, for the monks to come along; the monks see them waiting, and approach them demurely. But there are so many monasteries and monks in Bangkok that sometimes it is not easy to get enough to eat. On days of new-moon and full-moon, however ~ days which, according to tradition, are considered special ~ so many people wait to offer food to the monks that they receive too *much*. Now, why this imbalance? Why, on most days, do some monks get barely enough to eat, but on two days of the month, they get a surplus? Because it is considered that offerings made on these days will produce more merit than those offered on other days. It is not so, of course, but that's what people believe, and shows that desire for merit is in their minds. Had it not been like this over the centuries, however, monks would have found it very hard to survive.

Not everyone knows who *Bodhidharma* was, so I will introduce him briefly, before telling something of him that is relevant here. Bodhidharma was an Indian monk who lived in the 6th cent CE and was acknowledged to be the 28th of a line of masters going back to one of the Buddha's chief disciples, *Mahakasyapa*. This line of teachers had preserved a special kind of teaching on meditation. When Bodhidharma went to China to propagate these teachings he became the 1st Patriarch of the *Ch'an* School of Buddhism there (known later as *Zen* in Japan). Not long after arriving in China, his fame reached the ears of the Emperor, who was a good and pious Buddhist, and he invited Bodhidharma to the palace for an audience. When he came, the Emperor received him respectfully, and told him of all he'd done to promote Buddhism in his realm, and asked how much merit he had made thereby. He was very surprised when Bodhidharma bluntly replied: "None whatsoever, your Majesty!"

“Then what is the purpose of the Buddha’s Teachings?”

“Nothing holy, but pure emptiness,” said Bodhidharma, which confused the Emperor even more, and Bodhidharma left without explaining what he meant, and went to sit in cave for nine years.

This story has been told and retold countless times over the centuries, and it has been accepted that the Emperor was suffering from delusion and wrong view; Bodhidharma’s manner is seldom questioned. He is supposed to have been enlightened *before* going to China, but if so, why need to sit in a cave for so long, seeing no-one and saying nothing? And why, if he was so wise ~ even before his enlightenment, if that is what happened in the cave ~ and cared enough about the propagation of Buddhism to go to China in the first place, did he not explain his meaning to the Emperor, who was not only a good man, but had tremendous capacity to lead many others to a better understanding if he had understood better himself? Surely, this was a mistake on Bodhidharma’s part. Why speak so cryptically when a simple explanation might have produced a much better result? (It is said that later, when someone *else* explained Bodhidharma’s meaning to him, the Emperor *did* understand, so why didn’t Bodhidharma explain it himself?) Many followers of Zen ~ especially Western Zen *aficionados* ~ are guilty of this kind of thing, and it is done, in many cases, to display their grasp of the subtleties of things they think are beyond ‘lesser mortals’; it is often just a game, a silly show, and nothing to do with Zen.

Bodhidharma might have explained that actions done with the aim of getting returns will produce corresponding results on the material level, but not *merit*, which has the function of *decreasing* the defilements of Greed, Hatred and Delusion; in fact, greed is only *increased* thereby. Merit is the result of actions done through understanding, knowing they are the right things to do. And the freer actions are from the desire for results, the greater will be the merit; conversely, the greater the desire for results, the less merit there will be therefrom. How we do things is just as important as what we do.

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What we received in our alms-bowls had to serve for two meals, breakfast and lunch, after which we would not eat again until the next morning. This was/is one of the monks' rules, but more importance is placed upon it than should be. It is a training-rule, to help discipline oneself so that one can stand hunger instead of over-indulging. It is not a moral precept, and does not make one any better than those who don't follow it. Moreover, the Buddha promulgated this some years after he began His ministry, which clearly indicates it was only a minor rule. And following it without understanding will bring one no nearer to enlightenment, and in fact, will only bind one more firmly. Whatever we do should be done with understanding, not from fear of punishment or desire for reward, and we should beware of becoming proud of it.

It has been a custom since ancient times for monks to spend three months of each year in so-called retreat; it is known as *The Rains Retreat* because it was held during the monsoon, when it was hard to wander around, as monks normally did; thus, it would be a time for monks to rest, and focus on meditation and study. And, knowing where the monks would be at that time, it was also an opportunity for people to get more Dharma-instruction. This custom has largely lost its meaning now, as most monks stay in one place year-round anyway, and no longer wander from place-to-place as they did originally. It is still observed by Theravada monks, but not always by others.

Michael was ordained before the start of the Rains' Retreat, and given the name, *Madhavo*; and then, together with Paulos, Bill and Michelle, went to stay in a beach-side monastery near the Cambodian border. Young Sean was also ordained as a novice, and I was asked to take charge of him, but this didn't work out, and he was sent to join the others at *Ranong*. I was then the only Westerner in Wat Pleng for a while, but didn't really mind that; as it was more incentive to learn Thai. Now, Paulos had left some stuff with me that included a typewriter. I'd never touched a typewriter before, and decided I'd like to try, so wrote and asked if I might use it, and when his reply came authorizing me to do so, something came into my life that would ultimately change it quite a lot, and although I

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never got beyond pecking at the keys with just two fingers, I became quite fast, and it opened doors for me. I had always been a letter-writer, and my mother used to say that she was always thankful that I wrote home regularly. Because I used to write very finely by hand, I could get 150 lines on an aérogram, and Pete once replied to me and said, "Thanks for the book!"

During the Rains, for days on end there were torrential down-pours, so that the grounds of the monastery became a virtual pond, and the frogs therein set up an infernal chorus; the sun couldn't break through, and wet clothes became mildewed, unable to dry, but this is how it normally is every year, and if the rains fail, you get drought; it may not be very comfortable, but consider the alternative.

Halfway through the Rains, an Australian named *Alan Driver* arrived to stay; he spoke Thai well, having been teaching English in Bangkok for some years, and was also soon to ordain. So I had some English-speaking company. And there was a Brazilian monk who kept to himself, meditating alone; I sometimes shared my food and other things with him, as he had often had less than me. Also, there was a Cambodian monk who I sometimes used to talk with, but he was reclusive, and one day, was found hanging in his kuti; he'd been so concerned with getting results from his unsupervised meditation, and something had snapped.

It wasn't long before Sean made himself such a nuisance that Bill took it upon himself to disrobe him. He was then brought back to Bangkok to stay with his mother; they eventually left Thailand and returned to Penang, where enterprising Bobby got a job on a yacht in some capacity, and that took them to Israel. We kept in touch over the years, and I will tell more of her later.

One time, down with tooth-ache, I went along to a government hospital which had a dental-section. Now, I'd always dreaded going to dentists, and asked for injections whenever I needed a filling. But I was a monk now, and decided I should try to bear whatever pain there was, so went for it without anaesthetic. The young student-dentist they turned me over to

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drilled such a large hole in the offending molar that I was convinced he'd been a road-worker earlier, using a jack-hammer! I could get my tongue into it. And while he was drilling, I could smell the tooth burning away; but I tried to observe it all in a detached manner, without fear, and although it was still painful, of course, it wasn't half as bad as I'd remembered previous fillings to have been. It was a good lesson in mind over matter! It's amazing how much pain we can stand if we have to.

Alan was ordained during the rains, and given the name *Dhammadharo*. At this time, I became friends with a Thai monk named *Onsai*, who taught me several handicrafts, in which he was quite talented, such as how to crochet alms-bowl covers and repair robes neatly. After the Rains, I accompanied him to a monastery at *Saraburi*, some 100 miles north of Bangkok, where he was well-known and regarded. I greatly enjoyed being there, going for alms in the nearby town first thing in the morning, and spending the rest of the day in communal activities. During the time I was there, he took me to another *wat* not far away, situated beside some very deep caves, in which I came the closest I've ever been to complete silence; there was not even the sound of dripping water; it was an experience that stuck in my mind.

In early '73, I returned to Wat Pleng to find Madhavo there, and we decided to make a trip to Northern Thailand like *real* monks, barefoot and without money. Before catching a bus out to the suburbs (monks could ride free on city buses; the back seat was reserved for them, and anyone sitting there when a monk got on had to vacate it for him), we went to attend the disrobing-ceremony of a Thai monk-friend of ours, and for participating in this, we were offered a small sum of money, which we didn't really want, but used it to get a bus to the monastery at Saraburi; Onsai was no longer there. The next day, after alms-round, I told Madhavo we needed water-bottles for our journey, so asked him to wait while I went into the town to visit a shop-keeper I knew. Sure enough, he had some suitable plastic bottles, and taking them from a top shelf and dusting them off, presented them to me. Back at the *wat*, I showed Madhavo my acquisitions, but they'd obviously been

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on the shelf so long that they were perished, and shattered in my hands!

We set off down the road, but the little money we had left soon became a source of contention between us; Madhavo wanted to buy soft-drinks with it, and I still wanted to buy water-bottles. We eventually compromised by dropping the money at the side of the road for someone to find. That night, we stayed in a monastery in *Lopburi*, and the next day, were given things like toothpaste and toilet-rolls for our journey ~ things that most monasteries had plenty of. Well, we eventually got as far as the *Golden Triangle*, and something I remember from our brief sojourn in a monastery there was a trick that Madhavo showed some monks: taking six matches, he asked them to make five squares with them, which they proceeded to do easily by making first one square with four matches, then laying the other two matches crosswise inside this square to form four smaller squares. Then, taking just 4 matches, he asked them to make two squares, but, no matter how they tried, they couldn't do it, until he showed them how simple it was. First, he made one square, and then, using the same matches, made another, and could have gone on forever with the same matches ~ a matter of recycling, or using the dimension of Time, and was a good case of how to look at things in different ways. Since then, I have used this to explain about dimensions ~ how there are more dimensions than we realize, and beyond the dimension of Time, too. In order to demonstrate this, we must also use mental dimensions ~ the dimension of intelligence, for example, and, if we really care about sharing something with others that might open their minds a little, the dimensions of Love and Compassion, which can and should be considered dimensions or aspects of the mind.

Resuming our wanderings, we took a track from *Chiang Rai* through the mountains and jungle to *Chiang Mai*, and hadn't gone far when I felt the urge to 'go'. Taking a toilet-roll, therefore, I told Madhavo to wait and stop anything that might come along while I was doing my thing.

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As I was happily relieving myself, I heard a vehicle coming up the road, and thought Madhavo would try to stop it, but unknown to me, he'd also decided to do what I was doing, on the *other* side of the track, and as the pick-up truck got nearer, we came out of the bushes holding toilet-rolls! It must have been a very strange sight ~ two Western monks emerging from the bushes on a jungle road with toilet-rolls in their hands? The pick-up drove straight past us in a cloud of dust; maybe the driver ~ and most Thais are quite superstitious (although they are not alone in this, of course) ~ thought we were ghosts or demons! (Many Chinese, until now, refer to Westerners as '*Kwai Loh*,' meaning 'Foreign Devils,' obviously not realizing how offensive it is. Well, the British who forced opium on the Chinese in the 19th century and fought the *Opium Wars* for the right to do so, and thereby grabbed Hong Kong, certainly merited that epithet, but that's a long time ago, and not all Westerners deserve to be called that now. Meanwhile, mainland China continues its brutal policy of repression in Tibet; should *they* not be called 'devils' for this?)

We eventually got to Chiang Mai and went to stay with our friend, Santitthito, in the monastery ~ *Wat Umong* ~ that had been his base for a number of years, and knowing how to press his buttons, I got him going one evening by quietly singing some old Bob Dylan songs such as "*Desolation Row*" and "*Like a Rolling Stone*" (now, monks are not supposed to sing, so I was breaking one of the rules in doing this), and he, who had also been a hippie (Madhavo hadn't), said, "Wow, groovy!" I can see him now; it was so funny!

We got our plastic bottles in Chiang Mai, and more money also found us as we headed back to Bangkok. Madhavo then went off with another friend for a while, and I met a Singaporean monk named Freddy Khong (*Tissadhammo*), and joined him at his monastery for the Thai New Year festival of *Songkrah*n, when monks submit to having water poured over them by lay-people. With the monks there, we sat on chairs, and people came behind us pouring water of varying temperatures ~ warm, cold, some with flowers and perfume, and some with chunks of ice in it! ~ over us, until we were soaked, no doubt getting their own back on us for the many times they

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had been liberally sprinkled with 'holy water' during other festivals and ceremonies.

Now, in spite of these adventures and unusual things, I wasn't at ease with Thai Buddhism; it had become a thing of tradition centuries ago and not really something to live by. There are, of course, Thais who live by the spirit of the Buddha's Teachings (just as there are Christians, Hindus and others who live by their faiths), but they are in a minority. To understand the heart of religion requires time and effort, and few people, are prepared for that; it is easier to simply believe, and so the real meaning of religion is wasted on those who are unable or unwilling to make it their own. Merely calling oneself 'Buddhist,' 'Christian,' 'Hindu,' Muslim,' isn't enough; a name is not a thing and doesn't change much; in fact, a name is a lie. You can call a stone 'bread' if you like ~ it's not against the law ~ and even put butter on it, but it doesn't become edible thereby. Having seen something of Dharma before becoming a Buddhist, let alone becoming a monk, I felt as if I was in a strait-jacket in Thailand, with all the dry rules and unrealistic expectations of monks, so I decided to return to Malaysia, thinking, perhaps, to get some real teachings from Luang Pau there, such as I hadn't got in Thailand. Consequently, this is what I did, hitch-hiking all the way down the peninsula to Penang, stopping off near *Phang-nga* on the way to visit Dhammaviro, who had recently moved from Wat Cholabatthan to take up residence in a mountain-canyon with two other German monks.

Reaching Penang, I went to stay in MBMC again, but although I was able to communicate somewhat with Luang Pau in the Thai I'd picked up over the previous year, I got no more teaching from him than I did when I was unable to talk directly with him; and not only this, but my disappointment in him stems from this time. Now, monks are supposed to avoid physical contact with females ~ including even their own mothers and sisters ~ at any cost; at least, this is how the Thais interpret this particular rule, which has it that a monk should not engage in physical contact with a member of the opposite sex with lustful intent, and it is the last three words that are the key. Now, Luang Pau was so strict about it that

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he wouldn't even have female animals in the temple! One day, to test him ~ naughty me! ~ I asked what he would do if he saw a woman drowning and could reach in and save her; would he do that? "*Mai dai! Mai dai!*" ("Cannot. Cannot!").

"Then what would you do?" I persisted.

"I'd look for a stick or some rope and hand that to her and pull her out," he replied. It was only a hypothetical question I'd asked, to be sure, and what he would have done if he were actually faced with such a situation, I don't know, but to answer without hesitation as he had done, I think he really might have followed his convictions, unable to see that by the time he'd found his stick or rope, the woman would have drowned, not waiting around in the water for him to save her by such means!

I also soon came to see that Luang Pau was quite sectarian. If invited to any gathering to which non-Theravadin monks had also been invited, he refused to go, saying, "Mahayana is not the teachings of the Buddha" ~ a typical Theravadin attitude! I wasn't impressed by this ~ at least, not favorably ~ and wondered where the vaunted quality of tolerance was. Of course, I was soon to see that many Buddhists regard other sects of Buddhism with more disdain than they regard other religions, no different, in fact, than people of other religions, Catholics and Protestants, Sunnis and Shiites, and so on. Was it my idealism that made me expect Buddhists to be any way different?

Unable to get better teachings in MBMC, I went to spend some more time in the Ipoh cave-temple, but Lodro-Thye, the English monk, had returned to Nepal. I did my own thing there, and retreated in a side-cave for some time to meditate alone. Then, when some devotees of the abbot came and said they were going to Singapore and invited me to go with them, I availed myself of the ride down with them, never having been there before.

Upon arrival, these kind people took me to a Thai temple, where I was allowed to stay. It was there, one evening, that an Englishman and his wife, with their adult children ~ two

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boys and a girl ~ came to visit. While talking with the boys, I asked what they were doing in Singapore, and they said they worked in their father's store. "What kind of store?" "Hardware". I still didn't think anything, until I spoke with the girl, who told me she'd been adopted by this couple, and was Anglo-Chinese! At this, warning-bells started to ring in my mind, as the year before, while in Wat Cholatthan, Dhammaviro had introduced me to a Thai-monk astrologer ~ although monks were expressly forbidden by the Buddha to engage in such 'unworthy' practices ~ who predicted that in '73, I would return to Malaysia and Singapore, where I'd disrobe and teach English, meet an Anglo-Chinese girl whose father had either a bookshop or hardware-store, and get married. He also said I would marry twice by the age of forty.

Now, in '72, I had no idea of returning to Malaysia, and had not been to Singapore before in any case, so put this out of mind and didn't think of it again until many of the things he'd foretold came together in combination. I left there the next day and went to stay in a Sri Lankan temple, and never saw those people again. Nor did I get married by the age of 40, either once or twice, or until now as I write this; I can't say about the future!

Sri Lankaramaya was a large and nice place that had been built mainly with donations from Chinese, but very few went there, and the Singhalese did little to attract or make them feel welcome; their donations were enough. There, I met Venerable Narada, a well-known missionary monk who had written many books. He had just returned from South Vietnam, where he used to spend a month each year. He asked me to proof-read his book, "*The Buddha and His Teachings*". I was honored to do it.

Back in Malaysia, I went to stay in a Buddhist Society in a small town named Taiping. A Sri Lankan monk was staying there at the time. He specialized in chanting and blessings, such as most Chinese Buddhists love, but never gave any teachings; in fact, I'm sorry to say it, but few monks, of any sect or school, do; consequently, many Buddhists are superstitious and completely ignorant of what the Buddha taught;

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it's such a shame, to be so near, but at the same time, so far away.

I spent a year in that place, doing what I thought I should do, but with little success. A small group of people began to support me, although I soon regretted it. They followed someone in Penang, who I've mentioned before, an arrogant man who felt he was enlightened; they latched onto me with the idea of 'making merit', as that's what their guru emphasized. While I was grateful for their kindness, I also felt uncomfortable to have them on my back, as it were, and be treated as their 'pet monk'.

I used to visit someone who was seriously ill in that small-town hospital, and my visits often coincided with those of the patient's younger brother, who was about thirteen at that time. One day, a prisoner from the local jail was brought into the ward and handcuffed to a bed. He was avoided by other patients and visitors and so spent most of the time alone. I went over to speak with him but the language-barrier didn't allow much communication.

The younger brother of my patient must have been thinking about this. After a few days, without any prompting from me, he went over to the prisoner, removed the chain with his Buddha-pendant from around his neck, and unspokenly offered it to him.

This action, performed without any idea of 'merit', touched the prisoner and brought tears to his eyes. Later on, after he'd served his sentence and been released, he went to visit his young benefactor and kept in touch with his family for quite a while; he had seen that someone ~ a complete stranger ~ cared about him, a criminal.

To give with love, with no other motive, is a real act of merit, regardless of who one gives to. But if our giving is calculative ~ that is, looking at who one is giving and considering if he is worthy of a gift or not, or wondering how productive of merit giving to someone might be ~ can there be merit therefrom? This is something to ponder on. Merit, like enlightenment, comes from inside, not from outside.

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I restricted myself to Taiping when I should have gone to other places to do what I could; granted, I was only just starting out on my missionary work, and my capacity was very limited, but I *did* care, and still do.

As a Westerner, maybe I'm naturally skeptical and inclined to dismiss things like 'holy water' as 'just Asian superstition' (I still think Buddhism has gathered its fair share of superstition over the ages). But while in this Buddhist Society, trying to keep an open mind about things I didn't understand, I came to see that there really is something behind the popular belief in 'holy water'; this is how it came about: One day, a young man named *Boon Chai* came and told me that his friends' baby was crying almost non-stop, day and night, and its parents didn't know what to do, since the doctors they'd consulted had been unable to help them. Boon Chai ~ of a scientific bent, and not the type to incline towards superstitious belief ~ asked me to give him some 'holy water' for the baby, so, obligingly, I put some water in a plastic bag, concentrated on it, and gave it to him. The next day, he came again, and told me that the baby had stopped crying. Now, for those who claim that 'it's all in the mind,' I would like to point out that, in this case, I had not even seen the baby, and didn't know its parents, and even if I had, what could the baby have understood about what I was doing to the water? From this, I came to see that by concentrating and thinking strongly over water, while holding it, one's energy ~ or *chi* ~ passes into it; and this was confirmed by something I later read on the subject, about people who are so sensitive that they can taste the difference between water that has been 'magnetized' or 'energized,' and water that has not, or who can hold an object that someone has used or worn, without knowing the owner, and by concentrating over it and tuning into the 'vibrations' thereof, are able to tell many things about the owner; it is known as '*psycho*

metry.' Perhaps this is what lies behind the 'magic wands' that feature so prominently in some of the old fairy tales: rods or staffs that have been used for so long by high-powered individuals that they have become charged with their energy, like batteries; I think this is quite possible.

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I mentioned earlier that I'd been born and grew up in a haunted house. Well, this Buddhist Society was also haunted, but. I didn't know this when I first went there; at that stage of my life, I was not worried about having to stay all alone in the colonial-era mansion-turned-temple, which was locked up, from the outside, when people went home at night. There were all kinds of noises, of course, like the creaking of timbers contracting from the drop in temperature, birds, bats, mice and other things that could not be identified. One night, however, there was a knock on my door, and someone called my name, twice. Now, I knew there was no-one else in the building, but got up and opened the door anyway. No-one/nothing there. Maybe it could be said I had been dreaming or imagining things, but the same thing happened on another occasion when two Sri Lankan monks were staying there. One was awoken by a knock on his door and someone calling his name. "Yes?" he said. No answer. He got up and opened the door, but there was no-one there, so he crossed the hallway and knocked on his friend's door.

"Yes?" his friend said, "What do you want?"

"What do *I* want?" said the first, "What do *you* want? Why did you knock on my door and call me?"

"I didn't", said the second. The mystery remained, and some people said it was the ghost of an old woman who had died there many years before, and who seemed to be 'stuck' in the place. I actually know the grand-daughter of this old woman, and she confirmed that she had been very stingy.

Yes, some people are so attached to things ~ family, house, possessions ~ that after death, their spirit, ghost, consciousness ~ call it what you will ~ gets stuck and unable to go on. A similar thing seems to occur in cases of people who die ~ or are killed ~ suddenly and unexpectedly: they don't realize they are dead but think they are still alive. There are numerous cases of people being resuscitated and brought back to life after clinical death, indicating that the spirit or consciousness of the 'deceased' can see and hear things on *this* side, but can't be seen or heard except by clairvoyants. It must be a miserable and frustrating condition. Tibetans recognize this.

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When someone dies, they carry the body to the cremation-ground, and say things like: "Don't come back! We don't want you anymore! You must go on with your journey!" This isn't from lack of affection for the deceased, but, on the contrary, because they love him/her, and are concerned about his continued welfare, not wanting him to get stuck here. They feel that to show grief or affection towards the deceased would encourage the spirit to remain near, and get stuck in limbo ~ not here and not there, as it were.

Christian artists vividly depicted ghosts and demons as ferocious enemies of Man. *The Temptation of St. Anthony* ~ a desert-hermit of the 4th century ~ was a favorite theme of Renaissance artists, who painted him surrounded by and pinned beneath nightmarish figures. Satan, the Devil, was shown as a malicious, goat-like personage, with horns, cloven-hoofs and a long, pointed tail; people spoke about being 'tempted by the Devil'; but surely, a figure like that would terrify instead of tempt or persuade! People are tempted, persuaded and seduced by the pleasant and alluring, not by the terrifying, which is why it is so hard to resist! We want pleasure and beauty, not pain or ugliness, and our desires lead us astray.

Buddhist art has portrayed *Sakyamuni* beneath the Bodhi-Tree surrounded by the demon-army of *Mara, the Evil One*, but this is just iconography, and many Buddhists see Mara as the personification of evil instead of an actual being. The appearance of these phantasms is looked upon as the last-ditch stand of Sakyamuni's ego before his attainment of Buddhahood. Jesus's temptation in the wilderness could be viewed in a similar way.

According to my several experiences with ghosts (there were others besides those I told of earlier), I feel that they come not with the intention to harm us, but in search of help; theirs is a fearful condition, and there is no need for us to fear them. If we understand this, as our fear decreases, our capacity to help them increases. Now, in what way might we be of assistance to such 'hung-up' spirits? Obviously, food, money and clothes are of no use to them, but compassion and positive thinking might be, just like a caring parent might comfort and

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reassure a young child who has just awoken from a bad dream; it means a great deal to the child to have someone near who cares.



11

BACK TO NEPAL

Have we not come a long way? So many superstitions and dogmas have been exposed and debunked, setting us proportionately free. We might have gone on believing that the Universe and everything in it was created in 6 days just over 4,000 years ago, and that the planet upon which we live was the center of that Universe. We might still be living under the illusion that our Earth was flat, and that if we sailed too far over the ocean, we would fall off the edge. We might now still believe that disease is caused by demons, and any number of other preposterous things. The process of discovery goes on, and is exciting. We cannot afford to make up our minds and arrive at final conclusions. Better to acknowledge our ignorance and say, "I don't know".

Unable to extend my visa anymore, I returned to Thailand, but not for long, and in February of '74, flew to Kathmandu, expecting to stay with Lodro-Thye in his Tibetan monastery, but he didn't welcome me, making some excuse about them having to cook their own food. This was really better for me, as they were not vegetarians anyway, and I had reverted to my vegetarianism quite a long time before. So I went to stay in *Anandakuti Vihara*, a Theravada monastery behind Swayambhu, where the abbot ~ *Ven. Amritananda*, a scholar of some distinction ~ welcomed and treated me kindly enough. They were vegetarian here, and I stayed several weeks ~ it was so cold at first that I had to go to bed around 6 pm to keep warm! ~ until I heard of an upcoming meditation-course especially for Westerners at a Tibetan monastery on a

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hill outside *Bodnath*, at *Kopan*, so I went to enroll and paid the fee. Starting-day saw about 150 people assembled in a big marquee erected for the purpose; they were quartered in rooms of various sizes around the place; I was given a small one to myself; toilet-facilities were quite primitive, as the monastery hadn't long been founded, and bathing-facilities were either non-existent or it was too cold to use them anyway. This was the second meditation-course to be held there.

The course was conducted by a young lama named *Zopa*, under the guidance of his teacher, *Lama Yeshe*, who, even so, was lower on the hierarchical-scale than his pupil; *Zopa* was a recognized '*Rinpoche*', or '*Precious One*', a nomination found only in Tibetan Buddhism; I've never understood this, and have often wondered why, when all Buddhists, of any sect or school, accept the concept of many lives; it is obviously part of Tibetan culture, like so many things.

We'd been given a manual to help us to follow the course easier, as most of the participants were new to Buddhism and many had never practiced meditation before, so the first few days were somewhat hard-going and there was a build-up of tension until it became quite intense; some people quit and left after two or three days, and continued to do so throughout the month-long course; I myself left before the end, having had enough.

On the fourth day, the sky became overcast, and grew darker as time passed; a storm was obviously coming. In mid-afternoon, we were all sitting quietly, the lama on his throne, when suddenly, I began to shake, and wondered, "What's happening?" I thought it was something to do with my meditation, as strange things can and do happen during it, but not necessarily so. Then someone called out, "*Earthquake!*", and it was, the first I'd ever felt! People came out shouting in the valley below, but it wasn't a strong tremor, and soon ceased. We continued to sit there and then it began to rain quite heavily, and when we came out later, it was dark, the rain had stopped, and the sky was very clear, with a full-moon floating in it; and, more startling, the tension that had been building among us had dissipated and gone.

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I don't recall anything of great value from the teaching during this course, but do remember Lama Zopa saying something rather silly. He told of a fly that flew from pile-to-pile of dung and refuse around the Great Stupa at Bodnath, as a result of which, it became enlightened! Now, it might be alright to tell Tibetans this simplistic stuff, but quite inappropriate for Westerners, especially those who know nothing about Buddhism and who are unable to recognize the distinction between myth and reality; they might take the words of the teacher literally ~ many people *do* ~ and get turned off ~ again, many people do ~ thinking Buddhism no better or different than their background religions.

Of the two, I found Lama Yeshe the most attractive; he was so warm, friendly and ebullient ~ his face always ready to burst into a wide smile, revealing his gapped-teeth ~ that everyone loved him; he was so full of life! Lama Zopa, on the other hand, was still young and had not the same degree of confidence. Both had picked up the slang and idioms of the hippies they'd been with for several years by then, and often came out with expressions like, "Groovy", "Far out", and "Too much".

Returning to Kathmandu, I went to stay in another Theravada monastery nearer the town ~ *Gana Maha Bihar* ~ where there were several elderly Nepalese monks, one of whom, *Ven. Sumangala*, spoke English well, having studied in Burma, and because he'd spent some years in Japan, spoke Japanese, too. During my time there came down with amoebic-dysentery, which wasn't much fun, and I lost 35 pounds (16 kgs) before I got over it; I'd been only 150 pounds to begin with, and so was down to 115 pounds, which I can hardly imagine now!

Visiting Lama Sonam at Swayambhu, I asked him if he could get me some more relics (those his teacher had given me two years before had come from Swayambhu). He asked me to come back in a while, and when I did, he gave me a folded paper, which contained over 600 of the same tiny, pearl-like objects I'd had before, but which I'd given away. I will have more to say of them later, but let me just mention now that I

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gave three of them to Sumangala, who acted with surprise: "How can this be?" He said, "I've lived here all my life and have never even seen these things; while you have been here just three months and can have so many!" I was unable to answer.

After the Wesak celebration in May, Sumangala invited me to go to Pokhara. We went by bus, on the newly-built Chinese road, going to stay in a temple run by a kindly and elderly nun. Pokhara was a small and quiet town then; only later did it become a tourist destination, with hundreds of hotels near the lake there.

A Japanese monk named *Fuji-Guru-ji* was building one of his 'Peace Stupas' overlooking the lake (he'd built a number of such stupas in various countries, but died before he could achieve his aim of building 108 of them) ~ and Sumangala knew some of the monks there (Fuji was not there at the time), so took me by boat across the lake, then up the steep hills up to the temple. He had my food served to me separately, while he, not being vegetarian, ate with the other monks. In the morning, I took my leave of him, and descended to the road on the other side of the hills, and walked for the rest of the day towards *Tansen*. I should mention, before going any further, that the Shanti Stupa was apparently being built without proper authorization from Kathmandu, and not long after, the government ordered it destroyed, which it subsequently was. Several years later, the appropriate permission having been sought and granted, it was rebuilt, and now stands resplendent, like a beacon visible from afar; in fact, it is the first monument that comes into sight as people arrive from Kathmandu by road.

I obtained food along the way, but ate only in the morning, before noon, still following that rule, and when night overtook me, I lay on one of the flat-topped concrete barriers beside the road, and slept there beneath the starry sky. The next morning, I hitched a ride to Tansen, still some hours away, clinging to its hills, and sought out the temple there, where I was given shelter for the next night, after which I set off down to *Bhairava*, the town nearest to *Lumbini*. There was no

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paved road to Lumbini in those days, but just a dusty track, and no buses by the time I got there, so I had to walk most of the 10 miles. And what dust! I had never seen dust like it ~ so deep and fine that each footstep produced a large puff so that very soon I was covered in it! Halfway there, night fell, but I continued, and after some time, a tractor came from behind and gave me a ride, but it churned the dust up into a cloud, further covering me in it. I was so relieved to be dropped at Lumbini and shake off some of the stuff as I made my way to the Nepalese temple (one of two temples there in those days, the other was Tibetan). The resident monk welcomed me, and I bathed before settling down for the night.

Now, although UNESCO had allocated funds for developing Lumbini, it seems that these had been sitting in Kathmandu with the mice nibbling at them until finally, nothing was left, and it was many years before Lumbini saw any development. It was a dry, dusty place, with little to see apart from the Ashokan Pillar marking the place reputed to be the birth-place of Prince Siddhartha, a shrine with an image of his mother giving birth to him, a pool where tradition has it she bathed after the event, several bodhi-trees, a ruined, over-grown stupa, and a number of small monuments here and there. The people of that area are either Hindus or Muslims; there were no Buddhists at all; the winds of change had blown them away long centuries before.

Crossing the border nearby, I went to *Gorakhpur*, and from there to *Kusinara*, the place where the Buddha ended his days at the age of 80. As usual, I had to find a place to stay first, and went to the Burmese monastery (there were more monasteries here than in Lumbini, with several under construction). I greeted a monk there and asked how he was, and was rather surprised at his reply: "Fine, thanks; I've got small-pox"! I said I hoped he would soon recover, and quickly went elsewhere, ending up in a Tibetan monastery, where I stayed long enough to slowly visit the main shrines ~ a new building standing on the site of the Buddha's demise, holding a large image of Him in the passing-away posture, and the ruined brick stupa on the cremation-site ~ and after meditating a while in each place, continued on my way to *Sarnath*, near

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Benares, the site of the Deer Park where the Buddha is supposed to have given His First Sermon. His audience were the Five Ascetics who had attended him earlier until he began to eat again so as to regain his strength, and had deserted him, thinking he had abandoned his search and returned to a life of sense-pleasures (I will tell more of this later on in my narrative). There, I obtained shelter in a Thai monastery for the few days I stayed in Sarnath, which became and remained my favorite of the four main Buddhist holy places; it had a sense of tranquility about it that the others seemed to lack.

My next destination was *Budh-Gaya*, and so, skirting Benares (its real name is Varanasi, 'Benares' being the Raj-era name for this holiest-of-holy Hindu cities), and crossing the Ganges bridge by foot again, I hitch-hiked along the *Grand Trunk Road* ~ the road which *Rudyard Kipling* described in his classic tale, "*Kim*," as 'a river of life'. Built by the Muslim rulers centuries ago, but is really much older than that, it runs from the Khyber Pass on the North-West Frontier, to Dacca in what is now Bangladesh, and for long stretches of its length is still shaded by banyan and other great trees, so that in some parts it seems like a green tunnel. Kipling would not recognize his 'river of life' now, as it is congested by crowded buses and lumbering, over-loaded trucks, many of which come to grief along its length; you often see them capsized at the roadside, their loads strewn about, or, worse still, mangled and crushed from head-on collisions with others of their kind as they failed to overtake something else; the drivers of these, and of buses, too, play games of brinkmanship, to see who will give way first and pull off onto the shoulder, and who will go hurtling past, victorious. Cyclists, pedestrians, bullock-carts, camel-trains and others had better heed their relentlessly-blaring horns and move aside as soon as possible if they don't want to be knocked into oblivion; drivers here are merciless, considering the roads their preserve, on which to do as they like.

No matter what kind of vehicle you're in or on, you cannot travel very fast in India because of the poor condition of the narrow roads and the slow speed of many road-users; you must resign yourself to this.

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It was night, therefore, when I was dropped at the turn-off to Budh-Gaya. Walking the rest of the way, the sound of amplified music reached me, and I wondered what was happening in this, the most holy of Buddhist places; it was a wedding-procession, with elephants, horses and people gaily dressed. It passed, and I sought shelter in a Japanese temple, where I stayed overnight before moving to a resplendent Thai temple built for *Buddha-Jayanti*, the 2,500th anniversary of the Buddha's demise in 1956. I was given a room, but was disappointed to find that, even here, the monks continued to eat meat. At that time, there were still no butcher-shops, so in order to get meat, the monks had to go to the neighboring town of Gaya, about 10 miles away, but when Hindu taxi-drivers discovered why they were going, they refused to take them (I was told), even though they lost fares thereby. The monks stopped going, and got someone to go for them, still getting what they wanted, and were unwilling to do without. Many Hindus are vegetarians, and even those who aren't know about it, and have little respect for monks who eat meat; their own monks, of the various schools of Hinduism, and the sadhus, are all vegetarians. I have heard of, and seen myself, Tibetan monks in *Dharamsala* buying meat in butcher-shops, and Indians ~ unless they are Muslims or Christians ~ really look down on them, wondering why they can't give up this habit. I have also wondered, and never understood, why monks can go on eating meat and still talk about compassion for all beings; not that I'm the most-compassionate person in the world, but I see a discrepancy here, and feel that we should make a start, and that becoming vegetarian is the most-obvious way to do it.

Eating in the Thai temple, therefore, was a bit difficult, and sometimes I would make an excuse to eat out; when I did eat there, I ate only of those without meat or fish, which were very few, but with rice, it was enough to satisfy my hunger, and I didn't stay there long, anyway.

Of course, it was a thrilling experience to visit the Mahabodhi Temple, especially at this time, the height of the hot season, when there were few pilgrims, tourists, beggars, or vendors of trinkets. It was much more quiet and peaceful than at other

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times, and I was able to enjoy the tranquility and meditate undisturbed, either sitting in the shade of one of the several large bodhi-trees or pacing slowly and mindfully around the main shrine. It stands on the spot where Siddhartha ~ who, by then, had become known as '*Sakyamuni*' ('Sage of the Sakyas,' his clan or tribe) attained Enlightenment and became a Buddha, which is a title meaning 'One Who Is Awake.

Having stayed in Budh-Gaya long enough ~ traditionally, pilgrims stay a minimum of three days in each place ~ I caught a train in *Gaya* to Calcutta, where, crossing the *Hoogli* River by the *Howrah* Bridge, I got a room in the *Mahabodhi* Society. I didn't see much of Calcutta, and therefore got the erroneous impression that it was 'the end of the world,' an impression which would remain with me until a visit in '98. I spent my time browsing through bookstores and stalls on the street, buying books to take back to Bangkok with me, having resolved to deepen my studies. One of the books I got there was a copy of the *Tao Te Ching*, which ~ along with some books by Krishnamurti, who I'd only recently heard of ~ was soon to be instrumental in liberating me from the narrowness of Theravada Buddhism.

At the meditation-course in Kopan, I'd met a Dutch guy who told me he'd spent some time in Calcutta, and investigated things that went on there ~ *shocking* things. It seems that certain people ~ perhaps I should say, *ghouls* ~ prowl the streets in search of poor people who obviously don't have long to live, and approach them with offers to buy their bodies when they die. A deal reached, a down-payment is given, and the remainder paid to the family after the recipient's death. The body is then taken to a 'factory,' where the flesh is stripped away and the bones boiled to clean them, ready for export. The stench from such places is said to be overpowering! India is the main source of human skeletons for use by medical-students. I didn't come across such places myself during my several times in Calcutta, but did find this report confirmed in a book called "*City of Joy*," by Dominique Lapierre.

I returned to Bangkok in June '74, loaded with books, and stayed in Wat Pleng again, where I modified the kuti I was as-

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signed by making book-shelves.. I also painted a large mural on one of the plastered walls depicting *The Blind Alleys of Avijja* (Ignorance); it was still there, clear and fresh, when I visited ten years later.

Daily, I went for alms with my bowl, to receive the food-offerings of anyone who wished to give. Now, this is not begging, as is supposed, as monks are not allowed to ask, but accept whatever is given. This has been used, and continues to be used, as one of the excuses for eating meat; another excuse is that the Buddha never forbade His monks to eat meat, but that, too, is untenable today, as no-one eats 2,500-year-old-meat, and we have a moral choice.

During my four-months' stay in Bangkok this time, I established quite a good alms-round by going down lanes and alleys where I'd noticed no other monks going. At first, no-one came out to offer anything, but as I continued going there day-after-day, people started to come out regularly. However, most of the food ~ apart from any fruit or cakes that might be offered ~ contained meat or fish, and such food I gave away upon returning to the monastery, not eating it myself. I often had to get by with just a plate of rice with a cup of milo poured over it (which was one-up on the milk-rice offered to Sakya-muni just before his Enlightenment; I had *milo-milk-rice!*), or with pickled vegetables; and during these months, to save time that I felt could be better spent on my studies, I ate only breakfast rather than the customary breakfast and lunch within 5 hours, with the other 19 hours empty; at least, my single meal was at the same time every day. It didn't take long to adjust to this regimen and I felt alright with it. Then I began to ask my daily donors, in my broken but adequate Thai, "Please, if possible, could you offer only vegetarian food, as I don't eat meat?" Now, although, as stated above, monks are not supposed to ask for anything special, saying, "I like this; I don't like that", I felt that I was asking for the sake of the animals and fish rather than for myself. And the people obviously didn't mind me asking, as they readily complied with my request, and I was soon receiving as much food as I needed.

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There was a young novice named *Banyat* in the monastery, and when he found out I had relics, he was very excited, and used to visit me quite often. He was Thai-Chinese, and I saw something different in him, and encouraged him in his studies.

One day, I was called to the deputy-abbot's kuti; someone was on the phone for Alan, but he wasn't there. It was a young Aussie named Tim (not his real name; I've changed it in order to respect his privacy). He was at the airport, and briefly told me that while he and his wife, Jill, had been in the south, she had freaked out from smoking dope. Returning to Bangkok, they'd tried to board a plane back to Oz. In this, however, they were thwarted, as Jill was still mentally disturbed, and they were prevented. Tim asked me for help, and I told him to give me an hour or so and I'd be there. Getting to the airport, I found them in the lounge, Jill quite distraught. Tim told me more of their story, and asked me to sit with her, while he went to negotiate with the authorities again. Opposite me, Jill noticed I had a wart on my right thumb, and seemed to fixate on this; she leaned over to touch it. I was in a dilemma; what to do? We were in public view, and because I was a monk, many eyes were on me. I had to decide fast, between withdrawing hastily to comply with custom and thereby risk alienating Jill, or allow her to touch me and thereby establish a connection. "Well," I reasoned, "I came here to help her, and if I withdraw, I might lose the opportunity to do this." So I sat there and allowed her to touch the wart. Guys began to circle around us, like sharks, glaring at us. I tried to tell them she was out of her mind and needed help, but of course they didn't understand; I was, after all, going against their tradition.

Unable, still, to board their flight, we got Jill into a hospital, and Tim came back to the monastery with me. The next day, when we went to see her, we found that the hospital had transferred her to a mental-asylum; we were shocked, but could do nothing except make our way to the said institution, and were even more shocked at the conditions there; with loud-speakers blaring, I could imagine anyone becoming unbalanced if they were not so before being taken there! Poor Jill was kept there until she was deemed well enough to leave; they were then able to fly out.

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The Rains' Retreat came to an end, and I accepted the invitation of a monk to accompany him to stay in his countryside monastery several hours out of Bangkok for a few days. The day after we got there, I joined the other monks for alms-round in the nearby town, and was third or fourth in line as we paced along mindfully in single-file. Reaching the market, some people were waiting to offer us food, so we stopped and turned to face them as they came down the line, starting with the lead monk. While standing there, with eyes downcast, a fish jumped out of a tub at a fishmonger's stall, and wriggling its way directly towards me, and stopped at my feet. Again, I was in a predicament: should I follow the rule and remain silent on alms-round, not speaking even when people kindly placed food in my bowl but mentally blessing them instead, or should I say to the fishmonger, "Please keep this fish for me, and I will come back later and pay you for it, and put it in the river"? I am sorry to say that I followed the rule. I followed the rule, but I didn't do the right thing, and after the people had completed their offerings, we turned and went on our way. I was only two years as a monk then, you see, and unsure of myself, but if such a situation arose now, I wouldn't hesitate to disregard the rule and save the fish. But, you might say, "Why do you remember this, so long afterwards? It was only a fish." And I might reply: "To you, it was only a fish, but to the fish, it was its life!" I felt ~ and still feel ~ that it came to me asking for help, and I failed it.



12

A TRYING TIME

“No man can reveal to you aught but that which already lies half-asleep in the dawning of your knowledge. The teacher who walks in the shadow of the temple, among his followers, gives not of his wisdom but rather of his faith and his lovingness. If he is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind”.

~ Kahlil Gibran: *The Prophet* ~

While in India, I'd decided to return to Australia, and so, after my stay in Bangkok, I took the road south, as I'd done before, and stopped off to see Dhammaviro in his canyon again; by this time, he'd built himself a sizeable and substantial kuti, as he intended to stay there, period. I spent some time in Penang and Taiping, before going to Singapore. My idea to fly from there to Darwin, but for some reason, changed my mind and went to Sydney instead, and lucky that I did, as on 25th December ~ when I might otherwise have been there ~ Darwin was hit by Cyclone Tracy, which practically flattened the town; it was a national disaster!

In Singapore, I met Venerable Narada for the second time at Sri Lankaramaya. He'd just made what was to be his final of 17 visits to Vietnam; henceforth, he would go to Indonesia each year.

Ray Seibel and his family had returned to Australia from Penang, and were living in Sydney. We'd kept in touch, and I sent him a telegram, asking if he could meet me off the plane, and giving him the time of my arrival. He was there when I flew in late, and took me to his home for the night, and beside my bed had placed a Bible, still hopeful that I might recon-

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sider and 'return to the fold.' Little did they know that I'd gone further away from Christianity than they could imagine, and ~ just as the universe is expanding outwards ~ was still moving away.

The next morning, Ray took me to the recently-established Thai temple in Sydney, where I met *Khantipalo*, an English monk who I'd heard of while in Bangkok. He was notorious among Western monks, and generally disliked for his strict adherence to the rules ~ and not just *strict*, but meticulous and nit-picking. I was somewhat prepared for him, therefore, and it wasn't long before he started to jump on me up for some very-minor and irrelevant infringement of the rules ~ more about which later ~ but I soon learned how to deal with him in a way that other monks obviously hadn't: instead of allowing him to browbeat and intimidate me, I would make a joke and laugh, and he would then come down off his high horse; I saw through his strict and serious facade to his more-human side, and got on with him quite well after that. We kept in touch by letter intermittently, as he, like myself, was an inveterate letter-writer, and at one point, I wrote to him that his way was his way and my way was mine, but that was no reason why we should not respect each other and agree to differ where necessary; he did not object to this.

I joined a week-long retreat he conducted outside Sydney before flying on to Adelaide to visit my parents; this was January, 1975, and by then, they had retired and bought a little cottage on the *Yorke Peninsula*, at a place called Moonta, 100 miles NW of Adelaide; at the same time, Sheila and Frank had built a house on a hill near *Gawler*, 30 miles north of the city, in its own block of land. Mum and dad met me at the airport and took me to visit them before driving home to *Moonta*.

Although it was quite old, with a few cracks in the stone walls caused by subsidence, their cottage was cooler in summer ~ as it was then ~ than most modern houses, and not as cold in winter. It had not only a large garden, with some sheds, but a sizeable paddock at the back; we were a mile out of the town,

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and the nearest neighbors a hundred yards away, so we were not overlooked.

I'd been there some weeks when I was informed that Khantipalo would soon be visiting the fledgling Buddhist Society in Adelaide, so I went down to join him. The Buddhist Society consisted of no more than 25 members at most, and met once a week in someone's home, so this is where we stayed, and where I met Tim and Jill again, who were to help me a lot over the next year or so. Khantipalo conducted South Australia's first-ever Buddhist retreat in the home of another member. During his two weeks' stay, he said some memorable things to me, one of them that I should brush my teeth before 12 noon in case any food that might be lodged between them slipped down into my stomach afterwards, constituting a breach of the rule not to eat after midday. I wondered, but didn't say ~ as I was a junior monk, remember ~ whether the Buddha would have said such a preposterous thing. Then, one day, I had a towel draped over my shoulders for extra warmth ~ an orange-hued one, too ~ and he told me it was disrespectful to drape anything extraneous over one's robe. Following this, because someone had offered him a sweater, of the appropriate color, he told the donor that he couldn't wear it until the right sleeve and shoulder were removed. The sweater was duly cut diagonally from the left shoulder to the right armpit, and only then did he wear it. Now, while I've told these things of him, I should add that he mellowed a lot over the following years and became more human; but more of this later.

Well, he left Adelaide, and I stayed, unfortunately, because I was totally unfitted to deal with such a group, and must share responsibility for what subsequently happened. Most of the BS members knew nothing about monks, and had certain expectations, and I guess I expected to live ~ and to be treated ~ as monks did in Asia; it was a recipe for disaster, and that year was ~ as Q.E. II later called one of hers ~ an *anno horribilis*. The venue of the B.S. meetings shifted ~ as did I ~ to someone else's house, and the group soon showed signs of splitting into different factions (something so common with Buddhist groups, I later observed, that it was almost normal).

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Someone else of that early Buddhist group who I was to maintain contact with over the years was a Sri Lankan lady named Wilanie. She'd married an Englishman named John Wright, and was soon to give birth to their first child; she asked me to visit her in hospital for that event, and chant a blessing for her, which I did, several times. She later had two more sons, but her marriage was to break up, leaving her quite distraught.

Because I didn't want to impose myself on the people I was staying with, and couldn't stand staying with this group full-time, now and then I'd go home to spend time with my parents, and it was then my handyman abilities began to emerge (I'd been rather inspired by Dhammaviro in Thailand, who was very talented, but I would never equal his skills). I found so much to do to improve the place, and was soon hard at work in the garden, around the house and in the house itself. I really should have stayed there and continued non-stop instead of going back to town for more punishment.

Certain things redeemed the situation. Someone arranged talks for me in numerous Adelaide schools, from primary to high-school, and the response from the students was generally positive; I still have a bundle of 'thank-you notes' among my stuff in Melbourne, from the students of one primary school; I have discarded many things over the years, but these notes I kept, as they were so heart-warming. Tim and Jill often drove me to these schools.

With my limited knowledge and repertoire, I soon ran out of things to talk about at the BS meetings, and was ~ and still am ~ wary of repeating myself in case I bored people. Bore them or not, I soon felt I'd stayed too long and should move on, but was not in a position, financially, to do so. Tim and Jill offered me accommodation in their cottage in the hills, and while there, would still come into town now and then to conduct or participate in any lingering activities.

Sometime in '75, my mother, who'd been visiting an old lady by the name of Mrs. Jones in hospital, decided to bring her home and care for her there. She was already in her mid-80's and had no relatives, the beloved husband she had come out

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to Australia with from Wales in their youth, and their only son, had died long before, leaving her alone. She was a lovely old lady, with an amazing memory, but was crippled with arthritis and could not even walk unaided. For my mother, herself almost 65 at the time, to take her in and care for her in every way, was really a tremendous undertaking, and perhaps she shouldn't have done it, as it really restricted her; she couldn't go further than the town for a few minutes and leave her on her own. We soon came to call her *Gran*, as I'd never had a Gran to call my own, mum's mother having died giving birth to her eighth child when my mother, the eldest, was just 12 years old, and dad's mother, although still alive when I was young, I didn't remember; she had been in a nursing-home for several years until she died at the age of 96, and one time, when dad had gone to visit her there, she had said, "I don't like it here, George; they're all old people!"



13

'SEVENTY-SIX AND ALL THAT

I once knew someone so dishonest that
he didn't just tell lies at times,
but sometimes told the truth! And
when a person can lie like that,
there is nothing he won't do; it was
so in his case.

Anyway, somehow, I got through '75 and into '76, and by the kindness of my parents and Gran and Tim and Jill, had enough to enable me to journey on. Back in Sydney, I stayed in the Thai temple again, and by then it had relocated to a sizeable house bought by the Thai government. I spent a month or so there before flying out to Singapore. 1976 was to be quite a momentous year for me.

From Singapore, I went to Taiping for the Wesak celebrations, and this time, managed to unstick myself from the place and move further afield, as I should have done long before. After Wesak, therefore, I went to the East Coast, having been invited to attend a Buddhist gathering in *Kuala Trengganu*. Ven. Dhammananda ~ 'Chief High Priest of Malaysia and Singapore' ~ was there as the main guest, with a newly-ordained Malaccan monk, *Mahinda*, who had terminated his studies in New Zealand to become a monk after being so inspired by an itinerant preacher that he decided becoming a monk was more important than getting a degree.

Now, one of my students from Taiping had moved to *Kota Bharu* further up the coast, and was working there, so, being just five hours further on by bus, I decided to visit him, and stayed for the first of what would be many times in the *Kelantan Buddhist Society*, an old wooden building that was later rebuilt as a 3-storey concrete structure. I was pleased to see *Ng Song Poh* again, and he me. He had not been an outstanding student in school ~ not everyone can be, or even wants to be ~ but he had a good head on his shoulders and

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good heart in his chest, and would later build up quite a profitable business for himself from scratch; I watched it all happen over the years, as well as his marriage and raising of two sons, who, when they were old enough, he sent to a private boarding-school, providing them with opportunities he himself had never had or hadn't taken advantage of.

Retracing my route back down the coast, I stopped at *Kuan-tan* to spend a few days at the Buddhist Association ~ an old building with a corrugated-iron roof, beside a busy highway; consequently, it was hot and noisy; they wanted to relocate to another place but had to wait another 20 years or so before they could achieve their goal; they now have a beautiful place that really looks like a temple, in an ideal location that the authorities finally granted them; it was worth their long and uncertain wait. Anyway, I was to visit them in their old premises many times over the next 20 years, and was generally welcomed, though whether my teachings had much effect, it is hard to say; although I did touch one or two people momentarily, as in other places. One man I met there, a building-contractor by the name of *Tan Ngoh Yong*, was always very kind to me, although he spoke no English, so we had to communicate via the little Malay and *Hokkien* I'd picked up. He used to take me for breakfast of '*roti canai*' ~ a kind of Indian bread, followed by a walk along a nearby beach.

I returned to Taiping, but not for long, having learned how to go to other places in Malaysia. I set off for Kuala Lumpur, to accept the invitation of Ven. Dhammanda to stay in his place for a few days ~ the temple in Brickfields; maybe he'd forgotten about turning me away several years before, but I doubt it, as he had a prodigious memory. There, learning of my intention to go next to Malacca and stay in a Chinese temple, Rev. Mahinda told me I could stay in *Seck Kia Eenh*, a temple where things were conducted in English. So, this is what I did, arriving on my 30th birthday in a cycle-rickshaw with my belongings ~ mainly books, clothes, and some painting-materials ~ in an apple-box, still traveling relatively lightly. I was welcomed by the resident Sri Lankan monk ~ *Ven. Deepananda* ~ and some young people who used to spend their free time there; most were students from various high-schools

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in the vicinity, and some stayed there instead of going home to their outlying villages every day. The temple had a happy and relaxed atmosphere, and I spent my time talking with anyone who was interested and receptive. I also took long early-morning walks with some of the students, and stopped in cheap Indian restaurants on the way back for *dosai* or *roti canai*. Of the people I met at that time ~ and the only one I maintained contact with since then ~ was Goh Hock Guan, who will appear again and again later in my narrative.

One night, Deepananda and I stayed up talking about ghosts ~ a fascinating topic! ~ with the boys there, and went to bed after midnight. At 2:20 I was awoken by a horrible scream or howl, seeming to come from the back of the temple, where the boys were sleeping in the upstairs classrooms; I thought one of them was having a nightmare after the ghost-stories we'd been telling, so went back to sleep, and in the morning, asked, "Who screamed in the night?" but no-one else had heard it.

The next night, I heard it again, and this time, I called to someone in the next room: "*Boon Seng: Listen!*" and he heard it, too; it was like someone in torment or a mad dog howling. The following night, everyone heard it, but no-one there had made it. We then began to inquire around, and finally learned that someone had hung himself years before where the classrooms at the rear of the temple now stood. Deepananda and I therefore did some chanting and went all around the temple sprinkling 'holy water'; we never heard the sound again.

While staying in Seck Kia Eenh, I was requested to give a talk in the Chinese temple, *Cheng Hoon Teng*. I'd not met the man who was to translate for me until I got there a few minutes early, so didn't have enough time to assess his ability, unfortunately, because later, I learned he'd translated something really wrong. During my talk, I'd said something like, "Don't think about Nirvana; just do the work that's needed," and apparently, he'd translated this as, "Don't work for Nirvana" ~ quite the opposite. I was told that the chief monk there, *Ven. Kim Seng*, having heard this, and thinking that's what I'd said, was a bit upset. From then on, I became very

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cautious about translation, feeling it better to say nothing than to have one's words twisted.

Seck Kia Eenh organized a fund-raising concert in a large hall while I was there, and I was invited to attend. One item featured a temple-member who normally had such a bad stutter that I felt like pulling the words from his mouth, and standing in front of him one almost got a shower! On stage, however, the stutter was completely absent; it was remarkable! Anyway, during the concert, sitting in the front row, I suddenly got a terrible sharp pain in my chest, and thought I was having a heart-attack, but hung on grimly and didn't say anything or attract attention to myself until it passed; no-one noticed. A few days later, I went to the hospital for a check-up, but it didn't reveal anything.

Anyway, after a month in Malacca, my visa almost up, I went to Singapore, and this time got accommodation in the largest Chinese temple there ~ *Phor Kark See*, also known as *Kong Meng San*. After some days, I approached the abbot, *Ven Hong Choon* ~ Singapore's ranking and most highly-respected monk at that time, who was well-known for his *geomancy* (*Feng Shui*) skills, and whom even the PM, *Lee Kwan Yew*, used to consult, at times coming late at night, when no-one else was there. I told the abbot I was a committed vegetarian, and found it inconvenient wearing Theravada robes, as I had to explain to people that I didn't eat meat. I also said that Thai monks in general had an unenviable reputation in Malaysia and Singapore for dealing in charms and practicing magic, etc., and because my dress identified me with them, I would like to take Chinese robes, but didn't want to be a Mahayana monk, any more than I wanted to be a Theravada monk. I had to speak through a translator, of course, as the Venerable knew no English. He told me that as long as I was vegetarian ~ something very important to him ~ and was active in propagating Dharma, it was alright for me to do so. On those conditions, therefore, I took Chinese robes in September '76. I was given a new name, *Seck Kong Hui*, a rough translation of my Pali name. I also modified my Pali name to the Sri Lankan form, *Abhinyana*, rather than *Abhinyano*.

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There was a young monk in Phor Kark See with whom I became friendly; his name was *Kong Eng*. He was a nice enough fellow, but was *extremely* stingy, and couldn't bear to part with a thing, even though he must already have amassed a considerable fortune from his years in the temple performing ceremonies. I had been given one set of Chinese robes, and asked him for some old ones, but was not prepared for what he reluctantly gave, and came to call them my 'farmer's clothes,' as they were so old and stained that they looked as if they'd been worn by a farmer!

The toilets in Phor Kark See were so dirty that I just couldn't stand it and had to clean them; the monks who used them would never think of doing it themselves. In fact, some of them used to leave their clothes outside their doors to be picked up for laundering by a lady who worked there. Is this why they became monks? I was not impressed.

Soon afterwards, I returned to Malacca for a while. Deepananda had gone back to Sri Lanka. My new garb was apparently not appreciated by some of the older temple-members there, as Seck Kia Eenh is basically a Theravada establishment, although no-one said anything to me. After some time, I went to Penang, but stopped at Taiping Buddhist Society on the way. This is primarily a Mahayana Buddhist place, but my garb raised a few eye-brows there, too ~ not least with the people who had treated me as their 'pet monk,' and who responded in such a way that indicated they felt I'd betrayed them; they forthwith abandoned me, and I never saw them again, although I wasn't really sorry about that; in fact, it was a relief to have them off my back!

On, then, to Penang, where we spent a few days in a Chinese temple. Someone said to me, "It would be better not to visit Luang Pau, as he won't be happy to see you."

"Why not?" I said, "I haven't done anything wrong," so went to see him, and while he didn't show displeasure, he couldn't resist making some comment about my dress ~ particularly the pants ~ which I thought rather petty. Worse was to come.

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From Penang, I returned to Malacca, but while I'd been away, something had changed. Another local monk who'd spent years studying in Bangkok, had returned hot-foot to take up residence in SKE, fearful in case Mahinda should do so before him. His name was *Piyasilo*, and some of the members had told him of my visits during the previous months, and of my various activities. He was waiting for me to return. When I got to the temple, he met me with his iceberg demeanor, and told me flatly that I would have to find somewhere else, as I was not allowed to stay there any more. Needless to say, I was shocked, but could see he wasn't joking. What could I do but go? I had just met the most-evil person I had ever come across, although his evil towards me was yet to unfold. Now, I don't think of many people as evil, but he was certainly one of them, as I will explain.

I went to Cheng Hoon Teng, where I was allowed to stay, but not content with having barred me from SKE on his own authority, completely over-riding the committee there, the demon even went to Ven. Kim Seng, and tried to persuade him to eject me from there, too, but he refused, suspecting some mischief, and asked where I would go if he were to do that ~ to a hotel?

The committee of SKE went along with Piyasilo ~ who enjoyed explaining that his name meant: "*Beloved of Conduct*" ~ and he proceeded to ensconce himself there as if he were the abbot, when it was a Buddhist Society, not a monastery (*monastery*, perhaps, now that he was there). Towards the end of the year, he organized a 'Holiday Work Camp' for the youth (he was good at organizing things; in fact, he was good at other things, too, like writing and talks; unfortunately, everything he did was egocentric; he *had* to be the pivot, and would let nothing or no-one stand in his way). For this, he printed a 'Case Study,' obviously about me, but without my name. It told about "a certain European hippy who had donned the robe....," and exposed, as if they were crimes, my morning-walks, outings to an offshore island, and even the blood-donation I'd organized at the local hospital. He accused me of being against monks and advocating their abolition, of being disrespectful towards the elders in the temple, and other

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things his fiendish mind had come up with. I was shown his print-out, but kept quiet, feeling that to deny would be to affirm, and preferring to let time take care of him.

By then, I was staying in a fledgling Buddhist Society called the '*Humanistic Buddhist Society*,' and one day, was called to the Immigration Department, to be told a complaint had been made about me. The officer ~ a not-unkindly man ~ wouldn't tell me what it was, nor who had made it. I could tell, however, by my various names ~ including my latest Chinese name ~ on the form in front of him, that it could only have been made by Piyasilo: overcome by jealousy and hatred, he had stooped so low as to report me, probably on the pretext of preaching while on a tourist-visa, which I was not supposed to do, as both he and I knew. Unable to protest or appeal, my passport was sealed in an official envelope, and I was told to present it at the checkpoint when I left the country within 48 hours. I went to Singapore, and my passport was returned to me at the Malaysian side of the Causeway linking the two countries, and after two weeks there, decided to try my luck in returning to Malaysia, which I was able to do without any trouble. And because our negative actions will probably come back to us in some form or another, Piyasilo had played his trick to his own detriment!



14

“SEARCH FOR YOURSELF”

We speak of the Here-and-Now and also of the Way, not noticing the inherent contradiction here. A Way always leads somewhere, from A to B or here to there. But there is no way to get to where we already are. We are putting off until the illusory future what can only be found or experienced Now. There is either a Way, or the Here-and-Now, not both.

In early '77, I felt like making another trip to India, so went up the East Coast again, stopping off in several places along the way. One day, while I was in the temple in Kuala Trengganu, someone named *Lao Chang* ~ one of the elders of the temple ~ brought someone to see me; he wanted help for his son ~ aged about 21 ~ who, convinced that there was a ghost in his home, refused to stay there, and wandered around the town in a state of disorientation, sleeping wherever he could. I asked the man to bring his son to me if he could, and he returned some time later with the boy, but he was so nervous and unfocused that I couldn't do anything for him, and he went off. At about 10:30 that night, the father returned and told me his son was in a temple not far from ours, and asked me to go with him. I went, and found the boy fast asleep on the floor, without pillow, blanket or mosquito-net, snoring loudly. I asked for a cup of water and, standing near the boy, concentrated over it, then sprinkled a few drops on his face. Thereupon, he stopped snoring and gave a sigh of relaxation, but didn't wake up. I went back to my place and early the next day, left K.T. for Kota Bharu.

I continued up the peninsula to Bangkok, where I visited Wat Pleng again, and met Alan, who was still there. He told me that after I'd left in '74 and he had taken over my alms-round, one day, a lady offered him an envelope containing money,

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but he told her, in his fluent Thai, that he didn't accept money. She was visibly offended, and never came out to offer anything again. He could have accepted it, as I'd accepted the food containing meat and fish, and back at the monastery, given it to someone else. He was so strict about the rules that he painted himself into a corner and eventually disrobed. Sadly, years later, when his mother was visiting him, they were both killed in a car-smash.

From Bangkok, I flew to Calcutta, and after some days in the Mahabodhi Society, proceeded down the east coast of India. I turned inland to visit the ruins of *Amaravati* Stupa, which must have been magnificent in its time. Buddhism was never widespread in South India, but there were several centers where it was well established. I also went to *Nagarjunakonda*, where the great philosopher-monk, *Nagarjuna* was supposed to have had his base. Years ago, it was decided to build a massive dam on the *Krishna River* here, and some of the ruins of the monastery ~ like the temples of *Abu Simbel* in Egypt ~ were relocated to higher ground, which became an island in the lake when the dam was completed. The museum on the island contains some fine images of a lovely green stone. I took a boat back and forth.

South of here, *Tirupatti*, the wealthiest Hindu temple in the world sits atop some hills, and devotees have lavished their wealth here for centuries. Numerous barbers wait to shave people's heads; their hair then becomes another source of income, as it is turned into wigs and hair-pieces, to be exported all over the world. I waited in line to file into the main shrine, to have *darshan* of the image in the inner sanctum, but wasn't inspired.

I hitch-hiked on from there to *Puttaparthi*, the ashram of *Sai Baba*, but he was at his other center at *Whitefields* near Bangalore, so I didn't see him. And because he was away, few people were there; it was quiet and peaceful, and I enjoyed my brief stay, before going on to the Mahabodhi Society at Bangalore, where I found the head monk arrogant. He was an ex-brahmin by the name of *Buddharakkhita* (years later, I came to know something of him through the books of his

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brother-monk, Englishman *Sangharakkshita*, and by the time I did, of course, I had some idea of the person he referred to so unflatteringly). Whatever, it takes all kinds to make a world, but I had come across such a high proportion of arrogant monks that I'd almost come to expect it. From Bangalore, I went to *Tiruvanamalai*, where the ashram of a famous Hindu sage, *Ramana Maharishi*, is located in the shadow of the sacred mountain of *Arunachala*. After my encounter with *Buddharakkita*, this was refreshing, because although *Ramana* had died in 1956, his ashram had been maintained and was run by his disciples, who were friendly and kind, in keeping with the spirit of the place. They gave me a room without question, and provided me three meals a day (and by then, I had lapsed from my one-meal-a-day regimen into the simpler Mahayana pattern).

After the customary three days, I left Tiruvanamalai, and went on to *Pondicherry*, the old French enclave south of Madras; it still retains its French ambience, and another famous ashram is here ~ that of *Sri Aurobindo* and his successor, a domineering French woman who'd had herself styled '*The Mother*.' Immediately repelled by the strong feeling of regimentation, I got no further than the office, and lost no time in returning to Madras.

There, I was coolly received by the incumbent monk of the Mahabodhi Society, another officious person who expressed his disapproval of my dress, which was half-and-half ~ the pants and tunic being 'Mahayana' and the over-robe Theravada ~ and asked why I needed two ordinations; he couldn't understand my desire to be categorized as neither. After this, though, I met someone who was totally different: an old monk sitting quietly by. Unaware of who he was ~ I hadn't been introduced to him, and the pompous monk had left him on his own ~ proceeded to have a wonderful discussion with him, at his feet, in complete agreement with everything he said. This communion went on for several hours, and the next morning, I looked for him again, but he'd already left, and I'd not gotten his name or address; all I knew about him was that he was setting up a meditation-centre for Westerners outside Co-

lombo. I resolved to try to find him when I got there soon afterwards.

I moved to the headquarters of the *Theosophical Society* at *Adyar*, just outside Madras, a lovely place of calm and quiet with a river on one side, and the beach on another. After becoming a member of the Society, I got a room there and availed myself of the marvelous library. There, too, I met an old Englishman named *Dick Balfour-Clarke* who said that as a young man, he'd been hired to tutor the young J. Krishnamurti, and had seen him writing the little book of wisdom, "*At the Feet of the Master*," which K. later denied having written. Who to believe?

After a week in *Adyar*, I took a train to *Rameshwaram* so as to catch the ferry to *Sri Lanka* for the second time, but of course, I spent a while in the town before doing so, redolent as it was with fond memories of things that had changed my life.

There were several other Westerners on the ferry, one of whom looked so familiar that eventually, I asked where he was from, and when he said, "Austria," I knew he was none other than my old friend *Erwin*; our paths had crossed for the fourth time in ten years! Of course, he had changed, as had I. His wife was with him and they were going to *Sri Lanka* to photograph and document the ancient frescoes in some of the cave-temples there. Other than this, he told me little else about himself; our conversation was somewhat strained, and I never saw him again.

From *Talimannar*, I got a train to *Colombo*, and on the way, someone was caught stealing from a bag, and many people savagely set upon him and beat him up. In *Colombo*, I went to *Deepananda's* monastery, *Gangaram*. I'd not informed anyone of my coming, but was received anyway and assigned a room. (By this time, I'd reverted to Theravada robes for the sake of convenience in this Theravadin stronghold). *Deepananda* was engaged in teaching German somewhere, as he was fluent in that language, and I seldom saw him, and when I did, the friendliness he'd shown in *Malacca* wasn't there. Anyway, I was able to meet *Ven. Ananda* in another monas-

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tery, who I'd known earlier in Singapore, and he was pleased to see me again if Deepananda wasn't.

I mentioned to the deputy-abbot of Gangaram about the old monk I'd met in Madras, and asked if he knew anyone of that description. "Yes," he said, "it must be *Venerable Balangoda Anandamaitreya*, and his center is on the outside of town." He told me how to get there, and I resolved to go there the next day. But the next day I felt unwell, so stayed in my room. In the afternoon, however, someone knocked on my door and said: "Do you want to see Ven. Anandamaitreya?"

"Yes," I said.

"Then come," he said, "he's in the office." Imagine my surprise and joy! When I paid my respects, he said, "I don't know why I came here today, as I'd no intention of doing so when I left my place this morning, but my attendant said, 'Why don't we go to Gangaram?' and I agreed, so here we are!" It was so good to see him again, and he invited me to visit him at his center, which I soon did, and found him living very simply in a room so full of books there was hardly space for him in it, let alone me as well. I forget how long I spent with him that time, but before leaving, I asked him to accept me as a student. He said nothing, but took a sheet of paper and wrote: "*Search for Yourself*". I never saw him again. When he died in 1998, at the age of 104, he was accorded a state-funeral as the most highly-respected monk of his time. I consider myself very fortunate to have met him, even before I knew anything about him; his rank and position meant little to me; it was who he was that mattered!

I felt more at ease in Sri Lanka than in Thailand, and intended to spend quite some time there, as there was no visa-problem, but this wasn't to be. I got a letter from my mother, saying that Stuart, Sheila's son, had become hooked on drugs, and asked me to come home, as I was the only one ~ she thought ~ who could help him. I agreed to go, but was later to wish I hadn't. I went first to Singapore and one evening, while I was strolling up and down in front of the temple, an Indian woman and her teenaged daughter came up to me and asked where to find a certain Thai monk who stayed

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there and who was well-known for fortune-telling, palmistry, and so on. I directed her to his quarters and continued my stroll. A few minutes later, she came back and said: "He's sick and cannot help me. Can *you* help?"

"What's the matter?" I said. She then told me that her husband had gone off with a young woman, and she ~ the wife ~ thought that she must have charmed him away from her (the vanity of the thought!), and wanted him back.

When she said this, I heard alarm-bells ringing and thought: "Be careful; this is not your thing!" But I could see she was genuinely upset, so I said: "What I can and will do for you, if you like, is go with you to your home and bless it".

"Oh, would you?" she said, "I'd like that so much."

With someone to accompany me, we went down the road to find a taxi. On the way, she told me she was a devotee of Sai Baba. "Oh," I replied, "I was at his place in India just a few weeks ago, but he was away at the time, so I didn't get to see him."

"Really!?" she said, "Before I came here just now, I was in touch with him, mind-to-mind, and he told me to come to this temple where I would meet a monk who would go with me to my home and explain everything to me. I'd heard of the Thai monk, and thought it would be him, not a *European!*"

Upon arrival, she showed me her shrine-room with pictures of Sai Baba, and all over the walls, ceiling and floor, was ash ~ *vibhuti* ~ the materialization of which Sai Baba is famous for; it was as if someone had taken handfuls of wet ash from a dead campfire and thrown it around. "I don't know where it came from or how," she said. "One day there wasn't any, and then it was all over, just as you see it." She then told me about her husband ~ who was her second husband, and much younger than she ~ how he was very lazy and never worked and lived off her. When she wouldn't give him money, he took her things, and sold them.

I thought: "Why is she worrying and wanting him back? She's better off without him" But I didn't voice my thoughts; instead, I asked her for a photo of him that I might take back with me

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and meditate over. She gave me one, I blessed the house, and went back to the temple, where I meditated over the photo and tried to tune-in to the person thereof.

The next day, I was in downtown Singapore for something or other, about to cross Orchard Road, and found myself standing next to the man in the photo! I thought, "Should I say something to him?" but decided not to.

Back in the temple, I called her, but she said: "I can't talk to you now; would you call me later?" When I did, she explained: "I could not talk to you before as my husband was here; he had come to collect his things and told me that he wouldn't be staying with me anymore but would visit me from time to time. And when you called before," she said, "he asked me who it was, and I told him it was a European monk I'd met. 'Oh,' he said, 'does he wear glasses and look like ... ?' 'Yes', I said, 'how do you know?' 'Oh, I saw him on the street.' "

A few days later, when I was passing, I went to see her again, and she said: "After you came the first time, I contacted Baba again, and he told me: 'Yes, that's the monk I meant.'"

This time, I told her, indirectly, "Look, better let this fellow go; he's not worth bothering about".

Does this mean Sai Baba knew me, even though I'd never even seen him before? I can't say. It does seem beyond doubt, however, that he has powers most of us would consider 'miraculous' but which have been spoken of for thousands of years. India is a special country in this way; strange things go on there. Can we say it is all a hoax just because we do not understand the principles behind it, or do not even know of the possibility of such powers? That would be to display our ignorance and dogmatism, would it not? There is just too much evidence and too many reliable witnesses for us to take such a stand. All we can say, if we don't know, is simply that: "I don't know; maybe".

Although not a follower of Sai Baba, I won't knock or decry him, as his teachings are eclectic and broad; also, he's given many people a sense of direction in life they didn't have before; surely, he is to be commended for this, not denounced,

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as someone once requested me to do. Knowing I was quite close to some of Sai Baba's devotees, and thinking they might listen to me, this person wanted me to denounce him as a charlatan and 'magician' who was not worth consideration. I refused to do this on the grounds just given: that he has helped lots of people find a sense of purpose in life when they were otherwise lost.

Back in Oz, it was six weeks before Sheila and Frank ~ whose son I'd come to try to help, at the request of my manipulative mother ~ bothered to come to see me at Moonta, and as it turned out, there never was an opportunity to help their silly son, nor did I ever find out what kind of drugs he'd been on, or how my mother got her information that he was injecting.

I made contact with Tim and Jill again, and they came to visit me, bringing with them some new friends, Pete and Maggie, who told me of some they'd met ~ *George Gatenby*, an Anglican minister who had turned to Buddhism, and who, upon hearing of me, invited me to stay with him in his house beside the church he administered. I accepted, and spent several weeks with George, whose birthday, down to the year, happened to be the same as mine. He had lost his faith in Christianity, but continued to perform his church duties for some years to come. While staying with him, I came to know of a church-run organization helping newly-arrived Vietnamese boat-people, and became somewhat involved with them.

Before long, I parted company with George Gatenby, who was a snob, and went back to Moonta. I spent that summer working around the place, and then decided to return to Asia



SIX MONTHS IN INDONESIA

Go for the going, and don't arrive before you get there. Enjoy the journey; only the moment is yours.

Somehow, I scraped together enough money, and then, following my route of '71, I hitch-hiked to Darwin again, but this time it took me only 4½ days instead of 9 days the first time, as the road had been black-topped since, and after two short rides, I got one that took me 1500 miles, leaving me only 300 miles short of Darwin; another ride took me the rest of the way. Now, some friends of my parents had a grandson in Darwin and had arranged for me to stay with him and his family until I could get a flight out to Bali, so there was no need for me to camp on the beach again. I had chosen this as the cheapest way out of Australia, as before; it was good to retrace my footsteps, although the cyclone had obliterated many places, and the damage was still visible everywhere. I visited my old camp-site on the beach, and was gratified to see some of our inscriptions on the concrete pylons supporting an old water-pipe.

Flying into Denpasar, it was nice to be in this island paradise again. After a few days traveling slowly around the island, I went to stay in a Buddhist temple on the north coast near *Singharaja*. This had been set up by an ex-Hindu Brahmin monk named *Girirakkhita*, who treated me kindly, served me good food, and showed me around somewhat. His temple had been badly damaged by the strong earthquake of '63, but had since been rebuilt; Bali is often shaken by earthquakes. When some of his Chinese supporters came up from Denpasar to visit him and take him back with them, I also went along, and spent some days in the home of one, *Igde Brata*; it was better than staying in a hotel.

From Bali, I went to Jogja, and stayed in an old Chinese temple. This had originally been dedicated to Chinese deities but

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was declared Buddhist in the '60s, when the new Constitution of the land had made it clear that only five religions would henceforth be recognized, with Islam first, but with Buddhists, Hindus, Catholics and Protestants free to follow theirs. Apart from this, the Constitution required everyone to believe in God ~ it didn't matter how corrupt, dishonest or immoral you were as long as you believed in God. The God-idea therefore became a rubberstamp to endorse all kinds of things that God ~ had there been such a being that they claim to believe in ~ would hardly have approved of. This requirement placed the Buddhists in an awkward position, as Buddhism is non-theistic, acknowledging no such God, but only impersonal Law. In the eyes of those who had drawn up the Constitution, and of many who understood it as it stood, anyone who didn't believe in God was an atheist, and by extension, an atheist must also be a communist ~ the worst thing that one could possibly be called in a country that was at the time paranoid about Communism!

To accommodate this article, or to live in peace without being branded either atheist or communist, a prominent Buddhist leader in Java came up with an idea, and in place of the God-idea of other religions, introduced that of '*Adi-Buddha*' ~ a kind of primeval, eternal '*Buddha-head*' from which all subsequent Buddhas had sprung and would spring ~ something like the *avatar* concept of Hinduism. Although it was only a stop-gap meant to conform to the Constitution's requirement, it really caused further division among the Buddhists of Indonesia, who numbered only a few million out of a population of some 200 million. I was there when this introduction was a hot topic, and somehow got involved in it, my opinion about it being sought by people of various factions. It could have blown up out of all proportion and become very serious, but it eventually calmed down, with the several Buddhist sects remaining as divided as ever.

In that temple at Jogja, I met a remarkable Javanese monk who had been a Muslim until he was 80, when he became a Buddhist. At 101, he became a monk, and that's when he stopped riding his bicycle. He was 105 when I met him, and quite frail physically, though mentally very alert, and he told

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me that he wanted to learn English! Even at that stage, he would still go into the mountains to preach in isolated villages to people who had remained Buddhists since the collapse of the *Majapahit* empire in Java 500 years before, and had resisted the pressure to convert to Islam; nor did he quit until he died at the age of 112!

Next step along my way was Semarang, but upon reaching there, hoping to meet my benefactor, Pak Sadono again, it was only to learn that he'd died several years before; I got accommodation at the *Mahabodhi* temple, and went to visit his wife to express my belated condolences.

Several talks were arranged for me in the temple, and these were translated by an able young woman named *Siek Bing Twan*, who became and remained a good and loyal friend. I gave her the Pali Buddhist name, *Vajira*, meaning 'Diamond.'

Near Semarang is another ancient town ~ in fact, it was at one time capital of Java ~ *Solo*, or *Surakarta*, and here I stayed with a prominent Buddhist named *Ananda Sojono* who was very kind to me. I gave him some of the relics I still had with me, and not only was he delighted, but requested me to accompany him to visit a medium he knew, to ask him about them. I agreed, and when we got to the house ~ and incidentally, the medium was a Muslim, of the mystic kind, who consciously knew nothing at all about Buddhism ~ sat down at a low table, with the medium facing us. Placing the relics on a plate, Ananda asked him to hold it and see what feelings he got from them and if he could tell the state of the person from whom they had come. At first, he was reluctant to do this, as he said they were too holy. Ananda persuaded him to do so, however, and he got up and went around the room making *shooing* motions to send away ~ he said ~ the spirits that had gathered. Then, resuming his seat, he carefully and respectfully took the plate and raised it to the crown of his head, concentrating on it for some long moments with his eyes closed before placing it back on the table. Without speaking, Ananda then wrote on a piece of paper, *Bodhisattva?* The man waved his forefinger to signify 'No'. Next, he wrote, *Arahant?* and again the forefinger shook, 'No'. Finally, when he wrote *Bud-*

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dha? the forefinger signaled 'Yes', they were from a Buddha, just as I had been told in Ipoh and Kathmandu. Through Ananda, I then said that I felt uneasy about carrying these things around with me, as I had no proper place to keep them, and the man said it was my *dharma* to have them, and so it was alright.

The Wesak celebrations that year were organized at Borobudur and the equally-old nearby *Mendut* Temple. It was quite a resplendent affair, with a long procession snaking along the palm-lined roads from one monument to the other, and monks of the various sects uniting for it in their colorful robes.

Not long after this, I became aware of the scheming and ruthless character of the monk who had come up with the 'Adi-Buddha' concept, and was appalled to see how he would stop at nothing ~ even reporting other monks to the authorities on the false charge of being communists because they wouldn't buy-into this concept ~ in his desire (just like Piyasilo) to dominate and be Number One. Power and ambition really corrupt!

I spent some time in Jakarta, giving talks and meeting people like *Roslina Tasman* and her close friend, *Onfat*. They took me to see something of this vast equatorial city.

Onwards, then, to Sumatra, both to places I'd been before, and places I'd never been. I was kindly received along my way. Reaching Medan, anticipating meeting Mr. Kumarasami once more, I was grieved to learn that he'd passed away just two weeks earlier! I consoled myself with having met him the first time, however. I visited his family to express my condolences, and was shown some relics they had found in his ashes after his cremation; they looked just like the ones I had!

And this time, *Cheah Cheng Thak*, the past-president of the temple where I stayed ~ *Vihara Borobudur* ~ was not to be seen, having been voted out of office some years before. He had been kind to me, however, so I went to see him, and found him rather bitter, but we had a good talk, as a result of which his spirit revived somewhat.

MALAYSIA AGAIN

The flight from Medan to Penang, across the Straits of Malacca, was the roughest I'd been on; we were buffeted so badly that I really thought we would go down, but we didn't and landed alright. I stayed in a branch-temple of Phor Kark See, by the name of *Miao Hiang Lim*. According to the Chinese Buddhist system, the abbot there was considered my older brother, as he had also been ordained by Ven. Hong Choon in Singapore; he spoke no English, so we were unable to communicate much, but he treated me fairly, and we got along alright. I never went to stay in MBMC again, because I was regarded as a traitor or renegade, but I did visit Luang Pau. From that time, I would not see him again for the next 16 years.

Back in Malacca, things had been happening. The collectively-stupid committee of SKE had finally woken up to Piyasilo; he had done so many evil things ~ believing he was immune from their effects ~ that they had decided to expel him. Hearing I had returned, and probably thinking they could use me against him, they invited me to a meeting, but without telling him in advance. Imagine his surprise to see me walk in the room where they'd gathered! He recovered sufficiently to brazen it out, however; he was, and still is, a very clever person, and all the more dangerous for that. He denied everything I confronted him with, including his attack on me in his Holiday Work Camp notes, saying it was just a hypothetical case, and he had not been referring to a real person, either me or anyone else, but everyone knew he was lying through his teeth. I have never known anyone lie like him, and when a person can lie like that there is nothing he cannot do. While my interrogation of him was going on, the committee-members must have been aware that they were also 'on trial,' as they'd gone along with him without a murmur of protest when he first arrived from Bangkok to assume a position that wasn't his to assume, it being a Buddhist Association and not a monastery; they had allowed him to do whatever he wanted, and so were also responsible. I've never had an apology from

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them, but then, they don't have a good track-record, as at least one other monk came to grief there through their internal politics. But I had been somewhat vindicated, having waited two years, thinking that, given enough rope, this demon would hang himself, and in his home-town, too! I had not wished revenge on him, but *did* want to see justice done, and can't say I was sad when he was exposed and got something of what he deserved. This is not the end of the Piyasilo story; there is more to come later.

I went again to Singapore for a while, and there met an old man from Manila named *Koh Boon Hian*, which was fortuitous, as I had decided to go there for maybe three months to visit some of the psychic-healers for which the Philippines is famous (most of them are frauds and charlatans, no doubt, but some are probably genuine). I had no contacts in Philippines, and he told me he could arrange for me to stay in one of the Chinese temples in Manila (he himself stayed there when he was in the city), as he was due to return there shortly. This was good news, and I told him I would keep in touch with him, which I did.

I went up the East Coast again, and in Kuantan, met someone ~ an engineer ~ who was humble and kind. He had the idea of becoming a monk in the *City of Ten-Thousand Buddhas in California*, a temple that had been set up by a *Master Hsuan Hua*. I wasn't in favor, as this master was extremely egoistic, always boasting of his psychic powers, but I thought, let him go and see for himself; it was perhaps the only way he would learn.

Next stop was Kuala Trengganu, where my involvement with Vietnamese boat-people was about to begin, albeit *dead* boat-people. Two weeks earlier, a large boat packed with more than 200 people had pulled into the estuary of the river there and tried to dock at the jetty; but they were not allowed to land; the boat turned and went down-stream, but hit a sand-bank in the river-mouth and capsized; I don't know if there were any survivors, but the bodies, upon recovery by Chinese people, were buried in a local Chinese cemetery in a mass unmarked-grave, and *Lao Chang* requested me to go

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with him to the cemetery to perform a ceremony for those unfortunates; there was no monk in K.T. at that time to perform one (many Buddhists think only monks are qualified to perform ceremonies of this nature; / don't). I was the first monk to come along after this tragedy (and there were many such up this coast during the exodus from Vietnam).

I readily agreed, and went with him to the cemetery, where blood-stained stretchers lay discarded beside the grave. I focused my thoughts and chanted something in the hope that those people would somehow be at peace wherever they then were. Malaysia doesn't have a very good record regarding treatment of the boat-people, second only to Thailand, in fact; the authorities of both countries knew what was going on and did little or nothing to stop or prevent the atrocities perpetrated by their fishermen-pirates; attacks on boat-people continued, and they were robbed, raped and murdered for years; no-one will ever know how many perished at sea in their attempt to reach safety and find peace, freedom and happiness that was not available in Vietnam; it is simply impossible to imagine or calculate, but years ago, while it was going on, I read one estimate of over 350,000!

There was a group of boat-people ~ *live* ones! ~ in an old warehouse near the river, not far from the temple. They were visible from the road that ran past, behind a barbed-wire fence. Sympathetic Chinese from the town would throw food and clothes over the fence to them.

Keong ~ the ghost-boy of the previous year ~ visited me so many times asking me to teach him something that he became a bit of a nuisance; maybe my 'holy water' had been too strong!

* * * * *

And here, I must draw my narrative to a close. My next book will continue on from this, perhaps in 2007. It will tell of my involvement with the boat-people of Vietnam, and my further travels.



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When permitted to listen to alternative opinions and engage in substantive debate, people have been known to change their minds. It can happen. For example, Hugo Black, in his youth, was a member of the Ku Klux Klan. He later became a Supreme Court justice and was one of the dissenters in the historic Supreme Court decisions, based on the 14th Amendment of the Constitution that affirm the civil rights of all Americans. It was said that when he was a young man he dressed up in white robes and scared black folks; when he got older, he dressed up in black robes and scared white folks."

~ From: *The Demon-Haunted World*
by Astronomer & Author Carl Sagan, 1934 -1996 ~

Don't give in to despair when you see the condition of the world; instead, look back on the way we have come, and you may see that although we do indeed often take three steps forward and two steps back ~ or sometimes even two steps forward and three back ~ we are on a journey, and, I believe, moving in the right direction.

