

Email Articles

by Tarchin Hearn



Every year Tarchin writes and sends two or three “email articles” to students all over the world. Many of these have appeared in the Treasury of Wisdom on the Wangapeka website, but others are unknown outside of the email list. This ebook collects them together in one pdf, free to download.

It is intended to update this collection to include new articles as they become available.

*Compiled by Thelma Rodgers
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*To be on Tarchin's mailing list for these articles
please contact webmaster@wangapeka.org*

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Sarva Mangalam ~ All is Blessing

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What Does It Mean To Pray?

with warm thanks to Karen and Rob and many others

by Tarchin Hearn

June 2006

Wangapeka

Inevitably these things will happen more as one gets older. This year, hardly a week goes by without receiving a request for prayers. Please pray for someone. Please hold someone in your prayers. To tell you the truth, the more I'm asked this the more I find myself pondering, what does it actually mean? With a sense of the ineffable mystery of the universe, what does it mean to pray for someone? Surely we are not being asked to join in mere petition. Begging for mercy or for help; pleadings of desperation pouring forth from sadness and fear of imminent loss. Prayer as bartering, a kind of marketplace exchange. Prayer as anger or righteous indignation, it's not fair, we want justice. Prayer as the outflow of desperately needing to DO something, even though it does sometimes feel like 'just sending kind thoughts'. Prayer as payment, I'll do this, you give me or him or her, health or success or whatever. Prayer as control, tweak the DNA, fine tune the microtubules, reprogram the cosmic computer in a preferable way. All of this trying, all of this efforting; outflows of pain and sadness and the messy wreckage of broken connections.

Of course there is also prayer as celebration, co-mingling and falling together, tumbling through the sharp door of grief into an ocean of love. We mould each other, teach each other, shape each other; cajoling, pleading, reverberations of feeling and memory. What a blessing! Each moment; unique, fresh, never-to-be again-ness, alive to this, suchness resting, you reminding me and me reminding you of all that is precious; a bursting gratitude for having danced with each other in a way that was with no other.

Surely prayer that heals – even in the face of dying – is a mystery of aliveness, an unfathomableness described with four tiny letters; l,o,v,e. Linking, coupling, grieving, celebrating, discovering, losing, laughing and lightening, living together, merged and mingled. A need for prayer is life's invitation to all of us. The knock on the door. The message on the answer machine. An invitation to drop the pretence, the falseness, the façade. Drop the procrastination, the game playing, the toeing of the party line, the keeping up with the Jones, the fear of being different, the fear of failure – the fear of being real! Let us have the courage to ask each other for prayer, for help, for upliftment. Let's send out the invitations and then, resting in trust, let us dance abundantly with all that joins us.

In this context, perhaps it does make sense to pray for someone when they are not capable of praying themselves. This is a mystery, a place of guardian angels, of sambhogakayas and inexplicable linkages. Remembering a friend; an adventuring, struggling, drowning, pioneering through illness friend. Remembering this wondrous being of vast dimensions. Joining this memory to the piercing screech of blackbirds as they distract a morepork from their territory and the evening breeze gently rustling the limbs of the trees. Breathing with the thought of you while opening to the perfect weaving of lifetimes and lifelines ... becomings and unbecomings in countless realms and dimensions. This is my prayer, your struggle tugging my heart, drawing my mind to what is eye moist and wondrous. Perhaps even better than praying for someone is to pray with someone. Isn't that what we are doing? We touch each other drawing forth awakeness, amazement and sometimes blessed peace, and sometimes all of these together! Ah, you are weaving me into the world. Humming with the birthing/dying mystery of countless beings, immense gratitude explodes in all directions – a profound embracing.

In the last few months, so many people have reverberated through my being as prayer. People I know, friends of friends, people I've heard about, creatures, species, water sheds and ecosystems. The years go by. The list gets longer; this listing of gain and loss, this blessing of mystery, this savouring and celebrating of each vast boundless moment. We pray together, we live together, we struggle together, we love together, we feed all beings together.

E, Ma Ho! May all beings join in the banquet!

But – let's not get carried totally away. Sometimes we forget. Do you know what I mean? Blessing seems gone. Loss is all around. How then can I pray?

At times like this:

Pray with your body. Feel the tensing and relaxing of your muscles as prayer, the beating of your heart and the tides of your breathing as prayer, the movements of digestion and elimination as prayer. Enjoy and explore your posture as prayer, sitting as prayer, standing as prayer, walking as prayer, and lying down as prayer. Pray with all your activities, working as prayer, playing as prayer, exercising as prayer. Pour the nectar of exquisite attention into whatever you are doing, moment by moment, so that that too becomes prayer. Prayer without ceasing. Life without ceasing.

Pray with your voice. Sing, chant, call out all the names of all the beings you love. Speak from your chest, from your belly and feel the resonance of your voice loosening all the fibres of your being. Let the murmur of poetry and wondrous things ride on your breath, cadences of deep caring, choralling down into the marrow of your bones. Let your talking stop and surrender into the great silence. Listen to the whisper of your heart-knowing, a symphony of cells, a dance of intelligence. All around, spiders, trees, birds, and landscapes, myriad beings, talking, broadcasting, weaving you into their weaving. We see each other. We hear each other. We respond to each other. We are not alone. Com-unication, the activity of coming into union. Our languaging together is the prayer of the universe. Your every whisper – the prayer of 'as it is-ness'.

Pray with your mind. Release into stillness and feel the motionless motion of knowing of the world, and – being known by the world. Allow the gates of memory to fall open and enter the mandala of your life. Thanking where thanks are due. Forgiving when forgiveness is needed. Peacemaking when peace is right. Celebrating all the ordinary miracles that somehow were taken for granted. Blessing and supporting where blessing and support are needed. Letting go of regret. Letting go of 'yes buts'. Letting go of 'shoulds' and 'oughts' and things not accomplished. Let your mind be a prayer and allow yourself to dwell in the beautiful.

Day by day – body, speech and mind – living life abundantly, generously, humbly. In this way perhaps our entire life becomes prayer.

June 13 2006 It's one of those mornings. Five-thirty a.m. and luminous. The light is rose-ing salmon grey-pink, silhouetting the peaks, a celestial water colour washing the canvass of my mind, transforming a chill metal-blue dawn into a visual symphony of saturated colour. The air is dense. Everything is so extraordinarily still, it seems, that by simply opening a space of caring, I can feel pin prick crystals emerging one by one, billions of them, a gloaming of frost falling silently into our world, clothing the blades of grass, the bracken fronds and marble leaves.

Bellbirds, tuis, blackbirds, grey warblers and south island tomtits are waking, one bird, and then the next; a squeak, a twitter, a stretch of silence, a peep, another silence, then a raucous chatter; arpeggios of liquid clinks and bloonks, until avian breakfast chatter is bouncing up and down our little valley. Everyone's talking! Light, colour, stillness, exuberance, fluid breath, feet planted in the earth; it seems the whole world is blessed. Resting in this pristine wonder, thinking of you, thinking of me, sharing this holiness, savouring the luminosity. Surely the knowing of such a moment, this absolute ordinariness, this perfection of everything – just as it is – surely this is the very heart of prayer.

A single beech leaf.

blushed gold pastelling incrementally to a viridian hint of summer long gone,
flittering tumbling
pausing in a moment of perfect levitation
then changing pace and direction
zigging and zagging
falling down the staircase of the sky
and thwapping ever so delicately into a waiting puddle.

Imagine the limpid surface; intimately, effortlessly, echoing a golden leaf spiralling ever bigger and clearer,

details of veins and ragged edges,
turning in space
Does the puddle have any kind of aqueous expectation?
a tiny almost imperceptible thwap
pushing the surface tension, liquid drum skin stretching earthward
receiving, gathering,
then springing outward
a flawless catch and rebound
concentric rings of mirror-like crystal
a rippling world observed by fantail and the
sparkling of my neurons in breath-holding recognition of something miraculous.
Surely this too is a kind of prayer?

After breakfast,
sitting on the porch of Triple Gem ... a bowl of becoming,
petals of knowing opening and closing within and around.
River sound swooshes and hums with the light, pine auras of blinding whiteness, individual needles –
some neurotransmitter has turned up the magnification!
and suddenly
as if from nowhere
a harrier ... two harriers!
(Everything has become slow motion.)
hovering, gliding, sliding on the dense thickness of frosted air
rising in the waves of warming light
while visions of far away friends
and yogis in meditation
and earthworms wrapped in their dark warm beds
and micro-organisms in the stream
and each separate leaf and needle
all of us and all of this
together
weaving
an elegant tapestry of beauty and meaning.
Surely this is prayer in action.

A middle size fly is buzzing in the sunlight
exploring the wall of my hut
seeking whatever flies seek on pristine wintery mornings
His eyes are so big!
where did he spend his night?
Something feels immense and perfect
life thrumming as the earth turns
and illumination races down the face of Jones's ridge
a waking of newness
a heart glow of breath-catching gratitude
a perfect eternal moment
a life worth living
Surely knowing this is the blessing of prayer.

may all beings be well
may all beings be happy
Sarva Mangalam

New Year's Resolutions or is it revolutions?

by Tarchin Hearn

New Year's Day 2006

Orgyen Hermitage, New Zealand

I have just read "On Equilibrium" by John Ralston Saul. This rather dense but thought provoking book explores, amongst other things, the question of common sense and has contributed to this essay.

What do we have in common with each other? What do we share with our parents, our children and the people next door? What do we have in common with the trees and the birds, with the rivers and sky, with weather patterns and communities of intestinal bacteria? What is our commonality with stars and galaxies?

An atom is an interacting sensitivity of protons, neutrons and electrons. Myriad shapes and forms of interacting sensitivities: molecular, chemical, electrical; responsivenesses of cells and organs and organisms. An "Indra's Net" of mutual shapings and influencings and interpenetrations. A staggering interdependency. A beginningless endless community of multileveled communication. A boundless indeterminacy of co-arising factors, ravelling and unravelling in the transient sensing, an ocean of sensing, a commons of becoming, a common sensing, – this mysterious powerful stranger called now.

Winds are blowing down from the Kaimai
Whirling, swirling, gusting, blustering
Raising grit and dust, thrashing the punga fronds
and white noising through the pines
- needles floating in the sky.

Meadow of golden grasses,
of daisy, clover, ragwort and freshly sprouting gorse
countless botanical beings ripple and wave.
Earth pranas chasing and racing.
A joyful patterning
- the weaving and dancing revealed in photons of sun.
A mother thrush hops and runs, hunkered close to the ground as babies peep in the nest.
A hedgehog the size of my fist snuffles through the stubble still looking for worms.

Caffeine is blowing in my blood
Whirling, swirling, gusting, blustering
Raising thought and feeling
oceans of sensation
- rippling conversations of inner and outer.

Biomorphologies of bone and flesh
an infinitude of syncopations,
rhythms and beatings,
weavings of knowing,
coy peaking planes of becoming,
heating and warming and quickening and spreading
this sitting in the morning light
fingers tapping a keyboard
sharing these swirlings with the swirlings
that are you.

There seems a desperate need for certainty
stalking the limited byways of linear viewing.
Plodding, heavying, forcing, coercing
sinking thought and feeling in a shrinkage of general exhaustion.

- so busy, so tired. (Have you been here?)

Lists to be made
Things to be bought
Deadlines to be met.
The daily dose of media fear
whirling, swirling, gusting, blustering,
emotions of compulsion and unfulfilment racing along the
quantum fields of world wide web.
terrorism
bird-flu fear
inflation
mortgage rates
pension stability
eco disaster
fishery collapse
plutonium decay
Oh the list can be great!

Utopias, 'make overs', improvements, things to buy, and plans for control
Dreams of permanence enshrined in repetitive patterns of neural transmission and hormonal release.
And it's so relentless!

Ripplings of thought
flights of narrow fantasy
colluding together,
media enhanced,
a species wide prison of narrowness and monomania
one world, one market, one culture, one truth
disguised in the thin veneer of sound bites, lies and catchy phrases.

My friends
let us wake up!
Our common sense is the sensing that is common to us all.
A most precious quality
Not low grade public beliefs and collective superstitions
- fantasies of guaranteed outcomes driven by painful needs for certainty but

The all-ness of the commons
The vast, infinitude of breezes
the playful, terrifying, invigorating, creating, vividly awake sensing
The responding, dancing, jamming,
ensembles of musing
resonating the symphonies of meadows and thrushes and mountains and stars, and oceans and
creatures, both single celled and multi.
We share a common base of sensing!
and in this commons of sensitive knowing, is inherent uncertainty and unresolvedness
the story is vast
and it is still in process
an infinity of factors can never be pinned down in one simple plot-line.

My friends
let us wake up,
and down, and out and sideways
Let us wake in all directions
An Irish wake, singing and celebrating the lives of the departed, embracing impermanence
Our commonness, our humbleness, our unpindownableness.

Let us pause and breathe and actually think!

- some clarity
 - some common sense
 - some determination to walk, one step at a time, feet firmly rooted in the groundlessness of now, valuing the mystery of birthing and dying and indeterminacy.
- Appreciating the necessity of others
- the living world in which we live.

Commonsense is precious
It's much more than we usually think.
May it flower in our actions.
Don't be satisfied sleepwalking
Don't stop until you drop!

Notes:

Indra's Net is a metaphor for reality, often used in Buddhist texts. Imagine a multidimensional network. Each nexus point is a jewel that reflects all the other jewels. Each point is ultimately influenced by the activity of every other point.

The Kaimai is the name for a range of steep forested hills in the north island of New Zealand. Orgyen Hermitage is on the flanks of the Kaimai.

Punga is a general term referring to a variety of large tree ferns found in New Zealand.

Contemplations to Support a Well-Functioning Dharma Community at Wangapeka Retreat Centre

by Tarchin Hearn
June 2005
Wangapeka

*Ethics must evolve from clear seeing.
Attempting the reverse is a recipe for disaster!*

Periodic examination of ethics, moral guidelines and how we relate to each other is an essential, ongoing process for any well functioning dharma community. A healthy ethical stance, particularly at residential centres such as Wangapeka where there is a steady flow through of people, can never be something that is carved in stone. What is needed is a fluid approach to relationships that will reflect and support the current needs and experiences of all the people involved. A community that aspires to "awaken for the sake of all beings", needs to look deeply and frequently into the foundations of life, and of reality, so that each member's behaviour is in tune with the unfolding of Nature and is not just a reflection of a particular collection of human hopes and beliefs. A workable code of ethics must evolve from clear seeing. Attempting the reverse, in other words to limit one's seeing in order to fit the constraints of a pre-existing rigid set of moral rules, is a recipe for disaster.

To encourage some looking, I have outlined a few fundamental contemplations that, if we go into them deeply, will suggest a clear course of action in our daily lives. I hope that these reflections will serve as a starting point for discussion and contemplation so that the process of learning to live together in ways that support the flowering of wisdom, compassion and skilful action in the world, can become a vehicle of awakening for all those involved. Rather than a presentation of Buddhist "shoulds" and "should nots" this article will hopefully raise many questions and inspire some clear and useful thinking; perhaps even some fruitful discussion.

May we have the courage to live together with trust and honesty and in a way that supports awakening in all beings.

Five Themes to Contemplate

Causality

Everything and everyone comes into being due to myriad causes and conditions. Ultimately, every action affects everything else. What I do affects you. What you do affects me. What one person does affects the whole community. What the community does affects the individual person. What the humans do affects the plants and animals. What the other creatures do affects the humans. Contemplate this deeply.

Interbeing

Each of us is carried and moved by the inspiration, the aspirations, and the life examples, of uncountable dharma teachers from many backgrounds and traditions; a great river of wisdom and compassion expressed through art and poetry, through writings and philosophies and through the examples of their own inspiring lives. Contemplate this deeply.

Each one of us is an embodied expression of our parents and our parents' parents, and that includes their hopes and fears and attitudes to life. We contain the talents and foibles of an ocean of ancestors; their patterns of speech, their genetic tendencies, their approaches to work, religion, child rearing, politics, property and power. Each person is a vast treasury of possibility. Contemplate this deeply.

Every person is an interbeing of myriad dimensions. Each of us is a manifesting of an entire unfolding ecosystem, an evolving planet arising now as you and me. The green plants, and the water cycles, the sun and the mineral realms, along with all the other creatures, are weaving the fabric of myself and yourself through every shifting moment. Each one of us is part of the other. Contemplate this deeply.

Individual Activity

Every action of body, communication and mind is the seed for a future result. Every person carries within them the seeds of love and hate, of greed and generosity, of wisdom and confusion, of humbleness and pride. These seeds were planted by the uncountable actions of ourselves and the innumerable ancestors who preceded us. How can we water the wholesome seeds in ourselves and in each other? How can we weed out the unwholesome seeds so that they don't sprout again in the future? Consider this deeply.

Mind and Knowing

Everything that I experience arises in my own knowing. Each moment of perception is the bringing forth of a world, filled with meaning and import. At the same time, each being that I meet is, him, her or itself, also bringing forth an equally vast and meaningful world that is arising as their own unique knowing. The flavour of my knowing, my overall attitudes, typical emotional states, prejudices and aspirations helps to mould the universe I perceive and live in, and so too does yours. The universe that is my knowing shapes and affects the universe of your knowing while simultaneously the universe of your knowing is shaping and affecting the universe of my knowing. Contemplate this.

A Matrix of Knowing and Understanding

When we see the vast miracle that each being is, we relate to them differently than when we see them as a discrete fragment of our own field of experience. Each being is an expression of immeasurable inspiration, talent and raw material. Each being is a unique matrix of knowing with their own hopes and fears and aspirations. The question of wholesome relationship between ourselves and another, needs to consider not only how not to harm ourselves and others but also how to support each other as well.

These themes are overlapping and each one contains and implies the others. To recognise the vastness of oneself inevitably leads us to appreciate the vastness of another. To feel small and insignificant frequently leads us to see others as small and insignificant. Before declaring rules and guidelines for community members surely we need to give immense energy to enquiring and searching into what we are and what the world is. If we find that we are completely autonomous, independent entities competing with other autonomous, independent entities for limited resources, this will imply a certain way of living. If we regard every being other than our self as an object to be used to prop up our sense of well being, then this will imply a way of living. If we know in the bones of our being, if we feel with intelligence and empathy, our interdependency and interbeingness with everyone and everything, then this will suggest yet another way of living. Surely any code of ethics must be preceded by deep, heartfelt investigation of what is. Anything else would be a recipe for more suffering.

Over the years at the Wangapeka Study and Retreat Centre, we have encouraged all residents and visitors to use the Five Training Precepts, the Precepts in Positive Expression and the Bodhisattva Vow, as a way of encouraging mindfulness and ongoing question into how to relate to others during their stay. The Precepts and Bodhisattva ideal are basic to all schools of Buddhism and have historically arisen out of deep and profound contemplation of themes such as the one's I have suggested above. They are not rules in the way of the Ten Commandments. Rather, they are attempts to bring increased compassionate awareness to some of the major themes of daily living such as taking life as we do each time we eat, how we relate to each other through objects and the sense of possessing them, how we use our senses, how we communicate and how we feed ourselves. With deepening mindfulness of what we are and how we affect each other we can relate with others in ways that supports the wellbeing of the entire community. The Precepts and Bodhisattva vow are discussed in Daily Puja (available as an ebook here on this website) as well as some of my other books such as Natural Awakening (for a complete list of publications see Wangapeka Books). The themes of interconnectedness are beautifully presented in Thich Nhat Hanh's book "Cultivating the Mind of Love".

The Five Training Precepts

When we are lost in confusion or in the grip of negative habitual patterns such as fear and jealousy, anger and lust, these traditional training precepts can be a life raft that can save us from doing something that later we might regret.

1. I undertake to train myself to abstain from taking the life of any living being.
2. I undertake to train myself to abstain from taking that which is not given.
3. I undertake to train myself to abstain from sensual misconduct.
4. I undertake to train myself to abstain from unskillful speech.
5. I undertake to train myself to abstain from taking substances that cause intoxication to the point of heedlessness.

Precepts in Positive Expression

When we are feeling clear, awake and responsive, guidelines for wholesome relating that are expressed as negatives, ie "I will train myself not to do such and such" are hardly enough. Spending our lives not doing things isn't a very creative way of living. These positive expressions of the five traditional precepts point to a way of living that actively embraces and supports the wellbeing of everyone and everything.

1. I will train myself to support and appreciate the life of all living beings. I will live with a sensitive and responsible awareness for the whole ecology of life.
2. I will train myself to dwell more and more in the mind of spontaneous generosity. Daily I will give material support, emotional support, and an example to others of awakening in action.
3. I will train myself to use the senses to further awakening, explore Dharma, and to come to know the world more profoundly and more compassionately.
4. I will train myself to communicate in a skilful and compassionate manner.
5. I will train myself to be ever more directly aware of how nutriment affects the mind and body. I will eat and drink and nurture myself and others, in a way that supports awakening.

Bodhisattva Vow

There are many versions of the Bodhisattva Vow. All of them are essentially a strong expression of aspiration to live a life that is thoroughly imbued with compassion and clear seeing.

However innumerable beings are,
 I vow to meet them with kindness and interest.
 However inexhaustible the states of suffering are,
 I vow to touch them with patience and love.
 However immeasurable the Dharmas are,
 I vow to explore them deeply.
 However incomparable the mystery of interbeing,
 I vow to surrender to it freely.

From this day forth, with Wisdom and
 Compassion as my Lamp and Staff,
 I dedicate all my life energies to the welfare
 of all beings.

Further Explorations

- 1 - Each day take one of the five themes and make it your main contemplation for an entire day. Use it to shine the light of fresh seeing on the ordinary activities of your life, such as relating to your family and

friends, to the people you meet at work, to strangers, adversaries, flowers, trees, dogs, cats, birds and other creatures. At the end of the day review what you discovered and consider what this implies in terms of how you live with others and how you could live with others. Is there a difference here? In the light of this contemplation, would you change the way you do anything? Does this have any implications for how you earn your living, how you relax, in general, how you live your life?

2 - Do the above exercise with a small group of people, between 2 and 5. After exploring a theme for a day or so, come together in a group. Begin by spending a few minutes relaxing into awareness of your breathing. Then, if they are meaningful to you, recite the verses for Refuge along with the Bodhisattva Vow. Having expressed together a shared aspiration then share your insights with each other. What did you discover? Is there anything you feel bad about or regret? Are there ways that the contemplation has strengthened you? What do your discoveries imply in terms of how your behaviour helps or harms yourself or others?

3 - Each day take one of the training precepts or one part of the Bodhisattva Vow and keep it vivid and present with you in the midst of whatever interactions happen for you that day. At the end of the day review what you have experienced and what you have learned.

4 - Do the above exercise with a small group and, similar to the second exercise, share your insights and discoveries with each other at the end of the day.

5 - Having contemplated any of the preceding themes for some time, create a work of art that somehow expresses your insight or understanding. A painting, a poem, a dance, a sculpting, a piece of music and share it with others.

6 - Use your creativity and find ways of bringing these contemplations alive for yourself and others in ways that no-one else has ever done.

May your explorations and investigations flower beautifully
for the sake of all beings

Thoughts on Sangha

by Tarchin Hearn
October 2005

Adapted from a booklet by Tarchin Hearn called 'Sangha Work' available from Wangapeka Books www.wangapeka.org/treasury/wangapekabooks.html and as an ebook on this website www.wangapeka.org/treasury/sw.html

Sangha is a Pali word meaning, multitude, assemblage and community. It is one of the three Refuges in Buddhism.

At the time of the Buddha, the sangha of dharma practitioners was not considered to be separate from the larger society. Both sangha and lay community were profoundly intermingled and intermeshed. Each supported, inspired and nourished the other at many levels. To really appreciate and understand this, you need to be open to the possibility of a well functioning culture with very different sets of values than those we have in the money driven world of today. I'm sure ancient Indian society had many traits that we could easily recognise. A caste system separated people according to ethnicities of money, vocation and religious beliefs ... not much different from the social strata that we generally take for granted today. One big difference though was that in India there was a huge respect for people who left their worldly careers in order to pursue truth and the quest of enlightenment. One could shave one's head and wear simple robes and be called a *samanasamana* also has the flavour of one who is honoured or respected - honoured or respected for grappling directly with the great issues of how to live well as a living, conscious, thinking, feeling being, immersed in a matrix of mystery - a mystery of birth and death and grief and feelings and curiosity and wonderment - this world we humans inhabit.

Two thousand five hundred years ago in India, there were all kinds of religious orders: communities of naked ascetics, communities of renunciates, communities of forest dwellers, communities of sadhus. In the sutras, the Buddha often referred to these gatherings of yogis and meditators that acted as de-facto families and homes for aspiring seekers. The main stream society at the time of the Buddha, not only tolerated what today might be thought of as dropping out, dole bludging, or simply antisocial, neurotic or at least irresponsible behaviour but, by and large, admired this way of living and saw it as a heroic quest. Even though the average person may not have felt that they could follow such a path (calming, tranquillising, soothing, allaying, extinguishing or destroying the passions of attachment), they were often happy to feed and give support to those who tried to do so. It was a way of contributing to the well being of the greater society, of participating in a larger scope of meaning. I suppose, in a manner of speaking, the samanas of old held the prestige of astronauts today. They were the rare, brave, determined, explorers of the 'beyond'. Their lives were a visible compass always pointing a path of sane, integrated living; a reminder of something extraordinarily precious yet freely available for everyone.

In the 1960s many of us tried to form communities that aspired to something more meaningful than making money and blindly increasing the human population. Unfortunately we identified with a word that eventually helped to marginalize a lot of the good efforts. The word I'm thinking of is 'alternative'. We pursued and celebrated alternative life styles, alternative healing and so forth. This was an understandable attempt to separate ourselves from the madness of a society that was arming itself with nuclear weaponry, engaging in horrific wars over political ideology, and learning to methodically condition, through advertising, an insatiable desire for acquiring merchandise. Unfortunately, this attempted distancing meant that these 'alternatives' were often marginalized or at best, tolerated as benign aberrations, and so they had very little effect on the lives of most of the human population. Many of my friends became interested in Buddhadharma in its various forms. They helped to create meditation centres in mountains and forests, and teaching houses in cities but, by and large, these efforts ended up as little cliques and clubs that fell short of positively influencing the direction of the larger society. In those youthful days, when we tried to build communities for dharma study and practice, it often involved cultivating a sense of being at least slightly morally superior to the rest of the population who seemed to be blindly supporting the collective madness. When this 'us-ing' and 'them-ing' became strong, it actually hindered our ability to realise true sangha. Unbeknownst to us, it tended to obscure our knowing of the deep communal nature of everything.

When the Buddha began to teach, many came and wanted to live and study with him. His presence inspired people to wake up from the murky conditioned dreams of greed, hatred and delusion. To be fair, he probably had a lot less competition. Try to imagine the Buddha arriving in New York city today. Supporters would place advertising in the New York Times for a weekend retreat. It would appear along with the other 450 'spiritual' workshops and related activities happening that weekend, not to mention the movies, theatres, nightclubs and glittery shopping. Perhaps at the time of the Buddha, when he came to a village to teach, a much higher percentage of beings would attend. He was the best show going, perhaps the only show!

In those days, to be ordained into the sangha was very simple. The Buddha said "*Ehi bhikkhu*" and snapped his fingers and that was that. *Ehi* means come. *Bhikkhu* in this context means wander. Come wander forth for the good of the many folk. Right from the beginning there was a sense that joining the order meant going forth from a life of blind habit to a way of living that uplifted everyone. In Tibetan, the word for bhikkhu is *gelong* and it carries the additional meaning of 'one who is free to ask question'. *Ehi Bhikkhu*.

I imagine a relatively small group of beings, living and studying the dharma together. The wider, extended community was happy to give them support in the form of food, clothing, medicine and shelter and, in return, the sangha provided a very visible example of sane and mindful living. In this way, the sangha supported the society and the society supported the sangha. Each benefited the other. Sangha was not an alternative lifestyle choice. It was a co-operative endeavour the entire society engaged in, to support community building. Today we could call this, '*sangha work*', the work of discovering the true communal nature that we are.

As the years went by and the fame of the Buddha spread throughout the land, more and more people came to join the community. Five monks became ten, became five thousand and I imagine the Buddha could have spent all his time snapping his fingers and saying *Ehi Bhikkhu*. Eventually he allowed the senior monks to ordain beings into the sangha in the name of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. In those early years the sangha was small and the monks quite gifted in their aspiration to awaken for the sake of all beings. They spent their days in a continuous exploration and cultivation of compassionate awareness. As the Order grew, however, the calibre of the monks gradually diluted. What would you expect? You could be a servant and get ordained. With the snap of fingers, suddenly, the tables were turned and your former master would be offering you food with respectful bows. As Namgyal Rinpoché once remarked, a lot of monks were in it for a free lunch! They were not necessarily mature in their aspiration to cultivate wisdom and compassion for the sake of all beings. In the grip of desire and lust they would hunger after the visiting men and women and sometimes get sexually involved. They would speak angrily when caught up in frustration and, sometimes, when floundering in general confusion and unawareness, they would lose the inspiration to meditate or engage in any exploration or practice at all.

The lay community of supporters began to grumble. Why should we support these lazy do-nothings? They went to the Buddha and complained. Understanding the suffering that was arising in these situations and recognizing the importance of harmonious interactions between the ordained community and the lay community, the Buddha '*allowed*' the monks to have more and more rules, guiding their behaviour. By time the teaching of Buddhadharmā was established in Tibet, monks had more than 226 precepts! In the early days of the Buddha's teaching it would take a matter of seconds to ordain someone. When I received the full ordination from His Holiness the 16th Karmapa the ceremony took more than two and a half hours and I was the only person being ordained at that time.

Today, in many Buddhist communities, there is a clearly visible gap between the ordained sangha and the lay community. This gap manifests in numerous ways and has contributed to many unhelpful attitudes and beliefs. Monks and nuns and the lay community are identified as separate from each other by the clothes they wear and the life styles they follow. Too often, there has developed a belief that only monks and nuns have any possibility of awakening and this tends to support further beliefs that the ordained sangha is somehow superior while lay people are inferior. These beliefs are mutually colluding and often actively carried by both groups. This sense of separation has led to all sorts of conceits, rooted in comparisons such as better than, worse than or equal to. In the process, the living dharma which was originally to help beings cultivate wisdom and compassion has often become so utterly

obscured under rules and rituals concerning 'us' and 'them' that the Buddha himself would have been saddened to see it.

Turning to sangha work today, could we cultivate a sense of dharma sangha that is thoroughly inclusive? Not a sangha of celibates but a lay bodhisattva sangha - a community of beings who are waking up to their interdependence with all living creatures and cultivating their abilities to be of service to others. Could we work towards a sangha that was visible and concrete enough to give people a sense of belonging to something wholesome and clearly defined, while at the same time, spacious and open enough to not exclude? This means not excluding others from the sangha but also, not excluding the sangha from others. Could we cultivate a lay sangha that is non-hierarchical, yet carries a deep valuing of the wisdom of experience of those that have lived and practised before us? Could we cultivate a vibrant appreciation for the talents and life experience of each of the current members of the community? Could we bring forth a sangha that has the strength and resilience to act as a place of refuge and support for its members when they are lost in states of difficulty while simultaneously being flexible and responsive to the needs of the surrounding larger world? Could we live as a community of friends in dharma who support each other on the path of awakening love and clear seeing and through this, become an inspiration for others even when they are from very different walks of life?

The year 2005 seems to be a time of mounting sectarianism. Fear is has become a tool of governance. Suspicion of difference is on the rise. Race, religion, economic status, and political affiliations have become powerful motors for divisiveness. The challenges of ecological change continue to grow and yet we humans seem to be retreating from addressing and exploring in any practical, meaningful way the huge question and immense implications of true sangha. How do we live well together on this cosmically tiny sphere of living rock we call planet earth? Who are we? What are we? Where do we begin? Where do we end off? What are we doing? How is what I am doing affecting what you are doing? How can a thinking feeling human being function well in this vast mystery? Contemplate the stars. Contemplate the creatures living in a drop of pond water. Marvel at how a caterpillar can transform into a butterfly, how the moon stays up in the sky, how an acorn becomes an oak, and further still, how it is possible to raise any of these questions in the first place. Just to embark on such questioning is to enter into sangha work.

Intelligent Lovingkindness

by Tarchin Hearn

February 2 2005

Orgyen Hermitage, NZ

Dear Friends

My cabin is surrounded by soft grey mist. A light rain has been falling all night. The paper is damp and my pen is grooving into it like a stylus of ancient times. Bird cries are harmonizing with the rustle of wind in leaves. A chorus of cicadas are providing a background drone. Crystal drops of water plink as they fall from the gutter; round sounds that blossom as echoes of emptiness in my mind. The occasional muted roar of a car going by, hints at a larger world. It's hot and tropical and the earth smells mysterious and ancient.

The pace of human life seems to be going faster and faster. Perhaps this is as much a factor of getting older as it is an objective truth but I'm sure many of you know what I mean. News is often grim. Iraq, tsunami, economies based on weapon sales, governments powered by political manoeuvring, pornography, deceit, ecological disaster and on and on. It's ironic that in the world of global communication with its promised potential of more information and new possibilities for education, many people are so overwhelmed with conceptual data that there seems to be a retreat into cynicism and reactionary attitudes. In the last few months both in Australia and New Zealand, I have noticed numerous letters and editorials in newspapers and magazines, expressing views that essentially, celebrate greed and self interest and portray caring for others as the mark of woolly mindedness. We are surrounded by stuff, stuff and more stuff and yet modern culture seems to be utterly obsessed with acquiring even more. A mad world, yet throughout it all there are pools of beauty. There are streams of caring. There are reservoirs of wonder and cascades of moist eyed gratitude for the sheer love of it all. But these seem to be rarer and rarer. We must take care they don't altogether dry up.

A practitioner, or an adventurer, or perhaps more clearly a student, or even an explorer of life – of awakening – of buddhadharma, needs to frequently return to the place that nourishes and sustains them. As physical organisms, we need regular watering and fuelling to stay alive. This is a biological truth, but in a similar way, we need regular immersions in intelligent lovingkindness to stay human(e). Real lovingkindness is inseparable from clear seeing intelligence. The two go together like wetness and water. If you take the lovingkindness out of intelligence, it becomes cold, self justifying, intolerant and manipulative. If you take the intelligence out of lovingkindness, you get cliquish clinging and emotional reactivity.

Intelligent love and loving intelligence arise in the world from causes and conditions. It is not just a matter of luck or 'good karma'. I'm talking about actively encouraging a way of being and a way of relating to others. I doubt if 'market forces', so beloved by many economists, will bring these qualities into being.

Here is a meditation that popped into existence during a retreat last week at the Dharma Gaia Garden for Mindful Living. We practised it together in the evening, sitting outside with moonlight and stars. I will sketch out the method in a step by step way. You can spend as much time as you like with each section and, of course, adapt the whole thing so that it works for your own particular circumstances.

(1) Relax into a rich tactile awareness of the rhythms of your own breathing. Feel the tides of breathing, ebbing and flowing through the whole of your body; rhythmic pulsings of aliveness tugged by the moon of history and now. Breathe with relaxed sensitivity and allow sufficient time to settle.

(2) In the midst of this vivid awareness of breathing, imagine that in your heart there is something extraordinarily beautiful and flowering. A jewel-like precious flowering. A flowering jewel. In Sanskrit a word for flowering is bodhi. Actually, you don't need to imagine it. It is what you are; an awakening or flowering citta. Citta means heart, mind or intention. When we put these together we have Bodhicitta; a heart, mind, intention of awakening. Think of a freshly opening rose bud or peony or magnolia, its petals graced by tiny droplets of dew, glistening jewel-like in the morning sun. Something that is you is flowering, beautiful and natural, unhurried in its own rhythm of becoming. Breathe with this for a while.

(3) If it helps you could murmur the mantra OM MANI PADME HUM. Mani means jewel and padme, (often pronounced paymay) means lotus or flower. Feel the incoming tide of breath swirling in and over and around the tissues and cells of your body, and on the exhalation murmur the mantra, like the sound of a bubbling brook or the humming of bees. Rest in an increasingly confident knowing that the heart core of being, the heart core mystery of becoming that is your being, has been flowering jewel-like, for billions of years; stardust weaving into forms of intelligence and knowing, a planet waking up to itself.

As
you breathe in and out, allow the flower to open.

(4) Eventually, you can let go of the OM MANI PADME HUM and simply feel the sound 'Ahhh' on each exhalation – a great sigh of letting be. Resting in the heart, flowering and ah-ing, relax more and more in the moment.

(5) Recall the various beings you have met or thought about in the course of the day. Human beings, animals, plants, ecosystems, groups of beings and so forth. Recall them one at a time. On the inhalation, gently centring in the heart, mentally whisper their name and on the exhalation mentally invite them to rest easefully in the flowering of your heart. With the next inhalation, think, "May you be well" and on the exhalation, "May you be happy". The well means to be well physically. The happy means to be happy mentally. Then let go of them for one complete cycle of breath and then repeat the process with someone else. Gradually work your way through each of the beings you have been involved with during the day. Naming them, inviting them in, wishing them well, letting them go.

(6) Once the preceding steps begin to flow well for you, then you can expand the whole process. Each time you invite someone into your heart, you begin to see that in their heart core is also a flowering jewel. As you breathe, recognise that they too are breathing – rhythms of becoming dancing with the inner and outer circumstances of their own unique lives. Nestled in the petals of their own jewel-like heart flowering, are all the beings who are important to them. Now, when you invite this one person into your heart you sense that you are also inviting all the beings that have touched them. Of course, each of those beings also has a flower in their heart holding innumerable beings and so the process is infinite!

Visit this mystery again and again. Link it with your breathing and take it deep into your cells. This flowering heart jewel bodhicitta is able to embrace the interweaving lives of myriad beings. Good, bad, happy, sad, misguided and brilliantly inspired. Gradually a transformation occurs within you as the realization dawns that not only can you embrace all beings but that this clear-knowing-embracing is the heart energy of everything you are.

I'm pausing, my fingers are getting a bit cramped so I'm going to lay down my pen and imagine the more than 300 people on this e-mail list. Breathing in ... hello, warm greetings. Breathing out, please rest easefully in my heart. In my mind's eye I see a flowering jewel in your heart – the flowering jewel that you are. A flowering of your parents, your grandparents and their parents. I sense your children and your children's children, generations yet to come. I marvel at your teachers, myriad moments of learning and discovery. I am awed at knowing the flow of elements, soil, air, water and solar energy and the inconceivable numbers of sentient beings that support and sustain you. I see a flowering in your heart and the heart of each being that is part of you. Breathing in and out, Ahhhh! May you be well. May you be happy.

Practising this way, just before going to sleep at night. Waking up and meeting the day with this breath of understanding. Engaging in our daily business with this heart of appreciation. This is a way to moisten the desiccated heart, to slow the rush, and to nourish the knowing of beauty everywhere.

With warm good wishes to each of you
Tarchin

Thinking of my Lama

by Tarchin Hearn

August 2004

at Mana Retreat, NZ

*Read beside the Wangapeka River
during the Memorial Ceremony
for the Ven. Namgyal Rinpoché
20 March 2005*

Thinking of my lama.
Those days of summer 2003
You graced the world with profound pith.
The ultimate perfection resting,
just as it is.
You poured out your treasure vase
a cornucopia of jewels, myriad
eclectic ways of fathoming dharma
through the means of body speech and mind.
Great traditions of empowerment you scattered
far and wide sowing seeds in the
living earth of being's minds.
You opened your worldly treasury
weavings and jewels and perfumes and music
and food and telescopes, using these
wonders to feed the marvelling minds
of flowering bodhicitta.
You continuously pointed to material
to embodiment and showed the way of
love through celebrating the detail.
Sitting now in New Zealand, a remembrance,
of all of us
with you
The Great Empowerment of Mahamaya
Sun streaming in the windows
Row on row of red robes
Moist eyes
Blessed Recognition
This poem has no end.
A golden dandelion flower bloomed in our midst gradually becoming seed

And the summer winds of Kinmount
gently blew through the hall and
the entire seed head floated
out and up and over
Catching thermals and crosswinds and down drafts
Drifting on jet stream
and planting flowers of
laughing golden radiance
Not lineage but multiage
A vast blessing for the world

In all the realms of experience
may I never be separate from my lama
May I use with joy and abandon
all the teaching he gives me
May the bodhisattva stages flourish
at every level of being

May Love and Clear Seeing -
the wondrous blessing of the Victorious Ones
Flower everywhere for everyone.

Sense and Nonsense

by Tarchin Hearn

August 28 2004

Orgyen Hermitage, NZ

During the last few weeks we have been staying on our land near Katikati in the North Island of New Zealand. It has been a bountiful time, studying, contemplating, painting, writing, planting trees and digging paths. I am currently reading a fascinating book called "Guide To The Galaxy" by Nigel Henbest and Heather Couper. It is filled with images and ideas that trigger such fruitful contemplations that sometimes I barely make it through a few pages. I just read the following words.

'In less than a couple of generations, spaceprobes have completely revolutionized our knowledge of the Sun and planets to an extent summed up by the comment that 'pretty well all we thought we knew was nonsense'...

and

'... These new views have given us a fresh understanding of the Galaxy. No longer is it just an assemblage of stars moving sedately through empty space, affecting each other only by the long-range bonds of gravity. We now see the Galaxy as an active, and interactive place. Space between the stars is far from empty; indeed, we can now map the swirls and clouds in the interstellar gas as we can now map the Earth's atmosphere. In the densest clouds, we can now see stars being born. And we can measure how dying stars churn up the interstellar gas, and promote the birth of new stars. Just as some scientists have said that we should see the Earth's land, sea and living beings as a complete entity, 'Gaia', so we now see the Galaxy as more than just the sum of its parts.'

Sitting and contemplating, I found myself rewriting the text.

Half a lifetime of studying, contemplating, and teaching buddha dharma has completely revolutionized my knowledge of things, events and consciousness to an extent summed up by the comment that 'pretty well all I thought I knew was nonsense'.

New views are giving us a fresh understanding of what is going on. No longer are we just an assemblage of beings and objects moving through empty space, affecting each other only by long range attractions and repulsions. Now we can feel our embeddedness in a totally active and interactive place. Space between beings and objects is far from empty; indeed we can now appreciate the multidimensional swirls of substance and knowing in the unbroken wholeness of totality. In a living being, we can now see universes of experience being born. And we can sense how continuously transforming present states are the birth places of new universes of knowing. Just as some scientists have said that we should see the Earth's land, sea and living beings as a complete entity 'Gaia', so we now see any living being, including myself writing these words and you reading them, as more than the sum of its parts.

The limitations of our viewing are probably infinite. Each breakthrough of understanding and experience opens our world, our universe, in the direction of increasing wonder and vastness, yet with continuing exploration, this new space of understanding becomes a new form of limitation. I think a life of dharma is a life of continual refinement of understanding.

Imagine meeting another human being in the middle of an open meadow. Photons, originally emitted from the sun, are bouncing off your surfaces and streaming, as dense arrays of electromagnetic energy, towards each of you. The lenses in your eyes, are focusing the light onto retinas, which trigger chemical changes in optic nerves. A cascade of neurochemical activity is flooding through two human bodies in this process of mutually seeing each other.

While you are standing there, the muscles of your entire body are constantly tightening and loosening maintaining an upright posture as you fall into the vast gravity sink of this planet that is whirling around a star. 'You' don't even know that this is happening. It appears you are standing firmly on the ground. There is a voltage difference between the crown of your head and your feet and although it is unlikely

that lightening will flash down your spine, your blood chemistry and arterial tension - actually an inconceivable number of reactions and responses - are continually adjusting to each other. We call this vast play of activity, standing in a meadow.

Your upright body is not just an object occupying space, it is a living body, an awesome co-operation of trillions of cells, each one metabolising, and reproducing, and repairing and communicating with its surroundings. The cells of your body and the ways they organise themselves are embedded in patterns of genetic conditioning, endless choreographies of chemistry that go back generation after generation, back to the beginning of patterning, the beginning of life, wherever that might be.

Photons from the sun are striking your retinal surfaces and triggering cascades of transformation in a flowing process that is the summation, the overall dancing, of an infinity of becomings. Memories are birthed into being and instantly your entire organism responds to them, all of this triggered by seeing the other person who is presumably seeing you. Muscles shift and metabolism quickens and you begin to sweat ever so slightly. This increases the humidity in the air around you. Flowers in the meadow are transpiring. If they loose water faster than they can take it up they begin to wilt. Increasingly humid air, the water being contributed from your body, slows the rate of water loss and the flowers look lush and beautiful. They too are reflecting photons. You take a step towards your friend, releasing pressure on micro-organisms which changes the soil chemistry thus affecting the plants. The plants are giving off oxygen through photosynthesis and you are breathing in the oxygen.

You open your mouth and say "Hello" "Kia Ora". You 'language' with each other yet without a talking social milieu you wouldn't be able to say anything meaningful. Language rests in a shared space of knowing. It is not something an individual person does but an extraordinarily complex experience shared with others. It took lifetimes for human language to come into being.

I'm going to stop here and let you flesh out this never ending story for yourself. 'Pretty much all we thought we knew was non-sense'. Most people are living most of their lives in a conceptual world, a dream world, even if they are dreaming about profound dharma and excitingly complex concepts. Open your senses and sharpen your discrimination and allow the wisdom that is ripening to blossom.

Today I woke up a little more
and flowered in the confidence
that
'pretty much all experience is sensible knowing'.

Halleluiah!

A Yoga/Sadhana of the Eight Offerings

by Tarchin Hearn

June 2004

Nature is a dance of continuous offering. Rain moistening ground and ground water birthing clouds. Sunlight energising plants and plants modifying sunlight. Creatures being food for others who, in turn, become food for yet others. Giving and receiving and receiving and giving. These flows of transformation are the ungraspable substance of everything. You could say that the entire the path of awakening revolves around recognising and releasing into this spontaneous fluidity of being. On the other hand, pain and suffering, anguish and worry, plotting and planning, the chaos of terror and the dreaming of security, these all too common energies help to craft a frozen world of forgetfulness, of blindness to the dynamic creative multi-weaving processes that we are. How can we thaw? How can we soften? How can we make the brittle more malleable and the stiff both warm and flexible?

In most religions there are ceremonies of offering. In the Tibetan tradition, especially the lower tantras, an immense effort is put into offerings. Thousands of butter lamps, bowls of water, flowers, food and so forth, are stacked up in front of statues or paintings of the Buddha. In Southeast Asia the temples are filled with elaborate offerings often given by people who are materialistically very poor. While we were visiting Myanmar it was explained to us that by making offerings people were "accumulating merit" and by giving as much as they could now, they hoped to be born wealthy in a future life. This is the point where many western Buddhists can begin to experience a flutter of doubt. Psychologically, it seems too much like trying to bribe or placate the deities, not to mention it being a backhanded way of financing the monasteries. Undoubtedly, when in the flow of religious devotion, these practices can be very uplifting, but when the critical thinking cap is on you might find yourself asking, what does this religious tinsel and decoration have to do with mindfulness, with awareness, with compassionate activity? Many people I have spoken to feel they can dispense with all the ritual. 'It might be okay for those people, it's part of their culture, but we have to have a practice that is in harmony with our culture.'

Actually, the culture I grew up in, and probably the culture you grew up in, is a culture that is hugely devoted to consumerism. It is devoted to establishing and maintaining one's identity on the basis of what one owns. Our sense of self is amazingly tied up in the objects that surround us. We live in a culture of greed and self interest, a strange mix of fantastic material wealth running hand in hand with a mindset of poverty. In the midst of plenty there is a pervasive feeling of never enough coupled with fear of loosing what we do have and all of this contributes to an inflexibility, a stiffness in body, speech and mind that warps our ability to relate to others.

In dharma, the classical antidote to greed and self interest is generosity, giving, offering. The real meaning of *punya* which is the word commonly translated as merit, is power. "Accumulating merit" through the practice of generosity means to accumulate more energy, a more powerful ability to compassionately, responsively and skilfully live in the constantly changing mystery of what is.

In the Vajrayana Buddhism, there are eight traditional offerings: water for drinking, water for washing the feet, flowers, incense, light, perfumes, food, and music or sound. These would be offered each day to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, or to other symbols that represent the flowering of wisdom and compassion. These offerings can be profound practices that have little to do with giving flowers and incense to brass statues or paintings or even living teachers. The Buddha really doesn't need water and candles and incense. Your liberation is not going to be bought for 100,000 butter lamps!

In the East, though offerings are made in a real and tangible way, they are supposed to symbolise inner qualities. Think of the eight offerings as a yoga or a sadhana which can have the power to transform the way we live. By cultivating the essential meaning behind these eight symbols, we remind ourselves of what is truly valuable. Loosening the strings of attachment, and resting with increasing confidence in an inexhaustible flow of mutual shaping and support, we gradually recognise and appreciate the real wealth that is in all of us. This is the heart of empowerment.

The following words are written in the first person. As you read them, take them to heart and feel that it is you who is speaking. Allow the meaning behind the words to flower in your midst as direct experience.

Sarva Mangalam ~ All is Blessing

Preparation: Reflecting on Refuge and Aspiration

I rest at ease enjoying the flowing of breath. Within me and around me is the shrine of the world, a monastery of becoming. The clouds in the sky, the rabbits on the lawn, the meditators in their huts, the birds singing bell-like in the bush, the river rushing in the valley, the farmer bringing in the cows for milking, this is where I am. Open your senses to where you are.

I feel the presence of my teachers inspiring awakening in the marrow of my being. I sense my ancestors, a river of talent flowing through the changing landscapes of time. I rest in the immense ecology of this living world, breathing with a matrix of beings and being. I pray for the well fare of everyone and make offerings to give myself away.

Actual Offering Practice

To all of you, teachers, ancestors and matrix of life, I offer water for drinking. Crystal water flowing through the body purifying the sense doors. Cleansing my seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and mental activity so that I can meet the world, just as it is, to be utterly present and compassionately responsive, to every arising object whether inner or outer, animate or inanimate. To offer water for drinking is to flood the entire of being with the fluid bliss of seeing clearly without judgment, of hearing without confusion, of touching with wonderment and curiosity, of smelling with vast sensitivity, of tasting with fine and subtle discrimination, of remembering, emotioning, thinking, and conceptualising whilst clearly knowing that this is what is happening. This is the offering of water for drinking and I offer it without attachment.

I offer water for washing the feet. This represents the purification and nourishing of the foundation of motivation, one's heart for awakening (*bodhicitta*). The act of purifying is the act of hundred percenting, being utterly present, giving all of my attention to whatever is arising. Instead of a chaos of conflicting projects, whirlwinds of hopes and fears that churn the ocean of my life, by washing the mud from my feet I reveal the mystery of awakening that is already in process. I nourish a deepening appreciation for the interdependency of everything and feel a conscious determination to unfold myriad talents and good qualities in order to help all beings flourish in this tapestry of awakening star dust. This is the offering water for washing and I offer it without attachment.

I offer flowers, mysteries of living beauty. Not dead plants, not style or fashion, but the natural beauty that shines forth when we feel utterly in tune, when the inner and the outer mesh together in a harmonious burst of creativity birthing newness into the world for others. Ultimately, offering flowers is to offer the beauty of buddhahood, the flowering of wisdom and compassion, tolerance and kindness, the budding, the bodhi, the buddha that is everyone's very nature shining forth and functioning well through body, speech and mind. I offer the flowering beauty of my life and I offer it without attachment.

I offer an immense cloud of incense, the incense of pure moral conduct, scenting each activity of my body, speech and mind. Appreciating and supporting life, cultivating a mind of spontaneous generosity, actively using the senses to explore the world, communicating skilfully and compassionately, and nourishing myself and all beings in ways that support awakening; all these actions pervading my relationships with people, animals, plants and landscapes, with micro beings too small to see and macro beings beyond my comprehension, with inner thoughts and feelings and memories, with each facet of this vast dance of life. To offer incense is to perfume every action with love, compassion, clear seeing and deepening understanding. May the activities of my body, speech and mind become perfume for all that I meet. This is the offering of incense and I offer it without attachment.

I offer light, not merely candles or butter lamps, but the illumination of wisdom; knowing with appreciative understanding the profound interconnectedness and interdependence of everything and everyone. Just as the light from one candle can ignite another, so the natural play of broad and inclusive continuously fresh awareness, awakens others to broad loving inclusiveness and these in turn awaken others; a fire of love and understanding spreading in every direction. Dwelling in the domain of the all embracing, I offer the light of deepening wisdom. May all beings shine forth illuminating the best in each other. This is the offering of light and I offer it without attachment.

I offer the perfume of sincere devotion. This is an offering of love and support for all that is wholesome,

perfuming each moment with immense energy; a heart felt commitment to uplift beings. Devotion to truth. Devotion to honesty. Devotion to compassion. Devotion to questioning and exploring freely. Devotion to looking deeply into whatever is arising and then to living according to the implications of what is discovered. May all beings enhance the world with the perfume of total engagement flowing from a fearless heart. This is the offering of perfume and I offer it without attachment.

I offer a banquet of food. This represents abundance, an abundance of talents, interests and engagements all laid out as a magnificent feast to feed beings, each according to their needs. I offer the food of delight which comes from living in accord with dharma. I offer the food of samadhi, the harmonizing of body and mind through meditation. I offer the food of prajña, the wisdom of seeing through the illusion of separateness. May the activities of my body, speech and mind become a banquet for all beings. This is the offering of the food of abundance and I offer it without attachment.

I offer music, the voice of Dharma, a symphony of teaching, encouraging, cajoling, inspiring, instructing, humouring, reasoning, uplifting and, demonstrating through the voice of silent action. I offer the wonderful rhythms, harmonies, syncopations and surprises, the music of heart and mind functioning beautifully, singing the song of awakening to all and with all that I meet. This is the offering of music and I offer it to all without attachment.

I stand in the midst of the miracle of being and offer all that I am and all that I have.

E, MA, HOH!

Resting in a beginningless endless stream of offering, parent to child, child to parent, teacher to student, student to teacher, friend to friend and friends to friends, creature to creature, being to being, this is the yoga/sadhana of the eight offerings, a celebration of life. May all of us carry it through every situation of the coming day.

These words contain whispers of ancient wisdom from the treasury of a multitude of cultures. Reflect on them again and again until they become inseparably braided into the cloth of your life. Take the practice and make it your own. Find your own words to call forth the essence in an intimate and personal way. Bring to life the meaning behind the words and manifest it in the market place, the current shrine of global culture. Help dissolve the madness of desperate grasping with the solvent of remembering the vast flowing of giving and receiving -
time and space weaving meaning
and empathy
and understanding,
in the living loom of now.

SARVA MANGALAM

The Music of Awakening

*by Tarchin Hearn
February 5 2004*

In the stillness,
Allow all your cells to listen.
Everything is music.

Feel the rhythms of your breathing
The pulse of your blood and
Enter the symphony
Of being dancing.
That's what you are
A dancing, a singing, a chorus of life
Without beginning and without end.

Noise is divisive
It's absence of music
Un-cooperating lumps of shock with little or no space, an
Endless cacophony of tumbling chaos that
Erodes the spirit and blights the world.

Music is so much more than mere noise.

Music is a presenting of presence
A revealing of who you are.
Perhaps the first music was rhythm
Drum fests of fecundity
Space and collision,
Wefting and warping.
Primordial musings
Atoms feeling their way into relationships
The pushing and pulling
Two things knowing each other in resonant response
Dancing and inter-knowing,
The informing of form.

Solos merging to duets, to trios and small chamber groups, choirs joining choirs, conventions of orchestras playing the symphonies of a wondrously alive universe. Individuals, singing and dancing with vast ecosystems. Societies of becoming, dancing with individuals. The evolving of the world IS the music, so don't say you are unmusical though from time to time you may be tone deaf. Kabir once said, "The unstruck drum of eternity sounds within me but my deaf ears hear it not." Sometimes, we just don't listen!

I am sitting in triple gem hut at Wangapeka. We just arrived back after eight months away. So good to unpack. No more airplanes for a while. The cicadas are thrumming a staccato drone with mysterious under and over tones. The river adds a swooshing texture, like a long drawn out exhalation, and bellbirds pierce the rolling mist with crystal bell-like notes, bubbles of clarity, expanding universes of feather-song cloaked mystery. Sitting quietly, fingertips resting lightly on the keyboard, I feel the soundless intimation of blood coursing through my body blending with the tides of breathing. All of these pulsings and punctuations are the music of the moment, perfect in every detail. As you read this now, open your whole being and join me in a duet, a chorus of present appreciation. This is the original 'a cappella'. As you breathe, can you feel the stillness between the notes of now?

Is music sound punctuated by gaps, or silence punctuated by sound? Without the silence there would be no music and yet the world we live in today seems to be terrified of silence and gaps. Everything has to be filled in. Background shopping centre music that no-one listens to. Radios, televisions, vehicle traffic; continuous buzzing, humming, screeching and jarring and so we try to find peace by

Sarva Mangalam ~ All is Blessing

making more sound. Drowning out the "noise" with other noises we call music. And as if this were not painful enough, we add to it inner conversations, arguments, pleadings, fantasies, an unending stream of inner dialogue; a cacophony of noise that drowns our knowing of the music, the musing of nature, and so we starve. Do you understand what I'm saying? We are nourished by music. We live for music. We are music and we are dying in a desert of noise.

Meditation and music are so intimately connected that I'm not sure where one ends off and the other begins. We can only appreciate the music by giving our full attention. The other day I was talking to a jazz musician and asked him what it was like playing in restaurants where people are eating and talking and not really listening to the music. He said it was pretty hard at times, a bit soul destroying, but he had learned to get used to it. He said it was so much more rewarding when people actually listened. It made him play better. Meditation is really just another word for listening. Music is the result of musing, of contemplating. The texture of my listening is the music I offer to others. What kind of music are you, right now? How are you dancing with the world?

We are music taken on flesh. The instruments of this orchestra are bio-rhythms, circadian rhythms, cardiac and breathing rhythms, eating and elimination, menstrual cycles, outer seasons moving with inner seasons, electrons whirling around nuclei, and gravitational fields of planets interacting with a star we call the sun. The pull of the moon pulls the tides of our world. Rhythms within rhythms weaving tapestries of being in the vastness of knowing. Right at this moment open with all your senses. How wondrous to be in tune. How painful to be out of tune. We each are an instrument in the measureless symphony of the world. In the silence of openness, feel the music of shaping. As you are nourished, so too you nourish. This is the art of meditation.

In my youth, I was very involved with making music. I sang in choirs and dabbled with french horn and piano and guitar and recorder and was once the lead singer in a rock and roll band. Some of you might find that hard to believe! Even at that age, I realised that to make music, one needed to be able to hear music. At twenty-one, when I began to study and travel with Namgyal Rinpoche, all my music making came to an abrupt halt or at least I thought it did. Instruments were too big to carry and meditation centres were committed to 'silence', at least outwardly. Although I made less outer noise, I spent a lot of time learning to listen and in the process discovered a chaos of noise coming from my own mind, a bolero of hoping and fearing that was often so loud that I couldn't hear what others were saying and I certainly didn't appreciate the unique and beautiful music that they were.

A few years ago, I realised that I needed to return to making music and I began to explore playing a Shakuhachi flute. We all need to return to the music. I sit in the stillness, breathing in and breathing out, feeling the fullness of now, the texturing of awareness knowing itself. My body sways with the coolness of the breeze coming in the window. Senses open, weaving a world of sounds and smells, of colour and form, and in the spacious openness, music muses on itself and the musing of other music. Delicately, I reach out and touch the bamboo resting before me. It was once a shoot of grass growing in Japan. It made music even then, a dancing of rain and sunlight, chlorophyll and cellulose; a living being reaching for the sun, bending in the wind. Breathing in, I delicately but firmly grasp the flute, the muscles of my body balancing this new felt weight. As I bring it to my lips, I smell intimations of its life long journey, a slight yellow-green hard-to-pin-down dampness. I relax my eyes and feel my whole being exhaling. Miracle. The bamboo vibrates. A rich and beautiful tone fuzzing at my finger tips, blending with the river, cicadas and sky.

We are all living instruments, sounding the songs of creation; a world of infinite beings, a river of becoming, singing itself awake.

The mystics said, "Be still and know that thou art God."

Entering the stillness, the spacious openness
We bend in the wind of circumstance and
In the bending we pluck the strings of others and are simultaneously plucked in return.
Compassion and spacious openness, the notes and the silence.
They go together.
They craft the songs of being here.

There is music in all of us.
Universes of music
Jamming together in a spontaneous riff that muses and forms and births new worlds.
Music within music musing on music.

Next time you meditate, don't forget to sing!

Touching the Earth in Six Prostrations

by Tarchin Hearn

October 2003

"I bow in all times and directions to the magnificence of creation."

Have you ever had the courage to admit that you try to find refuge in an extraordinary range of temporary fixes. Perhaps you try to find refuge in shopping, in maintaining power, in being loved; refuge in your bank balance, in relationships, in physical sex, in an idealised body shape. Perhaps you look for refuge in travel, in eating or in anyone of the myriad addictions that are so rampant in today's world. Or do you try to find refuge in philosophical beliefs or outward religious practices. All of these attempts are doomed to failure. They may provide a temporary rest, a momentary lull in the drivenness of seeking, but these infinite mirages of refuge are undependable. They are all subject to loss.

In a sense, the only real refuge, the only dependable "place" from which we can never fall, is the ground of reality. It won't let you down. As a Sufi saying goes, "It doesn't matter how fast you run, or how hard you dig your heels in, you can't get away from your own two feet." Well, no matter how fast you run or how hard you dig your heels in, you can't get away from the totality of being that is manifesting this present moment. From this perspective, refuge is the goal, the practice and the fruition of all Buddha Dharma. The knowing of refuge is certainly much more than a ritualistic prayer at the beginning of a class or meditation.

The following piece of writing is part of a larger unfinished article on refuge and the ground of being. It came out as a breath of inspiration, a sadhana which hints at a fresh way of experiencing. I offer it here, without much elaboration or explanation in the hope that even as an unfinished article, it will inspire some valuable contemplation and experience. If you are unable to physically prostrate, you can, as the Buddha did on the night of the awakening, reach down with your right hand and touch the earth, a metaphor for the ground of being; the ground of clear, spacious, responsive awareness, the ground from which we all came and to which we all go; the ground of becoming in which we are all embedded. I'm indebted to Thich Nhat Hanh and the four great lineages of Tibetan Buddhism, Kagyu, Nyingma, Sakya and Geluk, for inspiring this practice.

Basic Practice

- 1 - Recollecting all my teachers, an ocean of inspiration, I feel your presence within and around me, with deep appreciation and gratitude, I touch the earth.
- 2 - Recollecting the genetic and historic ground of my ancestors, feeling this vast river of talents, with profound gratitude and appreciation, I touch the earth.
- 3 - Recollecting the ecological ground, the matrix of living beings that support this very moment, in wonderment and appreciation, I touch the earth.
- 4 - Realising that myself and these three have never been separate, I touch the earth.
- 5 - Letting go of negativities and clinging, I touch the earth.
- 6 - Radiating lovingkindness to all beings, I touch the earth.

An Expanded Version

1, Standing – feet firmly upon the earth, I soften into my body and explore the exquisite dance of fine muscular adjustments that support this upright posture. Breathing – I move with the tides of air, the ebb and flow, the endless intimate breathing with a green living world. Present – all my senses are open: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and thinking, all vibrantly alive and responsive.

Standing, breathing, present; I open the doors of appreciation to all the beings who have been dharma teachers for me. Lamas, yogis, gurus of many lineages and traditions; artists, musicians, philosophers, scientists, adventurers, writers, educators, social activists, healers, and friends; beings who have inspired the unfolding of my life in the direction of Wisdom and Compassion. I open the doors of appreciation to all the teachers of the past, all the teachers in the present and all the teachers yet to come. I feel your presence around me and within me. You continue to inspire and shape me in innumerable wondrous ways. You are expressions of the very foundation of my being, reminders of

what is truly functional and meaningful. Feeling this vast river of inspiration flowing through my body, speech and mind, with deep gratitude and profound appreciation, I touch the earth.

Contemplating in this way, I bring my hands together in a gesture of prayer and touch them to my forehead, throat, and heart, with the mantras OM, AH, HUM. Then I lower myself down to the floor, resting there for a while, physically touching the earth while feeling the union of myself and these myriad sources of guidance and inspiration. On each exhalation I relax more deeply into the ground. After three or four unhurried inhalations and exhalations and I mindfully stand up.

2, Standing, breathing, present; I open the doors of appreciation to the genetic and historical river of becoming. My mother and father, grandparents, great grandparents, a beginningless chain of ancestors extending back as far as I can imagine. I feel the presence of whole societies, peoples migrating across the earth, meeting new challenges, discovering ways of surviving, passing on knowledge to future generations, a river of talents, flowing through as an eternally creative present. I feel your presence in the shape and workings of my body, the dance of my senses, the play of my attitudes, the history of mammalian life, the history of the mystery of living forms weaving the story of becoming that is this planet making itself known, through me and around me. I feel your presence flowing out into my children and my children's children, generations of ancestors yet to come. Knowledges of healing, of educating, of growing food and building shelter, of arts and sciences, of religion and philosophy. Feeling this vast repository of talent and knowledge empowering my body, speech and mind, with profound wonderment and respect, I touch the earth.

Contemplating in this way, I bring my hands together in a gesture of prayer and touch them to my forehead, throat and heart, with the mantras OM, AH, HUM. Then I lower myself down to the floor, resting there for a while, physically touching the earth while feeling the union of myself and these myriad sources of talent and knowledge. On each exhalation I relax more deeply into the ground. After three or four unhurried inhalations and exhalations and I mindfully stand up.

3, Standing, breathing, present; I open the doors of appreciation to the ecological ground. I feel myself embedded in a vast dynamic ecology of life, an unfolding of myriad interdependent manifestations of intelligent shaping. With each breath I breathe with the green plants. My body, speech and mind are expressions of air, water, earth and radiant solar energy, weavings of becoming, journeyings of atoms, molecules, cells, and organs, a matrix of living beings, bio systems, planets, solar systems and cosmic phenomena. I feel the rivers and oceans in my blood and tears. I feel the mystery of transforming vegetables and animal flesh, the continuous coming into being and passing away that is my body, feelings and thinking. Sensing the beginninglessness and endlessness of everything that is, with awe and wonderment, I touch the earth.

Contemplating in this way, I bring my hands together in a gesture of prayer and touch them to my forehead, throat and heart, with the mantras OM, AH, HUM. Then I lower myself down to the floor, resting there for a while, physically touching the earth while feeling the union of myself and this vast ocean of becoming. On each exhalation I relax more deeply into the ground. After three or four unhurried inhalations and exhalations and I mindfully stand up.

4, Standing, breathing, present; with deepening confidence that myself and these three great treasures, these three faces of the ineffable ground of being, have never been separate in the least; sensing the unbroken wholeness of totality, a seamless un-pin-down-able mystery appearing as the fullness of now; with awe, vitality and presence, resting in the mystery of non-separation, the spacious openness of interbeing, I touch the earth.

Contemplating in this way, I bring my hands together in a gesture of prayer and touch them to my forehead, throat and heart, with the mantras OM, AH, HUM. Then I lower myself down to the floor, resting there for a while, physically touching the earth while feeling mystery of union revealing itself in every moment of knowing. On each exhalation I relax more deeply into the ground. After three or four unhurried inhalations and exhalations and I mindfully stand up.

5, Standing, breathing, present; I recognise how clinging to patterns of body, communication and conceptualising are habits inherited or arising from this same triple ground. Feeling the suffering of

clinging, the struggle of trying to make permanent that which is impermanent; feeling the anguish, pain, hopes, fears and confusions of uncountable beings weaving these present patterns of dysfunction and defensiveness in my own being, with courage and determination to uplift everyone, letting go of clinging in body, speech and mind, I touch the earth.

Contemplating in this way, I bring my hands together in a gesture of prayer and touch them to my forehead, throat and heart, with the mantras OM, AH, HUM. Then I lower myself down to the floor, resting there for a while, physically touching the earth while completely letting go, softening in every aspect of my being. On each exhalation I relax more deeply into the ground. After three or four unhurried inhalations and exhalations and I mindfully stand up.

6, Standing, breathing, present; experiencing a vast glow of kindness and interest for every manifestation of life; radiating lovingkindness to all beings of present, past and future, with a deep wish that everyone recognise the true nature of being; with body, speech and mind, I touch the earth.

Contemplating in this way, I bring my hands together in a gesture of prayer and touch them to my forehead, throat and heart, with the mantras OM, AH, HUM. Then I lower myself down to the floor, resting there for a while, physically touching the earth and feeling the healing presence of lovingkindness flowing out in all directions, supporting and nourishing every arising manifestation. On each exhalation I relax more deeply into the Ground. After three or four unhurried inhalations and exhalations and I mindfully stand up.

After completing these prostrations, if time and inclination allows, I continue with a more traditional form of prostration, infusing the practice with this knowing of the presence of the Triple Ground.

After finishing the practice, I sit for a while and share the merit aspiring that through practising in this way, all beings will come to know their own true nature.

A few further hints:

- 1 Learn the general format. Feel free to use your own words, one's that touch your own life most relevantly. The words I have used in the expanded version are just to give a hint at the vastness of these themes. As you familiarise yourself with the spirit of these contemplations, you may find your words becoming simpler as you silently deepen into the essence.
- 2 Explore each of the three aspects of the ground as a flow-through. Guidance and inspiration from the past and present, flowing through you and inspiring all the beings that you meet. Talents of past generations flowing into you and out through your children and so forth. The continual flowing of materials and energies, revealed in the dancing of transient forms that is this ecosystem of life. Everything is an expression of flow and transformation.
- 3 Come to know this, not just intellectually, but with your body, speech and mind.
- 4 Do each prostration as an exploration of exquisitely sensitive body awareness, a kind of Tai Chi or Kum Nye or Feldenkrais movement.
- 5 Learn to see other beings, family, friends, strangers, co-workers, enemies and so forth as expressions of this vast creative ground.
- 6 Practise touching the earth in every moment of the day - walking, working, cooking, driving the car etc. Not stepping out of the ground for an instant! Like water returning to the sea - at rest, attentive, even, loving, appreciating, respectful, responsive, clear. Living refuge – a profound sense of belonging. Wondrous!

Some Thoughts on Dharma

by Tarchin Hearn

January 25 2003

Dorjeling, Tasmania

The following verse was written for a young man who was dabbling with dharma.

Hey my friend

What are you doing that's meaningful with your life?

Are you birthing beautiful thoughts into the world?

Hey my friend

Are you awake?

Is the fire of passion lighting your way,

burning the demons of doubt and complacency?

Hey my friend

When did you last stand under the stars,

the first tinge of dawn reminding of ever fresh mystery?

Or do you roll out of bed

and go to work with repetitive sleepiness

dulling your life like a chronic anaesthetic.

Where are your friends of awakeness?

Have you taken to hanging out

at the bar of ego conformity?

Hey my friend

Who and what do you love!

What are you growing in your garden!

Don't think you don't have time for this (*dharma*).

Hey!

My Friend!

Wake Up!

Our lives are our paths of awakening. There is no other path. Our lives are an intertwining of all that lives, a creative interbecoming, a mystery unfolding without beginning and end. Buddha Dharma is the teaching of budding, of awakening, of unfolding. Awakening from dysfunctional patterns of body, communication and mind; patterns that hinder our ability to be freshly present, awake and responsive to others; awakening to all the wondrous qualities of spaciousness, clarity, love, and compassionate engagement. Buddha Dharma is not the invention or property of Buddhists. In a wry moment, I've been known to say; "Why, even Buddhists can be expressions of Buddha Dharma!" Being a Buddh-ist is neither here nor there. It's a matter of conditioning or preference; just another club or society to belong to and find a sense of identity in. On the other hand, living a life of Dharma, appreciating the naturalness of Buddha Dharma, seeing it as a universal for all conscious beings, this has incalculable value.

Throughout the world today, we are seeing more and more sectarianism, more and more ethnic, religious and nationalistic prejudice and violence. It is critical that we, who at least aspire to healing and increased sanity, don't fall into these destructive divisions. Not only do we need to have a deep appreciation and respect for all schools of Dharma, but we need to have a deep appreciation and respect for all non-buddhist approaches to Dharma. We need to end the division between the times of our "practice" and the rest of our daily life, between religious duties and the daily live duties, between being in retreat and earning a living, between sangha and non sangha. We need to see that actually our lives are seamless continuums and that nourishing compassionate awareness in the midst of all that we do is a profound and meaningful contribution to ourselves, our friends and ultimately the entire living world.

Thich Nhat Hanh once described meditation as a way of cultivating the possibility and potential, within ourselves, to be totally present for another. To be so vitally awake, and responsive and empathically

present that we can listen to each other (this includes the others of birds, forests, rivers mountains and entire ecosystems) with empathy and deep understanding.

Vishy has kindly asked that I write a few words that might be relevant for Tasmanian Dharma practitioners. In a nutshell; May we all learn to let go of patterns of mistrust and divisiveness. May we all flower in tolerance for all the wondrous diversity of creatures and cultures and pathways to freedom and knowing. May we have the courage to let go of the deep patterns of consumerism, workaholism and the compulsion to value things primarily on the basis of money. May we have the courage to acknowledge our shortcomings. May we have the generosity to value the gifts and talents and understandings of others. May we cultivate easeful, loving, vividly awake presence in all of our activities. May all of this, flower in each and every one of us for the health and welfare of all beings.

I'd like to end with a prayer from H.H. the 14th Dalai Lama. May it touch you as deeply as it touches me.

May I become at all times, both now and forever
A protector of those without protection
A guide for those who have lost their way
A ship for those with oceans to cross
A bridge for those with rivers to cross
A sanctuary for those in danger
A lamp for those without light
A place of refuge for those who lack shelter
And a servant to all in need.

with blessings and good wishes to everyone
Tarchin

Praise to the Gurus of Nowness The Two in One The Evermanifesting Peace

*by Tarchin Hearn
February 2002*

It's been a big year for travel and experience. Tramping in the botanical reserves of the University of Hawaii; birds and dense foliage and thunderous downpours. Shakuhachi flute concert on the Sunshine Coast, north of Vancouver. What a place to find a Japanese living treasure! Kayanupassana retreat just east of the Rockies. Feeding mosquitoes in the Canadian North, visiting family and hearing the wild geese honking their way south. Urban retreat in Ottawa; friends and visits, sangha in the Gatinaux. Kinmount, Hevajra a wonderful week of empowerment with Namgyal Rinpoche and long time dharma friends. Flying to London on Sept 11. Shock horror of violence in New York. Retreat on the Welsh border doing something meaningful while much of the world contorts in fear. Teaching in Germany. Walking through golden poplar forests by lakes in Finland. Visiting the ancient city of Tallin in Estonia. Retreat in Switzerland. Music and museums, cathedrals and culture. Reverberations of dense history - European roots.

Flying into Kathmandu, the snow capped Himalaya stretching from horizon to horizon. During our time in Nepal and Myanmar we had so many adventures and wonderful meetings; so many teachers and teachings and now I write this piece at Dorje Ling, a beautiful retreat centre in central Tasmania with kookaburras laughing in the trees and black cockatoos screaming to each other as they fly slow motion overhead.

This is just a slim sampling of the last nine months. So much in such a short time. However, if you think about it, in nine months a single cell can journey into a living human being. That's an almost inconceivable amount of changing activity. In the spacious openness of knowing, a vast alive planet of interdependent beings, each a world in itself interacting with countless other transforming worlds; in such a space, nine months is a long time. Life flows on continuously, full of possibilities for growth and discovery. A universe of knowing, transforming itself. How has your year unfolded?

Much of the time since September 11 has been flavoured with tension. I don't just mean the outer tension of war and uncertainty but also an inner archetype of tension. A tension of contrast; of horror and destruction mingling with magnificence, beauty and immense inspiration. The palpable fear in Europe, the barbed wire and security at the Bundestag in Berlin. The delays and checkings in the airports. Dinner with a delegation from Palestine who had come to Germany to learn about water and waste management, talking together while they worried about the safety of their families and friends at home. The endless speculation on anthrax, weapons of mass destruction and economic collapse. The parading and propagandising of heads of governments and military departments. The army helicopters flying Maoist mop up operations over our tents by the lakeside at Pokhara. Curfews in Kathmandu. Constant vigilance. Constant vigilance! Military dictatorship in Myanmar, squashed spirits, a country cut off from the rest of the world.

Weaving through all of this were walks by Finnish lakes and Bach and Mozart played in magnificent concert halls. Great art galleries, and ancient architecture. Trekking into Anapurna Base Camp at 13,000 ft and waking in one's tent, the inside walls sparkling with ice crystals of frozen condensed breath while the mysterious glow of dawn light transforms the star strewn dome of the universe through subtle shades of greys and blues going to pink as the sun's rays touch the snow peaks and silhouette the great Machhapuchhare. Visiting the land of golden pagodas. Music and art of many cultures, and a tapestry of countless religious traditions. The glory and wonder of a world of creative life and the horror of humans shrunk into tiny universes of ego power striving. This contrast has been clear and strong in so many different situations.

It's been a full-on 9 months and I recognise a new, more subtle quality of renunciation arising within me. The suffering in the world is vast. We don't need to add to it. The mystery and magnificence of the universe is beyond grasping. A human lifetime is such a short period to engage in this awesome and wondrous flowering.

Our visit to Nepal was filled with the wonderful synchronicities one might expect on a pilgrimage/adventure. Meeting Beru Khyentse Rinpoche was just one of them. We had moved into the Rabsel Guest house adjacent to Shechen Monastery (about three minutes walk from the great stupa at Bodhnath) and were asking for the whereabouts of Rinpoche's monastery. An American woman who had overheard our conversation said it was unlikely that we would find the Rinpoche as she had been with him just a few days before in America. It turned out, his monastery was just 5 minutes from where we were staying so we walked over and discovered that he would be returning that very evening! What luck!

While we were there we took the opportunity to have a look in the gompa (the main meditation hall) and there to my wonder and happy surprise, I saw what was obviously a throne for the Karmapa and on it were two pictures of the two young Karmapas. It was so unusual that I thought for a moment that perhaps I had made a mistake and that they were pictures of the same Karmapa taken at different times. Often, during our travels, when I mentioned that I had been ordained by H.H. The Sixteenth Karmapa, the person I was talking to would ask in return which of the two new Karmapas I supported. It seemed an unquestioned assumption that one would choose sides. There was often an implied tone that seemed to indicate that if I supported the "wrong one" it might make the conversation awkward. On the other hand if I supported the same one that they did, we would be bosom buddies and members of the same group of Karma Kagyu good guys.

The next day we returned to the monastery and saw Rinpoche strolling up and down his balcony. He waved to us to come up. There was a beautiful view from the third floor; monasteries, stupas and forests of prayer flags against a backdrop of rice paddies and mountains. As we stood with him on the balcony we had a refreshingly informal conversation. I told him how much I and many of Namgyal Rinpoche's students had benefited from his contribution to the Ninth Karmapa's book on Mahamudra, and thanked him. The conversation flowed freely to what we were doing in Nepal. I asked him if he could recommend a place where our group could do a retreat and he made some helpful suggestions. Eventually I mentioned that I had noticed the pictures of the two Karmapas in his gompa and how unusual this was. He agreed that it was unusual and said that he thought a lot of harm had been done to the spread of Kagyu teaching because of the conflict between Karma Kagyu camps. "I respect and support all Rinpoche's" he said, bringing his palms together at the heart. "I try to live the Middle Way." He spoke with a deep sincerity and wonderfully simple straight forwardness. He then expressed his aspiration that the conflict be quickly resolved.

I was surprised to feel tears of relief and gratitude welling up in my eyes; such a mixture of joy and surprise. Finally I was hearing a high ranking lama of the Kagyu Sangha expressing some sanity on this painful issue that seemed so divisive. It felt like a cool refreshing breeze blowing through my being, clearing space again for me to feel strong and good about my Kagyu roots.

A few weeks later we stopped for a night in a tiny village called Daman. At 2300m we had a magnificent view of the Himalaya. I had heard about a small gompa that was nearby and in the early morning, we walked for an hour or so through beautiful forest to come upon a hillside covered with prayer flags. There was a small complex of buildings and inside the front courtyard was a young Tibetan woman doing her morning sadhana. Gompa? I asked. She pointed behind her and continued with her practice. We walked up some stairs into a small beautifully cared for shrine room. The wood floor, polished by many years of use, was curved and sloped in many directions. The windows were all cockeyed and along one wall were glass cabinets containing hundreds of Tibetan texts. The rest of the room was decorated with paper reproductions of tankhas. Compared to the great monasteries like Shechen this gompa was poor and humble but it had a wondrous magic; the magic of quiet continuous devotion and practice.

I was paying respects to the shrine when the father of the young woman came in and invited us to sit. We meditated together for an hour doing Vajra Sattva and then he asked his wife to bring us coffee and some biscuits. We had no common language so he pulled out a photo album with pictures of his gurus and to our mutual delight it turned out that we shared many of the same teachers. In his photo album he had a picture of the 16th Karmapa and then on the next two pages he had pictures of both of the new Karmapa candidates which he touched to his head with genuine devotion. It seemed so natural to him that he would honour both. It was a blessing to visit this family of Yogis and to feel the fundamental sanity and non-pretentiousness of their lives and their practice. It was a great inspiration.

We nearly didn't get to Nepal because of the very difficult political upheavals there and because of America's response to September 11. Wars against terrorists. Military actions against Maoists. Violence and suffering flaring up all over the world and the high lamas of the great and glorious Karma Kagyu Lineage playing sectarian power games over who is to be recognised as the 17th Karmapa. This is very sad. Politicians may not know any better but teachers of Buddha Dharma should!

I pray that the high lamas who have taken an exclusive public stand in favour of one or the other candidate will demonstrate the Buddha Dharma in action and become examples of peace making and constructive co-operation. I urge them all to follow the refreshing examples of H.E. Beru Khyentse Rinpoche and the Yogi of Daman whose name I didn't record but who's quiet, mindful, generous, presence, has inspired me to speak towards bringing this sad squabble to an end. The warring politicians and power mongers of the world are quite enough without the beings who could be examples of the Great Madhyamika, the Buddha's teaching of the Middle Way, to be fuelling the energies of division and sectarianism.

After Nepal we went to Myanmar, to visit Namgyal Rinpoche's first Buddhist teacher, U. Thila Wunta in Yangon. The Sayadaw was in wonderful health; active, alert and powerfully present at the age of 90!

Towards the end of our time in Myanmar the following words sprang from my pen, an expression of aspiration. Let me share them with you.

So many glowing words have been written
and spoken
and proclaimed
and broadcast
about the Teaching.

Also

So much distinction making.
So many seeds of sectarianism.
Seeds of divisiveness and misunderstanding.

I have read in a Theravadin text, about "corrupt teachings of so called Mahayana" and how only Theravada is the true teaching of the Buddha.
I have read in Mahayana texts, about how the awakening realised by Theravada is not as vast and as profound as Mahayana.

O may I and all beings never be separated from the spacious openness and clear cognisance of present reality. May we never be seduced by the fog of empty, misleading concepts.

I remember with gratitude and feel the presence of all my myriad teachers.
Some point north.
Some point south.
Some point inward.
And some point out.

Some point to skilful controlling.

Some point to letting go.
Some point to mindfulness.
Some point to service.

Some point to self.
And some point to others.
Some point to the mind of clear discrimination.
And some point to the heart of vast empathy.

Actually

All of them are pointing the same way.
Can you see?

All are pointing passionately and directly into the heart of now.
The vast space of present arising knowing.
The joy and peace of not a hint of somewhere else to be.
The adventure of continuous creation, growing itself into newness.

Great Gurus
of many threads and lineages
With tears of blessed relief, the bliss/joy of remembering
I bow to you all with gratitude
and sing your praises through the texture of each day.

My friends, we are now back in New Zealand and have the opportunity to resume sending out these e-mail articles. I pray they serve to remind you and I both, to keep our feet on the ground of basic sanity and to encourage the flowering of wisdom and compassion in all the activities of our lives.

Blessings to you all
Tarchin

Remembering Strength and Goodness

by Tarchin Hearn

October 18 2001

near Hanover, Germany

Dear friends

The verses that begin this article were written during the bombing of Kosovo and Yugoslavia in April 1999. Unfortunately they still seem appropriate. Acts of violence continue on many levels, each reflecting and reinforcing each other, each being used to justify even more violent responses.

Refugees, displaced persons, stateless beings.
Victims of cultural prejudice; never ending
Can't go back
There's no going back.

Learning to live together
feeling the wounds,
the agony,
the frozen despair of non-belonging
Not revenge but tolerance.
Not bigotry but deepening appreciation.

Abused childhood, hurt feelings,
family agonies exploding in a million cutting fragments
never ending spiral into righteousness
feelings of hard done-by-ness
Won't go back
There's no way back.

Learning to live together; feeling the wounds.
Victim thinks that only she is bleeding.
Victim believes that only he is hurting.

Yet we're all in the same boat; this vessel of earth
This vessel of knowing
This notion of caring
We are all here together
Our togetherness is the boat.

Our non tolerance, close-mindedness, arrogance and dulled stupidity
are different shapes of leaks.
Our love and widening appreciation is the very
soundness of the ship itself.

We are life
sailing on the ocean currents of an unfolding universe. A planet awakening.
A mystery of manifestation; stardust and knowing weaving a tapestry of becoming.

For billions of years, life grew through symbiotic co-operation in multiple realms of being: atoms combining as molecules, molecules interacting as cells, cells structuring organs and organisms, organisms interlinking as ecosystems, and all of these together bringing forth this living biosphere. Till now nearly all of these processes have been the expression of a rather unconscious awareness. Now we are at the stage of learning to participate more consciously.

Impermanence is everywhere. Everything is dynamic dance. Every coming into being is a passing away. There will never be peace if by peace we mean the unchanging stability of our own comfortable preferences. To rest easefully;- awake, responsive and caring in the midst of all arisings. Ahhh!!!

Sarva Mangalam ~ All is Blessing

How wonderful that a human is capable of doing this.

These days, I often point out that there are two fundamental views or understandings that all teachings of awakening rest upon. The first view is that everything is interdependent. We are all partners in this one world dance. I recall these words from the Sadhana of Chenrezi.

"Now, contemplate the essential interbeing of everything. Recognise how each aspect of your existence; body, speech and mind, inner and outer, micro and macro is interweaving with everything else in the universe. Nothing stands independently on its own. Everything is created, sustained and supported by everything else. All arisings are mutually shaping."

This is more than just a philosophical position. It is a biological fact, as factual as any fact can be.

The second view is that everything you experience is arising in your own knowing. The frustration and violence, the fear and intolerance, are all experiences arising in our own minds, in the field of our own knowing. Within our own experience is where the real healing needs to take place, in the texture of our empathy and understanding. Jesus spoke of taking the beam out of one's own eye before trying to remove the dust mote of another. He also spoke of allowing those with no sin to cast the first stone. This is as true today as it was then.

In the last few weeks, I have felt my mind swirling in the turbulence of fear and clinging; felt it rumbled and tumbled by the news media reports and desperate, though often well meaning e-mails.

Where have you been these last weeks? How has your journeying fared? Where is your refuge? Where do your energies go in times of stress?

How often my mind has shrunk in fear of being wrecked on the rocks of reality. How often, thank God, my mind has been blessed with the nectar of living the dharma, remembering the words of teachers and teachings and returning again and again to the source, the open field of knowing, the spacious ground of all becoming, that place of resting; easeful, open, awake and responsive.

Lately, the words of the former head of the Tibetan Nyingma tradition, Dudjom Rinpoche have been frequently arising in my mind.

He wrote:

"Since pure awareness of Nowness is the real Buddha
In openness and contentment I found the Lama in my heart.
When we realise this unending natural mind is the very nature of Lama,
Then there is no need for attached grasping
or weeping prayers or artificial complaints.
By simply relaxing in this uncontrived, open, natural state,
We obtain the blessing of aimless self-liberation of whatever arises."

Ahhh!!! Yes! I breathe and pause and touch the earth; rooted in the ground of being. I see the birds, the flowers, the forests, the rest of nature living this day like any other. The children are laughing in the park. The stars illumine the night sky and the sun and moon rise and set. I feel the sadness of so much suffering. The refugees of Afghanistan. The orphans of too many wars. The smug certainty and forced bravery of the rich and powerful who seem to have deeply lost their way, believing that violence will bring forth peace. Occasionally the suffering becomes fuel for anger or depression but more often I find it opening my heart towards something deeply meaningful, something that enhances this mystery of interbecoming.

The 8th century Bodhisattva Shantideva once wrote:

"If you can solve your problem,
Then what is the use of worrying?
If you cannot solve it,
Then what is the use of worrying?"

With worry, we sink the ship of our lovingkindness and deepening understanding. Being in Europe these last few weeks, it has become painfully clear just how much TV news is really a broadcast of

'worry-virus'. It lands in the soil of the human psyche and then works on our personal hopes and fears turning them into multiple infections of unwholesome states. It is so easy to call watching the news "staying informed", forgetting that that it is also helping to stay in panic.

There is no question that we are living in perilous times. Awareness of this can sometimes paralyse us. It could also cause us to turn off; burying ourselves in the proverbial bread and circuses. Alternately, it could cause us to consider what we really value and what we could actually contribute right here and now to the uplifting of all beings.

There have always been conflicts in the world. Glacial periods come and go. Continental plates collide and part. Food chains come into being and then collapse. Weather systems and ocean currents change. There have always been 'victims' and 'victors'. In human history there has frequently been reaction and revenge but there has also been compassion and clarity, patience and a willingness to understand, to learn to look in new ways, to empathise with points of view that have grown in fields very different from our own.

When I was quite young, my father used to make me debate contentious issues with him, topics such as nuclear weapons, the death sentence and how to best help the poor. I was seven or eight years of age at the time and he would often urge me to argue the side that I didn't agree with. I remember bursting into tears one day when he insisted I speak in favour of the death penalty. I said I couldn't and he asked me why not. I said because it's wrong. He said, "that doesn't matter, put yourself into the shoes of the people who think it is right. Imagine what it feels like to be them and give their argument." You have to put yourself in the other person's shoes. He said that so many times.

A few days ago I was forwarded an e-mail written by Christopher Titmus supporting the efforts to bring sanity into the current world situation. He pointed out that we should be aware that many of the circulating e-mails were going to those who already supported peace and that we should consider ways to spread the message of sanity to those who were still caught up in adding to the unwholesome turmoil. Much as I agree with him, I am not so sure that all these e-mails are simply "preaching to the converted". Each one of us has periods of forgetting. From time to time we all are conduits for the energies of violence and conflict. Over the last few weeks I have caught myself again and again, thinking negatively or at least unconstructively towards the perpetrators of violence, allowing the media to reinforce patterns of fear and anxiety in my own continuum. Speaking about dharma and living the dharma can be two different things. May I cultivate a garden of sanity within my own knowing and then interact with others from this place of strength and goodness. May we all come to deeper understanding of the people and actions that we fear or dislike. May we put ourselves in the other person's shoes and actively work to broaden our understanding.

In the Tibetan tradition there are said to be four contemplations or life experiences that can turn our consciousness towards sanity. They are:-

- 1 Death and impermanence
- 2 Karma and the process of cause and effect
- 3 The suffering of living in a society that is driven by blindness
- 4 The precious opportunities of being human

Each one of these has the potential to shock or inspire us into deeper understanding. The suffering of the last few weeks has strengthened these contemplations in my own continuum. I pray it does the same for innumerable beings.

Please pause with me right now, to breathe together and open our appreciation to a larger world of interbecoming, to the wonder of stardust dancing with knowing, continuously birthing worlds. Worlds interpenetrating worlds without obstruction. We are all involved. We can't not be involved. Every step we take changes the world irrevocably.

We are life sailing the ocean currents of an unfolding universe. A planet awakening. A mystery of manifestation; stardust and knowing weaving a tapestry of becoming.

May these words act as water for the seeds of intelligent goodness everywhere.

Some Autumn Thoughts on Death

by Tarchin Hearn

June 2001

Let us sit
quietly together
and sink
deep
into the mystery
of now
Let us touch
the ocean
the ocean of becoming
Birthing and Dying
Joy and Grief
The rainbowed stories of our lives

So many people we know directly and indirectly, have recently died. It is the reality of getting older that more and more of one's friends and acquaintances 'unravel' and voyage on; consciousness fading, then vanishing, leaving the atoms of the physical body to continue their journeying throughout the universe.

In almost every mystical path, the contemplation of death is seen as a gift, a doorway into a place of tremendous sanity. Death cuts through so much fantasy. Dust to dust, ashes to ashes, we are knocked to the ground; the ground of becoming from whence we all came, to whence we all go and within which we continuously dwell. The world of familiar relationships dissolves like a sugar cube in hot water and we are left with tides of strange sensations, unfamiliar breathing, and a feeling of being in a world that has lost all sense of direction. Surely the roller coaster of feelings we call grief are really our unique way of being with this stripping, so many fantasies torn to shreds. To be near death whether it be our own or another's invites us to feel the most alive core of our being touch in wondrous resonance, the most alive core of others – no more time for pretence.

Thich Nhat Hanh once said that the purpose of meditation is to cultivate the ability to be totally present for another. If this is so, then being in the presence of death is potentially the greatest of all meditations. Cutting through any superficial facade; at long last, allowing a simple core of love to blossom. When death comes to knock on our own door, can we greet it as an old friend, as a member of the family? Can we wrestle with it on the floor or on the bed and in the tussle recognise that this is not only a huge moment for ourselves but is also a potential flowering for those we love. Death is always communal. Every change in the world, changes everything else.

In our society, people often feel quite awkward around dying. Suddenly, platitudes are revealed for the empty words and guarded hearts that they are. Suddenly we realise just how much time we spend talking about and planning for a future that somehow never quite arrives. Incredibly, many people treat death as if it were a sign of failure, an indication that somehow they didn't do things as well as they might have; eaten the right foods, made the right decisions. With a painful mix of embarrassment, fear and shame many feel compelled to hide the fact of their dying from those they love. Don't let the children know. Don't talk about it with your partner. It's as if by talking about it and being matter-of-fact about it, we might magically bring death into being. In fact the reverse is true. By shrouding the entire reality of death in veils of allusion and whispered secrecy we begin to die from life even when we are still breathing. By embracing this great mystery of transience, strangely we begin to be even more alive right here in the face of dying. Everyone involved is blessed with the understanding of the tenderness, fragility and wondrous uniqueness that is every human being. Love and caring is flowing in all directions.

Death is such an upheaval in the normal flow of family life because we don't see that death has been walking with us from the very beginning. Some of its other names are change and impermanence and

growth. Our cells are constantly birthing and dying. Old experiences make way for new ones. We are not the same person we were a few minutes ago, not to mention last week. Who is this person we think we know so well? How is it that I can come to the end of a long journey and realise that I hardly know my fellow traveller? Have I been so concerned with myself that I hardly saw you or listened to you? Are we all so heavily invested in the cult of eternal youthfulness that we only know how to enter the stage, a grand and glorious entrance, but are never able to exit with any sense of dignity; moving with a calm clear sense that all is complete and that it's time to let go.

These are just a few words I wanted to share with you because we may not meet again. This is not a premonition but simply a statement of fact. None of us know when our time will come. A number of years after my father died, the following poem flowered in my mind. May we all live fully and die fully and open our hearts of appreciation for everyone we meet and everyone we know.

Blessings to you all
Tarchin

A Wake For All The Non-Irish; And For The Irish Too

by Tarchin Hearn

O Father, O Father
Where are you now?

Ashes spread by the winds
from a hilltop in Ontario

O Father, O Father
Where are you now?

Your spirit is everywhere
It is part of my knowing
Flavouring each moment
both truth and lie.

The children of your breath,
carbon dioxide born from your every cell,
rustle in the swish of gum leaves
the wave sounds of pine forest
the silent cool of shady oak.

Your body O Father is
become my mother
womb of now
womb of thusness
Feeding my knowing with
riches I never knew you had
when I was young.

O Father–Mother
Where are you now?

I breathe you every moment
My eyes are filled with your light.
My ears reverberate with your song.

My bones – your bones
My flesh – your flesh

My skin – your skin

And permeating all
the essential oil
the essence most perfect
the colour tinting the whole of being with a Holy uniqueness
making no separation,

Miraculous Knowing
 arising
 in this
 from this
 with this.

O Father O Father
Why do you talk to yourself?

I hear your call
Awake! Awake!

A wake with love
A wake with clarity
A wake celebrating the unbeginning and unending
Cremating the illusions
 and sharing the ashes as wealth.

A Story of Stories

by Tarchin Hearn

December 2000

Begun at Te Moata - finished at Wangapeka

Story telling is not just for entertainment. It is the way we humans give meaning to events. Of course we often become so entranced with a story that we believe it to be fact, if not eternal truth. Today, the story tellers are found in media and advertising. They tell stories of consumption leading to happiness, of the moral necessity of progress and the naturalness of devoting huge amounts of our lives to worrying about money. They tell stories of a mechanistic universe where only humans have a soul or consciousness, where the rest of nature exists primarily for the purpose of sustaining human beings and more specifically oneself and one's immediate family group. They tell stories which are closer to fantasies, about unlimited growth and development on a limited planet with finite resources. Stories we don't like to hear are called propaganda or proselytising. Stories we like to hear we call common sense and the way of the world.

Science too has its stories though they are usually called theories. The word comes from the Greek *theoria* which originally meant spectacle or view and gave rise to the word theatre. Our hubris makes it difficult for us to remember that the scientific "facts" of a particular culture are often called myths a thousand years down the line. We need to constantly re-examine and refresh our stories and allow them to evolve and keep pace with our actual experience of the world. One of the oldest human stories is the story of "The Beginning". I'd like to have a go at telling it in my own fashion. Perhaps it will entertain you. Even better, it might inspire a new way of being.

Cyberspace is not an ideal place for story telling. Our senses are so curtailed. As you read this, you'll have to use your imagination to help set the scene. A camp fire is crackling. Flames are leaping and dancing, throwing sparks and shadows against the surrounding rocks and trees, pushing back the evening chill while above and around float uncountable diamond clear stars clothing us all in the mystery of vastness. An owl hoots in the distance and another replies. The sound of the river blends with the occasional whirl of insect wings and the murmur of the leaves gently rustling in the trees. Come closer my friends. Wrap yourselves in your blankets, hot chocolates in hand and I will tell you how this all began.

The beginning is more extravagant and fantastic than most beings ever imagine. More awesome than a big bang. More powerfully magical than any act of creation. It is so simple yet so extremely elusive, for the beginning, my friends, is now! And now is a huge amount of not knowing.

The beginning is now. The end is now. (Isn't it interesting that the difference between now and know is just one 'k'. 'K' or ka is the Sanskrit syllable for space, the sound of the raven. So 'now' with lots of space, a spacious now, is know!) Within now-know, our story unfolds. The past is now. The future is now. Our story is shaping and reshaping, moment by moment. It is shaped by our DNA, by geo-tectonic pressures and dissipating heat. It is shaped by the lap of waves on the shore, the warming of summer sun, the infinite pushes and pulls of hunger and satisfaction. The story is shaped by cultures and teachings and cosmic events. It is shaped by hopes and fears and the creative attempts of myriad organisms to survive. The story is shaped by the experience that is all of me, being shaped by the experience which is all of you, mutual crafting; an unending flow of creation.

The story is also flavoured with expectations. Expectations of the atom looking for an electron to share; of the tree reaching up through the undergrowth, seeking light; of the psychic masochist expecting to always fail; of the obsessive controller seeing a universe needing control. The story is a revealing of views and understandings. A view of evolution, a struggle to greater refinement and complexity; a view of survival of the fittest; a view of co-operative co-creation. As the story changes, everything changes. A beginning, before now, is a plotline device to serve the present action. An end, after now, is a theatrical convention giving the patrons what they've come to expect. Suffering arises in not seeing we are caught in a story we helped to make. Suffering arises in not seeing our story is the making of others. It also arises when we believe the story should be fixed for all time and we struggle to keep it so.

In this tiny globe of imagined campfire light, surrounded by stars of possibility and the vast darkness of

yet to be known and yet to be told, pause and feel the texture and rhythm of your breathing.

Take some time with this.

Gradually relax your body and allow all your senses to be open, alert, awake and responsive.

Widen the gaze of your knowing, the gaze of your nowing, to include everything that is happening around you and within you; eyes seeing myriad colours and forms, shifting, changing, dancing, standing solid; ears hearing myriad sounds, the subtle rhythms of rain on the roof, the wind in the trees, the harmonics pulsing in the sound of city traffic; nose, tongue and body, savouring smells, and tastes, and responding to a huge variety of tactile sensations. Notice the panorama of thoughts; stray random arisings associated with "yesterday", feelings, judgements, fantasies and imaginings; huge dollops of implication and meaning plastered all over each object of sensing.

Stay with your breathing; very still inside, so that you become a lucid awakeness that knows no limits yet 'sees' translucent outlines of infinite distinction. Wherever you are, right now, appreciate the unbroken fluidity, the wondrous creative patterning, the dance of knowing that is you in this very moment. Each conscious being is a story teller, weaving magus magic in the infinite warp and weft of Being. Each conscious being is a character in the story of their own telling.

Now, before we get carried too far into poetic imagery, take a few more moments to notice something that is so obvious that many people can live their entire lives without ever appreciating it. Notice how in a very ordinary and natural way you experience the world of inner and outer sensations as three dimensional or if you include time, four dimensional space with "you" somewhere near the centre. Turn your head and look around. It feels like a real world with depth and dimension yet photons, not trees and houses, are entering your eyes. This is your universe and it is rich and vast and filled with meanings that, when examined in detail, are utterly unique to you. This is your knowing; not anyone else's and it is a knowing that is a living technicolour wrap-around experience; a virtual reality we usually assume to be *the* reality.

This knowing, this saga, this story, constantly ripples back on itself, adjusting and reinterpreting the earlier building blocks according to present needs. Then it shoots forward again, reshaping the goal in order to make sense of the action to date. This is the story of push and the story of pull and the light in the trees, the sound of the stream and the birds chattering in the bushes. It is the story of me and the story of you. It's even the story of stories. The objects we see are not separate from the "meaning" we give to them. The "meaning" is a reflection of our own understandings which even modifies our sensing of the object, bending the world of perception to our own wishes.

Realising that we inhabit a vast miraculous universe of seeing, hearing smelling, touching, tasting and thinking is rare enough but here is a simple but challenging thought. Consider that we don't so much inhabit such a universe as we *are* this universe. Consider that every object in your field of perception is, within its own experience, an equally vast universe of sense and meaning. Experiment with going through the next 24 hours with some degree of awareness that every other person you see is also experiencing themselves as the centre of a universe of sense and meaning that they, like almost every other being, assume to be the one real universe. How strange! How rarely thought about! The you that I see is very different than the experience you are having.

Try sitting in a place with a number of other people and all of you examine the same object. Then have each person describe what they are experiencing. It will become obvious that there are as many "seeings" of the object as there are people. If you then include the trees and birds, the worms and micro-organisms and fish in the sea you may discover the Great Ocean of Stories. Stories within stories shaping stories; a universe of intelligence shaping itself. With this kind of experience we might begin, as Thomas Berry so eloquently puts it, to cease thinking of the universe as a collection of objects and begin to experience it as a communion of subjects. ("*The Great Work*" by Thomas Berry p 16)

In one sense, what we are considering here might seem intellectually obvious but intellectually obvious can be quite different from experientially obvious. The difference is like reading a Lonely Planet Guide about a country you haven't visited compared to actually living there. The Tibetan teacher, Kalu

Rinpoche used to say that meditation was more a matter of acclimatisation than anything else. Try acclimatising to this way of being that sees a universe filled with sensing, feeling, intelligences whose subjective experiences become factors shaping our own subjective existence. This is very different from a universe of senseless, sometimes inanimate objects where I alone, often very alone, am the only 'sensible' being around. Where all other objects are seen only in the context of how they affect me. Are they a threat? Can they be utilised? Will they augment me? Where they are primarily things to be manipulated or controlled.

Look at a friend, at strangers on the street, at your cat, at the bird perched on the branch outside your window and realise that they are each experiencing a vast cohesive universe, every bit as complete and as meaningful as the universe that is uniquely yours. All these stories are interpenetrating and interrelating without obstruction. The scholars of the middle ages used to ask, how many angels could dance on the head of a pin. We might ask, how many universes can dance in the garden of your mind?

One day as I was leading a forest walk at Wangapeka, I saw in a very fresh way. We were moving along the path and coming out into the opening with the Pagoda. I was resting in a very tranquil space, experiencing the dancing of the senses weaving the continuously birthing now. I thought for a moment of how rich in colour, texture, sound, smell, and tactile sensation the world is. I thought for a moment how all of this was arising in my experience in a unique and wondrous way. We turned a corner and I saw the other meditators walking mindfully in a long drawn out line and suddenly I saw that inside each of their brains was assembling a universe as rich and complete, (and ultimately unknowable to me,) as the universe that I was so richly appreciating. My mind opened to sensing all these different "worlds" bobbing up and down walking the uneven pathway. I saw a Tui alight in a tree and call forth its beautiful bell like notes and I sensed a world of Tui assembling in its brain. The gum trees swayed in the breeze and I saw that they too were experiencing a world that was unique and meaningful within the context of tree experience. Once this began, the contemplation stayed with me for the next three weeks. Now merely by remembering it, I sense a world of interpenetrating universes; the fox gloves, the beech trees, the mountains, the river, the clouds, the rabbits, the keyboard under my fingertips, the strangers on the bus.

So where does this story of stories begin and where does it end. It is beginning and ending continuously in myriad moments, in myriad minds. A universe of infinite intelligence. Each part is an alive whole, contributing to every other living knowing part. Being such a universe invites a knowing that has no need to grasp at beginnings and ends. This is life appreciating itself; inviting a mystery of being called love.

The fire in your heart is still crackling and dancing. Roaring outward, filling the world with the light of understanding which in turn creates the shadows of both hope and fear. The flames then shrink inward, plunging everything into darkness which becomes its own strange kind of illumination. The rocks and trees and stars around are themselves other modes of knowing that dance with our stories creating the universe symphony, this one great Ode to Joy.

The most important criteria for stories of a culture is not whether or not they are true but whether or not they are functional. Stories of isolation and solitude, desperately grasping a universe of objects in an attempt to settle fear and end loneliness, how useful are such stories? Do they help to sustain life in all its richness? Are stories of intelligent, righteous me and unintelligent everyone else very functional? Are stories of intelligent humans and subintelligent everything else very functional? We need a new story, a story much vaster than that of one struggling hero called "me" or even called humanity, trying to survive in a world of danger, obstruction and fundamental entropy. Every object is the hero of its own dreams. Each part of my body, every part of the world, is intelligence unfolding. Waking up to this changes everything.

Here is a Powerful Stranger

*by Tarchin Hearn
September 2000*

The path of awakening is all around you.
It is the life you are living. It is the place where you are.
It is the mind that is experiencing.
Just pause and allow the looking to deepen.

Do you have sufficient love to see?
That's a big question!

Feel the fullness of being;
A living tapestry of infinite depth and dimension.

When the heart is flowering...
When curiosity is working its wondrous mystery in the very fabric of your body...
When interest and question are probing, caressing, fathoming;
Teasing out with endless appreciation the richness of 'other'...
When the doorways of your senses are wide open, allowing lightness; the joy of discovery...
Then, we experience wherever we are to be a treasure that bursts the prison walls of self absorption
And turns on a flood of joy, cascading out to water the wholesome seeds of others.

A while ago someone visited Wangapeka and gave me a tape of David Whyte, the Welsh poet/biologist, saying that she thought I would find it interesting. It sat on a shelf for a few months before finding its way into the tape deck. I was in for a wonderful surprise. Not only was it filled with the wit and wisdom of a man I'd not heard of, but in it, he read a poem by an American named David Wagoner. The poem, called "Lost" was written in 1976. Short and simple, it touched me in such a deep way that now I would like to share it with you.

So many people feel lost. Not just lost in a geographic sense, but lost in a much more pervasive and upsetting way. They have lost their way in life. Lost their energy. Lost their wits! Lost their sense of humor. They are lost in the endless impersonal labyrinths of faceless corporations and meaningless daily toil. They are lost in the tangled dealings of their own families. Lost in political correctness. They have lost their heart. Lost their smile. Lost touch with all that feels meaningful. We have all had our moments of being lost.

Wagoner's poem arose from his engagement with North American native traditions. It summarizes a teaching that was given to young boys to help them get over their fears of being lost in the forest. Ultimately it was to teach them that no matter where they find themselves, they are never alone. It spoke to me as profound Dharma.

This is what to do if you find yourself lost in the forest of your life; lost in the jungle of tangled feelings, the wilderness of the vacant heart, the vacuum of overcrowded city living. This is what to do. Although these instructions were given hundreds of years ago, I think they are just as pertinent today. They can be good guidance for all of us. Try reading this poem with the whole of your being. Memorize the words and make them your own. Allow these simple truths to manifest in your life, wherever your forest may be.

Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you
Are not lost. Wherever you are is called Here,
And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,
Must ask permission to know it and be known.
The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,
I have made this place around you.
If you leave it, you may come back again, saying Here.
No two trees are the same to Raven.
No two branches are the same to Wren.

Sarva Mangalam ~ All is Blessing

If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you,
You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows
Where you are. You must let it find you.
Stand still.

It's not uncommon when we feel lost to gradually accelerate into panic; rushing here and there, both physically and mentally. For many people, the feelings of lostness and panic go together. There seems to be a desperate need to orient ourselves, to clearly define our relationships in both physical and psychological space. We want to know where we stand, yet we run around, chasing reflections of ourselves in the mirrors of other being's experience; seeking opinions, attending workshops and meditation courses, and hoping that in doing so, we may come to a place of lasting goodness, that we may find our way back home.

Often, we are running so fast, we end up exhausted and rarely do we see the irony that all this running makes it very difficult for anyone else to find us. Though I want to find myself, I want it to be on my own terms, according to my own hopes and dreams but am I ready and willing for someone else to find me? Do I have the faith and trust that anyone will even be interested in me? This can be a sobering thought. Actually, when we are really lost, we have also lost the knowing that there is anyone else, anywhere, anyway. At this point we can become very disconnected; lost in the whirling of our self concern.

Stand still. The trees ahead and the bushes behind you are not lost.

The first step is to simply stop the running. Stand still. Just because I am lost doesn't mean that everything else is. Try this right now. Stop reading this article and feel your bum on your seat, your feet on the ground. Feel your body breathing.

Wherever you are is called Here, And you must treat it as a powerful stranger.

This marvellous truth is too simple for most beings. Wherever you are is called here. Whether you are sitting still or running as fast as you can, whether your mind is calm and settled or the thoughts are whirling chaotically; wherever you are is called here. Even the planning of future activities is actually just thinking happening right here. So too is the mulling over of past events.

It's a funny thing. If you know where you are, you know you are here. When you feel lost, although you are here, you often feel you should be somewhere else! And yet, how can you be anywhere but here. It sounds like a script from Fawlty Towers, or the Goon Show. Why are we here? asked Neddy. Well..... we've all got to be somewhere! replied Eccles. Though we desperately want to free ourselves from this anxiety of feeling disoriented and lost, even though we could find ourselves right here, we continue to look elsewhere! What a bunch of goons!

That we are 'here' is a bit of a truism but Wagner wakes us up from the sleep of platitudes by saying that.....You must treat it [here] as a powerful stranger! This is the great challenge of waking up.

Intellectually, we all know we are here but rarely do we treat 'here' as a powerful stranger. We domesticate it. We think we know it and hence our curiosity and interest dims to the point of vanishing. We stop looking and questioning. It's an old saying that familiarity breeds contempt. Perhaps the ultimate contempt is to assume that we know the other to the point where we are no longer actively interested in them.

How often do you treat 'here' with an assumed familiarity? This is real prejudice; pre-judgement. 'Here' doesn't seem so interesting whereas "THERE", seems so seductive, so desirable, so frightening! Sometimes so deliciously frightening!

Imagine right now that you are in the presence of a "powerful stranger". How does it feel? You're likely to be alert, probing and evaluating every nuance. Is this being dangerous or safe? Will it eat me or can I eat it? What does she want? What is he on about? Where does she come from? What does he do? To be in the presence of a powerful stranger wakes us up. Our consciousness is engaged. Our faculties are active and awake. You're unlikely to doze off in the presence of such a being, unless of course, going to sleep, becoming numb, frozen or paralyzed, is one's habitual response to newness.

All things are impermanent. All things are fluid processings of simultaneous becoming and unbecoming. The streaming web-working we call life, never stops; this "undying body of manifestation". How could we possibly know 'here' in all its detail and entirety? By time we look it has become 'there' and once again we are in the presence of a powerful stranger. Each moment is completely fresh. Each arising is completely new. This is 'beginner's mind', so highly valued in Zen. This is the birthing of true humility. While acknowledging our ignorance we might cease ignoring this wonderful moment that has never been before and will never be again.

Another idea that appears in the poem is that we *must ask permission to know it and be known*. This is the factor of question, determination and engagement. Do you want to know? Are you willing to be known? Do you want to wake up! You'll be changed by the experience. The world will never again be exactly the same.

If you examine this deeply you will see that it is impossible to perceive some object without the object, in its own way, perceiving you. Your eyes and body are responding to light and the light reflected from your body triggers responses in others around you. You are bathed in sounds and your body is emitting sounds in response; compressed waves of air rippling messages throughout space. For some, this is a challenging idea but try exploring the possibility that anything you can see, in a way can see you. That anything you hear, can in a way hear you. This can also be applied to smell, taste and touch though some experiences are more readily perceived than others. It is quite obvious with the sense of touch.

Become aware of your right hand. Now try to touch the fingers of your right hand to the fingers of your left hand without the fingers of your left hand touching the fingers of the right! Sounds absurd? But no more absurd than the idea that we can know something or someone without being known. To know where you are is to be willing to be known by others as we are, and this is a step that too many people are afraid to take. How common it is to want to know clearly where you stand while remaining slightly hidden from others.

This powerful stranger called 'here' is not just a dead abstract 'here and now'; a philosophical micro-slice between the infinite past and unfathomable future. We are lost when we can see no-one else around. Ask yourself, do I have the courage, do I have the love and interest, to ask permission to know this experience called here? Am I actually willing to be known; to be found, to be recognized; to be changed? Or am I preferring to maintain a frozen fantasy about myself and others. Am I right? Am I wrong? Am I getting better? Am I getting worse? Don't disturb my profound meditation!

The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,
I have made this place around you.
If you leave it, you may come back again, saying Here.

Everything is alive, breathing in and breathing out; the continuous transformations of knowing; the continuous flow of becoming and unbecoming. The forest of your knowing is alive. It breathes. Stand still and listen. Everything that appears around you, the trees, the sky, the moisture, the buildings, the people; everything is alive. Each being has its own agenda and yet each is contributing to your sense of who and what and where you are. You are not alone. You are not unsupported. If we "leave" this moment of mutually interbeing with all of life, we can instantly come home again remembering, "HERE".

Pause where you are; right now. Feel your body breathing. Open all your senses and appreciate what is going on within you and around you. Realize that all of manifestation is contributing to your existence.

No two trees are the same to Raven.
No two branches are the same to Wren.
If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you,
You are surely lost.

When we are lost in fantasy, in self absorption, in planning or reaction mode, we fall into a deadening space where all trees look the same. We know it all. We know all there is to know about our partner, our children, our friends and work-mates. We know all there is to know about our competitors, our opponents, our problems. As we become lost in our opinions and prejudices, we cease investigating. We enter the realm of boredom, sleep and 'take-it-for-grantedism'. Wake up! In an actual forest, if you look closely you will find no two branches or twigs the same. Though each pine tree is a unique being, if we don't observe carefully and appreciate the detail, they can all look the same.

The forest of our being is made up of trees and branches. If what a feeling or a thought does is lost on you then you are surely lost. If what a dream does, or a fantasy, or a day-dream, or an emotion, or a reaction, or a hope or a fear does, is lost on you then you are surely lost. If what the sun going behind the cloud does, or the water cycle, or the food chain or the effect of starvation in third-world countries does, is lost on you then you are surely lost.

Our beingness is interdependent with everything else. It is defined by everything else. In an awesome and small-ego-upsetting way this interdependent arising **is** us. And every other being is equally vast and mysterious.

Stand still. The forest knows
Where you are. You must let it find you.

The path of awakening is all around you. It is the life you are living. It is the place where you are. It is the mind that is experiencing. Just pause again and again. Open all the doors and look deeply.

Do I have sufficient love to see? That's a big question! A great and humbling question!

You know.....? though I too get lost again and again, the words of this poem open my knowing of the Ground of Being, the place of unshakeable refuge; the wisdom of ancients, resonating in a thoroughly fresh way.

Although I've never met David Wagoner I give thanks for his poem and thanks to David Whyte for reading it.

I pray these words may bring forth something wondrous in you as well.

with best wishes to all
Tarchin

Natural Awakening

by Tarchin Hearn

April 24 2000

Wangapeka

Peeing in a field
 So natural
 So ordinary

Stream of crystal cascading,
 arcing through space
 curving with the mystery of gravity
 splatting against a flowering weed
 and spraying fountain-like radiant orbs
 raining down in all directions.

Cells of plants shifting in response to salts and temperature.
Tiny insects, flattened, life terminated by a blob of liquid as vast as the sky.
Soil creatures responding to sugars and acidities
A world of countless beings transforming
Bending the face of the universe
Responding to a shower of pee.
Thirsty roots happy in the rain of blessing.
Bursting cell walls and crushed legs and antennae
 writhing in the great eco-disaster.
The satisfaction of emptied bladder.
Soaking in the sun and thinking happy thoughts.
Life flows on
 transformation endlessly.
No stops
No stepping out to ponder skilful action
Our stepping out is itself an action.

Breathing in, the world transforms.
 Breathing out, the world transforms.
 Drinking in, the world transforms.
 Peeing out, the world transforms.

The first step of natural awakening is to bring peace to the frantic reactivity in body, emotion, and intellect; to encourage the balm of ease and clarity, to thoroughly moisten the entire arising now.

The second step: Resting in the place of nowhere else to rest, the thinking begins to look deeply into all perceived assumptions; to translucentise all opacity.

The third step is to learn to dwell in this, in a wider and wider range of circumstances, all the time discovering an ever greater depth and profundity of question.

The fourth step is to interact with each and every being from this place of boundless wonder, interaction, interbecoming.

The fifth step is to realise that the first four have been effortlessly arising all the time.
The sixth step is innate humour, joy, clarity, presence, nothing more to "practice" resting in the fullness of nowness being itself.

A Few Words on Mantra

by Tarchin Hearn
1999

The word mantra comes from Sanskrit "mano" and "tra". Mano means mind and tra is a root associated with the idea of tool and firmness. Mantra is literally a mind tool. A tool to help focus and calm the mind; to encourage a state of being that is grounded and firm.

In the early stages of mantra work, the emphasis is usually on making sounds. If we say the mantra, listen to ourselves saying it, and at the same time feel the sound reverberating in our bodies, we have so much to do that there is not much energy available for fantasy and mental wandering. In this way mantra is a tool to help still the mind.

In later stages of the practice, the emphasis shifts from making sounds to hearing in a deep and profound way. The Sufi poet Kabir once wrote, *"The unstruck sound of eternity sounds within me but my deaf ears hear it not."* When working with mantra, in a sense, we begin by mimicking aspects of the unstruck sound. Our entire being begins to loosen and vibrate, bringing new dimensions of possibility and aliveness. Eventually we begin to hear the symphony of communication that is life declaring itself. This hearing is not just through the ear but is a tactile feeling/knowing of communication; a mystery weaving the structure of presence; the divine mantra of now.

Types of mantra

Traditionally it is taught that there are three categories of mantra.

1- Bija or seed syllables.

These are single syllable sounds such as OM, AH, HUM, HRIH, DHIH, BHRUM. Although there are general themes or ideas associated with these sounds, they in fact cannot be translated with single English words. Working with bija or seed syllables is to explore the vibration of sound. Feel it reverberating in the body. Allow the seed to flower into an experience that carries us, nurtures us and transforms us.

2- Mantra with meaning.

This is a mantra in which all the words are translatable. When we work with this type of mantra we are more contemplating the meaning behind the words than surrendering into the sound, the way one might when working with bija. A famous example of this type of mantra is from the Heart Sutra. GATE, GATE, PARAGATE, PARASAMGATE, BODHI SWAHA. often translated, "Gone, gone, gone beyond. Oh what an awakening! All hail."

3- Mixed Mantras.

This type combines bija mantra with meaning mantra. For example, the mantra of Chenrezi. OM MANI PADME HUM. The OM and the HUM are bijas and can't really be translated. Mani means jewel and padme means lotus. Working with this type of mantra, one would go deeply into the bija sounds while contemplating the images invoked by the words with meaning.

Pronunciation

Sometimes people get very concerned about learning the correct pronunciation. I have been asked many times to record the 100 syllable mantra of Vajra Sattva on audio tape so that people can learn to practice it correctly. It's understandable that people would have concerns about this, particularly when you hear of teachings saying you have to pronounce the mantra in an exact and specific way, however, it reminds me of a friend from Czechoslovakia who had a job teaching English in a school in Japan. I wondered about all those Japanese children learning to pronounce English with a Czech accent!

Even in Tibet there were a number of different regional accents, so the pronunciation would depend on who you learned it from. In answer to the question of correct pronunciation, the traditional response is to pronounce it the way you heard it from your teacher. Having said this, you should realise that it is natural for the pronunciation to change according to the state you are in. Mantra practice is not a rigid military tattoo. Allow the rhythm and pronunciation to flow. This way, the mantra becomes a mirror

reflecting your changing states of mind and energy. It's a wonderful opportunity to experiment and learn.

There is a Tibetan story about a man who came from China to study the Dharma. He was given as practice, the meditation and mantra of Chenrezi. In those days, it was a very long walk from eastern China to Tibet. On his way back home, so the story goes, he had to pass through hundreds of miles of countryside dotted with grazing oxen. As he walked, practicing the mantra and deeply immersing himself in compassion for all sentient beings, somehow the pronunciation changed to something like "Om Mani Oxme Hum". Practicing diligently like this he eventually realised the true nature of being, the union of emptiness and compassion. Settling in his home town in China, he subsequently became a very well known teacher.

Many years passed until one day, he heard that his Tibetan teacher was near to death. He then decided to make a pilgrimage back to Tibet to pay his last respects. When he arrived at the temple, the young monks, who didn't know him, were amazed that someone from outside Tibet could come to such a deep realisation! What mantra have you practiced they asked? He replied, Om Mani Oxme Hum. The monks were flabbergasted. "There's no such mantra." they said. "You are supposed to say Om Mani Padme Hum. The story becomes a bit strange here but apparently he tried working with this peculiar "Mani Padme" pronunciation and found that it just didn't "work well" for him. Eventually the monks agreed that he should continue with Om Mani Oxme Hum!

In the early 1970s we did a lot of psychotherapy in Morocco. It was a very intense period and I remember one day walking past a person who was leaning against a wall reciting Om Mani Padme Hum. About half an hour later I walked by him again and noticed that his mantra had shifted to "Om Mummy Take Me Home. I thought that was pretty hilarious at the time but given the work we were doing, perhaps he was getting closer to the truth!

How to correctly pronounce the mantra? Let it flow, Feel the vibration resonating in your body. Let it soften and open the tissues of your being. A kind of internal ultrasound massage. Your mother sang to you in the womb. You could mother your own being by allowing these archetypal sounds to nurture you now. Observe how the mantra changes in response to your changing states and learn about impermanence. Mantra is a tool to support exploration. Experiment and learn to use it well.

Speed and Rhythm

To the western ear it often seems that the Tibetan style of reciting mantra is to go as fast as possible. If you end up doing hundreds of thousands of mantras the way one does in Vajrayana practice, your lips, tongue, and vocal chords, will become accustomed to the sounds and the syllables will eventually flow through like a burbling stream. Sound and vision merge into a seamless experience and the mind becomes very stable and serene. It's a mistake to spend your time trying to sound like a Tibetan lama. No matter how fast or slurred the mantras may sound to the outer ear, on the inside you should be able to clearly distinguish each individual syllable. When beginning to work with a new mantra the speed will inevitably be slower than it is when you become more familiar with it.

A rhythm will sometimes develop that helps to focus and still the mind. Allow this to unfold naturally. The point of mantra practice is to take the sounds and accompanying ideas, deep into your being, to allow them to mould you into something wise and wondrous. Mantra practice is not a singing performance for the benefit of others.

Volume

When your mind is busy or agitated, it will help to say the mantra out loud. The busier the mind the louder the mantra. In these situations it may seem as if we were singing to ourselves. As one settles into a deepening stillness, the 'singing' becomes a humming and then the humming becomes a murmuring. Loud mantra at this stage would feel too crude and distracting. As the settling continues, the volume will diminish until it disappears altogether. At this point one is simply hearing or feeling the mantra sounding silently within.

Mantra inevitably becomes aligned to your breathing. A rich sensitive inhalation is followed by a long exhalation, sculpted by the mantra; the whole body, alive and breathing. I often suggest to meditators

that they give as much attention to the texture of the inhalation as they do to the sound and vibration of the mantra on the exhalation. You might think of the inhalation as meditating on the sound of silence. Try giving all of your attention to this. Then, on the exhalation merge with the symphony of sound, resonating on the body of breath.

Practicing in this way, you will eventually discover a place of pristine stillness that is inseparable from clarity and alertness. Blissful, clear with no sense of separation, you begin to taste the fruit of calm abiding.

These few words on mantra were inspired by the questions of a practitioner in Hobart. They have been put to paper in the hope that they may be of use to others. May the Divine Mantra lead all beings to the experience of true emptiness for the benefit of all that lives.

Sarva Mangalam

Love and Clear Seeing

by Tarchin Hearn

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Words, like species and languages, can become extinct. In their youth, words often have great vigour. They are juicy, evocative and filled with ambiguity. In middle age, they slow down and become predictable. In old age, people use them without too much respect and their meanings either begin to drift in a vague swirl of fuzziness or they begin to fossilise and become candidates for a museum exhibit. Perhaps jargon is the equivalent of cancer or terminal illness for a word.

One word which is perhaps in the throes of being worked to death is "love". "Oh, I'd love to do that." "I'd love to go to Fiji." "I love ice cream." "I love the Spice Girls" The way love is used in these sentences, one might deduce that it means desire, hunger or even infatuation. Perhaps this is what it has come to mean today.

In Buddhist traditions, there seems to be a great reluctance to use the word love without any qualifying phrases. After all, desire rooted in ignorance is pointed to as one of the fundamental causes of suffering. Logically, if love and desire are so similar, we should conclude that love, rooted in ignorance, is a major cause of suffering. Looking at all the dysfunctional relationships that pass as loving relationships we might have to agree.

It seems that in Buddhism, love became replaced by the word lovingkindness. Perhaps this was just to be on the safe side and not mix up a potentially sticky, unwholesome entanglement with something that is extraordinarily precious. Lovingkindness is the translation for *metta* and is related to *maitri* which has more the meaning of warm, open, friendliness.

As Sakyamuni Buddha's teachings on awakening (*Buddha Dharma*) evolved into the Buddhism we know today, *metta bhavana*, the cultivation or meditation of lovingkindness became one of the 40 classical meditations associated with *samatha* or tranquillity. It is one of the four divine abidings: lovingkindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. Although the Buddha himself often referred to the full flowering of these four as a major characteristic of the Awakened state, as time went by, it became commonly accepted in many traditions that only insight could bring liberation. The meditation on love or lovingkindness became more something one might cultivate on the side; good for calming and peace. Nice....meritorious.....

but....! I suppose in a world of "striving meditators", if you could imagine such a thing, lovingkindness perhaps feels a bit wimpy, not to mention dare I say it, a bit feminine.

I think it's time we looked more deeply into the energy and experience behind the word love. I wonder if, similar to the way we might reclaim a place of natural beauty, restoring the rich diversity of a river system or a block of native bush, I wonder if we could resurrect the word love, a simple, uncomplicated, beautiful word, referring to a rich, profound and wondrous state of being.

I suppose there is no reason why a word can't be used in many different ways but love as an attribute of the awakened state is much more than a feeling of warmth and belonging. I would suggest that the magic of love is inseparable from the magic of deep seeing and profound understanding.

We are living in a world that admires complexity. It says something about the process of maturing that the first books I wrote were on the subjects of Abhidharma and the Six Yogas of Naropa, both complex and rather esoteric teachings. Now, twenty years of experience later, the essential work seems to have gathered into a simple yet potent seed of cultivating, friendliness and interest. In actual fact, these two are quite inseparable. To inquire into something, we need to get close enough to see or experience it in depth. It's impossible to look deeply into an event or an object if we are keeping it at arm's length, or are trying to push it away. A degree of friendliness is necessary for insight to flower. The reverse is equally true. Imagine being in love with someone and at the same time not having any interest in them. The idea is absurd. To love someone is to be interested in them. To be profoundly interested in someone or something is an expression of some degree of love.

Looking through some of my earlier writings I came across this. "To love without attachment we must learn to look deeply. To look deeply, we must learn to love. Eventually we realise that profound loving and deep seeing—understanding are not two separate things." Love used in this way refers to a spacious openness. A quality of heart and mind that can embrace any situation just as it is, with a vast capacity to understand and appreciate. It is a long way away from a clutchy high-energised needing, a business deal, a bookkeepers love, with debit and credit columns. I gave to you this much attention, now you owe to me that much.

When we look deeply into anything or anyone, the looking will always reveal a networking of causes and conditions, a fabric of interbecoming that is vast and pervasive without any finite boundaries in either space or time. There is a transforming magic in deep seeing. There is a magic in love; magic in the sense that the moment is filled with a feeling of immense spaciousness and possibility. Things seem more intensely alive. The predictable world, filled with its opaque-making hopes and fears becomes transparentized revealing a world poised on that terrifying and awesomely alive point of impermanence, a universe dancing in that impossible place that transcends all paradox. To love someone is not to know that person totally. It is to constantly realise that they are infinitely vast and ultimately unknowable! So the voyage of discovery never comes to an end and the person is a focus of undying interest, continually revealing new facets of being.

So many human problems are problems of love and its lack. Not receiving love. Not able to receive love. Not able to give love. Not having the opportunity to give love. The problem is love; spacious awake allowing openness, and yet the solution is often seen in trying to find the reasons for its lack, which is perilously close to trying to find something or someone to blame. How is blaming going to restore us to health. I have heard that Aristotle once said. "The child who is not loved will seek to be admired." If this was true at the time of Aristotle, then one wonders how much has really changed since that then. It seems to be painfully descriptive of many people's life experience today. Instead of love we have the cults of political power, media stardom, and intellectual property copyright. Even the teaching of Dharma can stray into dharma politics and hierarchies of control and power. This lack of love and trust in the wonder of life, this desperate effort to control and manipulate situations so that we will get the recognition, the admiration that we have somehow come to believe will fulfil us, has spilled over into violence on a scale that threatens the fabric of life on this planet, not only for humans but for everyone.

As meditators, we must be careful not to encourage this madness in our interior life. As has been said by a number of great teachers, "Make a hair's breadth of difference and heaven and earth are set apart." It doesn't need a gross defilement to derail the awakening process. Problems can manifest in very subtle ways. In the name of healing we negate certain sensations and welcome others. We try to get rid of painful situations or at least avoid them and even when trying to gain insight into them, we often have the ulterior motive of keeping them at arms length. Do we have the courage to touch life and, in turn, be touched by it in a straight on way? Or do we wobble to and fro, blindly led by prepackaged preferences. A little more gentleness and allowingness in our practice may take us much further than determinedly trying to stare down the wall!

Look deeply. Feel deeply. Know deeply. This kind of looking is very gentle but it is certainly not wimpy. It is much more than a mere "acceptance". It's a kind of sinking into, a merging with, coupled with a bright sense of aliveness and discovery. How can a profound ecological appreciation not simultaneously be suffused with love and lovingkindness. How can love and lovingkindness not be coupled with a profound appreciation of the interdependent miracle that is arising. There is a danger of allowing the word love to continue in its decay until no hint of its original meaning is left. The danger is that we may lose sight of the key that can reopen the door of healing and sane living. Loveless deep seeing is dangerous. Applied science and technology has demonstrated this many times over. Love without insight brings its own problems. It is almost always a recipe for suffering.

If we are truly concerned about the well being of the world, our children and of future generations, we really must take this to heart. The work of cultivating love and lovingkindness is essential for healing at any level of being and it begins right here; right where we are.

Please pause with me for a moment and feel your body resting in its chair. Feel the movements of your breathing. A living body is a breathing body. Feel the alternating sensations of warm and cool at your

nostrils or lips. Soften into the movements of your chest and abdomen. If you can become very still, you may have a sense of the rhythms of breathing moving throughout your entire body. Become very intimate with this; touching this alive body with kindness and interest.

Don't slide into a habitual pattern of "watching your breath"; standing to one side, watching and analysing. Instead, actually feel your body breathing; a tactile reality. Meditation is intimate and personal. On the inhalation, allow your whole being to quieten, as if you were listening with every cell of your body. Within this rich texture of stillness, imagine that the entire of your being is saying your name. "Tarchin....." Then on the exhalation, hear it whispering, "I'm here for you". "Tarchin.....I'm here for you." "(Your own name)..... I'm here for you." Breathe like this for a while.

If any difficulties arise, you might name them. "Critique, worry, impatience, exhilaration etc. I'm here for you." "Sound of the traffic ... I'm here for you." No more running. No more fighting. No more escaping. "Present moment.....I'm here for you. Give a few moments of your undivided attentiveness to this present mystery of breathing. Please do this right now. I am pausing in my writing to join you. Very simple. Very direct. Gateway to vastness of being.

We certainly haven't exhausted the subject. Kindness and interest, this mystery of love is not just for bedrooms, it's not just for moments of meditation. It doesn't need to be restricted to any particular place and time but can flower in the midst of any situation ... even when we are walking. I would like to end this short essay by sharing with you a poem that birthed into being towards the end of an hour of mindfully walking in the forest. It's called "Sacred Walking".

Come my friend
My dear dear friend
Come walk with me a while.

My foot, my sole
Gently touching your shoulder.
Your quivering birdsounds penetrating my being.

A coolness of breath through nose and mouth
Opening – yes inviting forth my heart
To kiss the world a new with laughter
 breaking forth all over
Cascades of shimmering joy and meaning.

Come dear friend
Let us hold each other gently.
You in me and I in thee
And let the paths of life walk through.

Brother sun and sister river sound
Mother, father,
We are the pathways reaching up
To bless all tender feet
 so tentative
 so wanting deep to know their tread secure.

Walking this path creating.
Pathing this
 a walkway.
Creation
 dancing all over

Come my blessed,
Breathe with me the mystery of stillness
Walking through the glades of light and shade
We offer beauty
Pouring forth continuous
Nourishing the world.