

SPIRITUALITY IMPRISONED

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I was delighted to be invited to speak to the Members' Day of the Alister Hardy Society in November 1997. As a staff member of the Prison Phoenix Trust, I had a feeling of home-coming that day and I prefaced my remarks with a dedication to that gracious lady, the late Ann Weatherall – who, ten years before, felt she was called to research imprisoned spirituality and thus started the Prison Phoenix Trust. When Ann's sister heard I was to give the lecture, she exclaimed: "We have come full circle!"

A Working Definition

Spirituality Imprisoned. It is not easy to come up with a working definition of spirituality. From everything I've read on the subject as preparation, I am assured that just about everybody has his or her own definition for spirituality. We would, in all probability, agree that there are many kinds of spirituality, some of which fit under a larger umbrella. For instance, there is a well-known Franciscan spirituality, which comes not only from the personality of the man who spoke to birds and flowers, but also from Christian spirituality as well. And in the contemporary world there also seems to be a kind of New Age spirituality, which I have met since coming to England, in which one is presumed to be a Buddhist at heart, a vegetarian, a practitioner of alternative therapies and an animal rights protector. To me, spirituality is something much more intimate.

The other aspect to be considered is imprisonment. I must admit I couldn't see any easy checkmate in that area either. The more I sink into the work of the Prison Phoenix Trust, the more insidious 'imprisonment' becomes. The past five years with the Trust have been a great eye-opener in the various forms which unfreedom sometimes takes. We will look at some of them.

I have spent the last 35 years of my life trying to discover what a lived spirituality really is. Today, I would like to re-live part of that journey with you, as we consider together the way of spirituality imprisoned which we are all travelling.

Our Personal Journeys

I went to Japan in 1961, surrounded on many sides by the marvelous integration of its spirituality and everyday life. After I became somewhat fluent in Japanese, I acted as interpreter for the many, many people from all over the world who came to see my famous Japanese Zen master. They enquired about meditation and, upon being asked 'why?', invariably replied: "I want to know who I am".

That oft-repeated reply struck a sympathetic chord within and I have heard that longing expressed a hundred different ways over the course of many many years. More recently underlined by the world-wide success of the book *Sophie's World*, I could see that people are still stating that same need to know who they are.

And just very recently our present Japanese Zen Master, on a visit here, related a recent trip to Harvard University's graduation. The valedictory address for the occasion was given by a female graduate who in her discourse stated: "I came to Harvard seven years ago with two questions I trusted would be answered in my quest for an education. Those questions were, 'Who am I?' and 'Why am I here?' I leave now seven years later with my doctorate, but still ignorant of those basic questions of life."

The Zen Master said he could hardly contain himself not to rush up to tell her that there is a way of coming to know about those matters. To come to KNOW, no surprise to a Japanese Master, the famous *Satori* of the Orient. It is of course not intellectual knowledge, but a kind of knowing that is experiential, the brand of knowledge that is Wisdom itself.

Although it seems that the discipline of coming to this knowing has been surely practised for centuries in the East, the ultimate of this KNOWING is not the sole prerogative of the Japanese. I was delighted to come across these words of Robert Browning:

to know
consists in opening out a way
whence the imprisoned splendour may escape

A Personal Imprisonment

Whenever I give a Workshop in prison, I start off with the fact that I went to the Orient about the same time as the Beatles and thousands of other seekers. And very unashamedly I say I suspect we all went there for the same purpose: to know (in the terms of the above poem), and seeking to experience that imprisoned splendour. For many people, uninspired by the state of present day religions, spiritual longing takes that form, which for me, has a certain appropriateness. The splendour is imprisoned because we are imprisoned, and our life work is to co-operate in its release. I would venture to say the Harvard graduate was still imprisoned.

One of our basic imprisonments is handed to us as children, especially in religious matters. When I was young, the favourite God of grandmothers was a wise old man with a long white beard sitting on a throne beyond the clouds.

Luckily, when I was about 10 years of age, I was freed from those shackles. I had been born on the feast of Thomas Aquinas, and was well informed of his superior intellectual gifts. One day, I

happened into a religious book store, and noticed a volume with the name Aquinas written in large gold letters. I recall getting something to stand on, and started to examine the book. It opened at a section entitled *Five Proofs for the Existence of God*. That didn't seem to be too difficult for a 10-year old to understand, so I proceeded to read. The explanation said something to the effect that all the movement we see around us comes from the same source, from a kind of prime mover. And that prime mover we call God. My respect for Aquinas's intellectual prowess did not allow me to question that, so for me, God became a PM – not the Prime Minister but the prime mover. I have courted that PM God all my life, and been grateful to my Patron ever since for that release and freedom.

But the first time I was aware of my own imprisonment was at the time of graduation from High School. Someone had given me an anthology of famous sayings, and in it was a snippet of Pascal's, no more than a sentence or two. It shot out like a slender arrow and pierced my very soul. Strange as it may seem, I cannot recall a word, but it caught me in some way. It left an ache, and that sensitive spot kept nagging for the next 20 years. I suspected I had glimpsed a fact that was to become my life's search. In the words of Browning, the 'Inner Splendour' was tapping for recognition and freedom.

Without consultation, I mistakenly came to the conclusion that Pascal had been speaking from the field of philosophy, so my search started in that area. I met my next teacher in the course of time: a gentle, articulate, and well educated young philosopher. With his sympathetic guidance, it did not take long to discover that, whatever I learned about the great philosophers, their intellectual erudition never touched the aching inner spot. The walls of my own prison seemed to become even higher.

The Potential of Silence

One day my philosopher friend articulated a suspicion. He said he suspected I was not seeking ideas at all, but the Real Thing. The real thing. Yes, now I see 'Browning's splendour' was beckoning but, for a youngish Canadian at that time, seeking the Real Thing usually meant becoming a religious. I thought IT was primarily a life of service because, after the war, the main Christian concerns had to do with justice and poverty.

I did not know then that competent masters in the Oriental Way would never dream of developing thoughts about the great Unknown Reality. They teach with great confidence, that *satori* is not possible by thinking. It is available only as a gift found in the depths of silence. In Eastern meditation, you must not think, not remember, not imagine, not feel. You must go the Way of Silence, both of body and mind.

At first I was astounded by this revelation of the potential of silence. And the road along which one travels in silence is the Way in which there is no object. In other words, one does not think ABOUT anything. It is perhaps only by hindsight that we understand that, since what we are seeking is not 'other', it is paramount that our meditation does not pose an object.

I said I went to the Orient at much the same time as the Beatles but, unlike them, I was able to stay, to learn the language and imbibe the culture to the extent that a Westerner can imbibe such things in the Orient. Many psychologists say it is very difficult for a Westerner to take on the ways of the Orient especially in spiritual matters – that we are too imprisoned

psychologically. For all the glories of silence, it has not been highly regarded in the history of western culture. A Westerner often finds silence maddening. After 35 years of practice, I can say it IS difficult, but not impossible.

The Shortcomings of Western Culture

There is much in western culture that is imprisoning. We think too much, we plan too methodically, we recall too minutely, we idealise 'will power'. I believe one articulation of this tendency is being too 'right-brained'. And even to mention a religious experience is considered taboo.

We seem to have lost sight of the fact that religions are founded on an experience and consequently have been known to be religions of love or compassion or pursuing other such altruistic ends. But things have gone wrong somehow. And, far from existing for the good of their members, some religions are themselves imprisoning. A theologian from the hallowed halls of this very university [Oxford], stated in a journal that some of the fundamentalist religions are positively fascist!

The start of getting out of the head and into the whole being actually opened for me when I was in Novitiate. One day someone gave me a small book by the Belgian Jesuit Paul de Jaegher, a veritable fellow-traveller. He obviously had had an experience, and it certainly changed his spirituality. He had started where I was, working at an intimacy with the Christ of Christianity, but his experience had changed the 'intimacy' to something he called 'identification'.

That's a big shift. The happening came for de Jaegher whilst meditating on the famous quotation in Galatians 2:20: "I live now not I, but Christ lives within me". His whole be-ing was obviously blown apart by an illumination emanating from that experience or, dare I say, the reality of that fact. Even though my own Third Eye was as yet shut tight, I knew in some way that the 'not I' in the quotation was the catalyst.

The Oriental Tradition

Later, as I discovered in Oriental meditation, *satori* is in fact an experience of identification, and in its deepest realisation it is usually expressed in a negation. The discipline leading to *satori* uses neither words nor concepts. Soon after my arrival in Japan I was taught to meditate by *Rinzai* Buddhist nuns and invited to participate in their monthly retreat which is called *sesshin*.

Sesshin schedule at first seemed a contest of endurance. Rising at 3.00am and chanting at 3.05, I found I didn't get my face washed for three days and never did discover just when the other nuns washed. *Sesshin* consisted of silent meditation, chanting, physical outdoor work and meals – right up until midnight. My first experience of this marathon was the principal annual *sesshin* Rohatsu, from late November until December 8. Total lack of heat, insufficient sleep, unfamiliar food, no normal communication with others, and downright spookiness were constant hurdles. And at the end of the day, all these were as nothing, compared to the daily appearance before a stern Zen Master, to be tested for *satori*. Many times I would have settled for a hot water bottle, but no, the goal was *satori*! At this price could it all be worth it?

A Zen Disciple

At the time of Ann Wetherall's connection with the Religious Experience Research Centre, apparently no common denominator was found amongst the many who reported on an experience, except perhaps a sense of helplessness and despair. I think now the early experiences at the Buddhist Temple would have qualified me as a potential for *satori*!

The reason I didn't give up is that something was happening to me. We generally articulate the process as 'becoming free', the blocks, hang-ups and prejudices I had had for years, were gradually disappearing. The ups and downs of life were less up and down, and certain emotions like anger were much easier controlled. In other words, I was gradually becoming free of some imprisonments.

This discipleship in Zen continued over my 32 years in the Orient and, looking back, I see the great fortune of being under a teacher who will certainly go down as one of the greatest Zen Masters of the Century. Strangely enough, I have no memory of his preaching the therapeutic results of sitting in meditation, though the goal of coming to *Satori*, coming to KNOW, was regularly stressed. Eventually I did come to an experience which satisfied that criteria and, over the ensuing years, I became more proficient in the Japanese language and was able to take the long training given to Zen monks and nuns and other serious practitioners.

About 20 years later, I was given transmission and made a Zen *Roshi*, and eventually came to what is considered a deep experience. Without a doubt, for a Japanese Master to give transmission to a non-Japanese and non-Buddhist is awesome. To a Buddhist, being in transmission means that your teacher is qualified to confirm a true experience, upon which salvation for a Buddhist is based. Some Buddhists believe this cannot be done by an outsider. When I took over the Singapore Zendo, half the Buddhists walked out – very understandably – not being able to put their trust in a white-female-Catholic-nun Zen Master!

Forms of Meditation

There are many forms of meditation in the Orient, but there is a kind of mainstream from which they depart. To my knowledge, Zen Buddhism has preserved the purity of its stream, and maintains a kind of patriarchal position in Oriental mysticism. Its practice consists of a meditation using a silent body and silent mind whilst becoming absorbed with one's breath. Away from the cushions, Zen practice consists in living attentively in the present moment and place.

Very interestingly today, ancient Buddhist and Zen texts are often used by physicists in their study of sub-atomic particles. Although I do not mean to pursue the statement, it is fascinating to read Capra's articulation of a deeper appreciation of knowing. When speaking of his book *The Web of Life*, he says: "The ancient intuition of soul or spirit being the breath of life, dovetails beautifully with the new scientific theory which says that cognition of knowing is the process of life ... the mind is not a thing, it is the process of life." He speaks enthusiastically about the mystical concept of the breath of life, which goes far beyond the rational mind.

And one must go deeper than the rational mind if one is to come to *Satori*. No adequate Zen teacher would take issue with any disciple who chooses the path of Zen 'to come to know who they are'. But that 'who' is the deep subjective 'who' which operates if the blocks are not too

dense, and the hang-ups and prejudices not too numerous. Once released, that 'who' straightens the back, tucks in the chin, and brings us dignity and respect. It is also the very deepest and most intimate part of oneself.

There is a minimum of actual teaching in our Zen Buddhist Dojo. Yamada Koun Roshi, my teacher, gave his disciples three *kanji* (three ideograms) with which to understand a human being.

The first is *SHIN* which means 'body' [see figure 1]. When we talk about an imprisoned spirituality, it is often imprisoned in the body. In our work with prisoners, we find their bodies very tense and full of blocks, which impede the inner workings and the outer thrust of the imprisoned splendour. So we help them towards a physical freedom using the techniques of yoga.

The oriental understanding of the body starts with its central point. If you were lying on the floor, and I wanted to pick you up so that you would 'hang out' evenly, I would seize a point just a couple of inches below the navel; the body's centrifugal point. Oriental Spiritual Masters understand that the best body position for silence is to bring all its extremities towards that central point; this is called the lotus position. Archaeologists have discovered representations of humans in this pose in statues that date from 2,000 and 3,000 BCE.



Figure 1: *SHIN* – Body



Figure 2: *SHIN* – Heart-Mind



Figure 3: *SHO* – Nature
left = heart-mind
right = life, life-ing

The second ideogram is also *SHIN* in Sino-Japanese [see figure 2], although with a different *kanji*. Japanese frequently use this ideogram by itself, when it becomes *KOKORO*. It is usually translated as 'mind' or, better still, 'heart-mind', but in reality has no English equivalent. This *SHIN* comes from the ancient Sanskrit word *hridaya*, meaning 'heart', which suggests 'interior', 'centre' or 'core' – and, pertaining to this core, 'what is best, dearest and most secret'. Although not contained in either the Japanese or Sanskrit word, I recall that, to many of us Westerners

studying in Japan at the time, this *SHIN* seemed to include the wider and deeper concept of consciousness or psyche.

The third *kanji* is *SHO* and it [see figure 3] consists of two parts: on the left the *hen* of the above-mentioned *KOKORO* heart-mind, and on the right *ike, ikite iru*: 'life', 'living' or (the way I like to present it) 'life-ing'.

The dictionary meaning of *SHO* is 'nature', our most basic Being, often called our True Nature. Oriental Masters teach that it can be found only in experience. In this experience, we discover it expresses itself in power. Our power-filled Nature is always manifesting in some kind of an 'i-n-g' way. As the contemporary sage Raimon Panikkar says so simply: "... it is the power that moves us". Is that not a reiteration of Thomas Aquinas and our PM God, moving as a first principle, like that Prime Mover? I take special joy in revealing that my Buddhist Master reminded me that, when writing this *SHO* in our English script, we must use upper-case and capitalise the letters.

Spirituality

In introducing the *SHO* and telling of its function, I have finally come to the point of discussion concerning the other word of our topic today, namely 'spirituality', and how I remain in true transmission in Zen whilst being Christian.

For my review of this word, I got in touch with the American Dominican, known to many of you, Father Richard Woods. He says that, in recent literature, the meaning of the word 'spirituality' has become problematic. It is a relatively modern word, both in French where it first appeared, and in English as well.

Spirituality, spiritual and spirit are obviously related semantically and also chronologically, although in reverse order. They are all of the non-material, the non-worldly, the non-temporal. Spirit and its cognates were used to translate the Latin *spiritus*, which in turn was generally chosen to translate the Greek *pneuma*, which rendered the Hebrew *ruach*, the breath of God. For me, all of this has a parallel in Oriental Spirituality.

Richard says that, as a metaphor (and it is a metaphor), 'breath' is an accurate rendering of the Hebrew in Genesis 2:7, "God breathes life into the clay figure of man, and the first human being becomes a truly living person". The important words for us in that statement are "God breathes life". Breath remains the chosen metaphor of God's gift of life, all through the Hebrew Scriptures, and for an obvious enough reason. Breathing is the first act and most manifest sign of life itself.

Focus on Breathing

We focus on breathing as the most appropriate image of the life communicated by God and, indeed, God's own life: invisibility, power, and freedom but, of course, sovereign freedom. In general we may say that images of breath point to the intangible simple essence of life, both human life and divine life. But we have to leave it at that, for, as Richard says, it is hard enough to define biological life. Eternal life beggars the imagination. But the act of breathing is the first

and most manifest sign of life. Life it is, and life it remains, and life-ing is the stuff of spirituality. Listen to it illustrated by Walt Whitman:

“How the earth darts on and on!
and the sun, moon, stars, dart on and on!
How the water sports and sings! (surely it is alive!)
How the trees rise and stand up
with strong trunks! with branches and leaves!
Surely there is in each tree, some living soul!
O amazement of things, even the least particle
O Spirituality of things!”

(from Walt Whitman: *Song at Sunset Leaves of Grass*)

Isn't that the simple essence of life? I tend to call it 'i-n-g-ing': the earth darting on; the water sporting & singing; the trees springing up; and for humans, it is walking, running, laughing, crying, loving, etc. Browning's inner splendour is dynamic. It is life, it is power. Zen spirituality is the giving over to that Power.

I must say I am always startled when people remind me that Zen is not Christian. It is certainly not historically so, but if it is of the intangible, the simple essence of life, which expresses itself in life-ing and experience, then it is not the priority of any one religion. And each practitioner, whether Christian, Hindu, Muslim or Jewish, can experience that splendid life-ing.

You might be interested to know how Christians articulate such an experience. One Jesuit colleague wrote: “It is nothing other than a life in attunement to the Spirit, the breath of God, where we let our total being be taken up ... meditation is the very abandonment of our total being to the breath of God here and now in its dynamic presence ...”

A Personal Meditation

Last May I was invited back to our Motherhouse to participate in a community retreat. At one point, we were asked to articulate our individual spirituality. As the testament of a Christian who imbibed the essence of Buddhist meditation, I wrote a parody on the principal prayer of our community, the Magnificat – which you may recall begins: “My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit doth rejoice in God my Saviour, for He who is mighty hath done great things for me”.

I am special. I am not special.
Because everyone is special.
My body, my soul, the Divine Inner-dwelling
glories you, O God.
I have joy because of this.
You have blessed me with the greatest gift
that was yours to give ... your very Life, your Be-ing.
When all the blocks and prejudices and hang-ups are shattered
and I can forget myself and let you BE
then I need not plan or devise or calculate.
I can only let you BE yourself in me.
As long as I do not try to take over
I am free with your freedom, and strong with your strength
so there is nothing that can't be done
if it is appropriate.

You are the power-filled ONENESS
and I glorify you for giving me this happening.
Help me to keep that balance,
you the DO-ER,
I the instrument.
And when this proceeds to enactment
then your Kingdom is Be-coming.
Thank you. Amen.

My teacher in Japan used often to say that everyone is born to be a mystic. Everyone. And that means everyone here today. And sometimes in prison, when I feel the moment is right, I say that. I have yet to hear or notice any dissent amongst the inmates. In some deep place inmates believe that. "Walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage" is as true in the realm of prison spirituality as it is in a convent, and for you at home. To develop our spirituality as a kind of inner adventure to freedom, we carry our place of practice within, wherever we go.

From a spirituality point of view, the Oriental sages teach us that, if allowed, the ego gradually weakens to the point where that inner power and splendour of our True Nature can take over, and return to its original spontaneity. Until then, we are un-free. We are imprisoned. Until we get our inner life focused and working as it is meant to work, our spirituality is imprisoned. In an ambience of silence, the Inner Power of our True Nature dissolves the blocks of the body and consciousness down to size, and we start to live. It is living (or 'life-ing') under its own steam, as it were. Dare I interject, 'I live now not I but Christ lives within me'. For a meditator coming from a Christian background, this is fertile soil indeed. How can such a meditation not be included in Christianity's fabulous storehouse!

The Experience of Knowing

And then, when all things are ready, the power of our True Nature darts out and reveals itself in experience. In Japanese the experience is called *satori*, and the verb is *satoru*, to know. And that is why I chose Robert Browning's phrase. To know, is to find a way to release the imprisoned splendour, and it can be experienced. I join Abhishiktananda in saying that to come to this experience is the most noble path for a human being.

What happens in such an experience? The masters of old say: Body falls away, mind falls away. The outer containments must disappear. Raimon Pannikar illustrates this very succinctly with the drop of water entering the ocean. As long as you have the perimeter of the drop, it is not one with the ocean. When the differentiating line disappears, then there is just the ocean.

One Oriental master used to say that the *satori* experience is just like two drops of rain-water coming down a window-pane and meeting to become one. When they meet, they discover they are of exactly the same substance. (I believe we may safely describe that as 'identification'.) As a present-day Korean Master teaches, things in the world have different shapes – just as cookies are shaped by cookie cutters. There are teddy bears and trees and fishes and boats and so forth, but they are all made from the same cookie-dough. And this came to mind recently when I heard Stephen Hawking say that people and planets share the same chemistry. One of the famous Zen *koans* phrases it, "everything goes back to the same root".

When body and mind fall away, what is left is the very deepest and truest part of ourselves, our Nature, our essence. And it is ONE with all that is perceived. In other words, at last, at long last, we have arrived home and 'we fit perfectly' because we are really one with what is perceived. This brings a joy beyond all telling. As John says in the fourth Gospel: "This joy, this perfect joy, is now mine". And, in reference to the eternal question we posed at the beginning of this talk, in experience I come to know who I am – the divine splendour experienced, the imprisoned splendour at work and unmasked.

Working Inside Prisons

Prisoners do meditate and, as with us all, the inner dynamism becomes appropriately operative under the discipline of their silent meditation. Herein lies the paradox. Silence, an apparent nothingness and lifeless IS vital, dynamic, a new creation, and is happening every moment, for anyone who practices it.

It is often said, by teachers of mystical prayer, that life is ontologically silent. Silence then cannot be the repression of thought or expression. To the uninitiated, silence only seems to say nothing. In reality, that nothing is 'no-thing' (a *koan* or conundrum for every Zen student) and at the same time the well-spring of all wisdom.

What are the disciplines which allow all this to happen? What are our tools in this Inner Adventure? First of all, we silence the body, because if the body is chattering away, so will the mind. Spirituality sometimes forgets the body. To neglect it is a lethal dichotomy. Once we realise this inner power as the seat of the sacred within, we understand the disciplines we undertake to keep its flow unrestricted and free. In the human condition, it is a process which demands some asceticism otherwise we are not free. In their long histories, both Zen and the Christian mystical traditions have supported ascetic practices.

Then we silence the mind. We do this primarily by not using it, by giving it a rest. Although it is unmoving, something is happening. The more we sit in meditation, the deeper that realisation becomes. The little bits of inner garbage are chipped away, and finally we come to a simple purity of heart, a transparency, an integrity.

And gradually, things seem to get right within, and glancing without, we see everything just as it is. The practice of silence becomes a kind of eye-opener, the famous Third Eye. For the meditator, this is peace, this is freedom. When we reach that point, (and sadly it is not available on demand) the ego-strength lessens, and we can allow the inner Splendour to shine and sparkle with its own life. I call that state, Be-ing, or perhaps more fully, the meditation is the space where we let Be-ing Be.

Attentiveness

There are also helpful psychological aspects: there is a story that the Zen Master Ikkyu was asked about the basic rules to obtain the highest wisdom. Ikkyu answered: "Attentiveness." He was asked again: "Aren't you going to add something?" Ikkyu replied: "Attentiveness. Attentiveness."

But that attentiveness must be in harmony with our everyday life. New students often start by being attentive to their walking. I recall one fellow-student in Japan became so attentive to his walking that he tripped himself up. When he explained his problem to our teacher, the advice given was to walk like a centipede, who just keeps its hundred legs going on and on, in 'just walking'.

There is also a story that when a philosopher asked the Buddha about his method leading to enlightenment, the Buddha replied, "We talk, we wash, we sit down, we stand up ..." The philosopher interrupted, "What is there special in these actions? Everyone talks and washes and sits down and gets up." "There is a difference sir" the Buddha replied, "when we wash, we are aware of the fact that we wash."

Not letting the mind dash around to other places and other times is a constant interruption of ego-satisfaction. In practising this, we do not allow the consciousness an arbitrary course that would prevent an advance into a deeper perception. It is the consciousness, the working wheels that keeps us from deeply perceiving. With the practice of attentiveness, we are led into our deep, true Nature, and thus away from our ego. We 'move along with' the hundred legs.

Gradually we are no longer so dominated by our egotistic way of thinking. Other ascetic practices and privations may occasionally be necessary, such as cutting down on sleep, comfort, food, sex etc. But to come into contact with true life, the practice of awareness seems vitally important, because it does not allow ego action, and it prevents the consciousness taking an arbitrary course. Daydreaming is more than a waste of time.

There are forms of attentiveness in the body, such as our breathing, sense perception, and physical movements in the body. Do you ever consciously become aware of your life-breath? When you eat, do you really taste? And are you at one with your physical movements? There is a moment of awe we sometimes witness in sports, when a superlative figure-skater rises above technique, or the world's No.1 tennis player demonstrates that he has honed his reflexes to perfection. Joseph Campbell used to say that sports can bring one to the edge of mystical experience. Sometimes I think I see that.

In the forms of attentiveness in the psyche, we must be aware that we relate to most things affectively and so desire them. The Divine inner Splendour tends toward itself (like those two drops of rain water on the window-pane). It is present in all creation. Another illustration of this I often use, is what happened during a childhood disease. There were two thermometers on the tray by my bedside. I played about, and of course broke them both. This left me with two lumps of mercury. What fun, bringing them within a certain proximity, and then seeing them almost jump together. What an attraction they had for each other! When I had a *satori* experience, I immediately recalled this happening.

Psychotherapy and Zen Spirituality

Turning to psychotherapy and Zen spirituality, it is my understanding that the former brings the client to understand and gain insight into moods and feelings and accept them so as to be able to meet life situations. Zen teaches us to recognise and admit our moods, but in no way do we identify with them. We are not anger. We are not joy. These are moods in our psyche, and our

consciousness is so often coloured by moods. We realise that these moods are neither us nor our deepest nature, so we don't try to do anything with them. In other words, we disregard them.

Under the influence of that inner power, they gradually recede and we maintain our distance. Thus anxiety doesn't turn into panic, nor joy become euphoria. We accept our fears but do not wallow in them. As my confrere Willigis Jager says: "We become momentary spectators, watching the events in our own psyche emerge and recede, and we let them go." Let go. A Zen teacher could write a book on those two words.

It is the same for thoughts. During meditation, they too come and go. We practice a pure observation, pure attentiveness without any evaluation or preoccupation, no commentary, no getting swept-away. The American psychologist-scientist-meditator Ken Wilbur articulates the state: "we remain a non-preferential consciousness amid all the troubles". Most of our efforts to get rid of troubles simply strengthen the illusion that we are the cause. We learn to look at our problems without judging or identifying. "Instead of attacking trouble, we adopt the guilelessness of a distanced non-partisanship toward it." (Wilbur)

There is a Buddhist tradition of comparing this process to the use of a mirror. We simply mirror all sensations or thoughts, just as they are. A mirror reflects with perfect impartiality whatever is before it. This helps to neutralise the movements in our psyche. It does not pay to waste energy on such bubblings. As my Zen teacher used to say, there are always a few wisps of clouds around Mount Fuji which don't bother the mountain at all. Our deepest BE-ing remains untouched.

As we mature, we will notice pauses occurring between thoughts and emotions, when we can look attentively at our interior life, and we become peaceful and serene. With additional help from the 'let go' process there opens to us the possibility of pressing forward into transpersonal space and of realising our true essence. In any case, in our spirituality, the basic directive always remains, let go!

In the course of time, the hunger for new impressions subsides, and the addictive need to busy ourselves internally lessens. As desire weakens, meditative 'seeing' becomes possible. And in Zen we call the early sightings of the Nature which is the splendour *kensho* (*ken* is 'to see' and *SHO* is 'Nature') with the newly awakened third eye. Attentive-ness awakens in us the capacity to experience the only constant which is the flow that does not come or go.

It is not an easy path, but it is usually motivated by the inner longing which is, in reality, the longing of God himself. The use of drugs won't ease this longing, neither are they a boost for meditation. As Yamada Roshi used to say quite simply: "There is no *satori* without sore knees."

Narcotics Anonymous

In the Prison Phoenix Trust we always encourage drug users who want to meditate to enter a Narcotics Anonymous programme in parallel to their meditation practice. In the interest of the harsh climate in Britain at the moment concerning addicts and their crimes, I'd like to point out that addiction must surely be one of the most imprisoning states, where there is no freedom at

all. The most comprehensive study of drug use ever done, shows that over 85% of users IF THEY WANT TO can return to normal living. Some of the measures to attain this will have to be disciplinary. In our present human condition, some asceticism is necessary if we are to be free disciples – and I use that word advisedly, because it is the root of discipline.

And when we undergo all the dying and being born that asceticism and living entails, we find the path of human life is a going home to the place we came from, as described in all the world's great religions. That is why we go out and search until we learn that we have already been found. We aren't seekers at all, or should I say we are not only seekers. We are the sought.

Sometimes when I go into a prison, my prayer is only that some-how I can tell these incarcerated men and women that they are not alone. That we are all sharers of the inner ache that sparks the wheel turning. For there is a longing in the human heart. It arises out of the realisation that we have within us a power of life that tends towards itself, the very source of life. It seeks an experience of transcendence, a transcendence that starts right here and right now. Our whole life-time is a journey homeward. The paradox is that we have already arrived. It has been my life experience that, to live this paradox peacefully, we need to live both in silence and in relationship every day.

Political Prisoners

My prison teaching in the Philippines was with political prisoners, who, once they had recovered from their torture, returned to a normal psychological state. Since I myself had four hours with them each week, I was able to offer regular sitting in Zen meditation. In my absence, they sat together for an hour each noon, and then most of them sat on their bed, when banged up each night at 8pm, for another hour or two. They were thus in a position to come to a deep experience, three of which I shall describe.

The first is that of Marcello, who had had five arrests, tortured each time, blindfolded, and harassed almost beyond human endurance. He wrote a letter to me about his experience:

My dear Sister Elaine

I have tried many times to put my awakening experience on paper, but I found out that in no language can I write what I want to say! Can I just say that I have NOTHING AND EVERYTHING to write about, because I now know how to say something without moving my lips or tongue.

I gradually became aware that something was happening to me, and I was very happy, even though incarcerated. You just kept bringing me along in my sitting, until the REAL IT happened ... at a very unforgettable moment. For me, that moment defies all description.

You confirmed my experiencing that celebration and I joyously announced 'I am perfectly free, I am perfectly happy, and deeply at peace!' This was possible because, even though in prison, I had tasted of the true ONENESS you led me to in meditation.

That night, back in my cell, I slept soundly like a baby, with a smile on my lips. Now I know that where I am and where I want to be are no different at all! The bars and stone walls do not really separate me from my loved ones, from my friends, from my people, or from everything and everybody. In reality, I and the universe are one.

Zen is a very freeing practice. One woman prisoner sitting with her inmate-companions happened to open her eyes during meditation, and they fell on a dry piece of grass lying in front

of her. Suddenly, without warning and for no particular reason, body fell away, mind fell away, the grassyness of the grass fell away, and the union that exists became apparent to her, and she tasted such sweetness that she burst into tears. She described it as follows:

February 15 did not seem to be of any special significance to me although the day before, I kept asking questions about love and its importance. I asked what ways are there to show love and why we Filipinos seem to be sentimental about celebrating it on February 14. Why not on every one of 365 days of the year, every year?

I never expected the insights that came to me that day sitting with Sister Elaine and Boy in the visiting room at the usual schedule Friday, from 10 to 2 in the afternoon. I sat with an empty mind and an open self closing my eyes and savouring every bit of my calmness and emptiness until the time came that I felt like opening my eyes.

I SAW THE DRIEST BLADE OF GRASS SPROUTING THROUGH THE CONCRETE FLOOR. SEEING IT WAS SEEING MYSELF HEARING THE ANSWERS TO ALL MY QUESTIONS UNDERSTANDING WITH ALL MY SOUL.

In the coldest concrete floor there is warmth, there is love. In the driest blade of grass life flows, love grows.

And the third account is from the above nick-named 'Boy'. He came from a privileged family, and had completed his education in the States. He went underground during the worst of the Marcos years, was captured and tortured for ten days. It was he who invited me to teach at the Bago Bantay prison. He wrote of his experience in summary.

Being confined is an opportunity to take stock of things ... to reflect and refresh oneself. It soon became clear to me that the key to self fulfilment lay in the resolution of the constant tension between me and the rest of existence. All of this came to naught one wonderful moment in the middle of an April night.

We are locked in our individual cells daily from 8pm until 8am. I sit every night and find these periods very conducive to deep sitting, even though it is almost impossible to do *kinhin* [walking meditation] since the length of the cell is only 3 steps and there is no width.

But one night I sat for a couple of hours, and then as I was doing *kinhin*, all the tensions and the inner struggles suddenly dissolved into nothing, and a new boundless Union only existed. At that particular moment, instantaneous yet Infinite, I was awakened to the Essential World.

How true the assertion that the experience is incommunicable. Now that I look back on it, I can say with certainty that I 'saw' emptiness and then Oneness, and intimacy and harmony and

appropriateness which made me 'see' the happiness and beauty in everything; but at that moment the whole universe was in my prison cell, and Sister Elaine who was sick in Canada was not separate either.

Now it seems to me that I see all things more clearly. Not only are the answers evident, the questions are irrelevant. Once we know our True Self, the different roles we assume no longer bother us. Getting rid of garbage in sitting, our True Self will gradually be able to do the appropriate thing, and fit into any role that may be required.

I don't get obstructed by prison walls any more. Through my prison window I can see IT pervades the whole universe, and I am in my perfect place, moving along the Way.

Right now the prison walls are down, and I am roaming and romping about. At the crack of dawn, the surroundings are resplendent, and the fields are verdant. In a short while, we will wake up to a new spring when everything will be new.

Conclusion

I would like to bring all of this into simple focus. In the Prison Phoenix Trust we offer prisoners a Way to change their lives through the spiritual means of yoga and meditation. We encourage them to use their cells like the monks and nuns of old, as a place for spiritual practice. We give workshops in these two disciplines in prisons all over the UK, and select and train local teachers for weekly classes inside. At any moment we are in touch with about 2,000 within prisons, and have about 75 teachers in place.

Prisons get bad press in this country. I am asked repeatedly about hardened criminals. I have never met one. Criminals are damaged people living in a tense body and pain-filled psyche. Mostly born into poverty, they have been for the most part, abused and unloved. Forced to fend for themselves, they develop a behaviour pattern of violence, and turn to drink or drugs to keep it all a merry-go-round.

Of all criminals, we find that young offenders in remand are perhaps the most challenging. Because of their fears and insecurity, they seem to be 'sizzling' most of the time. To present a meditation based on a silent body and silent mind is asking a lot of such an 18- or 20-year-old.

And yet, when I illustrate what meditation can do, I usually quote from a letter a 20-year-old lad wrote from one of our Young Offenders Institutions: "You know as long as I can remember I have had this awful pain inside of me". He said to me: "Now that I'm in prison, sometimes I cut myself or burn myself just so that the pain will be on the outside. ... I saw your book mentioned in your Newsletter, and wrote away for it. I just want you to know that, since starting meditation only one month ago, not only is the pain better but for the first time in my life I see a tiny spark of something within myself that I can like."

The young offender perceived a tiny spark of the imprisoned Splendour within. May I close by wishing you that same blessing and freedom.

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THE AUTHOR

Born in Moncton, New Brunswick, in Maritime Canada, Elaine MacInnes went to university in nearby Mount Allison Conservatory of Music for violin studies, and later at Juilliard in New York. In 1953 she entered Our Lady's Missionaries (a Canadian foreign mission community), where her first overseas assignment was to Japan in 1961. Whilst helping to found a Culture Centre, she became interested in Buddhism and was soon introduced to its meditation *zazen*. She studied with Rinzai Buddhist nuns at Enkoji in Kyoto and, after eight years, joined the Soto Zen Sanbo Kyodan at Kamakura under Yamada Koun Roshi.

After fifteen years in Japan, Sister Elaine transferred to the Philippines (1976) and shortly afterwards was invited to open a Zen Centre for the Catholic Church in Manila. Whilst pursuing her apostolate in animal husbandry amongst the poor, she was fired by interest in helping Filipino Christians develop an Asian spirituality. In 1980 Yamada Roshi invested both Sister Elaine and Father H. M. Enomiya-Lassalle, SJ, as *roshi* – the first Roman Catholics to receive this accreditation which is in spiritual transmission.

For four years she taught Zen to political prisoners who had been tortured during their incarceration in the worst of the Marcos years. The therapeutic effects of sitting in silent meditation became eminently evident. Sister Elaine saw the detainees change from an angry, tense, enervated and incapacitated group to a relaxed, sociable, energised and effective team. She then became an enthusiastic believer in restorative justice, that prisons be not punitive but rather places of hope and healing.

In February 1993 the present head of the Sanbo Kyodan, Kubota Ji-un Roshi, went to the Philippines and, upon recognising the three Filipino teachers trained by Sister Elaine, officially turned the Zen Centre Philippines over to Filipino teachers. Last year the Centre celebrated its 20th anniversary. Sister Elaine was then (1992) free to accept the invitation of Ann Wetherall to become Director of The Prison Phoenix Trust, Oxford, which encourages UK prisoners to use their cell as a place of spiritual practice, with the Oriental disciplines of meditation and yoga. From her own experience

Sister Elaine felt the best way forward was to train teachers for their local prisons. At the moment (1998) the Trust has about 75 teachers, and is in letter-contact with about 2,000 inmates concerning their efforts in silent meditation. Some wittingly see it as 'Zen and the Art of Doing Time'!

On 7th May 1996 Harper Collins Religious published Sister Elaine's third book *Light Sitting in Light* with a launch in London. On 11th May 1998 Sister Elaine is to be awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws at Mount Allison University, Canada.

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