

POSTCARDS FROM THE PRESENT MOMENT 2013

A Buddhist Journal

POSTCARDS FROM THE PRESENT MOMENT 2013
A Buddhist Journal by tiramit
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Introduction

2013 Hello and welcome to another year of Postcards From The Present Moment. In preparation for this volume I've been browsing through the collections of old notebooks, hard-to-read hand writing, scribbled in urgency many years ago. This was before our days of optical, digital devices, hand-held scanners for interesting pieces of text and 'selfies,' of course, posted to social media. We didn't have internet back then, no access to discussion groups. Texts came from books in the library, hand written or a photocopy made by the librarian for a charge per page. It was all unbelievably slow. Snail-mail letters written on a sheet of paper, folded into an envelope, lick-and-stick-on stamp... thump, and post in the mailbox, then wait a few days for a reply.

Postcards were the thing, a public space, not much room to write, minimalism determines the essence of what you want to say. Then a picture chosen for the other side. I used to send a postcard from Bangalore, South India, back home in the north nearly every day – I was living in an urban district near to a post office. After a few years I went back home in the north to visit and there was this large bundle of postcards I had sent waiting for me to read and reflect on the present moment – how it was then and how it is now... there was an idea at that time about how the present moment is always with us, and these are 'postcards from the present moment'. There-and-then is here-and-now... a prevailing sense of Self, of course, running through every part of the configuration – we didn't know any other way.

You can imagine then, the surprise at the discovery of the Buddhist 'no-self' concept, and I found in the notes, the following quote copied by hand from the book at Wat Pah Nanachat library twenty years ago: "The 'self' is merely a condition that arises when there is grasping and clinging in the mind. We don't see it as empty, but see it as 'self'. Grasping arises by itself, there being ignorance or unknowing in the mind. It's not that we make a deliberate effort to consciously establish a self. When the mind contains unknowing (avidya), it inevitably experiences all things as being 'self', the vast myriad of things seen as independent entities. [Buddhadasa Bhikkhu from "Heartwood From The Bo Tree"]

In the West, the process of selfing is relentlessly identified with. My difficulty with 'no-self' had been extricating myself from the Judeo-Christian conditioning that assumes the existence of an eternal soul. Suffering of a Christian kind. On television, images of 'self' are everywhere, TV celebrities, Facebook... face-acting newsreaders. A well-known actor wearing a disguise is interviewed by a panel of 'experts' and they have to guess who he is. A cheering audience underscores how significant this is... outrageous dress in idleness and 'play'. Mind is just chatter and small-talk.

That said, if it happens I'm suddenly in a hazardous situation say, fast moving traffic behaving in a wild sort of way, I'm just coping with events as they present themselves, kinda scary. After the danger has passed and I'm in a more relaxed state, I might reflect on what just happened. Look into the mind for what to do or any passing thoughts, and there's nothing there, just the curious extended, stretched-out moment where there's no thought at all. Wide-awake, watchful – all senses switched on and the little sense of 'me' as a self, is gone.

Since that time, meditation practice has included that place, the 'zone' athletes refer to, not always reachable but I've been there and understand better now, the meaning of the word, 'emptiness' when there is no thought, only consciousness.

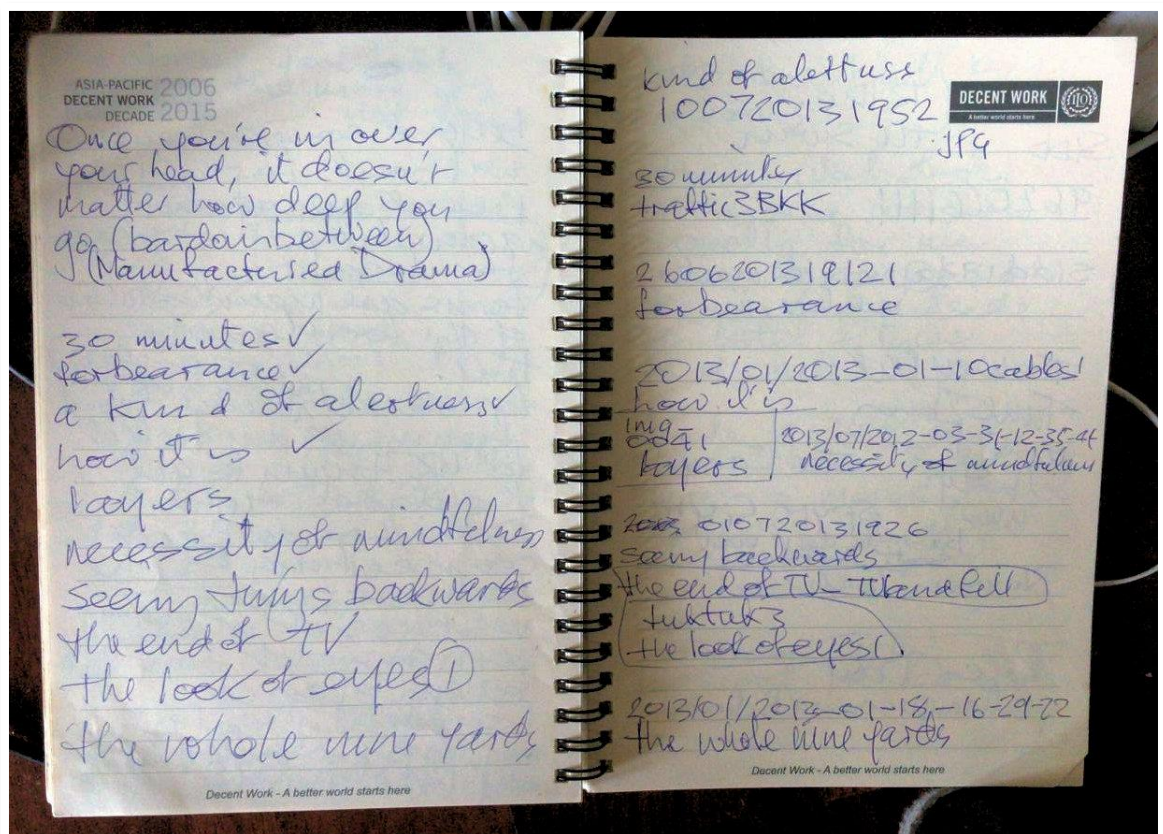
In this volume two posts appearing in the 2012 edition are followed through here in the 2013 edition.

1) Going on to the post titled "Too Much is Never Enough", published on March 25, 2012. The text is focused on Tanhā (craving) the seventh step in the twelve-step cycle of causality, Dependent Origination, the Paticcasamuppada. Tanhā is this deep craving for the 'self' we construct to fill the apparent void of 'no self'. I am 'me', in this world, due to tanhā, the reason for rebirth. Also 031- Generosity of Letting Go, published on December 7, 2013. Read more in: Twelve Nidanas ... Paticcasamuppada in the appendix..... 2013

2) The Eye Operation, posted on July 2, 2013 titled "Necessity of Mindfulness", (re: the second part of this post) This was my first visit to Rutnin Eye Hospital in Bangkok. The diagnosis: cataracts in both eyes. Treatment: a small incision is made at the edge of the cornea. A tiny device is inserted through it that emits high-frequency ultrasound vibration to dissolve the cataract formation. The dissolved parts are suctioned out of the eye. An intraocular lens implant takes place on the second visit through the existing insertion hole, and the hole is then stitched up. Third visit, eye is checked, and stitch is removed. Same for both eyes, total six visits to complete the procedure. Interactive Links- Three other posts are available in this 2013 volume ([Post 1](#), [Post 2](#) and [Post 3](#)).

Click [HERE](#) to reach the Twelve Nidanas

Below is an image from text I wrote in a notebook on 1st January 2013, when I was preparing a blog post.



Postcard 051/- a handle to hold on to



POSTCARD#051/: **Chiang Mai:** Going to the airport in a tuktuk through a network of small streets. It's probably a shortcut, but all these speed bumps? I'm feeling a bit queezy, seasickness must be like this. Or is it just that I'm surprised to be rolling up and over joyful little mountains. First the front wheel then the back wheels (three-wheeled vehicle), again and again; overkill on speed bumps. Sure enough it makes you feel giddy, all the ups and downs and I don't 'like' it much but my wanting it to not be like this is making it into an issue. It's a control thing, it's about the so-called 'me'. 'I' am the problem because, in fact, there's nothing here; a body-mind mechanism that can process and transform data, the *Five Khandas*, that's all. Nobody at home, no 'self' *anatta*, no-thingness. Only *namarupa* responses, natural processes and the feeling of 'I', 'me' and 'mine' arises due to the curious nature of sensory experience – this game of hide-and-seek, and the flip-side of concealment is revelation?

Maybe so but first things first, at this point in time I'm having an acute bout of speed-bump nausea and the small discomfort of it is in the centre of consciousness. Some basic sense informs me it's a mistake to try to reject it or think it shouldn't be there, I'd be better to get around to accepting it; the 1st Noble Truth, a deep acceptance that causes the 'holding' to ease off and there's definitely something about this teaching; if you can understand it, the suffering disappears. The first time I came to see it, all kinds of habitual 'holding' that had bothered me for years just fell away. Gratitude to the Ajahns in Thailand for their guidance. It seems to me now though, there's still something I'm not getting here? I'd been thinking that all the Theravadin masters are teaching, in their tremendous intensity and detail, is mindfulness about what you're doing and the skill of letting-go. Beyond that there's nothing said except the reference to it as the 'deathless'.

'When meditators practise correctly and have the discernment to see that quality (of deathlessness) as it really is, the result is that they can withdraw their attachments from all things — including their attachment to the discernment which enters in to see the quality as it really is. The practice of all things good and noble is to reach this very point.' (Ajahn Thet)

Non-duality teachers talk about pure consciousness in the sense of something tangible; they're saying there's something 'there'. The 'I' that is arising is the 'I' of everything. Theravadin Buddhists, on the other hand, are saying it can't be like that; it's emptiness – if you think there's something there, it's a handle to hold on to and the whole thing is about letting go, not holding on. So, today I'm thinking it's helpful to have the stability of that 'thing' and I'm holding on; I want there to be something in that space, a sense of familiarity, it's a known place and the sick feeling can be happening in an awareness that's much larger than the confines of the cramped 'self'. No little 'me' having to cope with it, the speed-bump nausea is not 'mine', no ownership, it's not personal.' It's about learning how to be a totally open presence, aware of the way the 'self' perpetuates itself – on all levels and not buying into that.

A short while after that, thankfully, we get out of the narrow streets, small intersections, and onto the open space of a smooth, flat, easy highway in one long straight route across to the airport....

Postcard 050/- a movement in time



POSTCARD#050/: **Chiang Mai:** Walking back from the market carrying bags of vegetables through groups of slow-moving people in brightly coloured clothing; noise, heat, bright sunshine, large, coloured umbrellas and dense dark shadow. All kinds of obstacles on the pavement, sidewalk – more like walking on the edge of the road, sharing the space with the traffic, things being as they are, in this densely populated place where the sidewalk is often needed for other civic requirements. Maybe a phone box takes up the whole area. Or there's a tree in the way, uneven paving stones due to ongoing repairs, or a raised concrete lid over a drain, fallen in, and one corner sticks up at an angle so you step down to street level because it's easier. Then there's a parked car in the way and you have to get around that; mindfulness of moving traffic coming in all directions. There's an alertness that just automatically locks in place, obstructions and dangers above and below and on all sides like this, the infrastructure intrudes, but always there's just enough room, squeezing through a sort of tunnel of directional force that extends in front, takes me along out from the space I'm in here now, along the way through this urban clutter and busy-ness of objects.

Then something happens that's completely unexpected. There's a green cloth sheet that obscures a construction site on my left side; three or four floors up, scaffolding, ropes and there's a tied-up bundle of concrete blocks being lowered down above my head – it's coming too quickly, I can see it in the corner of my vision. This lowering bundle strikes a sticking-out platform on the way down and a large board catapults out, spins in the air and lands just behind me CRASH! There it is, a long heavy scaffolding board held by the green cloth sheet, now ripped, and the board caught there in a small cloud of dusty air. If it had been one second earlier.... People stop and look up, call to the workers in the building. They lean over, wide-brimmed straw hats, observe the scene. There's some shouting and I don't want to get involved in this; continue down the path to the apartment, nearly there. Open the door and the air conditioning hits me, up in the elevator, unlock door and into my quiet rooms.

I'm trembling, – there's an elation too, can't decide if I'm happy or scared out of my wits. Can't get over how near I was to being injured by that falling board. The important thing is that it missed me and maybe that's the way to go with this – no matter how near it was, it didn't happen. Something is telling me I need to let go of the holding-on thing here; just calm down and watch the breath for a bit. Open the laptop, start-up, find the page I was looking at yesterday, Sangeeta's 'Serene Reflection' and her Inner Landscapes page:

<http://serenereflection.wordpress.com/2011/09/30/inner-landscapes/>

'I meander along the babbling brook – all the while realizing that its song comes from the obstructions it surmounts.' It all fits together. There may be obstructions in the babbling brook but the water passes through them all anyway. We hear the sound of it: a river of small collisions. The near accident is telling me the World is all of this and more; the obstacles and that which encounters the obstacles. Sometimes I can look for an understanding of it everywhere and not find anything because I am part of what I'm looking for; that which is looking for itself, not finding it and seeing that this is what is taking place. This is what it is really

but I can't see it. Or you can say there's nothing to find anyway because, always, it's the World revealing itself, and 'my' seeking it isn't actually doing anything. It's simply a movement in time. This thought is enough to see the event as part of a very much larger all-inclusive whole.... And I can abide in that restful awareness.



Photos: Bang Pah In (upper) & Khaosan Road (lower) by Peter and Elaine Henderson

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/January 6, 2013

Postcard 049/- wisdom in unknowing



POSTCARD#049/: **Chiang Mai:** Street-side, noodle shop, low headroom under wide umbrellas placed at an angle to create shade. I duck my head and squeeze through into this place, aware of obstructions and watching for uneven surfaces at ground level I could trip on; feet in rubber slippers appear below me, first left then right, then left... ask the noodle shop man if he has what I want, find an empty place, sit down and look around. Thai language like birdsong and traffic sounds, a bell rings, cooking pots collide, somebody's ring tone... 'hello?' All kinds of noises, smells and the fragrance of jasmine with faint odour of a sewer nearby – not unpleasant. The mind has to discern which is which according to likes and dislikes. And the high-activity level of it all more or less insists on mindfulness. Head spinning around to register environmental activity; this curious reality of receiving sensory input by means of sense organs situated mostly around the head and face, has that effect of the whole head seeming to enter into an 'outside' world.

Attention moves from one thing to the next. Loud sounds take priority over quieter sounds, the whole sequence adjusts to allow for it, then continues as it was before. In the same way, a chain of thought waits to be completed as soon as there is a gap in the flow of other thoughts. It's the traffic of thinking about things; the mechanism engaged in its functionality, never any peace. I find some stability in the constructed self and hold on to that – that's what it's there for.

Focus on a particular sound, or sensory object and a simple 'knowing' says if that's out 'there', then I must be in 'here' – subject-object link activated by default. The world enters through eye, ear, nose, mouth, body feeling, mind, and creates consciousness: 'I' am born and the 'world' is out there. Being a 'self' is a little trick I learned when I was a child, it's not real. It only appears to be a personal experience, because if there's a sound that's not demanding my attention, there's only a neutral awareness, no reaction, nobody at home; the sound is there but there's just the receiving of it and our shared world. Sensory input enters and there's no 'self' to really notice it's there, so I imagine it just buffets around for a while like the wind from the fan above my head disturbs the papers on my table and then it's quiet again.

Conscious awareness is the sixth sense. It knows the other five senses, and knows itself as a 'self' then attachment to that dissolves away; the 'self' aspect is gone – seeing the events without the story. Deconstruct everything, carefully disassemble it to see how it all fits together, like a mechanic breaks down a car engine into its parts. And this is such a phenomenal thing to do, putting it back together again doesn't seem worthwhile.

'Self-realisation can know itself within complete ignorance, so self-realisation is possible for someone who's had no education and it can also be possible for a king. There are no preconditions to self-realisation. Self-realisation isn't just for those who've undergone years of spiritual practice....' [David Bingham, Conscious TV]

Can't be 'complete ignorance', let's call it 'unknowing'. Just another mind state. I can look into my own 'unknowing' and it's as if there's a small seed of wisdom in there, buried deep in the layers of unknowing, that's saying, come on, wake up! I could call it the Noble Truth of Waking Up (numbered 2a and it comes between *Tanha* and *Nirodha*). This is how it looks to me now; there's the focus on *Anatta* and freedom from suffering and the Non-Duality 'no-thing-ness' takes on a whole different meaning.

Postcard 048/- how it is



'All conditioned Dharmas are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, shadows. Like dew drops, a lightning flash. Contemplate them thus.'

POSTCARD#048/:Chiang Mai: It's late morning, getting near to noon and I have to go out and get something from 7-Eleven. Down in the elevator and it's not far, along to the end of the lane, tall buildings on either side and the brightness of the daylight is astonishing as I step out of the shadow into the open space of the main road. Intensity of colour, noise, people and everything is undeniably what it is, no room for considering what it might be or might have been, a tendency we have – those of us originating in the indistinct climates of the northern hemisphere, colourless eyes and no pigmentation of the skin – to ponder like this over hypothetical situations, *papañca*, that proliferate without end.

This is the tropical, the equatorial, and all in uncompromisingly vivid maximum pixel, vibrant colour. This is how it is; clearly defined, good looking people with black hair and golden skin. And all with a will to go out there and get it done. We're all in this together, including the pale foreigners, who live here with us for part of the year. This is the public domain, the shared environment, we are a large population accommodated in small houses and rooms and we like it like that. No allowances for personal space – what is 'personal' space? It's structured to allow for large numbers of human beings who may carry with them their 'personal' space and other needs and requirements, their babies their infrastructural support systems, schools, hospitals, shopping malls, cars, motorbikes and everything as it is here and now, inherited from generations before us to whom we are grateful and pray for earnestly.

I'm having some resistance to the immediacy of it, I don't want it to be like this; too bright, too public; I feel like an owl in the daylight, a nocturnal shadow, like I shouldn't be here, cloaked in the darkness of my quiet space, buddhist vampires wither away. Same old story, just see this aversion without being overly attached to the thing. Have *metta* for the state of mind. There's the getting-into-it thing; there's the attachment, the 'hook' to get caught... or is it a 'perch' to rest on for a moment and look at the view... waves of *samsara* all around; I'm wanting 'it' to be 'this' and believing this is really how it is – the experience of being able to change the image in the mind's eye, to make it be how I want it to be – a skill I learned as part of childhood conditioning. I can see the folly of it, *the baseless fabric of this vision... all which it inherit, shall dissolve...* it leads nowhere, exists for it's own sake, momentarily and comes to nothing in the brightness. The sun shines through all parts of it; they become shadows, vapours and disappear.

It's that 'letting-go' thing again. Why does it have to be like this? You could say there's a kind of glue spread over objects and attention gets stuck on that. Seeing it like this means, of course, I recognise the possibility that there's also a solvent that renders the glue unstickable, it doesn't adhere and, there's no need to remind myself to 'let go' because everything has been let go of already? There isn't anything anyway that has the power to cause one to attach. It's the mind that's doing it. Stop creating it and there's nothing there! I get what I need from 7-Eleven and back upstairs to the apartment, where it's cool and quiet and shady.

'Our revels now are ended. These our actors, As I foretold you, were all spirits, and Are melted into air, into thin air: And like the baseless fabric of this vision, The cloud-capp'd tow'rs, the gorgeous palaces, The solemn temples, the great globe itself, Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve, And, like this insubstantial pageant faded, Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff As dreams are made on; and our little life is rounded with a sleep.' [The Tempest Act 4, Prospero, scene 1, 148–158]

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/January 14, 2013

Postcard 047/- the non-personal self



POSTCARD#047/: *Chiang Mai:* Death is a failed internet connection. Three o'clock in the morning, unable to sleep so I get up, stumble through in the darkness and start up the computer. The brightness of the screen is blinding. But no internet, and no matter how much I think there should be a connection, it's just not there. Consciousness operates in terms of subject and object; to be conscious I have to be a separate entity, a subjective being situated here. And the object, the internet – my friend, is part of this assumed 'self-ness' I've been accustomed to see in everything, still held by the conditioning of my childhood. But my friend is not there, and it is a death in that sense.

Stubborn and resentful, I go back to bed, and for quite a long time, mind continues rummaging through the disarray of its files and references; I see, with mindfulness, there's a sense of it being a bit put-out; can't sleep, the dream-state is set in the context of my being awake. It's been like this, for as long as I can remember – there's a created 'self' everywhere, it has it's own momentum blindly searching for situations that offer pleasurable gratification (or gratification in displeasure), and not much more than that. I can see what this is about, but lose sight of what's beyond 'self' in the attempt to grasp an understanding of it.

Same old thing. There's something about this that's so clear and obvious yet, again and again, when I look for it, it's not there – the direction to take is unknown; the means by which I get there, as yet, uninvented; I study it as an object, and it's the created self again. Up till quite recently I've been thinking in terms of *anatta* (no-self), an undefined nothingness, and now starting to think there's also a desire to 'not-exist' involved here – the way I'm doing it. So if the 'I' construct isn't what this is about, what is it, then? I can change the pronoun from 'me' to 'it' and that gives me distance, somehow there's an 'it' there that recognizes 'itself' everywhere....

Head leans back and enter into a huge yawn, *yaaaaawn...* so deep and large, *...aaaaawn...* and reaching optimum yawn capacity, coming to an end, and there's a distinct 'click' noise in the ear. The hinge of the lower jaw – is it supposed to do that? This holds my attention for a moment, wetness around the eyes, nasal passages blocked up and fuzziness. There's the beginning of a thought related to something I was puzzling over and a little picture of it is somehow revealed, a solution to the problem... I have to get up and find a reference in my notebook, mark it with a bookmark, come back, collapse on the pillow and drop off into deep sleep completely.

Some hours later I wake up for the second time. Senses switched on, eyes open, sounds enter, taste in the mouth, feet on floor, arms push upper body into sitting position. And there's the notebook with the bookmark lying where I left it: *'What had been realised in that moment was that self isn't personal, it's non-personal. And not only that, the realisation wasn't personal. The realisation was simply something else appearing in what had been assumed to be my consciousness, and was realised to be the Self: absolute, timeless, radiant being.'* [Roger Linden, *'The Elusive Obvious'*, *Conscious TV*, July 17th 2008]

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/January 17, 2013

Postcard 046/- the 'I' metaphor



POSTCARD#046/: *Chiang Mai:* Contemplating birdsong here in this place, next to a wooded area and a very large tree in the early morning and there's a male Koel bird on a branch somewhere repeating its call: *ko-el, ko-el, ko-el!* a two-syllable utterance, at measured intervals, getting louder and louder each time, reaching its peak and the bird stops for a breath. It starts again from low volume working up to high volume, The sound, *ko-el* echoes around in the spaces between the hard branches and trunks, the layers of foliage and around in the air into my space here in the room: *ko-el, ko-el*. The end of the sound *-el* collides with the beginning of the next sound in the sequence: *ko-* and for a moment it becomes more like: *el-ko-el-ko-el-ko*, smoothly presented in a unity the bird knows so well and I'm just discovering it.

The preception of the sound shifts back to *ko-el, ko-el*, contained in this space. And in the space contained in all the other rooms in this building, the corridors and passageways, as I go down to street level; the elevator and front lobby. The *ko-el* sound can be heard everywhere in the building. I know, of course, it just seems like the *ko-el* sound is contained in the building, it's an illusion. In fact the *ko-el* sound and the whole building are contained in space; space holds all, there are no boundaries, no beginning, no end. The *ko-el* sound can be heard all along the street too.

Back upstairs again and I am in this space, the space is in me. I can say 'I' am here, meaning the fictional 'self' arising from *the five khandhas*, the mechanisms that filter conscious experience received through the senses. And the *ko-el* sound reaching my ear convinces me that if there is sound, there must be somebody in here hearing it – and that's 'me.' The belief in self is backed up by sensory data input through ear, eye, nose, mouth, feeling sensations and mind. I can hold on tight to this belief that I am 'me' but there's really nobody there. I can let go of it. It's a metaphor; it's saying conscious experience 'is' individual identity – a figure of speech, a kind of analogy. Not real. The emphasis on it being the same as the object of comparison pushes the whole thing over the edge and it 'becomes' the object. In fact the conceptual metaphor is a tricky business....



My Western conditioning still struggles with the *anatta* teaching, and the misleading statement: 'I think, therefore I am.' [René Descartes] isn't helpful. It's like the opposite of what Buddhists know to be true. If Descartes had been a Buddhist, he might have said: 'I think, therefore I am a thought construct' ...but it doesn't quite have the same ring to it, does it? What I think I am is not what I am. Thoughts think themselves, dependent on conditions arising from other conditions which are dependent on other conditions; peeling back the layers of onion, like this, to discover there's nothing in the center; just empty space (again). It's the 'I' metaphor; a structure created by words to explain a concept. In the mind's eye we can leave the body behind, soar up into the sky and leap up into the heavens. It's a figure of speech. The self is not contained in me, 'I' am contained in 'self' – the universe – everything, no subject/no object.

The *ko-el* sound shifts to some other location and it must be because the bird has flown to a different tree, further away. Later in the day I hear it again, coming from some distant place and after a while I don't hear it anymore....

'...the anatta teaching is not a doctrine of no-self, but a not-self strategy for shedding suffering by letting go of its cause, leading to the highest, undying happiness. At that point, questions of self, no-self, and not-self fall aside. Once there's the experience of such total freedom, where would there be any concern about what's experiencing it, or whether or not it's a self?' ["No-self or Not-self?", by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. Access to Insight, 8 March 2011]

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/January 19, 2013

Postcard 045/- how it seems (1)



POSTCARD#045/: *Chiang Mai:* I see the world through a built-in selection process that reflects and supports the default state of mind; it's like fish cannot see the water they swim in; so obvious, yet... but I can get it to fit, more or less, according to my likes and dislikes and fall deeper into the dream. I make it into something good or bad or whatever and the fact that I can't see it – well, it just does that. I call it reality. How I perceive the world is dependent on causes and conditions that were here before I was born; you could say it comes with the software. I think I'm an independent being not affected by anything or not affecting or influencing anything else. I can't see this is a work of fiction and it's all being monitored by the ongoing needs and requirements of an entity I created; a 'self' that has no real substance. I'm dismayed, of course, by how it all gets swept away in randomness; subject to the kamma, unknowingly created at some earlier time.

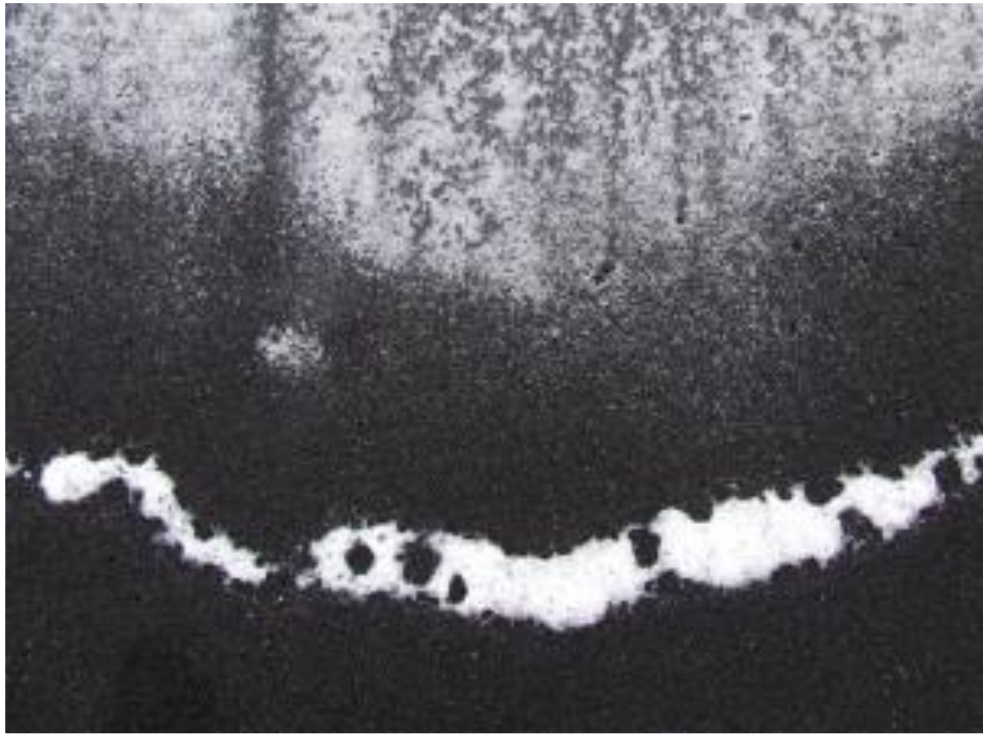
'... It's because of not understanding and not penetrating this Dhamma that this generation is like a tangled skein, a knotted ball of string, like matted rushes and reeds, and does not go beyond the cycle of the planes of deprivation, woe, and bad destinations.' [Tanha Sutta: Craving" (AN 4.199)]

The outer world just rolls along, as it does, in all its diversity, and totally neutral. Whether there's belief it's this or that, makes no difference; it's just how it seems. The devastating emptiness of it all means the population is driven to get and do and attain and protect and defend. It's a battlefield. To avoid and deny, to have fear and anxiety and be controlled by authority and feel threatened with the flimsy nature of existence, although the absolute fragility *anicca*, is the beauty of it. But the population can't see it like that. They are clutching at straws but don't see it like that; don't see they are maintained in an unknowingness of the world like penned animals are by the farmer, well intentioned though he may be, in order to cultivate a special kind of hunger, *upadana tanha* (clinging and craving) – and the economy depends on this. The greater the craving, the faster the turnover of stock and the Western style of God together with governments and the corporations are simply involved in farming the population.

I can understand why the Buddha was thinking the Dhamma was too subtle and there was no point in teaching it because no one would understand. I can see how, in those historical times of feudal hierarchy, it would have seemed impossible to create social change.... and is it any different now? It seems just as impossible for people to understand today. I wonder if I really fully understand it myself. I'm no different from other people, this is our shared suffering. But the Buddha changed his mind about it being too subtle. He said there is a way out and we can find it in the framework of the [Four Noble Truths](#). The teaching has survived 2600 years. Understanding replaces misunderstanding; ignorance is pushed out. There's a simple curiosity and this quiet state of at-ease knowingness....



Postcard 044/- backstory



POSTCARD#044/: *Chiang Mai:* Skype call from P in the North of Scotland, walking through a shopping mall interior, holding up his phone camera in front of him and I'm able to enter into a view of the world at this moment, about 5500 miles away. It feels like I'm really there; a chromium steel, tiled and glass environment with Starbucks and everything is recognizably 'the mall'. People wearing scarves and hats, thick clothing – it's below freezing outside that building. Light from the mall windows fading out to zero white, pixelated edges of electric blue and turquoise suggests air so cold it's like an ice-cream headache, chilled nasal passageways and cranial cavities. I'm thinking of ice-rinks, peppermint and menthol. Words come out with vigour in great gusts of steamy vapour.

I lived there in a former life – long ago and far away. The sharp clear air, constant wind, and winter daylight lasts only a few hours; it was a world without colour. Cold, wet, windy and the mind is saying: 'No, I don't like this. I want sunshine, I want warmth,' the *samsara* of wanting it to be different from how it is. And eyes looking through the gap between hat and scarf, out into the world but inwardly removed and seeing the sunshine in some fictional landscape created in the mind. I didn't know anything about the Buddhist perspective on Suffering, *dukkha nirodho ariya sacca*, at that time, just 'driven' by a sadly dysfunctional family and nameless hunger that arises from the feeling that there has to be something better than this.

So, one thing led to another, and it's a long story, but eventually I discovered it's not 'me', it's just the way it is. I can have loving-kindness, *mettā*, for the created 'me' and lighten up about that. I don't get seriously into it any more, now there's that distance from my constructed identity. It's been with me all those years, wow, like something historical: '*This is the house that Jack built.*' And now I'm here in South East Asia; not too hot at this time of year, warm like a Mediterranean summer; rubber slippers, shorts and a T-shirt. The quality of light is amazing, colours of things are outstanding, as if lit from within – a Disney cartoon – papaya fruit is an amazing fluorescent, magic-marker orange; green trees against blue skies and the whole thing feels like it's been photo-shopped. The air is warm like a soft quilt cover wrapped around the shoulders, with no weight, so you feel this lightness – 'Unbearable Lightness of Being' by Milan Kundera, worth reading if only for the title.

But all this coming to an end very soon, less than a week to go before the time comes to go back to Delhi and the colder climatic conditions of the North. Not able to flop around in thin cotton clothing any longer... nope. This time next week I'll be socked and shoed and trousered, and scarved and coated, hair-combed, passported and ticketed and transported to the North of India in a passenger jet, but that's not happened yet so there's time to reflect on that difference and get ready for the adjustment.

I've been living in other people's countries for more than 30 years; met Jiab on the way. She still identifies with her Thai cultural context. I've nearly forgotten mine. I used to go back to the family home up there at the top of the world and most people couldn't remember me; all the elders' hair going grey, and greyer then white, Now I go there for funerals and people just don't know me at all. I'm a foreigner there and a foreigner everywhere else. I'm more into the Thai world than any other culture – they see me as a kind of cultural hybrid.

There's a shrine in Jiab's family home; a structure of tiny ornate tables placed one on top of each other, in a hierarchy of size. The larger ones are at the bottom and smaller ones placed on top and even smaller ones placed on top of them. It's built up to about five levels. An ascending, perspective effect as things recede above eye level with candles and an image of the Buddha on the topmost table. It's the one where he's protected by the hooded snake god Naga, extending Cobra neck hood and curved over the head of the Buddha forming a kind of umbrella (there was a rainstorm at the time of approaching enlightenment). Above that, framed on the wall, there's a row of these faded old sepia photos of Jiab's ancestors. There they all are, looking down at me. I feel their gaze because I'm not just a cultural hybrid in their eyes, I'm from a different planet too. I sometimes feel they need to look at me more carefully than they look at other visitors to the shrine. So I just let them do that, it's a kindly gaze, without the burden of thought, *comfortably dwelling in a state of wakefulness, and understanding things in their actuality.*



Photo (upper) Iceland wave, Peter H. Photo (lower) Chinese temple Bang Pah-in, Elaine H

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/January 27, 2013

Postcard 043/- the whole nine yards



POSTCARD#043/: *Chiang Mai:* Somebody gives me a lift downtown and she's upset about the traffic, shouting at the other drivers, voice echoing around in the acoustics of our small vehicle, really letting it all go. She's a local person and this kind of pressure-valve release is weird, like a bad dream; road rage is the same everywhere, I suppose. We're accelerating down these narrow *sois* (small streets) lined with parked cars, pedestrians everywhere, sudden braking and lurching around corners, then reversing all the way out of there because there's an obstruction. I'm sitting in the back seat, she's twisted around peering through the rear window, as she negotiates reverse gear, so I get to look at this tense face, complaining about how these drivers all come from the hills; they don't know anything about road courtesy; the whole nine yards ...

Maybe she's just having a bad day – correction, she *is* having a bad day. What to do? I can get upset about how upset the driver is, or I can just watch the road on her behalf – two options. I opt for watching the road; the mindfulness thing, and immediately I'm into this kind of alert awareness of everything that's happening. I'm discovering this (or maybe I always knew) instinctive preparedness that just seems to engage: life is fragile and tenuous. At the same time struggling a bit with the other option: *Hey! what's all the fuss about? Smile and pretend it's not happening.* But there's just no getting away from it, and this fully switched-on-headlight of fierce alertness is locked in and focused.

Part of me is asking what is going on here? There's awareness, conscious awareness and then consciousness itself – so this is it, the big question... what is consciousness? Turn the mirror around like that, and consciousness sees itself; there's a duality and we return to the default reality of 'me' in here and 'that' out there. It's this thing about mirrors again; 'I' become the subject of what is being mirrored: *you can see for yourself*, it's saying, *this is proof of how it is... right?* But I choose to take refuge in awareness of the danger, rather than do the ostrich-head-in-the-sand thing. I can take *sati-sampajañña*, awakened awareness, as my refuge. The inclination is to be awake, to be watchful, all sensory receptors are switched on full blast; any little sense of 'me' as a person is a distraction. So this is the way to go, I stay with that and there's a clear knowledge that it's not a 'created' mind state. It's something Ajahn Sumedho would call the Unconditioned [*see link below*].

We get to the destination and I'm very glad to get out of the car, *'thanks for the lift!'* Wow, life, as we know it, returns – it puts on its appearance of comfortable familiarity. Amazing, how does it do that? It really is such a fine balance, we are just on the edge of all this disappearing, all the time! And with conscious awareness the system is more inclined to go directly with what is really happening than run for safety in some kind of 'pretend' world. I wonder, though, what happens to people who've never bothered to look beyond the reality of the fictional 'self'. It would require a lot of last minute revisions; could it all be done in time? Maybe it's possible.

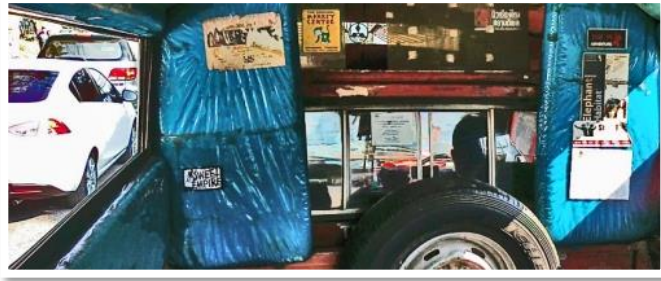
The driver... well I dunno, but she was pretty good. Somebody told me later she did a training course in driving emergency vehicles, so maybe that's it – life for her is just one continuing emergency. That's OK too....

'... We take that which is aware of the conditioned realm, sati-sampajañña, awakened awareness, as our refuge, rather than trying to find or create a condition that will give us a false sense of security. We are not trying to fool ourselves, to create a sense of security through

positive thinking. Our refuge is awakening to reality, because the unconditioned is reality. Awareness, awakesness, is the gate to the unconditioned.... You can't take refuge in your thoughts or your perceptions. That's just the way the conditioned mind functions. It can't help it. It can't do anything other than that. You can only take refuge in awareness. All the problems are resolved right there. Of course, the conditioned mind thinks that awareness is nothing; it not worth anything – but it's everything....Whatever assumptions you have about yourself, no matter how reasonable they might be, they are still a creation in the present. By believing in them, by thinking and holding to them, you're continually creating yourself as a personality.'
[Ajahn Sumedho, 'The Problem of Personality']

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/January 30, 2013

Postcard 042/- the uncreated



POSTCARD#042/: *Chiang Mai:* Sitting at my desk and there's somebody drilling in the floor of the apartment upstairs, just above my head. Renovations are going on up there. There's been a lot of banging and drilling these last few days but this sound is incredible. It's a hammer drill drilling through hard concrete; the sound is vibrating through the structure of the building and if I lean my elbow on my desk heavily, the vibration is conducted through the elbow and bone structure of my arm, to cupped hand holding my jaw, clenched teeth and the skull is vibrating in resonant frequency. I'd really like that sound not to be there and it takes a moment for the thinking mind to create a background to this event. Maybe I should go out for a walk somewhere. Is there somewhere I can hide away?

Then a child starts crying, it's small voice going on in a seemingly inconsolable way. I can hear mother's voice there as well. Yes, I'd be upset too if I was woken up by this kind of noise... and there's a resentment about the noise building up inside me; a very large complaint-mode beginning to take shape. In an instant it's formed. *Who is responsible for this?* I'm looking for somebody to be at fault here, who's to blame for this? I come from a society conditioned by blaming; searching for the scapegoat. Blame it on somebody – or blame myself, that's just as effective: *I should never have taken the lease for this place...* Then that whole emotional thing just disappears as quickly as it arose.

I hear a plane approaching; it'll fly over in a few seconds. We're in the flight path here – departing flights, from Chiang Mai airport, flying quite low and heavy with fuel. Some are very large passenger jets that go to Singapore and this must be one of them. In a moment, the immense sound is present; everything in the apartment, and outside too, submerged in a colossal din. This is like an epic disaster movie! I can hear the hammer drill and the child crying but it's as if I've gone deaf, the sounds are so faint. The thinking mind is quiet, only the presence of this noise; a great chasm opening up in the fabric of reality, getting wider and wider and the receiving of this whole experience.

I'm drawn to these strange moments when there seems to be no thought at all. The mind just stops, allowing the immense sound to exist. There's mindfulness of 'self' continuing as it always does but there's no connection with it. I can be aware of this automatic self, just go along with what it's doing as if it were something separate. The applied thinking mind; just seeing it and everything that arises, ceases.

The totality of aircraft noise recedes and hammer drill sensory impingement returns. Crying child remains unconsolated and for a little while I give way to the raging fire of emotion again. The thinking mind is engaged: a kind of intensely gridlocked traffic of thoughts driven into near collision with other thoughts and backing up and trying to find a way out of this cramped condition.

Then I step out from it. There's a pause and in the small space that exists I remember the Ajahn talking about *sati-sampajañña*, saying consciousness is a natural function, it is 'uncreated', there is no sense of self associated with consciousness. Outside the thinking mind there is only the uncreated. I look around for the pause... it's still there, a curious extended, stretched-out moment when there's just no thought at all....

It's getting easier now, the child is not crying anymore. When the drilling stops, the silence is overwhelming. Mango trees outside my window; sunlight on leaves, branches move slightly as tiny squirrels leap around in playfulness.

Postcard 041/- somewhere over the rainbow



POSTCARD#041/: *Bangkok-Delhi flight:* Something happens to interrupt the dream... it wakes me up and I remember I'm on the plane. It's a window seat, clouds outside and a huge horizon – the curvature of the earth. Here in the confines of economy class, the large man next to me wears a short-sleeved shirt and has hairy arms, the passenger in front has extended his seat all the way back, and it's like his head is in my lap. I feel I'm part of the South Asian population already. Stewardess announcement: *'raydee and gentermens...'* Thai, mispronunciation of the L and R consonant and a plurality problem, *'.. ensure window shades are up, armrest is down, fold away table up, and chair forward...'* If I think too much about it, I get lost with the instructions. *'And this concludes our fright service...'* Reminds me of a flight to Jakarta once; and the last part of the stewardess announcement: *'... and the penalty for dlug tlafficking is death, thank you.'*

The final part of the Woody Allen movie I was watching before I went to sleep is still showing on the screens. I don't have the sound plugged in, just looking at the actors fumbling around like serious, grown-up children. The 'I' metaphor is an image projected on a screen; reassuring in the midst of our existential anxiety. Consciousness plays the game of hide-and-seek, concealment and obscuring – if consciousness is revealing itself, it means it's also obscuring itself and things appear to be what they are not. Woody Allen has a cartoon face, he was born with it, that was/is his destiny. I plug-in the sound to see what it's about – the idleness of it is immense, *samsara*, conversations of no consequence unravel here during the time it takes from departure point A, to arrival point B at the speed of 600 miles per hour.

Watching other people looking around, heads spinning left and right, down, up, coordinating body movements; going along the aisles and coming back to their seat, holding on to chair backs as they go, simply occupied with the physicality of being in the limited interior of this aircraft, mesmerized by the phenomenon of individuality. There's not anything beyond the mind's perception of itself as the leading actor in this movie; the assumption is that, one way or another, everything coming through the sense gates and into the mind is about 'me.'

'Infinite being playing the game of limited being. The limited being is a construct we've taken on; it's like this because the infinite being that we are isn't bothered by limitations and permits everything with infinite love...' [David Bingham, *Conscious TV*]

Plane tilts over and makes a left-hand turn. Sunlight comes in through the cabin windows on the right side and sweeps around the interior as the plane changes direction, circles around and goes into descent. It's as if it were a flying house, spinning around on its axis (*We're not in Kansas anymore, says Dorothy to Toto. We must be somewhere over the rainbow.*) Audio switched on; music for arriving. Slow calm triumphant music has a kind of congratulatory sound; the final approach; our journey's end. And the digital map of the world shown on the monitor has the illuminated flight path BKK/DEL as a diagonal line about 30 degrees North East with the small icon of the plane now circling over New Delhi – population 16 million, including rural/urban seasonal migrants. A few moments later: *BUMP BUMP* wheels touch down on runway. Population increased by one planeload.

'I'm not afraid to die, I just don't want to be there when it happens' [Woody Allen]

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/February 5, 2013

Postcard 040/- relinquishment



POSTCARD#040/: *North India:* Early morning light, people wrapped in shawls, long scarves bound around the head and tied under the chin. Dark faces, eyes looking out and they see me for an instant through the window – eye contact. I’m on a tourist bus, just passing through this small township, on the way to somewhere else. I think they see me as one of those who live in *maya*, not in the real world; living in a dream, and they might laugh to themselves; I’m naïve, dependent on support mechanisms that I pay for with an impossible wealth. It’s true; I’m in awe of them and, for me, their reality is unreachable. I don’t know anything about the actuality of their lives. My ongoing practice of ‘self’ consciousness reflecting upon itself is maybe something that comes naturally to them.

Inside the dark interior of their houses, I see shadows moving in the dim light of old-style incandescent 25-watt bulbs in unsteady current, candles, oil lamps and small burning fires. Domestic items, pots and plates, carefully placed outside on the ground and I feel they should be inside. A pregnant woman glances at me for a moment with deep eyes and there’s something supernatural about it. I look away. The houses all look like they’re only partly built. Bare brick walls and there’s one incomplete upper floor, or some part of the house seemingly under construction. I ask the tour guide and she tells me it’s because you don’t have to pay tax if your house is still being built. These half-built houses are everywhere; a family living on the ground floor and upstairs bare brick walls reaching up like pillars with no roof, just the sky. There’s an underlying uneasiness about it all, it seems to me; inadequate shelter, no protection, and a fierce tenacity of holding on to life.

There are others in more hazardous circumstances, street people and those with no dwellings at all, the dispossessed. Beyond that the *sadhus*, bearded men with matted hair in yellow robes, white pigment smeared across the forehead, incense and candle-wax – hovering in a kind of other dimension – a living statement that all that is born, ends. It ceases. We die because we were born. That’s how it works. There’s birth and death in every moment. It’s so obvious, but I can’t see it.

I don’t want to see the cessation of anything; I want to hold on to what is good but it falls away to nothing and I start looking for something else to replace it. Chasing after things I want, and running away from other things I don’t want, creates the illusion that this is what life is about. I’m tossed around in the experience of having this, and rejecting that. And even the quiet space

that just comes along by itself sometimes; the neutrality of neither this nor that – even in that place I’m dissatisfied. It’s a kind of nowhere thing.

I’m subject to praise and blame, pleasure and pain, fame and disrepute, gain and loss [*Eight Worldly Dhammas*]. All I can do is react or respond; and I cannot seem to see that everything that happens now is the result of something that happened at some earlier time when I was reacting or responding, just as I’m doing now: *vipaka-kamma*, resultant *kamma*. This is what comes of it. And it’s so obvious, all I have to do is allow the cessation to take place... but I can’t see it.

Dukkha, suffering is looking for certainty in something that is, by its very nature, uncertain; running from one thing to the next, looking and looking, and pretending the uncertainty is not there. The Ajahns say, stay with it until you see the cessation. Everything comes to an end. This is what it actually is... the letting-go of it, giving it all away, relinquishment....

*‘I am of the nature to age, I have not gone beyond aging; ^{[[I]]}_{[[SEP]]} am of the nature to sicken, I have not gone beyond sickness; ^{[[I]]}_{[[SEP]]} am of the nature to die, I have not gone beyond dying; ^{[[I]]}_{[[SEP]]} All that is mine, beloved and pleasing, will become ^{[[I]]}_{[[SEP]]} otherwise, will become separated from me.’ [From: *The Five Subjects for Daily Recollection, Chanting Book*]*

Photo: From the Buddhist Sites Tour album

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/February 8, 2013

Postcard 039/- being here



POSTCARD#039/: *New Delhi:* This is the 100th post! I feel like I should celebrate, I'm a blogger centenarian! But still a youngster, I think. Many bloggers are much older than me. So, what's going on here? This blog is about the Buddha's teachings, Advaita Vedanta, non-duality. I went public on July 6th, 2012 and I've been putting up new posts every three days, mostly, since that time. Now it's 'The One Hundredth', and I was going to use that title for this post but it's been used already – the 100th in the TV series: 'Friends.' The *dhammafootsteps* blog is, of course, about reaching out to friends, but the discussion is about just being 'here.' We're all here in our various states of being, in different parts of the world; in different time zones and we're all individually contemplating our own experience of being 'here.' Blogging is a good medium for this kind of thing because, just being 'here' is what everybody is talking about or describing, one way or another – isn't it?

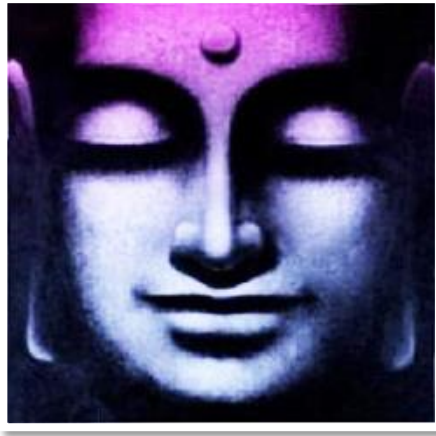
Here's something from the blog: *Beyond The Dream:* '...the awareness that looked out of our eyes as a five year old is the awareness that's looking out of our eyes now.' When I read that sentence it had a curious effect; there was an instant understanding of what being 'here' means. Then the next thought was, what is 'the awareness'? And it's a good question, that one, you can just go on asking it.... It's like trying to understand *sati-sampajañña*, clear comprehension; what does that mean? And maybe I'm off somewhere searching for the meaning of clear comprehension, overlooking the fact that all the confusion is still there in my head. So, I'll never find clear comprehension that way, because every time I think I've found it, the confusion just jumps up in its place. Eventually I realize clear comprehension means understanding the confusion. It has to be that way; clear comprehension of the confusion, and not some kind of desired state of clarity that doesn't exist. The confusion is, I can't see reality because I'm too engaged with the idea of it.

In the West we suffer from the creator-god condition; God made the world so the world and God are two separate things. I see the world from some impossible place outside of it; I'm on shaky ground here, in control mode, there's the paranoia of thinking I can't let it go and the fear of having to hold on indefinitely. All the clutter and stuff and mental goings-on and stumbling over all the indistinct, half-seen, misunderstood truths – believing that this is what life is about. Not able to see that it just doesn't matter what kind of story is showing on the screen, it's all fiction, created by the mind, arising and ceasing, dependent on causes and conditions and the karmic outcome of past events.

The mind doesn't create awareness, mind is contained in the awareness. It's something like, awareness is there, I just think I can't see it. Thinking I can't see it, is another mind moment that exists temporarily in the awareness. Being here is about getting to know everything there is to know about what that means....

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/February 11, 2013

Postcard 038/- metta/loving-kindness



POSTCARD#038/: *Valentine's Day 2012:* 'All you need is love, love, love is all you need...' One very small problem about love is that if you love this person, you can't love that other person as much. So you have to manage all the likes, dislikes and unlikes; friend and 'unfriend' too. The stormy weather of loving one thing completely and other things not at all – but how can we love everything? The practice of *mettā* holds all beings in loving-kindness; all phenomena, all sentient beings, we contemplate in terms of loving-kindness. Okay but it's not easy to love everything... yep, some things aren't very lovable; lovability potential: zero. No matter how much I try, I can't love that thing; sorry, no, I can't do it. But what I can do is have *mettā* for the feeling that I can't do it; I can have loving-kindness for my resistance to loving the unloved. Being open to all conditioned experience with an attitude of kindness, and accepting things as they are; this is the practice of *mettā*.

The aversion I experience is not so much about the unloved thing itself, it's about 'me' struggling to accept the reality of it being there. *Mettā* is about non-aversion, if I have aversion for the unloved, it just exacerbates the situation. Allow it in to conscious awareness, the unlovedness, let it be there and just know this feeling as it is now. Okay, so I leap into a state of aversion as soon as I open up to it like that. But I have *mettā* for that state too. I can come back later, try again; I can be patient with this condition as it is right now in this present moment. Having *mettā* means allowing it to be. I'm not interacting with it, I'm just willing to be with it. It's the same as everything else, its nature is impermanent, it changes, breaks down, crumbles into pieces and it's gone. I'm not looking for the natural cessation of it, though, that's not the goal. I'm just allowing it to be as it is, accepting that and, bit by bit, there's a release of the tension caused by 'me' resisting the presence of the unloved. That's the point of the exercise.

The effort to get away from the reality of the unloved, restimulates the discomfort and negative emotion starts building up again. Even so, there'll be times when it's possible to just receive the experience without resisting it. I see then, this is the way to go; loving the unloved. Over time, things begin to change, there's a willingness to let everything be as it is, pleasant feelings and unpleasant feelings. I can have *mettā* for all the negativity locked away inside, opening the door, letting it all go; freedom! The heart isn't heavy with dislike, blame and resentment. A sense of lightness and well-being.

'By reminding ourselves to have metta for the feelings we experience – not thinking about them or analysing them but going to the place in the body itself, to the mental quality, really embracing that – really being willing to feel those particular emotions, they become bearable. By changing our attitude to one of acceptance rather than of rejection, to interest, rather than just wanting to get rid of them, we find that they are things we can tolerate. Then they cease on their own, for all conditions are impermanent.' [‘Universal Loving Kindness’ by Ajahn Sumedho, Forest Sangha Newsletter, October 1997, Number 42]

– g r a t i t u d e –

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/February 14, 2013

Postcard 037/- wake up



POSTCARD#037/: *East Anglia:* There's a book by Jack Kerouac titled 'Wake Up', the story of the Buddha in the style of the 'beat' way. I used to have it on my bookshelf in the house in [East Anglia](#) and one day the electrician came to the house to fix some circuits and his young assistant picked up the book; a young guy, long hair sticking out, wearing shorts and running shoes, tattooed legs, said he'd heard of the Buddha and also Kerouac and that was pretty cool. So we had a little discussion about this. Later on I noticed the tattoo on his leg, there was something familiar about the flowing calligraphic style and then I remembered: *Om mani padme hūm* in Tibetan script. I asked him about it and he was pleased that I'd noticed it; said he got it recently, didn't know much about what it was, really, just looked good. And I told him, it was nice, and we looked at it for a while; him spinning his leg around so I could read it all, leg hairs and the indigo coloured inks. I said that I'd read somewhere this six syllable statement contains the essence of the entire teaching of the Buddha, according to Tibetan tradition. 'Cool,' he says. There it was, the innate consciousness in nature, activated by mysterious Sanskrit sound frequencies in harmonic resonance, tattooed on the leg of an electrician's assistant in East Anglia.

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Kerouac begins with the statement: 'Buddha means the awakened one.' Buddhism is the wake-up call; it's built-in – comes with the software. There's the quality of being aware; receptive to the whole thing. The sensation of sunlight on my skin, of how the body senses the outer world, and everything I see, hear, smell, taste, touch, feel and think. The mental faculty senses the larger consciousness, looking to see what that might be. It's not the thoughts, the thinking process, or the identity of 'me' engaging with this. It's *anatta*, what's outside of all of that; an awareness that includes everything. And I can find it coming out through all the layers created by the mind. Just trying to understand what it takes to see what that sort of thing could be.

This holds my attention in a particular kind of way. It's a kind of alertness, an ongoing investigation into the present moment and everything about the sensory function and the cognition of it is there too. It's triggered by a simple curiosity: what is this? And the attitude of careful listening, I am the awareness inside of the object outside, awareness is both and everywhere is here, everything is this; as far as the eye can see.

'Thus Tathagata, He-Who-Has-Attained-to-Suchness-of-Mind and sees no more definite conceptions of self, other selves, many divided selves, or one undivided universal self, to whom the world is no longer noticeable, except as a pitiful apparition, yet without arbitrary conception either of its existence or non-existence, as one thinks not to measure the substantiality of a dream but only to wake from it; thus Tathagata, piously composed and silent, radiant with glory, shedding light around, rose from under his Tree of Enlightenment, and with unmatched dignity advanced alone over the dreamlike earth as if surrounded by a crowd of followers, thinking, 'To fulfill my ancient oath, to rescue all not yet delivered, I will follow out my ancient vow. Let those that have ears to hear master the noble path of salvation.' [Jack Kerouac, 'Wake Up,' 1955]

Image (upper): detail from a photo by Louk Vreeswijk (lower): Om Mani Padme Hum, in Tibetan script

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/February 17, 2013

Postcard 036/- quicker than thinking



POSTCARD#036/: *New Delhi:* Sitting under the thatched shelter built on the roof terrace here, watching a small bird about the size of a large bee, so tiny! Is it a relative of the humming bird? Wikipedia says it's a Purple Sunbird, less than 10 cms, the male is a kind of black-purple. This one, I see from the photo, must be the female, a more sedate olive green. Yep, this is the lady Sunbird, so small, it's like it's almost not there at all; takes my breath away. How can such a thing exist? A delicate speck of life, fragile and light; there's birth and there's death and there's the bit in between. That's where the Sunbird is, so brief... I suppose these tiny birds have just evolved like that because predators can't catch them – always one step ahead of everything. Its movements are immediate, now here, now there; the quality of sunlight – elusive, a flicker of pure reality. Not like a bird, more like the shifting of my line of vision as I try to follow where its gone, then my conscious seeing of it in another place happens at the same time as the actual presence of the small creature itself, perched on a twig and ready to dart off somewhere....



The alertness of the Sunbird is having an effect on me, how to identify this? It's as if there's a space between the things we take for granted and ponder over; a small gap, there in the absence of the object that has not yet arrived. The Sunbird gets to that place before we can even think of it being there. Faster than thought. I've noticed a few references to this space before something happens and after it's finished; recently found it in the context of the short emptiness just before giving way to an emotion [*Kadampa Life calls it 'an inch of space'. Follow this link: Being realistic*]. There's room to move before giving way to an automatic thought response. There's a moment before cognition locks in; a gap in time, quicker than thinking that allows the mind to see it all as it is – a small window opens and we see the whole thing passing by, *sorry, can't stay, got to rush, bye!* Off it goes in a continuation of its itinerary, if it comes around here again, everything will be completely different; we may not remember it was this...

My eye follows the little brown bird as it flits and hovers from flower to flower and doesn't seem to mind me being here quietly watching. Then it flies over the parapet of the roof terrace, hesitates there in the air, buzzing wings, makes a decision to go left and down, veers off in that direction and it's gone...

'This awakened consciousness, as pointed out by the Buddha, is not conditioned as with the six kinds of consciousness (the six sense-doors: eyes, ears, nose, mouth, body or mind), neither being part of the natural world (earth, water, fire, and wind), nor having size, being neither long nor short; it is without texture, being neither fine nor coarse; it is without moral quality either, being neither pure nor impure; neither is it psychological in nature (nama) nor physical (rupa). It is invisible, limitless, and radiant.' [*Ajahn Sumedho, 'Awakened Consciousness'*]

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/February 20, 2013

Postcard 035/- only the world ends



'The world, 'loka', is the world as we experience it: sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, thought, emotion and feeling – my world, your world. It's not the abstracted, geographical planet, universe-type world. It's the direct experience of the planet, the people and the cosmos. Here is the origin of the world, the cessation of the world and the way leading to the cessation of the world.' [*'Consciousness: Invisible, Radiant, Limitless', Ajahn Amaro, Buddhadharma, December 1st 2003*]

POSTCARD#035/: **New Delhi:** Power cut and everything in the house goes totally black; streetlights are out too, the whole thing.... Use my phone as a torch, an island of light and fumbling for matches. A candle placed exactly for this eventuality; strike a match, some comfort in the small light and scented flame. Okay, so how long is it going to be? Listening to all the generators out there like a fleet of helicopters has landed in the street, rotor blades whipping round – time passes, yep! it's going to be a long one. Go through to bedroom, get into bed with clothes on because it's cold, heating is out too.

Unexpected, unplanned situation. The warmth of bedding, face on pillow cover; no other input from the outer environment except sounds coming from the freezer in the kitchen: *creak, crack, creak* – ice is starting to melt. Listening in the silence between the creaks, no other sounds, only this; the listening action, and that small space before the thinking process is engaged. What is it that is aware of this? Consciousness removed from the sensory experience of everything I see, hear, smell, taste, touch, feel and think; outside of the elements: earth, water, fire, air – and not held by time.

Unsupported consciousness, an awareness that's different from the basic functions of interacting with the world; distant from the usual state of simply being aware of what's going on in the body/mind organism and that's enough – living in a dream; the deluded not-knowing state and random karma: *'a tangled skein of thread, a woven nest of birds, a thicket of bamboo and reeds...'* The thinking thing gets a hold, loves it, hates it; tries to control it, tries to figure it out. And beyond all of that is the unsupported consciousness. It's there that my curiosity is drawn.

Some controversy over *viññanam anidassanam*, a synonym for Nibbana, the unconditioned consciousness, non-temporal, the consciousness that is outside of everything and includes it all. Theravadin extremists argue that this leads to the idea of a soul and the god/creator thing we're familiar with from church conditioning. I'm reminded that all the Teachings were intended to be tools to assist in our awakening. We don't attach to them, develop a clear mind, let go and see for ourselves.

Blinding light, suddenly, all the lights in the house start up at the same time. Generators outside shut down, fridge begins to hum, water heater starts to hiss and bubble. I go through and start the computer, find the page about Unsupported Consciousness by Ajahn Amaro: *'In describing unsupported consciousness, the Buddha taught: "Wherever there is something that is intended, something that is acted upon or something that lies dormant, then that becomes the basis for consciousness to land. And where consciousness lands, that then is the cause for confusion, attachment, becoming and rebirth, and so on. But if there is nothing intended, acted upon or lying latent, then consciousness has no basis to land upon. And having no basis to land, consciousness is released. One recognizes, 'Consciousness, thus unestablished, is released.' Owing to its staying firm, the heart is contented. Owing to its contentment, it is not agitated. Not agitated, such a one realizes complete, perfect nibbana within themselves."* (Samyutta Nikaya 12.38 and 22.53)

Note: 'Only the World Ends' is the title of the autobiography of Ajahn Tate, translated by Jayasaro Bhikkhu.

Gratitude to Fierce buddhist for the image used in this post header

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/February 23, 2013

Postcard 034/- space and thoughts



POSTCARD#034/:New Delhi: It's that Sunday morning feeling again; so silent, the neighbour's dog feels uneasy about barking too loudly – maybe there's nothing to bark at. Sadly, it walks to its place on the balcony and looks out... nope, still nothing happening out there. No intruders on the property, no people anywhere to be seen. The world is asleep... the zzz, zzz ZZZZZs, slow breathing of sleep; the no-work-today comfort zone. No need to get up until early afternoon. Sleeping off the excesses of the night before; dinner started at 10pm and the party went on until sometime after two o'clock in the morning.

I didn't get to sleep until late but it wasn't because of partying, it was the neighbour (not the 'dog' neighbour, the other one). These people decided to have a medium/large social event last night – verging on the mildly-obstreperous. The noise and kerfuffle became kinda abstract to me, drifting in a coma of half-sleep, sounding not like people having a party, more like a party among the animals at the zoo; two or three hippopotamuses (hippopotami?) trying to get comfortable in a room too small for them – getting up and sitting down again and disturbing each other in the process, smashing small breakable things, reversing into corners and making squelchy sounds along the side of the wall with their great weight squidding around awkwardly. Slightly frenzied but not 'losing it.' A bit farmyardish too, with yelps and howls, crowing chickens and meowing cats and geese and ducks; somebody with hiccups. On the other side, the dog barking on the balcony – dogs of the mind bark – and the whole thing reached a kind of pandemonium of people talking over each other in a flowing jibberish of words, scraps of music mindlessly playing in two different places, punctuated with the odd crash, squeak and shout. Other percussive noises, the smell of beer floating out into the air and a cloud of cigarette smoke from men standing outside the house, speaking on the phone, lengthy shouted monologues in a language I don't understand.

It's really noticeable that the mind grabs at something immediately; velcro fastening, unpleasant rip as it comes apart, so you leave it attached: *Yep, I could get really angry about this...* There is nothing pleasant about this feeling at all, no reason for it to be there other than simply the desire it has to adhere-to, and 'be' something. It's 'birth' in the Buddhist sense. No matter how mindful I am, there's that driven brooding thing, the scenarios of outrage. I concentrate on letting the mind untangle itself from the problem; just letting it get on with it; it goes away for a while. Then it comes back again and eventually I move through to the front room, wrap myself in a blanket, sit on the cushion, and get ready to remain there until it's over – watch the breath...

See where the mind leads, where it goes how it reacts to 'me' trying to hold it, how it is able to concentrate and how it does that. A bit like getting to know it as if it were a stranger, rather than thinking it's 'me' and I can control it. It really is undeniably noisy next door, it needs attention and I give it what it needs and what's left over gets focussed on the struggle to be in a state of peace – not a placid thing, mostly it's like swimming in dangerous waters, but knowing that as long as mindfulness is maintained, there's no threat at all from the carnivorous species

of the deep. Just letting them be there. Anger/distress is a passing mental state, same as everything else, nothing special.

There is the body, the heat, the cold, the hard, the soft, and the thinking mind starts to drift. Let it go where it wants; a sense of travelling behind it, follow it, be curious about where it goes. Disengage from the attachment, just enough to feel safe from the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, flying around dangerously and ricocheting off the walls and ceiling.

There is Rupert Spira's example [[Link below](#)] about a room filled with people. 'I' am the space in the room, the people are my thoughts and images, bodily sensations and world perceptions. All kinds of people in the room, large, small, kind, unkind, intelligent, unintelligent, loud, quiet, friendly, unfriendly, etc..., each doing their own thing. But what they do or say has no effect on 'I', the space of the room. The space is there now and it will be there when the people go home. The space, is/was there before the building was constructed and will be present after it is demolished, it's always present.

Now it's later, the morning after. Am I the only one awake? So quiet, the electric *hiss* of the computer seems loud. It may have been on a morning like this, in those historical times, that Siddhartha Gotama, the prince who became the Buddha, woke up in the rooms in the palace, where the endless parties had taken place, surveyed the devastation of spilt drinks and furniture tumbled over, and seen the true reality of the event... he just knew, this is not where it's at. Left the palace, gave away everything he possessed and set off across the landscape...

'Our objective experience consists of thoughts and images, which we call the mind; sensations, which we call the body; and sense perceptions, which we call the world. In fact we do not experience a mind, a body or a world as such. We experience thinking, sensing and perceiving. In fact all that we perceive are our perceptions. We have no evidence that a world exists outside our perception of it. We do not perceive a world 'out there.' We perceive our perception of the world and all perception takes places in Consciousness.' [*The Transparency of Things*, Rupert Spira]

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/February 26, 2013

Postcard 033/- how it seems (2)



POSTCARD#033/: *New Delhi:* Travelling across town, *Shym* is driving. He drives slowly and carefully, surrounded by vehicles honking their horns, cutting in on the nearside; they don't like it that he's driving slowly. But *Shym* remains calm – *much ado about nothing* – he's an older man. Out there, fierce displays of male feathers in a ritual display resemble pure outrage, shouts and gestures through wound-down windows. If looks could kill... eyes sparkling with diamonds of malice, giving him 'the daggers'.... *Shym* stays solidly as he is. Ah well, people, you can't always get what you want. Sometimes you're just stuck with it, you know? It's how you respond to that unhappy state of ungratified wanting that determines the future for you; cause/effect – if you react with anger, it'll lead to more anger. But these drivers seem to have gone way past that stage: up-to-their-eyes in the world of anger. Without their anger there's no purpose in life. They thrive on the struggle; mythical realms of the Titans, and the Asuras, declaring a state of war that lasts an eternity. All this doesn't phase *Shym*, at the correct time he slides the steering wheel slowly through his fingertips, indicators flashing *clicka-clicka-clicka*, telling the world, *I am now turning right*, and the car sweeps around like a large boat in a wide arc. The surrounding traffic forced to move out of the way. The response is plosive, to say the least. But, well that's just how it is.

I'm sitting in the back, looking out through tinted windows, incognito, people can't see me in here – a car wearing dark glasses. Nobody knows I'm inside, the voyeur, the invisible man, looking out at the world all around. I feel like I'm not here. Everything passing by outside the windows of the car; events come and go, arrive and leave. Things occur in random order and drift away without leaving anything behind, video images recorded on security cameras from various places in the 360 degree coverage, showing the car entering the car park, that I'll never see. I say something to *Shym* and I hear my own voice in the acoustics of the car; the sound of it causes me to pause for a moment. Everything stops... it takes an effort to get started again. Before it happens, just this silent space. The body feels light and I'm seeing through it.

We turn into the car park. Parking attendant looks like ex-military, sharp uniform, whistle held in his teeth, a piercing blast, signals for us to go left but *Shym* indicates right. Outrage, more whistle blasts, and he comes up to the car, peers in through the tinted glass, hand cupping the

space around his eyes to shade from the sun, I see a large bristly moustache and yellow teeth, the glass fogs up slightly and there are small bits of spittle from his hot breath and shouted words. But *Shym* gently points with an inclination of the body and politely insists that he'd prefer to go right, not left. More displays of warlike behaviour but I can see this is an act, it's only how it seems to be. So we are allowed to go right, there's no problem.

I'm amazed how this system works. All my assumptions are wrong. Attachment due to causes and conditions, that's all. It's like everything is a continuation of how things have been; inherited from some former time, or former life, the outcome of actions still hanging around due to *tanha*, attachments... velcro fastenings, super glue, magnets, welded bridge structures and all the mind stuff about wanting things to be like this or like that or wanting things to be different from what they are. The created 'self,' seeing the world according to likes, dislikes and preferences, obscures cessation; doesn't see that things stay as they are only for as long as it takes. Then it all dissolves in a myriad of changes, disintegrates, crumbles away. We can't hold on to anything. It all comes to an end.

'...when attention is drawn to the presence of the Knower, to that which knows and experiences, whatever that is, it immediately becomes obvious that there is something present that is conscious of the body, the mind and the world. As we do this, whatever it is that knows seems suddenly to become more present. It shines. In fact it is simply discovered to have been always present, but apparently eclipsed by our exclusive focus on the known.' [Rupert Spira, 'The Transparency of Things']

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/March 1, 2013

Postcard 032/- memories and the wind



POSTCARD#032/: *New Delhi:* Gusty warm winds blow through the trees in the park, rustling the leaves and swishing the branches like the sound of waves breaking on the shore. The pigeons are exhilarated by it, flying over at tremendous speeds past me here sitting on the roof terrace, watching them now swoop up above my head – so actively engaged with the mechanism of flight, it's as if the movements of their wings and the movement of the air are one and the same thing. A wind like this is energy to the birds; it's a dance. Flight is an expression of the air displacement itself – flying and the wind – ground level is not the reference point; 'up' is not necessarily up and neither is down. I see them caught in rapid flight; a stationary moment in the air, suspended in time and space, then an audible flap of wingtip and change in direction.

This wind buffeting me around, hair whiplash on the forehead and the pages of my notebook suddenly leap and turn over on the spiral binding, fluttering through all my various handwritten notes over the last month. In this way, the wind blows through 'mind', stirring memories and things from the past, held for years, and released, they come flooding into present time. Each memory stays as long as it takes to examine, and the fullest extent remembered, like meeting an old friend. Time disappears for how long it takes to tell the story and, towards the end of the memory stream, the space behind is seen shining through, the images become transparent and vanish.

The next memory arrives after a moment, I examine that and it disappears like the others. It goes on like this, a collection of things from long ago and far away. Allowing thoughts to go by, unheld, uncaught – the opposite of catching fish; consciously unhooking fish-thoughts caught in the mind at some earlier time; letting them go free and they swim away. Memory stream moves from one moment to the next and I can't actually see these moments... is this it? Is this the next moment? Is this it, now? Can't be measured like that; just the circumstance itself; the situations and occurrences follow one another – not a sequence in time, it's dependent on the nature of the events, there's a linking that groups them together like coloured beads strung on a necklace.

Going back to Thailand tomorrow where it'll be hotter than a locked laundromat dryer. Ah well, better go pack my bag now and... has the next moment arrived yet? The mental images and fragments have reformed themselves in the endless stream of things? Can we say, possibly, yes, this is, actually the next moment? If so, I must have missed it, everything seems like it's in the past again...

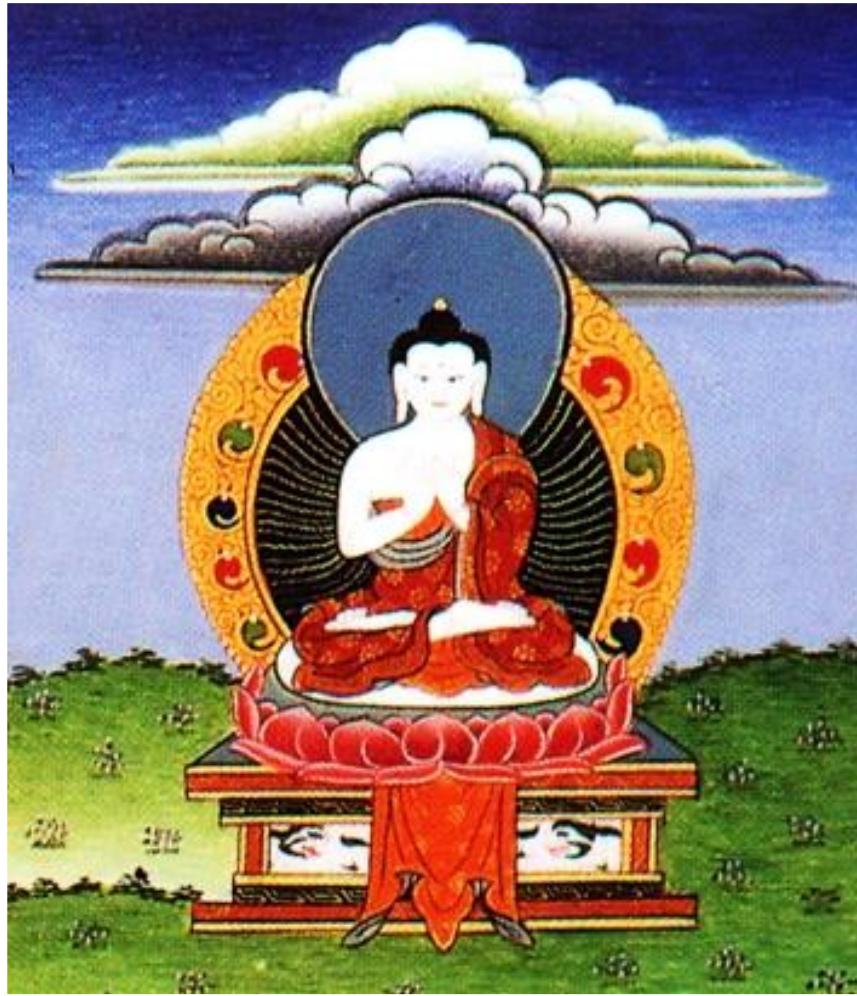
[Includes excerpts from: Birds on the Balcony 4]

'Unhooking fish' taken from an original idea by TJH

Photo image: dreamstime

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/March 4, 2013

Postcard 031/- not something – not anything



'When the iron eagle flies and horses run on wheels, the Tibetan people will be scattered over the earth, and the Dhamma will go to the land of the white man.' [Prophecy by 8th Century Indian sage Padmasambhava]

POSTCARD#031/: **Chiang Mai:** The flight takes four and a half hours, Delhi/Bangkok, then the long walk through this celestial airport and into the domestic terminal. It's a one hour flight Bangkok/Chiang Mai and you're there. Arrive late evening, drop bags in the hall and crash out on the bed like how you park the car: reverse in, switch off, lock doors, shut down and lights flash in acknowledgement. Sleep for eight hours, wake up next day and it's one and a half hours earlier. Dis-joint-ed-ness of a different time zone, a bit bewildering. Pondering over something Ajahn Sumedho says about what is real and what is not; the real is not something, it's more like it's not anything. If I can see it like this, there's a sense of ease; the holding-on thing is not getting in the way.

The flight experience is easy, it's getting on the plane and getting off again that takes the time and if you have to do it twice, there's an opportunity to contemplate the experience. At Delhi airport, I had an hour in duty-free up in a place on the second floor, looking out at the planes standing down there on the hot airport tarmac like huge lizards in the desert. Wings displayed like curious extended reptilian protuberances, skin stretched over a lightweight structure of hollow bones and the heaviest thing is the engine. Unbelievable power, hundreds of thousands of horsepower, and I'm caught for a moment, thinking of all these horses an A-380 needs, something like half a million horsepower. I imagine them galloping along the runway faster and faster and when they reach the speed of about 150 mph they all take one mighty leap up into the air, above the mountains, through the blue sky heaven realms, leaving a long straight line of white vapour in a southeasterly direction, and land in Bangkok, 1800 miles in the distance.

Over the hills and far away over many horizons; this is the place of my origin. Northern Europe, distant in time and space like another planet. I've left the past so far behind now, it feels like this is it; I made it into the future – time traveller contained in a bubble of the present moment. Thirty years of living in other people's countries – *gratitude* – always a visitor. And here in

Chiang Mai there's M, my niece aged 8 years, who comes close to my face and looks intensely at my left eye, then her gaze flickers over to my right eye. She looks at that for a while; shifts back to the left eye again, then asks her mum: 'Tamai lung mi tah si fah?' (why does uncle have blue eyes?). And mum says it's because he comes from the West and, over there, lots of people have eyes that colour. While this is going on, I have the wonderful opportunity to see M's small face and almond shaped eyes absorbing me into her consciousness.

There's a familiarity with Thailand that I don't have anywhere else. I'm the pale skinned cognitive hybrid, one of these giants who live here, situated in the population but in a separate place... not really part of anything. I'm somewhere between being 'in' this world and being 'of' this world. Darwin's Theory of Evolution seems to take on a different meaning: survival of the fittest – done so by any means to achieve that end *lobha, dosa, moha* (Greed Hatred and Delusion). This just don't see it that way, *mai pen rai* (nothing is serious), everything is light and easy, innovative ideas held together with bamboo, string and rubber bands. Easily relinquished, it exists only for the time it's needed then it's gone...

'The real is not something, it's not anything. It's not a phenomenon. You can't think about it, you can't create an image of it. So we say unconditioned, unborn, uncreated, unformed. Anatta (not-self), nirodha (cessation), nibbana (liberation). If you try to think about these words you don't get anywhere. Your mind stops, it's like nothing. ... if we're expecting something from the meditation practice, Enlightenment, bright lights and world-trembling experiences, then we're disappointed because expecting is another kind of desire, isn't it?' [The End of the World is Here, Ajahn Sumedho]



The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/March 7, 2013

Postcard 030/- deductive inductive



POSTCARD#030/: *Chiang Mai:* Small figure of *M* sitting at the breakfast table on a chair too low for her. The plate with her toast too high and elbows sticking out, takes a large scoop of grape jelly from the jar, carefully carries it, at eye-level, on the flat of her knife, *wobbling-wobbling* over to her toast, descends and lands on toast without spilling a drop. I'm kinda transfixed by this manoeuvre. We were playing a game where you have to say as many words as you can, beginning with a given initial letter. So it's my turn; I watch her spreading the jelly over the toast and ask her to give me a word beginning with 'S' and immediately she says, '*SpongeBob*', then continues spreading jelly on the toast. *SpongeBob?* I ask... and she says, yes (like, is there something wrong with that?) Pretty good, considering she's only 8 and English is a second language.

Also that *M* is Thai and coming from a cognitive place that's different from the rigid Western, logical, clearly-stated position, that-which-is-known. You could say the Thai way is remote from this. But *M* is a child, like any child, learning as she goes along. There's the impact of *SpongeBob* to be included, same as it is with Western children but she's got the advantage of having an inherited understanding that's more intuitive, Eastern (inductive); feeling the way through and let's not bother with objectives, goals and all that stuff, okay?

Westerners find it difficult coping without a given structure. It's not LOGICAL. In the Western (deductive) behaviour, we almost always express things having a plan in mind; the idea of what we're saying is right there at the beginning, clearly seen, and all the backup related to that follows after. Then there's a conclusion at the end.

The Thais are sometimes shocked by the bluntness of this kind of thinking. Their way of expressing things is like the inverse of that, no real indication where it begins, plenty of general

examples and there's a conclusion in there somewhere but it's difficult for us Westerners to find it because we didn't understand how it started ... it seems vague.

Hotel staff, tour guides, any situation where you're asking for information at random: *Excuse me, do you happen to know where I can ...?* This kind of question is an invitation for the Thai to lay out a tapestry of possibilities, together with additional info you might like to know.

Western visitors are baffled. The idea is that the solution to the problem is already there, an understanding of this is induced; the conclusion is inferred, arrived at: *Yes! I see what you mean...* the *aha* moment. There's a skill in asking the question, of course, mindfulness, and that's on-going for me, no expectations (that helps) and there's a skill in the ability to be patient, appear interested while looking around for someone else who might know.

The West, separates God and the world. We are not Him, we are created by Him; a subject/object duality. The Eastern inductive reasoning understands the function of things through recurring patterns, a 'puzzle made of its parts'. If there's a God it must be 'inside' this, cannot be separate, it's integrated. Not easy for me, letting go of the seeking for logical patterns of cause and effect that aren't there. And I'm suddenly interrupted by *M*, who asks me if she can use the computer; she opens google, and finds a YouTube video of the Chipmunks singing Gangnam Style in cute squeaky voices: *Op op op op, oppan Gangnam Style, Gangnam Style. Op op op op, oppan Gangnam Style...*

Photo: Carved doorway Wat Phra Kaew, Elaine H collection

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/March 10, 2013

Postcard 029/- a sense of release



POSTCARD#029/: *Chiang Mai:* 06.30 hours, sitting on the cushion watching the breath and listening to the monks chanting, some distance away. Soon they will stop just below my window, it's *takbat*, people offer food, and there's a special chanting of thanks *anumodana*. Suddenly the sound fills the room, that particular pitch of human voice frequencies that brings with it a kind of physical sense, an awareness of the body, heat, air, fluids, and bone, the experiential aspect of simply being alive, here and now. It has a familiarity to it, a resonance in the air triggers consciousness of the chest, drum-like lung cavity, the heart organ and the lower abdomen, limbs extend out from the centre. The soft hot brain organ at the top of the body, cranial cavities behind the face, ear membranes. It's a discovery to revisit this known experience of the living body. There's life for a short time. Then there's death, something every living being is deeply familiar with; a feeling that's comforting and stable here that says, Yep, this is OK... it's alright, it's exactly as it should be. There is no death; there's only the end of life.

Somebody I know died recently and I'm a bit caught up in it. The memory of that person is all there is; faded like an old sepia tint photo. Where 'is' he right now? Do I believe in the idea of a heaven? I don't know. It's not an idea; it's real. I choose to think in terms of reality – not abstraction. The enigma... the empty space where that person used to be. Nothing there now, but that's just how it seems to be; if it is just 'nothing', I'd need to have something else there to confirm it is nothing. So it's 'nothing' in the sense that it's not 'something', not anything? Language tends to identify things, I have to try to see past the concepts the mind creates: 'nothing' is more like a feeling of no-thingness. It's accepting change, *aniccan*, an easing-away from the tendency to hold on, to adhere, to stick like glue. Releasing that heaviness that doesn't have a name; welded metal, concrete, brick and iron embedded in stone, it all just fades away. '*melted into thin air ... the baseless fabric of this vision... we are such stuff as dreams are made on...*'

Thinking about death is really thinking about life. It's always an overwhelming wonderful moment; story with a happy ending, details accumulate and appear to have form and direction. But only when the end comes near does it have a context. There's something about it that's

seen in hindsight. The route by which I arrived at this point becomes somehow ... satisfactory, just right – it was the correct way to come here and everything seems to unfold from this place. A curious reversal happens and I'm on the route to getting here and at the same moment I'm looking back on how it happened and how everything happens like this. And time is ordered, in the sequence it is, simply because it would be too confusing if everything was happening at the same moment.

In the end what's left is the conscious experience of just sitting here in this quiet room with morning coming in through the windows. The monks have gone; nothingness means 'I' no longer have the burden of 'my' thoughts about 'me'. There's something very normal about it; I let it all in and let it go; a great sense of release, of peace, of rest, of ease and gentleness...

Photo: Monks go to collect food in the morning, from the WPN collection

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/March 13, 2013

Postcard 028/- applied knowing



'Either you look at the universe as a very poor creation out of which no one can make anything, or you look at your own life and your own part in the universe as infinitely rich, full of inexhaustible interest, opening out into the infinite further possibilities for study and contemplation and interest and praise. Beyond all and in all is God.' [Thomas Merton, from: *'The Intimate Merton'*]

POSTCARD#028/: **Chiang Mai:** Standing by the main road facing traffic going into town, looking for the small red bus *songthaew* /song-tae-oo/. I see one coming in the distance. This time of day there's always one nearby. It'll go anywhere you want, the driver will fit you in, depending on the itinerary of the passengers already on board – so the journey may take a different route every time. That's how it works; 20 baht (US: 69 cents) for a ride to nearly anywhere. There's no designated route, no schedule, the *songthaew* just comes along and it's a bit like jumping into a flowing river, holding on to a lifebelt and somehow it gets you there. I see the indicator light flashing, the *songthaew* stops, I tell the (lady) driver where I'm going, she says ok. I climb up two steps and get into the vehicle. Low headroom, sit down on the bench, smile at the other passengers, and fall into the mind-state of being taken away.

The outside world rushes by, seen through the open rear door of the vehicle and side windows with no glass; warm air rushes through. The way it unfolds is the way it is and everything is integrated, including my perception of it. The 'world' is the metal structure of this small vehicle enclosing the space I'm in; contained in the greater space all around and permeating through. Moving with the traffic next to the canal, water fountains, huge ancient trees and the remains of a 700 year-old wall that encloses the old city in a square. Same 'now' as it was then; being in the present moment at that time is as it is now, seven hundred years further on; or just a few seconds later, more-or-less the same. Conscious experience appears like a series of screen shots, holding the movement for a moment and it stays like that, then it changes slightly and becomes something else. Difficult to say how or when it alters but I notice it has changed only afterwards – like, that's different from what it was a moment ago, isn't it? It must have happened and I didn't see it. Present time transforms itself. Seven hundred years in the past, it wasn't any different for the people who lived then, returning, as I do, to this same reference point every time and seeing the situation from the perspective of 'self.'



It's not anything, the only reason it's there is that I linger with the idea of it. I can enter knowingly; I can consciously apply 'knowing' to the 'self' construct, applied knowing (not the theoretical kind), and the knowingness clears away the habituality. Thoughts that just wander for no reason are brought to an end by knowing that this is what it comes down to. *'Every time I close the door on Reality, it comes in through the window.'* [Ashleigh Brilliant] All that remains is the emptiness of the moment; the sound of the engine, the vibration and the pressure of the bench I'm sitting on. There's skin, hair; there are arms, legs, a head and eyes, ears, nose and tongue. I am a sensory-receptive organism. Just the warm air in my face and things rushing by. There's identity but it's nothing other than what it is; the personality flutters like a piece of cloth in the wind; coloured plumage of a bird and a sense of immensity occupies the entire background.

'Perception... can easily be seized on as having a self-reality or as one's self. The average villager likes to say that when we fall asleep, something that he calls the soul departs from the body. The body is, then, like a log of wood, receiving no sensation by way of eye, ear, nose, tongue, or body. As soon as that something has returned to the body, awareness and wakefulness are restored. A great many people have this naive belief that consciousness is the self. But, as the Buddha taught, consciousness is not a self in this sense. Consciousness is simply sensation and memory, that is, knowing, and is bound to be present as long as the body continues to function normally. As soon as the bodily functions become disrupted, the thing we call consciousness changes or ceases to function. For this reason true Buddhists refuse to accept consciousness as a self, even though the average person does accept it as such, clinging to it as "myself." Close examination along Buddhist lines reveals that quite the opposite is the case. Consciousness is nobody's self at all. It is simply a result of natural processes and nothing more.' [Ajahn Buddhadasa, 'The Things We Cling To']

Upper photo: Chiang Mai tuktuk, lower photo: Songthaew

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/March 21, 2013

Postcard 027/- seemingly continuous



POSTCARD#027/: *Chiang Mai:* 05.00 hours. Darkness of early morning. I can hear a motorbike some way off, coming nearer, and voices talking loudly. They're shouting to be heard over the sound of the engine. The motorbike passes below my balcony on the third floor, sound fills the room, and I realize it's the driver with a friend on the back having a conversation as they are going along. Curious acoustics here in this narrow street; concrete and glass buildings face each other. The sound of the two voices disappears quickly past my windows and moves on further down the street, contained in the little capsule of their moving world. I hear it again, faintly now, and fading into the distance.

Strange dream-like event; receiving pieces of an animated conversation moving past me at 30 mph. Then it's gone from my auditory awareness and (I assume) is being heard by other people further along the street. There's something here about consciousness creating a sense of continuity; like how you string beads on a necklace and it appears to be one whole piece. A continuous stream of individual events taking place and, in the context of the body, it appears to be one, on-going connected reality – an illusion. When I wake up in the morning, it takes a moment, and everything is a development of the night before.

It must have been the motorbike that woke me up; windows wide open all night in the hot air, with just the mosquito mesh separating me from the world outside. Only 20 miles to go, straight up in the sky, before you reach outer space; no gravity, the universe (where did I read that?). Wow! outer space is so near, half an hour's drive to get there, if there's no traffic problem. So, what does that feel like? I suppose it feels pretty... precarious, balanced on the end of a flagpole fixed on top of a monument – the absolute verticality of it... quite scary. The only thing that gives me any sense of stability is the 'self' I'm inclined to depend on sometimes? No wonder there's this tremendous attachment to it; can't let it go, irretrievably lost in thought; I am contained in this body, stumbling around in this small area I inhabit, on the surface of the planet. I am a bit uncomfortable with the reality of what exists only 20 miles above my head. And go through life assuming that all there ever is, or all there ever can be, is 'me'; the experience of a created self.

I hear a sound, and think: if that sound is out 'there' then I must be hearing it in 'here': the subject/object duality: 'I' am my body, I am my feelings, I am my consciousness and everything else (that's not 'me') is out 'there.' In here, I'm me, I have a personality, it's myself. And *Bert0001* refers to it as: the 'my' in 'myself.' A distinct feeling of focus that disincludes other evidence – it's all about me. Fortunately, I can understand and know that the idea of a self just seems to be there, seemingly continuous – a kind of mirage. Delete the 'my' from 'myself' and I'm free of all the tugs and pulls of likes and dislikes, emotions are not 'my' emotions, they're

just emotions; things that happen – liberated from the *papañca*, proliferating concepts, and concocted thought trying to make something real that's just not real at all.

I'm glad to be awake early, leaving this place tomorrow and I'll have to pack bags and get ready. Why can't I just walk on to the plane not check in any bags at all, only passport, ticket and the contents of my pockets? Why bother with luggage? Ah... if only life were so simple.

Some time after this I hear the Tuk-kae lizard chuckling in a corner somewhere: *tuk-kae-tuk-kae tuk-kae*. And the Coucal, (whoop-whoop bird) (*centropus sinensis*) clambering around in the branches; *whoop-whoop-whoop-whoop-whoop...*

'Just as a monkey moving through the forest or the woods holds on to a branch, lets it go and holds on to another; in the same way what we call viññāṇa (consciousness) arises as one thing and ceases as another, by day and by night.' [SN.II.95]

References in this post: Sue Hamilton: 'Identity and Experience'

Photo: Buddhist shrine in Bhutan, collection Khun Pornchai

Posted in the 'now' moment Tagged non-duality, *papañca*, Sue Hamilton, viññāṇa

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/March 25, 2013

Postcard 026/- the who-I-am thing



POSTCARD#026/: **Bangkok:** Flying above street level and over the rooftops in the BTS Skytrain on elevated track, bright yellow seats, red holding straps and blue wall sections. Primary colours; diminutive, childlike and cute; it's a toytown train. Brushed steel, shiny chrome and a smooth metallic click of wheel on rails, rushing through a landscape of blue sky over the city as far as the eye can see; billboards and upper storeys of town houses, moving past in the foreground, tall buildings of steel and glass standing like pillars in the background urban concrete environment. Here and there on the train, are TV monitors fixed at eye level with adverts running continuously so that we can enter into a world of consumer preferences: the Western model, East Asian style, adapted to fit Thai cultural attitudes to spending. Stories acted out by adults who look like children; cute 'faces', attractive personalities, 'charm'. Products presented as if it were a game, makes it all seem acceptable; we don't see the high-voltage sales strategy, cloaked in naivety – a new society, a whole new generation of consumers – the corporate entity engaged in long term planning.



I can get caught by it, drawn towards the TV screen, something I see in the advert triggers it, and the *who-I-am* thing arises: I LIKE THIS and it all gets to be really important, relevant, vivid and intense. I feel suddenly energised, compelled and, I WANT TO HAVE IT, ready to start

discussing with sales staff at the retail point and proceed with the purchase; the plastic in my wallet, the samsara of advertising. For me, no worries, it will cease of its own accord if I can allow it to become nothing, and fortunately it's all in a language I can switch off from so it fizzles out...

To become a person, I have to 'believe' in it – I have to consciously engage with it. To become me, I have to think 'me'. The 'me' that I believe in depends on *me* thinking it. I am conditioned to be attached to my opinions, my emotionality, and the sense of self in all kinds of ways. I can manipulate the conditioned world so that, from this perspective of thinking, I see (my)self situated favourably – or it could be unfavourably if I'm caught in being the victim (but there is a way out). Everything arises due to causes and conditions, then thinking about it, excessively and often enough to have it embedded in the fabric of this self construct I recognise as 'me,' subject to its perceived whims and waywardness, as some kind of fictional character.

But there is a way out; an intelligent reflection on the human predicament; a proximity-to but distance-from situation: the Middle Way. The practice is about this simple truth: don't mess with it, it won't arise if I don't *think* it into being. And I am my own boss, the nearest thing to God, as we know it, is *viññāṇa*, conscious awareness, self-sustaining; I don't create it. There's the body, sitting here in this yellow plastic seat, minding its own business, other than that, *anatta*, no personal essence or substance or core or soul given to me by the grace of (some external force); nothing added, nothing extra. The simplicity of this seems to immediately throw everything to do with 'self' into disarray; enough to cause it all to come tumbling down; a house of cards. And an artificial voice announcement gets my attention: *Siam-interchange-station-doors-will-open-on-the-right-hand-side-of-the-train*. I join the throng of passengers squeezing through the door and pouring out like liquid into the centre of the shopping mall heaven realm experience. There's nothing wrong with personality, it's the attachment to it that's the problem...

Upper photo image:

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ABTS_Skytrain_over_Sala_Daeng_Intersection.jpg

Lower photo image: Coke ad Ploenchit, collection author

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/March 28, 2013

Postcard 025/- relaxed resistance



POSTARD#025/: **Bangkok:** In a taxi on the expressway and it looks like the whole route is blocked with traffic but we are moving along slowly. A small voice is saying, *we'd've been better off taking the ordinary route through streets with traffic lights and the congestion of that would've been quicker than this...* yes, possibly, but hypothetical. And I'm not getting pulled into that scenario, thanks, no. Strangely, I feel no frustration sitting here. The taxi driver's radio is playing; it's a call-in chat dialogue with music. The mind isn't absorbed into it, the sound is just there. It's not loud, it's not demanding; sometimes I notice it consciously then the mind moves on somewhere else. And, there's that small voice again saying, *wow! this could get really boring.* But it's not like that, it's a neutrality maybe, there's just this experience right now; the reality of being here. Nothing else to do, so obviously it's okay to stay with what's 'here' and see where that gets me.

One thing that helps is that there was this really nice post I read the other day [*The Path of Waiting*] and I'm thinking of that now in this place where traffic is at a standstill, nearly. It's the idea that we're always waiting on something, somewhere, most of the time and it helps if you can be 'willing to stand hand in hand with your waiting for a few moments.' It was that, I think, that started me off in this mind direction of, let's see what this waiting thing feels like. So now I'm hand in hand with my waiting and it feels nice.

The mind is clear, free and empty. There's a careful observation and contemplation of everything that's happening, it's like being focussed on balance and openness – poised between things, in a sort of high altitude mind-place of emptiness. That's all, and everything just seems to be slowly moving along here, the moment transforms itself and there's this attitude of gentle curiosity, like what's this now? I hear the small voice again; a shadowy question hovering on the periphery: *how come I'm not frustrated by this endless traffic situation?* Nope, it's not necessary to go there; no desire to get pulled into that. It's the wisdom of just mindfully placing one foot after the other on to stepping-stones that lead over the river to get to the other side. There's something about the easy lightness of this that makes it obviously the right thing to do, and what else is there to do anyway? Not a lot, I look out the window and see the gridlock of slow-moving metal parts in this tremendous heat.

Amazing really because I'm not feeling the frustration of it. There have been times in the past when it would've resulted in a semi-suppressed raging inferno and getting engaged with it, or trying to get rid of it, would seem like the way to go. Getting rid of stuff always seems like the right thing to do; a kind of righteous feeling; got to clear up this mess, okay, let's get on with it! But that hasn't worked for me, experience has shown.... Long ago and far away, I remember the Ajahns telling me about this – well, I didn't know what I was doing at that time – and the teaching was about how I was unintentionally holding on to some unpleasant mind state, even though I was sure that trying to get rid of it was the thing to do. The desire to get rid of,

vibhava-tanha, is a desire, same as the desire to have something is a desire; they are the same. So the teaching is that trying to get-rid-of-it is like trying to get rid of the desire to get rid of it, and it doesn't work like that – all I'd be doing is creating more suffering.

It's fortunate for me that I'm seeing it like this today, I need to remember how it works. The problem is really with the resistance to frustration – so, relax the resistance, allow the frustration to come in. Know what it's like when it's present, know what it feels like (the holding on to it) when it's there. Knowledge replaces ignorance, we are not deluded by it any more. So, I'm just moving along now; looks like the traffic flow is easing up a bit – getting there...



'... in the context of the four noble truths, the origin of suffering (dukkha) is commonly explained as craving (tanha) conditioned by ignorance (avijja). This craving runs on three channels:

- (1) Craving for sense-pleasures (kama-tanha): this is craving for sense objects which provide pleasant feeling, or craving for sensory pleasures.
- (2) Craving to be (bhava-tanha): this is craving to be something, to unite with an experience. This includes craving to be solid and ongoing, to be a being that has a past and a future, and craving to prevail and dominate over others.
- (3) Craving not to be (vibhava-tanha): this is craving to not experience the world, and to be nothing; a wish to be separated from painful feelings.' [dukkha samudaya (wiki)]

Upper photo: collection of the author

Lower photo:

http://www.virtualtourist.com/travel/Asia/Thailand/Central_Eastern_Thailand/Bangkok-1445238/Transportation-Bangkok-Expressways_Toll_Roads-BR-1.html#4

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/March 31, 2013

Postcard 024/- one in five hundred



POSTCARD#024/: Suvarnabhumi airport: 05.30 hours, enter the check-in hall, and I'm one in a great sea of people, all pushing trolleys with luggage... amazing; takes my breath away. It seems to be divided equally over two check-in areas: H on the left, and J on the right. Quick decision, go right – I'm at the end of the line, I'm the last... *I'll miss the plane!* Everybody is stumbling along, dismayed: *how could it be like this?* The slow-shuffle, steadily moving down a very long, snake-like line, doubling back on itself, for five rows – looks like about 100 persons in each line, 500 people in front? The paranoia of individuals acting-out in wild queue-jumping behaviour arises (protecting my place in the line...) then that ceases. Relax, watch the breath, and observe reactions: a narrative of events in the mind. Seeing it happening as I'm going along; emotions rising and falling like sailing over these large waves on the sea. Stormy thoughts rise up and activate the red light: *stop thinking!* There's the experience of intense contraction in the mind and immediately there's the insight into letting go of it, *drop that one now.* Back to watching the breath again.

Lose track of time and later I check my watch and realize it has taken about an hour to reach the check-in desk where I have to show my passport and get the space on the plane I paid for. Then it's done, I'm processed, got boarding pass, making my way through the multitudes, contemplating thoughts on an archetype of Asian migrations and, always, there are 500 people in front. At the toilets 500 people ahead of me, into immigration and the continuing capacity flow of 500 people is passing through. In the larger departure areas there's an ocean of people as far as the eye can see, and at my gate, again 500. Flight is boarding and the capacity of the plane is around 500. Take off and all 500 of us mind/body units are airborne...

Airline staff serves the meal, feeding the five hundred – sounds biblical. Through the window, sky, clouds, and the surface of the planet. It makes me feel like a tiny speck of life, a microscopic cell. The body is allotted a space in a chair moulded to fit, takes up volume and weight. The body composed of the four elements: earth, water, fire and air, is something like a car battery, positive and negative poles, chemical reactions, and the mind is the energy that comes from that, the [nama-rupa compound](#). Who 'I' am is not important, and the idea that it is 'something' (it is 'me') is a concept, a digital display that comes with the software. The whole thing is more like 'process', a connectedness on every level. Origin unknown, just believing in an external creator doesn't seem to be it – the only reason that comes to mind is my own Christian conditioning as a child. I need to investigate this. The metaphor helps me to transcend my existing situation, figures of speech; other than that it's all speculative conjecture. How can I see it in any other way? Anything else beyond this present conscious state must be so remote from what I presently know that none of the rules I'm familiar with apply. I'm in awe – I simply don't know....

'... radiant emptiness should not be mistaken for the pure emptiness of Nibbana. The two are as different as night and day. The radiant mind is the original mind of the cycle of constant becoming; but it is not the essence of mind which is fully pure and free from birth and death. Radiance is a very subtle, natural condition whose uniform brightness and clarity make it appear empty. This is your original nature beyond name and form. But it is not yet Nibbana. It is the very substance of mind that has been well-cleansed to the point where a mesmerizing and majestic quality of knowing is its outstanding feature. When the mind finally relinquishes all attachment to forms and concepts, the knowing essence assumes exceedingly refined qualities. It has let go of everything – except itself. It remains permeated by a fundamental delusion about its own true nature. Because of that, the radiant essence has turned into a subtle form of self without you realizing it. You end up believing that the subtle feelings of happiness and the shining radiance are the unconditioned essence of mind. Oblivious to your delusion, you accept this majestic mind

as the finished product. You believe it to be Nibbana, the transcendent emptiness of pure mind.'
[Luangta Maha Boowa]

photo image, dreamstime: <http://www.dreamstime.com/pier-free-stock-photography-imagefree198297>

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/April 5, 2013

Postcard 023/- hold on and let go



POSTCARD#023/: *New Delhi:* Arrived late morning on a flight from Thailand and *Shym* picks me up at the airport. It's that feeling of bewilderment; having been scanned by X-ray machines, identified, processed, held in aircraft cabin pressure for 4 hours and transported. Now I'm here, nearly two thousand miles away from where I was, placed on the ground and having to reassemble the parts of who I am in this new context.

Where are we now? Eyes looking out, bright sunlight but not fiercely hot like Bangkok; more like a Mediterranean climate, feels okay. Heavy traffic, drivers with attention-seeking behaviour; the 'BLOW HORN' message on the back of trucks says everything. It's a kind of open invitation to press your horn to say you're here. *Get out of the way! I am coming; it's me!* 'Self' is something real, something eternal, according to the Vedas and Upanishads – something that *is*. Completely different from the Thai Buddhist culture that I'm used to, which says that what we cling to as 'self' is really only impermanent phenomena subject to arising, changing, and passing away – nothing of substance.

India is not a Buddhist country, it used to be but the Teaching is more or less unknown today, and the only reason I make the comparison is that I'm often going between these two places, Thailand and India. It's culture shock, really, happens every time. And now, stuck in this traffic jam, some drivers try to get relief by blowing their horn while we're all at a standstill. I hear the sound and find I'm vibrating like a bell that has been struck... it's the argumentative, provoking nature of it: I feel his anger. I forget about this when I'm away – an unavoidable reaction.

Mindfulness, focus on the breath, let it just be there – everything that arises ceases *aniccan*. In a moment the impact has gone, nothing special. I just need to be careful I'm not indirectly fanning the flames and causing it to blaze up again. I don't want it to be like this but saying this doesn't help because 'not wanting' (*vibhavana*) is as much a desire, as 'wanting it' is. If I continue to 'hate' it like this, I become even more attached to the anger of not-wanting it and cannot easily disengage from that. So, looking for the place that's somewhere in the middle ground where I can find a temporary abiding.



It's inevitable that North India looks confrontational when the Thai way is to keep your temper, whatever the situation; the *chai yen* concept (keep a cool heart). Thais very rarely show their anger. If there's a problem, Thai people keep it inside... that particular intensity of unexpressed anger, like a pressure cooker that explodes suddenly – it can be dangerous. In 2001 a German motorcyclist, frustrated by the traffic situation, made an obscene gesture to a van driver and was shot dead. The van driver lost his cool. It's what happens when you don't manage to hold it anymore, the release is really explosive. In this kind of emotional holding, it can be pretty scary because everybody knows the consequence of a lifetime of intense holding; clinging with tenacity to the refusal to let go, and no safety valve. But not necessarily, Thai children learn

about this Buddhist teaching at an early age, and in the right circumstances, most people see it for what it is and allow it to come to an end.

Then some hours later, I'm at the house, and somebody I don't know is shouting in anger outside my front gate. I go to the window and a man is standing out there under the tree in the shade, talking on his phone in Hindi and waving his free arm. *Shym* told me the man was expecting to receive some money, seemingly, but didn't get it and this was his reaction. The fury in his voice was like something Biblical, the wrath of God, I'm immediately intimidated, and the vibration of anger starts up again, it's like a contagious disease. You just can't pretend it's not there – that compelling sense of 'me.' After a short while it's gone, and I'm thankful there's no 'eternity' in my mind: no heaven, no hell. There's liberation from suffering: the way out, the Third Noble Truth, *nirodha*, and cessation, no holding. In the emptiness of the moment there is no self, only the stillness of the mind and everything comes to an end...

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/April 9, 2013

Postcard 022/- Thai New Year, Songkran



POSTCARD#022/: **SONGKRAN**, the Thai New Year, takes place on Saturday 13 April 2013. The traditional greeting is สวัสดีปีใหม่ (sawatdi pi mai), “Happy New Year”. Most people say สุขสันต์วันสงกรานต์ (suk san wan songkran), “Happy Songkran Day!” The most obvious celebration of Songkran is the throwing of containers of water, mixed with talcum powder, and everybody gets drenched, including (and especially) innocent bystanders. It’s a fun time, the peak of the hot season.



People make New Year resolutions, pay respects to elders, family members, friends, neighbours. They go to the *wat* (Buddhist monastery) and offer food to monks. They cleanse the Buddha images from household shrines as well as Buddha images at monasteries by gently pouring water over them, mixed with a Thai fragrance (Thai: น้ำอบไทย). In Chiang Mai, the Buddha images from all of the city’s important monasteries are paraded through the streets so that people can toss water at them, ritually ‘bathing’ the images, as they pass by on ornately decorated floats.

Songkran is a time for cleaning and renewal and many Thais also take this opportunity to give their home a thorough cleaning. The throwing of water originated as a way to pay respect to people, by capturing the water after it had been poured over the Buddhas for cleansing and then using this “blessed” water to give good fortune to elders and family by gently pouring it on the shoulder. The water is meant as a symbol of washing all of the bad away and is sometimes mixed with fragrant herbs when celebrated in the traditional manner. The holiday has evolved to include dousing strangers with water to relieve the heat – temperatures in April can rise to

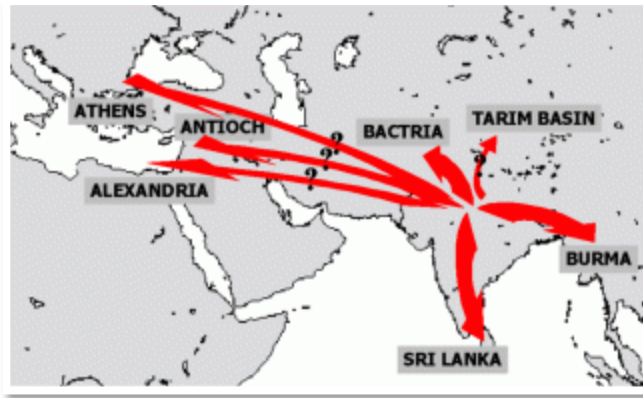
over 40°C. Nowadays, the emphasis is on throwing water at everyone, rather than the spiritual and religious aspects, which sometimes prompts complaints from traditionalists.

Songkran is similar to the Indian festival of *Rangapanchami*, *Holi*, with the same splashing of water, colored powders, and fragrances. The festival coincides with the Tamil New Year, *Puthandu*, either on 13 or 14 April and coincides with the New Year of many calendars of South and Southeast Asia. Songkran falls on the same date observed by most traditional calendars in India as in Assam *Rongali Bihu*, West Bengal *Pohela Boishakh*, and in Kerala, Manipur, Odisha, Punjab, Tripura; also in Nepal, Bangladesh, Burma, Cambodia, Laos *pee mai lao* and Sri Lanka, *Auruddhu*. Songkran is also celebrated in Cambodia *chaul chnam thmey*, Myanmar *thingyan*, and by the Dai people in Yunnan, China (called Water-Splashing Festival).

Reference and photos, wikipedia page: Songkran (Thailand)

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/April 12, 2013

Postcard 021/- redefining the question



POSTCARD#021/: *New Delhi:* 04.00 hours. Awake at some time of darkness that's neither night nor morning, getting some coffee and toast ready for Jiab going to the airport for the Gujarat flight at 06.00. Car comes, she gets in, *bye...* door-slam and she's gone. Stars shining in the dark sky, then I come inside and look at a Google map of India with Gujarat there on the coast of the Arabian Sea – so that's where it is... really not that far from Europe. Then take a look at the *wiki* map (shown above) of the Buddhist routes going out in all directions from North India in the time of Emperor Aśoka the Great, 273 BCE to 232 BCE. It looks like an explosion of consciousness that took place in North India, and spreading out from there; North, South, East, West, along the Old Silk Road directions. It goes West as far as the South-East Mediterranean countries; arriving there in pre-Christian times. Not impossible that the Buddha's Dhamma had an influence on the Jesus Teachings. Maybe that's why I had this strange recognition of it, *déjà vu*, when I first went to *Wat Pah Nanchat*. Studying Buddhism revealed fragments of an innate knowledge.

Text comes in, Jiab: 'boarding soon'. It's a two-hour flight, Delhi to Gujarat. Looking at the map again, I notice *wiki* uses the word, 'proselytism', hard to believe... maybe there were large numbers of people who didn't think about it at all and they were the ones who were told about God and were 'converted'. There's no doctrine of God-worship in Buddhism, 'I believe (I believe) in God (there's no real Teaching other than belief for me to study). In Buddhism (and Advaita Vedanta and the Tao), the separate 'self' is an illusion, 'a cluster of memories, thoughts, habits and conditioning', maintained due to this basic human tendency to hold on to stuff. It's not about that, it's not about our origin, our Creator or what we are made of, it's about how the whole thing works. It's a 2600 year-old teaching about learning how to see what our hang-ups are, and easing the burden. It's not about living for our(selves): seeking, acquiring and hoarding, it's about generosity, relinquishment and giving it all away*. It's about mindfulness and the way things exist, rather than what exists. It's about realities that fit into our world today, exactly as it was in ancient times. The Buddha anticipated modern physics: all matter is energy; beings exist as "bundles of energies" (*five khandhas*). It's not about 'self', it's no-self, *anatta*, it's about consciousness, *viññāna*, and the big question: what is consciousness?



I go through to the bedroom to lie down for an hour or so; still not yet dawn. Watch the breath, conscious of the sound of the ceiling fan above me in the shadows, constant spinning cycle that somehow says something about the weight of the rotary blades. It looks like how it sounds: a spinning propeller of an old fashioned aircraft – consciousness of the visual image. Always there's consciousness *of* something: consciousness *of* the smell of coffee and a crust of toast in the kitchen, the taste of it; consciousness *of* the soft bedding I'm lying in. There's consciousness *of* thought and then there's consciousness of no-thought – including my perception of it. Consciousness without an object, the still mind, unsupported consciousness – unconditioned? The non-dual perspective is that it's like this anyway.... So it's without an object in the sense that it is different from the basic functions of interacting with the world through sensory organs: eye, ear, nose, skin, mouth and mind; different from the state of being conscious of what's going on in the body/mind organism, *phassa*, as a result of responses to the world outside. Not consciousness *of*... just consciousness itself – what is that? No answer... is this the kind of consciousness that's needed to find the answer to the question or to redefine the question, maybe, or whatever... is it the true self?

If so, it's not what I thought it was: *'...this true self is also the fundamental source of all attachment to being and becoming... attachment to the allure of this primordial radiance of mind that causes living beings to wander indefinitely through the world of becoming and ceasing.'* [Luangta Maha Boowa]

'Consciousness cannot be known by mind. The mind is an object. It doesn't know anything. It is itself known by Consciousness.' [Rupert Spira – [Link to: Spiritual Artwork](#)]

**This post contains excerpts from: 'Beyond The Dream, Tao Te Ching7: Selfless'*

Lower photo image: Central Asian monk teaching East Asian monk, 9th century fresco

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/April 13, 2013

Postcard 020/- inevitability of circumstances



POSTCARD#020/: A LONG TIME AGO I had the idea to write a book. It was 1983, I'd just arrived in Asia and all this colourful, exotic stuff around me, I'd never seen before. So I started making notes. That was okay but I got stuck with it; no story-line, no plot and, for a while, I thought the story could be a kind of unfolding of events as they went along... but this was too wide, I needed to narrow things down a bit. Too complex, it'd give me a headache. I kept on making notes, anyway, believing that a story would reveal itself in the course of time, but it never did and I never figured it out. Years went by and I just carried on with more and more notes. Now I've got five A4-sized ring folders of typed notes I managed to print out from an old hard drive just before it finally crashed about 10 years ago, and I'm scanning these back into text files bit by bit. Also there are all these little old notebooks full of scribbles I have difficulty deciphering today – it's like they were written by somebody else. I'm telling you this because this is how the blog came into being. The posts are developed from these old notes; you could say, altogether, this is the book I never wrote.

The difference is there's a distance now that wasn't there then. There's no obvious author, "thoughts without a thinker," it's very much more indirect than it was. There are these faded old notes written by *the younger me*, on yellowing paper, etched into the surface with a dried-out ball-point pen and I don't remember half of it. Now they seem to be a bit reckless, stepping into that magical world of heightened feelings that generates a kind of gripping intensity: the experience itself... what's this? what's that? Things had to be written down quickly before they'd disappear and I'd not be able to remember, suddenly – wow! gone, they'd vanish and all I'd have were the fragments of their being there.

Of course, it was stress all the way; trying to hold on when holding-on wasn't needed. The urgency of it going past too fast, whole scenarios flashing by like buildings seen through the windows of a moving vehicle and you see this shadowy reflection of yourself in glass shop windows, looking out from a taxi or bus or car and always in the same position: the point of reference... Then I started to slow down, one thought-moment, then another thought-moment – thinking is the linking thing. And eventually I arrived at an understanding that this is what the process is; a mindful effort to experience consciousness of the real live situation as it's going along. Haphazard things that before just seemed to fit in as happy coincidences, came to be more like a recognition that all things are related anyway; similarities that link parts of the story together in a kind of inevitability of circumstances.



So there's now this quiet familiarity, and it's more relaxed. Being free of the great rush that lasted all these years, I reckon I've arrived... yes, that's it, the purpose in life has been achieved. There's also something here that tells me it could be that I'm just experiencing normality. Isn't this just ordinary reality? Isn't this, in fact, the place where 'normal' people abide all their days, and what's been happening is I've been practising brinkmanship, acting slightly mad all these years and have only returned to ordinariness? Ah well, whatever... I'm pleased because how could you not be? How much better and more mindful it is now compared to how it was then. And, okay, the transformation from that to this maybe makes it seem like something more than it is. Well, ho hum, it could be that the release from that *samsara* is all that can be achieved in one lifetime and just being happy with small miracles is all there is – nothing else needs to be done. So I go on here in this quiet place with the pleasantness of simple things and every day seems quite wonderful.

Upper Tarot image of the Fool: <http://tarot-lovers.com/the-fool-detail.shtml>

Lower Tarot image of the Fool:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Jean_Dodal_Tarot_trump_Fool.jpg

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/April 17, 2013

Postcard 019/- strange familiarity 1.



It is not an effort to achieve something. It is a state of effortlessness. It is a state of no-action. It is a state of tremendous passivity, receptivity. You are not doing anything, you are not thinking anything, you are not planning for anything, you are not doing yoga exercises, and you are not doing any technique, any method — you are simply existing, just existing. And in that very moment... the sudden realization that all is as it should be. [Osho]

POSTCARD#019/: *New Delhi:* Emerging from these long dark tunnels of constructed thought, blinking in the bright light of the present moment – it's always the present moment, no matter what you call it; today, yesterday, tomorrow – it's just knowing it is, that's all. And even if you're living in a dream where it's always in some future time, the present moment catches up with it and becomes now again – then it's gone: '*...now we are in the concept of now*' [Moojie]. Thinking about 'now' in the darkness of 05.00 hours at my desk; laptop feels hot and it's a slow internet connection. Just this large white open space where the page should be. In the tab it says, *untitled* and in the toolbar it says, *about:blank*, unstated presence. I have to wait for it, balanced on the edge... anticipation of it filling my vision with colour... unfulfilled. Yet there's something that I actually like about this, an emptiness that triggers the letting-go thing. I used to get caught up in that stressed feeling but today there's a great easefulness spreading through the neck, shoulders and facial muscles. If I'm not feeling totally tensed up, waiting for something that I feel 'should be' loading faster than it is, there's just this sense of letting things be as they are. It's like a deep inbreath, filling the chest cavity from top to bottom, and the long outbreath becoming a ribbon of road in a landscape, reaching out there to a vanishing point on the horizon.

Some time after that, the page loads but I don't notice it because I've wandered through to the kitchen and standing there considering the cavities and space above and all around and this strange familiarity (?) of the body/mind conscious state present here, in itself, since birth. Jiab comes through, says quietly: *what you doing in here?* And we talk for a bit about this thing, the connectedness with everything and all living beings... sharing it with others – like eating a meal with friends, a basic sense we all have, just the feel of the air and the experience itself. Jiab says: *let's make the breakfast then, shall we?* And it changes to something else, another episode, and a different story... cessation, THE END, no layers or filters. Just trying to understand what that sort of thing might possibly be, is enough to begin to know it; to know that all that's left are events and situations immediately associated with mind states as they arise – the result of kamma created in earlier times and the immediate Now. The mindfulness (and whatever it takes) to allow it all to unfold, to be here and to pass away, *annican*, no holding....

'Thus everything lingers only for a moment, and hurries on to death. The plant and the insect die at the end of the summer, the animal and man after a few years; death reaps unweariedly. But despite all this, in fact as if this were not the case at all, everything is always there and in its place, just as if everything were imperishable. The plant always flourishes and blooms, the insect hums, animal and man are there in evergreen youth, and every summer we again have before us the cherries that have already been a thousand times enjoyed. Nations also exist as immortal individuals, though sometimes they change their names. Even their actions, what they do and

suffer, are always the same, though history always pretends to relate something different; for it is like the kaleidoscope, that shows us a new configuration at every turn, whereas really we always have the same thing before our eyes.' [The World as Will and Representation, Arthur Schopenhauer]

Photo: Steam clouds at a Power Plant in NZ, by Louk Vreeswijk

This post is inspired by: LIFE AS IMPROV.COM what is meant by now and the Moojie video at the end. Also: AWAKE AND FINDING PURPOSE.WORDPRESS.COM The spiritual path. And the fisherman and the businessman.

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/April 19, 2013

Postcard 018/- dimensions of pain



POSTCARD#018/: *New Delhi* I WAKE UP FROM THE DREAM to find I'm shipwrecked on the sofa, notes and papers strewn around, a cold cup of coffee – how long have I been asleep? Turn to look at the clock, then the pain; lower back pain, *oh... aaah!* Yes, I remember now, I've been disabled for a few days and situated on the sofa mostly: *pain is bad – I must have done something 'bad' to deserve this...* the tendency to criticize oneself for having the pain, perpetuating the kamma of causes and conditions. I need to correct this frequently. Another thing is that I've had the pain often enough to know there's a difference between the pain itself and the act of resisting it; also the attachment to wanting it to go away: *I-don't-want-it-to-be-there....* Profoundly desiring it to not-exist, *vibhava-tanha*, but I'll not find any peace in attempting to gratify that need – although I may persist in trying. What to do? There's nothing I can DO about it, except try to get comfortable and see how that goes. It's a no-choice situation and, strangely enough, things start to improve as soon as I stop trying to do something about it...

Some years ago I had abdominal surgery (abominable abdominal surgery – no joke) two operations, 6 months apart. Just enough time to recover from the first before getting ready for the second. More difficult the second time around, because I knew what was coming. The first time it was unplanned, an emergency, severe abdominal pain, straight into the emergency room in a Bangkok hospital and admitted right away; something sinister and twisted in the large intestine. So I sign the no-liability form and get operated on the next day. The surgeon tells me after I come round, he's removed two tumors together with a length of intestine – doesn't tell me how much, I didn't ask, and he also says he's my closest friend; nobody else has ever left their handprints on my intestines!

Colonic cancer, I was lucky. In both operations the post-surgery period was dramatic. After the anaesthetic had worn off, the pain arrived suddenly, right there in the centre of my physical being – absolutely no getting-away from it. The immensity of it occupying all the space and I'm backed into a corner. No escape, the only way I can go is forward, step into it. No choice, but dropping the resistance to the pain caused a moment of ease to arise, just before being swept away in the pain... *wow, how did that happen?* Clutching at straws: an insight, a tiny one, but it made a huge difference. There was desperation all around but just enough of an easing in the pain to tell me that whatever it was I'd done was good so how to do that again?

This back pain is the same kind of thing, but less intense, not erratic and scary. So I can allow it to be there. In contemplation of it, I see there are the other systems of the body all around the pain, normal stuff, just quietly ticking over. There's sufficient space to distance myself from all the immediate responses to this pain; the obsessions and fears, mostly a conjured-up conceptualizing where, in different circumstances, like intense joy, it would lead to everything being compellingly interesting. And, in the same way, when I have intense pain I'm subject to

fear and wild imaginings: *'your joy is your sorrow unmasked. And the selfsame well from which your laughter rises was oftentimes filled with your tears.'* [On Joy and Sorrow by Kahlil Gibran]

Conceptualizing is an automatic default that returns always to that same starting point: the 'self'. Unless something propels it right out of there (like what happened to me in surgery) there's nothing beyond this, no real insight into finding the way out of pain. But what the Ajahns told me about the Buddhist teaching is that the mind is not self. Mind is the sixth sense – everything I see, hear, smell, taste, touch, feel and think. The mind sense usually leads to a consciousness of how everything is coming in from the outer world through sensory experience and that default to the sense of self: *hey, this must be happening to 'me'*. With insight, the mind sense can bypass that, and then the pain is not happening to anyone – there's no 'me' engaging with these thoughts. Instead there's an awareness of the thinking process with no attachment, mostly abiding in a state of mindfulness and careful receptivity, *sati-sampajañña*; just looking to see what it might be. There's a kind of alertness about the sensory function, and the simple curiosity: *what is it?* Just being open to what this could be, is enough to understand how it works...

Photo image by Louk Vreeswijk, New Zealand Collection

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/April 24, 2013

Postcard 017/- before the story begins



POSTCARD#017/: Delhi/Bangkok flight: People don't normally go to Thailand for their holiday in the middle of the hot season – highs of 40°C – mad dogs and Englishmen... No passengers, plane is nearly empty, fortunate for me with this back pain I've had for more than a week now. I set off on this journey knowing that really the last thing I'd want to be doing is getting into the overcrowded economy class section with no room to move. But Hooray for the good karma of plenty room today, I can position myself in the chair so there's no discomfort and able to quietly contemplate the clouds in the sky. Everything seems so still, not really comprehending the phenomenon of travelling at 500 mph – 1 mile in seven seconds? I count to seven: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 and one mile further on. *Hmmm*, it feels like everything is stable and down-to-earth; stewardess smiles sweetly: *something to drink sir?*... I feel I'm a bunch of time-stretched-out spaghetti strings, going most of the way back to the point of departure.

Consciously watch the breathing and the mind settles. Soon there's the quiet space of no thinking. Watch the breath for a while but then, after a moment, something triggers thought again. A story starts up and I remember Lisa's post, *Doing Nothing Out of Anger*: '...we have to get the story of it going in our head'. Without the story, it doesn't happen. Usually you fall into it and it's more to do with convincing yourself it's like this, rather than it actually really being 'this'. But there's the small space just before it locks in and I can see that this is the last opportunity to consciously let go of the story-building, and be aware of the unchecked habituality that's there for no good reason.

I read something about this in Rory's blog/Tao Te Ching 12: The Inner World: *'It's been estimated that we think around 60,000 thoughts each day... probably over 90% of them are simply recycled from yesterday and the day before...'* Thoughts about absolutely everything – most of the world is inside your head. No wonder the space of no-thought is such a novelty to discover, no stories unfolding. Training the mind to consciously monitor the randomness, *yoniso manasikara*, contemplate the act of thinking with focus and concentration.

Mind settles again in the space of no thought, no end, no beginning, everything is always in present time, no past, no future... then, in the mind's eye, I'm with my mother in the Care Home, holding her hand and she stops breathing, I see the moment she dies and it's like her last teaching to me: *this is how you die son, just watch me...* and I see her move from the present into the past – forever.

A long time spent coming to terms with the fact that all of that is now irretrievably in the past; there are memories but if I don't start the thinking process, there's nothing there. Sometimes finding myself cast away on a small island of thought with stories like this, then the peace

returns, sound of the aircraft. No thought, not trying to find it, not engaging with the story of it. We're all just seeing 'the seeing of it'. There's something about the human reaction to the world, sensory organs mostly positioned around the face, so the head moves in response to functions of eye, ear, nose, tongue, skin and mind – the mind and stories, the ubiquity of the story.

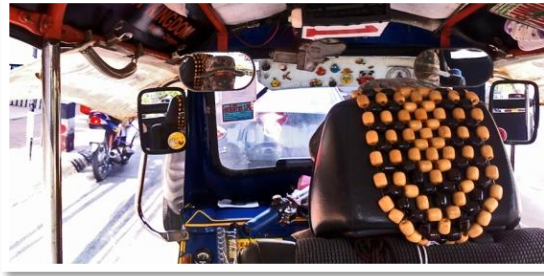
The story is everywhere and it's necessary to see the input clearly and the habituality. As far as possible let there be no reason for Mind to step in and take control, create the story of 'me'; someone at the receiving end and the whole subject/object duality starts up. Without that there's just the sensory receptors and our shared world. There isn't anything else to be done; only to 'see' the reality – seeing the seeing; awareness of the awareness; knowing the knowing. 'I' am not creating it. Awareness has somehow sidestepped that. Seeing the events without the story.

On a journey like this, you somehow think that, at the destination, that'll be the end – no more stories. But you arrive and there's just another set of stories going on and we're always only part the way through whatever story it is – same as what's going on with everyone, everywhere else in the world, all at the same time.

Landing at Bangkok, yawn and swivel the lower jaw to release trapped air in the cranial passages; ears go 'pop' and a whole new 3D sound enters.... didn't realize how cotton-wooly it was before. Ah well, so which gate are we coming in at? There's a long walk to the domestic terminal and the next flight to Ch'mai...

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/April 30, 2013

Postcard 016/- remains of the dream



POSTCARD#016/: *Chiang Mai:* 05.00 hrs, phone alarm goes off, ascending ring tones of celestial music and the small window of digital light illuminates the dark room. Too bright, it's difficult to see how to switch it off. OK, I got it...

Peace and quiet, it's a Chiang Mai morning. Difficult to wake up because I just arrived from Delhi and there's a time difference of 1½ hours – neither one thing nor the other and the remains of the dream scattered around. Fragments of a story and the urge to try to put the pieces together and recreate the dream. There's this built-in curious 'wanting' *tanha*. Maybe I'll find out what the story is about in the process of looking for the pieces that are lost?

Impossible. The predicament of the dream, the tendency to be wanting something... anything, it doesn't matter; something to attain, obtain, procure, secure – a mood, a good feeling – the language of consumerism – wanting something, but I can never seem to narrow down the options sufficiently to actually get what I want, and all that's left is the 'wanting' itself. Ungratified desire, just the wanting, hungry and dissatisfied, I feel like I want to get rid of the 'wanting' but wanting the 'wanting' to stop doesn't make it stop. It only increases the level of 'wanting' and this is my suffering, *dukkha*....

Slowly moving up through the layers into a more wakeful consciousness, here. Difficult. All the pain meds for backache coming to an end now, very nearly pain-free for the first time in 10 days. Wonderful. So, I think I'm nearly able to pull the body into a meditational posture. Try it and see. Carefully adjusting the pillows and cushions on the bed to get myself sitting upright with folded legs. Aching knees because it's been a while but it comes alright, settles down, and everything just falls into place again.

Mindfulness. The presence of the body, just quietly sitting here, and the mind slowly moving from sleep to wakefulness. The in-breath and the out-breath seem like incremental steps going higher and higher up a narrow winding stone staircase until it doesn't go any higher and when I let go of that, the mind eases off into this state of peace. '*... meditation is not an activity; it's the cessation of an activity*' [Rupert Spira]. It's about consciously not doing anything.

Peacefulness and fragments of the dream remain, pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. I'm drawn towards it, still, and inclined to try to put the pieces together again. The peaceful state becomes blissful, nice – if I merge with it, I'll fall asleep and there's a reluctance to do that. I'm holding on to it again, I see I'm trying to make it do what I want it to do, even though the blissful state is incidental, subject to change, *annican*, and I'll never succeed with that.

It's the 'wanting' thing again. I could 'modify' this and get it to be what I want? It would be nice if it were blissful all the time but I recognize something; the bliss can become irritation and sometimes it's a hell realm and I have to get out of it quick... Heaven/hell, there's no way of knowing which way it's going to go, so I need to remove the function that tries to manipulate the pleasant state through greed and wanting.

This helps me to detach from it; let go of the bliss, bye bye... but it's still there; just feels like it's happening to someone else; generosity, share it with the world. Can't find words to express. Leave it at that. I'm really a minimalist, *anatta*. No God, no 'self', no *I, you, he, she, it, we, you, they* – and the sentence often makes no sense because there's no subject, no object. No problem, the feeling is too large, no words for it...

Postcard 015/- no more than this



POSTCARD#015/: *Chiang Mai/Bangkok flight:* Sitting on the plane with *M* beside me, my Thai niece, and her coloured Tshirt, funny hat; her iPad mini and her 9 year old vision of the world. I've been watching her use these kiddy's applications; cute kittens with large eyes and she shows me how they respond to your voice; all kinds of stuff. We can make fruity ice-cream drinks, waffles and cup cakes with different kinds of toppings and *M* insists I have an opinion about what kind of toppings to have – lemon or strawberry? It's important! *M* asks me in basic English; only the key words: *What you like, Toong-Ting?* So I choose a lemon topping. When it's finished we eat the cup cake by tapping a finger on the screen. The name *Toong-Ting* is part of her former baby language she doesn't use any more but, somehow, *M* decided to keep it as my name. She selects things in this unique way because English is a second language. Maybe it's easier to say *Toong-Ting* than my actual name, or she likes the idea of being cute (I think it's this).

And so the time is taken up with *M* asking me about various things like this. I engage with her on these points and in the intervals, when she's busy with the iPad, I'm simply aware of our physical presence. There's really not anything left to think about... mindfulness, waiting for the next question. In the silence there's a curious emptiness, just a quiet awareness, *bhavanga*, the space in-between; not reacting to stimuli, there's nothing happening. Just being here; the knowingness of it. My responsibility is to take care of *M*; to respond to her small requests in a way that's in tune with her way of thinking and her use of English. That's all. We are linked in our present-time mutuality and there's nothing else coming into consciousness from the outside world unless it's something very interesting or something we need to be careful about. Right now, here in the aircraft seats, it's all very bland and neutral. Somehow I seem to have sidestepped my own mental activity; the usual state of affairs of the mind, the way the 'self' attempts to perpetuate itself is seen; there's only this, being here...

Then the cup of coffee is served and *M* says I should have the powdered creamer in the packet that comes with it: *'Why you not put that in your coffee, Toong-Ting?'* and she looks at me with these almond shaped eyes and little face... so I put the powdered milk in, even though I normally take black coffee. She watches me open the paper packet and pour it in, her eye level is much nearer to the brim of the cup than from where I'm seeing it. I lean over, we watch this together, powder dissolving in the cup in small clouds and imploding movements. I never really noticed it before... children are here to teach adults (I read in a blog recently?). *M* tells me to try it and see if it tastes nice. I try it and say yes.

Looking out the window, down on the land below, there's the surface of the planet; swirling movements of rivers and patterns of vegetation, land shaped by many millions of years of the

wind and climate, and it looks like the powdered milk dissolving in the coffee. Liquid in a small plastic cup 38,000 feet above what's seen on the surface of planet below; macro/micro, the oneness, all things have the same characteristics. *'Look, look at this, Toong-Ting!'* and I have to look again at something else *M* is doing and make a comment about that. We discuss it for a while, then back to considering the powdered milk in the coffee and I'm feeling this same continuing state that's empty of thought. I know that *M* is going to ask another question soon so part of my attention is occupied with being ready for that with a clear mind; *metta*, loving kindness. I'm a passive passenger transported on an aircraft, aware of the immediate surroundings; a gentle bumping of the plane, the hiss and hum of the engines. Just a sort of space I am occupying right now, no more than this...

Photo Image: Flowers growing in a Thai temple in Buddhist India

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/May 10, 2013

Postcard 014/- persistence of the dream



POSTCARD#014/: **A village near Hat Yai:** Here in a house surrounded by trees, it's nearly one year since I was last in this place [[Link to earlier post: 'nothing in itself'](#)]. Birdsong and mostly quietness; only a faint noise from the road reaches us here, drifting in according to wind direction. And the sound of two puppy dogs *yap-yap* tied up on long leads, getting bathed by being dragged along the concrete path, pulled under the garden tap and held there as long as possible (they're so small you can do that), then untangling the leads is the difficult part. They soon dry off in the hot sun. The chicken population *chirp-chirp* of last year has disappeared from this world, some eaten by carnivorous nocturnal creatures that watch from the edge of the clearing. Most are eaten by carnivores who live in the house – thus the truth of farmyard life is revealed. A new population of chickens pecks the ground *chirp-chirp* where the others once pecked, and who's to say they're not the same ones reborn? A piebald kitten *miaow* goes around seeking attention, *miaow*. Four cows; three have bells *tingaling, tingaling, tingaling* around the neck and there's one with a bamboo bell that goes *clacka-clacka*. Three of the animals are dignified and silent; there's one that goes *moo-aaaah*, feeling a bit hard-done-by, maybe. I don't know if it's the one with the bamboo bell; that's just the way it is, no obvious connection; no reason for it – or for anything. There's just this multiplicity of loosely related phenomena that has the characteristics of a farmyard scene. It's like this right now because it's nearly evening, and everything's going: *chirp-chirp, yap-yap, miaow-miaow, tingaling-tingaling, clacka-clacka* and *moo-aaaah*. Sun turns orangey, pinkish purple, sinks rapidly below the horizon – no twilight. Approaching darksome night mystery, and wild nocturnal carnivores wait in stealth at the edge of shadow. Insects *zzzzling* and large moths surround the porch light that's left on till morning.



Upstairs in the half-dark of the guest bedroom, *M* can't go to sleep. *'I not go to sleep yet, Toong-Ting. You have to tell me a story'*, she says, addressing me as *Toong-Ting*, in her 9 year old way of giving people and things in the World different names. It's my responsibility, I'm the fictionist. Too late now to go find a story book from downstairs, and I try telling her that... *'Then you tell me your story, your own'*, *M* says. This means I have to invent something... there's just no getting away from it. So, in an inspired moment, I start telling her about all the birds here around the house and, when we leave next week, all the chickens and the rooster and the ducks and birds in the trees and the owls will come with us to the airport. They'll have to take a taxi by themselves because there are so many of them but the driver can follow us in our car. They don't have to check in any bags because they don't have any bags, of course. They just get on the plane with us, perch on the seat backs and arm rests and fold-away tables and go: *chirp-chirp, cockadoodledoo, quack-quack, woo-woo, tweet-tweet* as the plane rushes along the runway, up into the air, flies away into the clouds, far far away until nobody on the ground can see it anymore. There's a short pause and *M* asks me, *'Leally (really) Toong-Ting? Why the birds go in a plane, they can fly by themselves?'* And, yes, there's this unforeseen logistical problem about the story, I realize – so, I begin my explanation for these circumstances then notice that *M* has fallen into the dream and is already asleep...

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/May 14, 2013

Postcard 013/- Dependent Origination

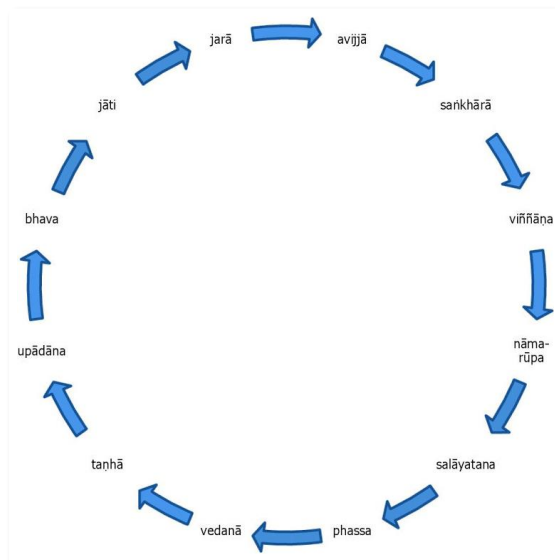


Image obtained from © rukkhamula.wordpress.com

POSTCARD#013/: Excerpts from an English translation of three talks given by Ajahn Buddhadasa to a Dhamma study group in Siriraj Hospital, Bangkok in 1961 and 1962.

Sabbe dhamma nalam abhinivesaya: Nothing whatsoever should be clung to.

“Usually, the ego is thinking ‘I am me,’ and ‘this is mine.’ It’s divisive and selfish. Whenever possible, we must mindfully drop all claims to our Self. “If we are empty of egoism, there is no consciousness of ‘I’ and ‘mine’. We have the truth-discerning awareness that can extinguish Dukkha and is the cure for the spiritual disease.”

“Whenever one sees a form, hears a sound, smells an odour or fragrance, touches a tactile object, or has a thought arise in the mind, the feeling of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ arises, and it can be taken to mean Dukkha, suffering, which manifests itself, therefore we are caught; the mind disease is fully developed.”

“[Thus] whenever forms, sounds, odours/fragrances, flavours, tangible objects, and mental phenomena crowd in, the antibody, ‘nothing whatsoever should be clung to’, will strongly resist the disease. The ‘germ’ will not enter or if it is allowed to do so, it will be only in order to be completely destroyed. There will be an absolute and perpetual immunity.”

Note: For Buddhists, there are only three possible feelings: pleasantness (I want it), unpleasantness (I don’t want it) or neutral feelings (I neither want it nor don’t want it).

“I want it” or “I don’t want it” are the precursor to desire and aversion--the clinging to pleasant feeling or the rejection of unpleasant feelings.

The Diagram

The cycle begins with Ignorance and ends with Aging & Death. It might seem curious that Birth is only one stage before Aging & Death, but Birth is to be understood as a momentary ‘birth’ and death is the end of the cycle. It is possible to go around the cycle in an instant. Usually, as soon as there is contact with a sense-object there is Phassa, and the subsequent development of Vedana, Tanha and so on, it happens immediately – right around the cycle.

Note: No reference at all is made to the stages before salayatana (the 6 sense bases). This makes our practice much easier; we only have to think of two steps: Phassa or Vedana. It is good to have an understanding of all twelve, steps of course, and more details can be found at:

We have to try to stop the cycle at Phassa (sense-contact) by having the neutral response, 'I neither want it nor don't want it', and not allowing the cycle of dependent arising to take place; by sheer force of mind, cutting it off right at the moment of sense-contact.

If, at the moment of sense-contact, the cycle can be stopped, and there is only Phassa, then there is no arising of 'I', 'me' or 'mine'.

If it is too difficult to stop the cycle at Phassa, we can focus on the next stage, Vedana and stop it there. By holding Vedana with the neutral feeling, 'I neither want it nor don't want it', and not allowing feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction to arise, the cycle is ended there because there is no development of the next stage, Tanha (craving) and Upadana (clinging). The cycle completes in an instant and there is no arising of the 'I' 'me' and 'mine'.

All events (Dharmas) arise in dependence upon other events:

"if this exists, that exists; if this ceases to exist, that also ceases to exist". The basic principle is that all events arise in dependence upon other events. The Buddha understood experiences as "processes subject to causation." This means that "nothing is independent (except nirvāna). A phenomenon arises because of conditions which are present to support its arising. And the phenomenon will cease when the conditions supporting its arising no longer sustain it.

The Law of Dependence Origination is a realistic way of understanding the universe and is the Buddhist equivalent of Einstein's Theory of Relativity. The fact that everything is nothing more than a set of relations is consistent with the modern scientific view of the material world. Since everything is conditioned, relative, and interdependent, there is nothing in this world which could be regarded as a permanent entity, a self, or an eternal soul. Many people who are not able to see the Truth, are afflicted by Sorrow – born often into conditions that are dismal and dreary, where confusion and prolonged suffering prevail. And, they do not know how to disentangle themselves to get out.

Postcard 012/- the holding-on habit



POSTCARD#012/: *A village near Hat Yai:* Sitting in the house with *M*, it's been raining and the farmyard is a plethora of muddy things. *M* is inclined to stay indoors and that's how it is today, a day of uncertainty, the catastrophe of failed projects, unfinished paper structures, and fooling around with the camera phone. *M* is tired with the stories in her 9 year-old world. Some excitement and interest when: *clacka-clacka*, the sound of the cow with the bamboo bell around its neck, energetically chomping the grass that grows around the house – all this thick lush grass in the wetness. The other cows, four altogether, have been brought home because it's the end of the day and soon they'll be herded into the cowshed and closed in for the night. I ask *M* if she'd like to go out? *We can get the big umbrella and go look at the cows?* But this is not a good question to ask right now.

Complex emotions, *M* is suffering a disappointment. We took her to the bookshop in town. There was a book about science with a 'SUPER SCIENCE KIT' in a large box that went with it. The thing is, it was really too advanced for *M* but she became convinced she had to have it. So we got it, came back to the house and I started to look at the instructions. Opening the box and assembling the pieces of the kit, test tubes and small pieces of plastic equipment – all that goes okay, but following the instructions to carry out the experiments, has no meaning for her. She simply doesn't know where to begin and I can't explain because of our limited communication. She tries to enter a created story with a 'pretend' thing but science doesn't work like that. Somebody thoughtfully removes the difficult SUPER SCIENCE KIT and all that can be done now is damage repair. *M* is quiet. I ask her if there's anything I can do, and she says, '*... no, is OK, Toong-Ting.*' (Toong-Ting is *M*'s pet name for me.) I suggest we read a book or play with the iPad... then I remember there's no Internet and some of her apps don't work. That's part of the problem. '*No, Toong-Ting, is OK,*' she says.



So I sit with her, everything is dull and meaningless – I can feel it too. *M* makes small, whimpering sounds like her digital kittens on the iPad. She's holding my arm, cuddled up in a small ball next to me, eyes closed and face hidden away, struggling with the uncertainty of her world. Thai children are taught *othon [khanti]* patient endurance – or it could be an inherited character trait. I don't have any children of my own, so no experience; having *M* in my world is

an opportunity for me to learn. What I notice is, there are no tears or tantrums that I'd expect (from Western children). Here, it's more like a locked-in holding. I'm available, ready to support, but I can't do much to divert her attention. It's the holding-on habit and what this is about is just allowing for these moments of not knowing that we've all got to get through, somehow, and the uncomfortable feelings that go with it. Just letting them go...

I'm affected by the mood, it's really tense, but can sit quietly without making a 'thing' out of it. The self is a sensory experience. The experiencer is itself an experience. Consciousness is the sensory organ of the void. There can be nothing separate from this, except the ability to think about things. The question, then, is: *what is thought?* And thinking about thought, itself, leads only to the empty space where the question used to be...

Sometime after that somebody finds a small bottle of food colouring in the kitchen and I show *M* what happens when you put a tiny drop of it into a test tube of clear water. The violet colour is like a tendril of descending smoke curling around the inside of the test tube and her whole attention is focused on this extraordinary event; the world is opening up again... *wow!* how to develop this? The uncertainty of the moment has vanished and suddenly everything seems full of wonderful choices....

Upper Photo: My pic of M taking a photo of me. Lower photo: The cows coming home

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/May 21, 2013

Postcard 011/- loving-kindness to animals 2



POSTCARD#011/: *A village near Hat Yai:* Going to see the cows with *M* and we meet the first one. I ask *M* about pulling on the rope tied through it's nose and if she thinks that would be painful? *M* tells me it's like pulling your hand and she pulls me along by holding on to my finger: '*Like this Toong-Ting*' – laughing, Toong-Ting as a reluctant cow... I can hear the voice of (her auntie) Pa K, who lives here, a down-to-earth farming person; and I guess *M* must have asked Pa K the same question and she'd shown her, as *M* shows me now. I'm also aware that *M* sees me a bit like a grown-up child, because I'm a foreigner and have such naïve views about things. For us Westerners, the simplicity of rural life is attractive, but we're not able to see it in the long term, or accept the hard work that's necessary to be able to live like that. Also having to accept basic truths like killing animals for food and all that... yes, well, I don't discuss this with *M*. We just go on through all the wet ground towards the other cows in the distance.

There was another time I came here to visit the cows, and met the little cow with the bamboo bell around its neck: *clacka-clacka* sound when it's eating grass – strange grass-eating rhythms. We stop and look at it, and it looks at us. Such a miniature creature, it looks like a calf, and comes towards me with cautious movements, swinging head in motion with the way it walks. It raises it's head and points a snuffling, sniffing wet snout in my direction; bits of grass and green stained mouth. Large snorts. Then it extends a long tongue and sticks it in it's nostril (how do they do that?), comes a bit closer and there's quite a bit of sniffing of the air around me. This cute little cow is curious about me due to a certain familiar milky smell coming through the pores of my skin? It's not smelling the others who are with me like this... This don't drink much milk so I'm thinking, *hmmm*, here's proof that the Western body releases a noticeable odour of milk. I know this little cow has never been near to a Western person before in its life. The recognition of this milky smell, a familiarity: I am an upright, standing-on-it's-hind-legs member of the species – a cow person? A bit disturbing... I'm conscious, all of a sudden, that humans are carnivores and there's this unpleasant conceit about being at the top of the food chain that's bothering me right now.



Later, reflecting on this while eating a breakfast of grains, nuts, fruit and cow's milk – jaws move in a slightly circular motion, down up, down, up, down, grind, grind, and swallow. I'm an animal too. I consume the environment, whether it's other animals, fish, vegetables, eggs, milk and – we are the cow's babies! I notice cutting up vegetables is a bit of a sacrifice too; every time I start to cook food there is the opportunity for this kind of contemplation. Vegetables and fruit may not have the obvious characteristics of sentient beings but we may eat their reproductive organs along with everything else and that's kinda weird...

There's a couple of lines of text somewhere in an essay by Tan Ajahn Buddhadasa, that I cannot find at the moment; it's about consciousness of all the things we eat, bits of animals, poultry and fish and how all their ghosts will come back to haunt us in the end. Pretty scary, nowhere to run, everything we are: mental, physiological, flesh, blood, and bones is a composite of what we have eaten, internalized. And it extends back through the generations to the beginning of time. The cellular substance of what we are is a genetic composite of all kinds of animal fats and enzymes and there's just no getting away from it.

Contemplating the eating of meat helps me to see the true extent of my delusion driven by a voracious appetite for all consumables. Things I feel drawn to consume surround me – non-food items; ideas, concepts, 'mind' hungers for mind object. Consciousness is clouded over by habitual 'mind'. Remove habitual 'mind' and there may be something like a deluge of reality comes in and with it comes a satisfactory understanding of the mystery that people eat animals.



When Acharn Mun was at the end of his life, weak and lying in a village in NE Thailand, a very large number of his followers began to assemble. He asked the bhikkhus to take him away from the village because the villagers would have to kill many animals to feed those people. They took him to a nearby town where there were market places and various kinds of prepared food could be easily obtained. Shortly after that Ajahn Mun passed away.

'From the day of my ordination I have never thought of harming (animals), let alone killing them. I have always extended my loving-kindness to them, never neglecting to share with them all the fruits of my merit. It would be ironic if my death were to be the cause of their deaths ('The Venerable Phra Acharn Mun Bhuridatta Thera, Meditation Master', page 201 – 202).

Sections originally posted in *loving-kindness to animals 1*

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/May 24, 2013

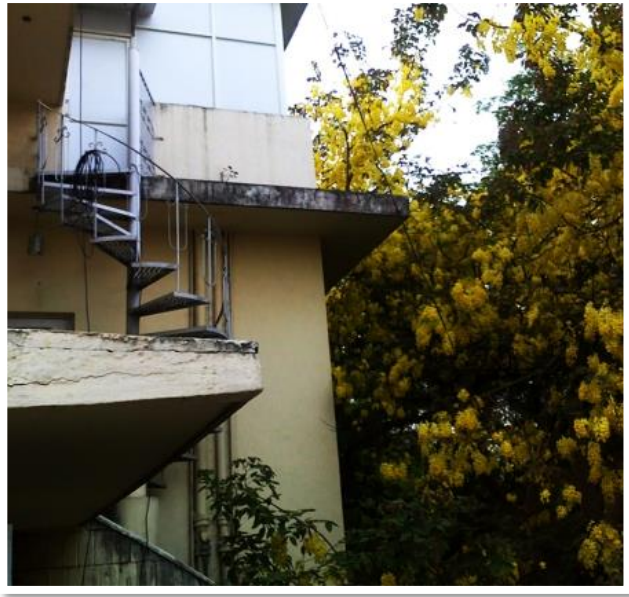
Postcard 010/- sustaining factors



POSTCARD#010/: *New Delhi:* Monkeys swing through the trees, jump down on to the roof terrace and turn on the tap to have a drink of water. I don't mind; except that they don't turn it off when they're finished, just leave it running – water trickling down the drain from up above – that's how I know they've been there. The neighbours have the same problem. I see somebody climbing up a ladder to the water tank up there at the highest point... *what's he doing?* hmmm, replacing the tank lid; the monkeys have pulled it off to get in and drink, and have a little freshen up. Yes, well, it's hot here, Jiab said around 45°C. Not worth it, being precise about temperatures above 40°, just waves of hotter air wafting around in slightly less hot air, something like being in a swimming pool of hot water. It's so hot, I feel like a pancake on a hot plate. I don't want to eat a pancake, I feel I am a pancake... cooked and kept warm. No problem, really, we have a room in the house with air-con, and I'm in there. All I need to consider are these long power cuts, but nothing more than 10 minutes. Longer than that is uncommon. But it did happen once [[Link: Power Failure](#)], what can you do? If it happens, it happens – the uncertainty element. Causes and conditions, no more than that. Phenomena are sustained only as long as their sustaining factors remain.

I can't say I'm as detached as that when it comes to coping with stifling heat but knowing that this is how it is helps me to ease off and away from the proliferating stories in the head I don't know are there because I'm seeing *through* them [[Link to: The World is Made of Stories](#)]. If there happen to be long periods with no air-con, it's best to go outside, find a shady spot to sit and say hello to the neighbours, who're all outside for exactly the same reason. Outside is better than in; the heat is trapped in these brick and concrete oven-like buildings. But, so far-so good, most of the time I'm sitting in this cool room.

It's still early morning but I better get on and cook the food for the day because the kitchen will be like a furnace by noon. I open the door to go in there and enter an atmosphere that could be the planet Mars, images of volcanic slopes and bubbling lava... I have to boil water in the electric kettle, a curious old thing made of metal and if you forget to empty out any remaining water at night, when it has cooled down, tiny ants climb up the side and sit there enjoying the coolness of this small reservoir. Then, for some reason I find them drowned in the water the next morning. I think they must drift off in a dream state and fall in. I suggested to Jiab we just spoon out the ants, then boil the water but this is not well received: *I do not want tea made with water that has been swam in by ants!* So I've learned to empty out leftover water in a bucket to give to the plants.



Kettle boils, add the hot water to the steamer, put in the vegetables and switch on the gas. I can sympathize with the ants, there's a ceiling fan spinning around, swooshing and splooshing the hot air in gusts and not doing much to lower the temperature. I have to switch it off, even so, when using the gas cooker because the gas flames get blown out and I'd asphyxiate in gas-flavored hot air (limp bizkit, chocolate starfish and the hot dog flavored water – no, no, not that, please...). Switch on the extractor fan, maybe that'll help. The stove heats up the atmosphere by another 10 degrees and now it must be about 50°C. Strangely, it seems okay because there's an object in awareness; the heat is coming from that; the gas stove. I don't notice it's hot, just standing waiting for the food to heat up, then it's done and I can return to my cool room...

All there is, is sitting in the coolness with this mindful alertness: the possibility that the power may go out any moment. There are more attention-grabbing existential phenomena but this'll do me... listening for the monkeys and M's little rhyme she taught me in Thailand comes to mind...

Five little monkeys jumping on the bed, one fell off and bumped his head. Mama called the doctor and the doctor said: "No more monkeys jumping on the bed." Four little monkeys...

Upper Photo: monkey-tap-India_16761531 GIRISH KUMAR : Message : Animals in News. Lower Photo: Cassia fistula, golden shower tree (the tree the monkeys use to access my roof).

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/May 28, 2013

Postcard 009/- halfway through the hot season



POSTCARD#009/: *New Delhi:* I wake up sometime deep in the afternoon. No need to look at the clock, the haze of light tells me it's not yet 4pm, the time when it turns towards late afternoon and the cooler evening. So I continue lying there on the sofa, for a while, letting it sink in that I need to go upstairs to the roof terrace and get my laundry off the line – left for too long, the clothes get crisp and semi-baked. In a few minutes I'm upstairs, open the door at the top landing and step out into +40° centigrade, a blaze of mature, afternoon sunlight reflected off the concrete floor and walls. The air is a tangible thing, heavy like liquid, consistency of thick translucent soup. It has weight; there's a sense of displacing the quantity of it that equals the mass of your body as you walk through – it squelches around the back and over your head and occupies the place where you were a moment ago. The presence of this extraordinary heat causes the mind to create reasons for it. Difficult to see clearly, most of the time I am involved with it (or I am it), depending on perceptions and understanding of the circumstances:

'Investigating the mind... requires the use of the very thing we want to study. The mind functions as both the subject and object in this case. In a conventional sense, this limits us to a superficial understanding, possibly coupled with a glimpse of some deeper aspects in the mind (or qualities of mind) that we recognize only through intuition. The superficiality is locked in by our descriptive language that attaches labels to the surface of things, preventing a meaningful exploration of either subject or object. Meditation is the entering into this process. It allows us to penetrate the barrier of chaotic language, taking us beyond rationality and placing the mind's eye beyond the influence of the intellect.' [Ajahn Sumano, 'Meeting the Monkey Halfway']

I go over to look at the tap where the monkeys come to drink and when they've finished, leave the water running and the tank goes dry. Then we have to start up the pump more often than usual. But no sign of any activity here, no puddles, no monkeying around. There's a large basin full to the brim sitting below the tap. Jiab suggested we put it there, instead of the monkeys allowing the tap to run like that, and they can drink and fool around with the water – generosity. The neighbours would probably not approve of us providing facilities for the monkeys, even though we're just allowing them to do what they do and be what they are – monkeys. For me it's a novelty; they're our near cousins, there's a mutuality, we have some understanding of how we each see the world.



I get my laundry off the line quickly. Held in the fold of an arm, the clothes are hot and burning. Open the door, scald fingers on door handle, step into the stairwell, close the door behind me to stop the furnace heat from getting in. Down the stairs, drop the laundry in the basket and into the L-shaped room; two air-conditioners running, three ceiling fans, and my desk is in there, in the coolest corner of it. Smooth tiled floor where I walk barefoot and all curtains drawn closed to keep out the glare, except for one that offers a shaded view through the foliage of the large leafy tree outside in the garden and the various tints of translucent green leaves through which sunlight filters. I see in the newspaper today the southwest monsoon arrived in Kerala, South India. Here in Delhi, we're maybe only halfway through the hot season...

Note: The monkey and the orange story developed from a discussion with Lisa A. McCrohan

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/June 2, 2013

Postcard 008/- girl at the traffic lights



POSTCARD#008/: *New Delhi:* Sitting in the car, *Shym* driving, and I'm in the back seat looking out through tinted windows, incognito. Slow down and stop at the traffic lights. Street people and traders walking up and down between the vehicles, selling kiddy's toys, books, and all kinds of stuff. Children with bunches of wilted roses knocking on windows, and discussing with passengers in auto rickshaws. One of them presses her face against my window, hands and arms cupped around her head so she can see inside through the tinted glass film. A shadowy head and face spin around looking for where I'm situated in the dark interior. Finds me, then some kind of eye contact, and: *tap-tap-tap-tap* on the glass with a small coin.... *tap-tap*. Doing it just to see what'll happen. *Shym* puts the car in gear and drives forward a little bit, trying to discourage her but she remains stuck to the glass like glue, walking sideways, legs slightly back out of the way of the turning wheels.



I slide down the window and give her a folded 10-rupee note. Hot street air enters the cool interior of the car like a blast from a huge hair dryer, and I see a dark girl about 9, with hair a light reddish-brown colour, dusty with the street atmosphere. The entrepreneur. How does it look to her? A foreigner gives her money, somebody with colourless eyes, pale, half invisible; like a creature that lives at the bottom of the sea, no sunlight. Her dark eyes hold my attention, intense, penetrating; there's only 'the look'. I slide up the window again. Giving her a few rupees is encouraging this kind of livelihood – that's not really what I want to happen... but what to do? The lights change and we're off, accelerating through the traffic, overtaking on the left, or the right, wherever there's a space.



There's a small smear on the glass where she was looking in. How does the world seem, seen through her eyes? Must be a no-choice situation; hardship at a level I can't comprehend – we're not watching the same movie. But it reminds me of something in the early times in Scotland. In those days I was pretty much caught between polarities. A rocky road. I went down South to England and I'd look at other people's lives there; unbelievable to me, how their reality seemed to be so... bland? Where I was living you'd open the door of your house to go out and the wind would blow you back in. Extremes of climate, extraordinary confrontations; the rough and tumble. At that time, I didn't know about the Buddhist perspective on suffering *dukkha*, all I had was the experience of it. "The cloud of unknowing"... life was held by random karma. Consciousness was a kind of unconsciousness. Awake but unclear, living in a dream... *dum-di-dum*. Subject to all the whims and fancies; tugs and pulls. Like/unlike – and for long periods, quite lost in *samsaric realms*. I thought I could just carry on like that, hoping to muddle on through...

Carefree, at times, and reckless, not happy, no sense of an applied mindfulness other than, *okay, so... what's going on here?* Sometimes I was nearly right, other times terribly wrong. I'd weather the storm and somehow things stayed okay. The mistake was (although there are no mistakes) I'd be trying to get 'it' to do something or be something or become something (or not become something), without realizing that I didn't have to do anything with it, or make a 'thing' out of it, or have it become anything. Just letting it be there in the background, or the foreground or seeing it in the middle distance, not focusing on it unduly – whatever. So the 'it' became not so important; less and less of an identity found in the 'object', more like a larger subjectivity. It's the same for everyone but at the time I thought it was just happening to 'me'.



It's not about guarding that little self-construct called 'me'. The Buddha's Noble Truth of Suffering is about receiving the suffering as it is, conscious experience. Open wide and let it in so then there'll not be a self for it to attach to. If I can allow the Suffering to enter, I'm not confused by it or perplexed by the fact that I don't know why I don't know what it is. I 'know' what it is: maintaining a 'self' that isn't there. So I can let all of that go. It's about

relinquishment, giving it all away – a shared experience. A kind of generosity, like giving money to the girl at the traffic lights; she was there to enable my simple act of generosity (*raison d'être* for panhandlers). Who knows, maybe she has the wisdom I've been looking for all these years. I've been caught in delusion, a dull *puzzleheadedness*, caused by the influence of the painted consumer god, the psychiatrist witch-doctors – is it so very different from her world? Failing to see that if my life is never nourished by anything greater than what I need and want, I become cynical and negative. There are some people like that; holding on to 'self' with such tenacity, they get old and bitter with disappointment. Offering something to somebody else makes me feel good, brings gladness into my life... *'The Buddha-Dhamma spreads out from here to all sentient beings throughout the universe. Mettā, loving-kindness and goodwill is generated for the welfare and development of all beings everywhere: seen, unseen, born, not born yet, animals, devils and angels. The whole cosmology of possible sentient beings is included in the practice of mettā bhāvanā...'* [Ajahn Sumedho]

– G R A T I T U D E –

Ajahn Sucitto, for the use of the word: 'puzzleheadedness' also edenriley.com and thehindu.com

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/June 7, 2013

Postcard 007/- nothing cannot be anything



POSTCARD#007/: *Delhi:* There's a needle in my arm. Strange how the body accepts this intrusive object and the antibiotic fluid coming through it that enters the blood stream. Veins have a plasticity like something synthetic we recognize from the world of manufactured polymer substances. But human tissue is better; you can make a hole in it and it repairs itself. You can cut it, stitch it up, remove parts of it and replace these with other parts that fit. The human body is a miracle. The pain of this needle, though, has a directness, increasing, then easing off, over and over, *dukkha*, there's no getting away from it.

I don't want it to be there, *vibhava-tanha*, I want to disconnect it from the plastic tube leading to the upside-down bottle suspended from the hook above my head. It feels unnatural; it shouldn't be like this.... Lying here on the bed looking up and counting the drips that fall into the receptor that fills the tube; one drop every 4 seconds and that's the rate of the fluid flowing down the tube into my pierced blood vessel. It's a full bottle, and there are others I have to take after this one... treatment for an intestinal infection – nothing really extraordinary in a country like India, in the hot season, when all kinds of bacteria thrive. Caused by drinking water from a filtered system that didn't filter. Organisms survive the filtering system; bugs everywhere in this intensity of 43°C.

I need to find a way of getting through this period of invalid status and prolonged boredom of a plain room with hospital fittings, plugs and sockets in the walls, hospital furniture and a TV screen I'm not interested in. Dissatisfaction with things; clicking the buttons that control the position of the hospital bed; down/up and up/down. Lying here with eyes closed, listening to the metal trash bin; it makes a satisfying percussive sound when the cleaner presses the pedal with his foot, lid springs open and strikes the wall next to it *Clang!* He releases the pedal and the lid closes: *Flumpf* an airtight trash bin with plastic bag liner. *Crash! Flumpf!* again and it's joyful and funny.

I need some joy here, there are men in dark navy uniforms in the room; cleaners with large grey floor mops that look like they're soaked in muddy water swabbing the tiles; smell of Dettol stings the eyes. Muddy grey mops and dark navy uniforms seem out of place in an environment of lemon yellow, soft pink walls; pastel shades and shiny chromium fittings. The muddy grey mops are a bit scary also, because I'm sensitive to things that appear dirty, having fallen into this sickness as a result of drinking water from a filter machine installed at home that allows dirty water to come through.

'We're not in Kansas anymore Toto...' The doctor said always drink boiled water in the hot season, organisms are present in the water, filter or no filter. I feel some frustration with the company that sold me the water filter: 'it shouldn't be like this'... but we don't live in a world of 'should' and 'shouldn't' – western theory applied in an Indian context. We expect it to work, and it doesn't. Western systems are deductive and life is inductive. Organic growth has no beginning no end. How to understand that, what to do? Don't make it into a structure. Let it be nothing.

So I can lie here on the bed with my eyes closed and the cleaners expect me to be like this because I'm a hospital patient. And in this curious public place, enter meditative contemplation, watching the breath, the rising and falling of the chest. Allow the thoughts that arise to fall away and be replaced by others that I allow to fall away and allow everything to fall away and cease, as far as possible – just the effort of trying to do this leads to a quietness in the mind; spaces of no thought. There's some peace to be found in this activity. And from here consider nothingness, just nothing, no thought. It's not an idea of nothingness, that's a concept. Nothing cannot be anything. Nothing cannot be located anywhere in time or space; no before, no after. If it is truly nothing, it can have no cause or effect. I can't work towards some mind state in future time when I'll see what 'nothing' really is, it has to be now, it's always 'now'. Nothing cuts through, penetrates, and dissolves everything. It's just nothing.

'One must have a mind of winter... (to behold) the nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.' [[Wallace Stevens](#), The Snow Man]

Photo image: <http://www.jeffzinn.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/poor.jpg>

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/June 12, 2013

Postcard 006/- conflict & release



“Metta is non-discriminatory. It doesn’t mean liking one thing rather than another, it isn’t a question of singling out: “I love this person, I don’t love that one.” [Ajahn Sumedho, “Universal Loving Kindness” From Forest Sangha Newsletter, October 1997]

POSTCARD#006/: *North India:* The image here shows some kind of serious argument happening among a group of men, viewed from the window of a moving bus. I couldn’t actually see what was happening because other passengers were in the way, but I got the camera into a space near the window of the bus and took the picture, guesswork, thinking it’ll not come out clearly but it did – perfectly positioned in the centre of the frame. The man in the green shirt is trying to do something with that pole and the other guys are struggling with him violently. The bus pushed itself on through the crowd and the people made space for it. When we got up close, all I could see was the top of their heads and I took the photo without seeing where to point the camera...

The bus moved on and we were gone in a moment, accelerating along empty streets. I was amazed to see the photo after we’d moved away from the area. What to do with it? The tremendous intensity coming from the green-shirted man is scary – murderous feelings in the air. There’s another emotion too, he looks tearful, as if he might start to cry. It was an event I didn’t see, all I have is this picture of it. I could hear the explosions of angry voices, and the memory of it is still a bit scary, but it didn’t happen to me. If it hadn’t been for the camera lens, I’d not have seen it. As long as no effort is there to keep it going, conflict falls away. But we fuel the fires to keep the conflict going; our wars and war-mongering, allowing everyone the means to build up the tension, justified outrage, creating stories in the mind. We could just as easily allow it to fall away, but we’re drawn in, and it gets to a point when conflict is inevitable; this is always how it is.

Then Ajahn Vajiro was in town the other day and somebody asked him about what to do when you have to put up with some unreasonable, insensitive person giving you a hard time and you have to see this person on a daily basis. Ajahn spoke about the *Brahma Viharas* and later Suffering, the First Noble Truth and how the Buddha didn’t say he could eliminate suffering – he gave us the tools to escape the suffering. It led me to see that conflict is resolved if we can focus on the subjective nature of it, see our own anger, and see the anger the ‘bad guy’ has to cope with, and recognise it as exactly the same thing – what’s the difference?

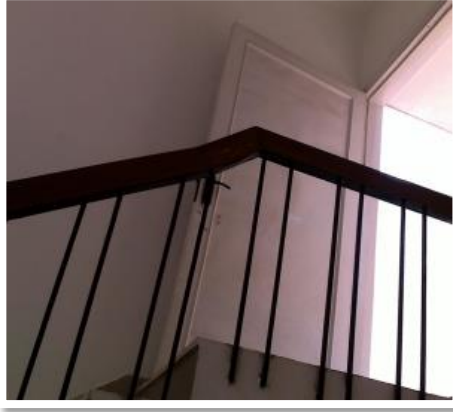
The practice of meditation is the solution. Ajahn talked about getting to know the inner world; start from there, explore the universe from the inside. It’s not just about feelings of bliss and peace, that’s there too but it’s about the real world. Long term goals. Following this path, you get to know about suffering; you notice your own suffering, you have compassion and act towards others with compassion when you notice the suffering in your opponent. Apply wisdom – especially if your opponent is swinging a long pole, aimed at your head. See the angry person as someone who doesn’t understand his/her own suffering and recognise their difficulty – then get out of the way of the swinging pole!

It's about the difference between 'knowing' and ignorance. Ignorance is the result of unskillful action. Non-ignorance (knowing) is about accepting limitations and doubt. It's not a sure thing but it doesn't have to be a serious drawback; having to cope with being not sure, uncertainty. Ajahn V described it as being at the edge of the known; doubt is nearly knowing what it is.... In a different context, uncertainty is what's in the wrapped gift you've been given. You don't know what's inside until you open it....

"The metta – kindness – engendered in us encourages us to accept ourselves and others, and so to understand ourselves and others. Understanding implies wisdom. And this wisdom is that which allows us to find the way, to grow beyond, or let go of, that which limits and binds the heart. The kindness expressed to others allows them to accept themselves and others. This is an emotional, gut or heart acceptance that allows the acts of body, speech and mind that are a response to that which is perceived as 'other' to be kind; not motivated by not-liking, not motivated by aversion or fear. The effect is unlimited Metta is radiant and attractive, warming to those that are cold, cooling to those that are hot." [Venerable Ajahn Vajiro – "Mature Emotions" from the Forest Sangha Newsletter]

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/June 14, 2013

Postcard 005/- the opportunity



POSTCARD#005/: *New Delhi:* I leave the door open that leads to the roof terrace and come downstairs. *Ksum* is in the kitchen, cleaning up. She says: *You no close door up?* Pointing, so that I can understand her English; large black eyes look at me; blue sari, olive skin, Assamese Buddhist, originally, converted by Christian missionaries. Then she's smiling in a kind of patient way when I start to explain I'd like to have the door open, to get fresh air? Looking at me like, does she have the energy to tell me this? *Ked come in. You know Ked?* ...raises her voice because maybe I'm deaf or something, *Ked come in, you open door.* And I'm thinking... what's *Ked?* And there's that incredulous look. *You no unerstan' Ked? Ked come in door, come down stair, into house steal food from all th' trash'n make a mess everywhere!* And then I understand *Ked* is 'Cat'... pronunciation is different. She sees the dawning of recognition on my face. *Ahh...* she says on my behalf, and nods her head with a sideways slant, goes back to her work; like I need to be told everything. I go upstairs to close the door then decide to step out on the roof terrace where the air is cool and nice.

Wow, *Ksum* having a bad day. But she's right about *Ked*, cat; instinct and the window of opportunity – or door, in this case. There's also monkey, of course, and rat, and all the other freeloaders and opportunists out there in the world of Wild Life, claws, wings, beak and teeth, quick and clever; skills evolved from when they were all dinosaurs. The ability to grasp, snatch, hold and eat. Human beings similarly motivated, driven by desire. Reacting to the sensory world – sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch, mental objects, and grabbing at these with extraordinary speed. The habituality of it inherited from former lives... *the reason I was reborn in this world is that I'm attached to everything I love and hate.* We keep coming back. It's the relentless search to feel good about everything, and avoid feeling bad about everything when the good feeling falls apart.



Carrot-and-stick; the good feeling is nice when it's there and the bad feeling is nice when it's not there. The good feeling makes it seem like everything in the world is alright, joyful, a sense of success; it's rewarding. And the bad feeling is the opposite; a strange sense of failure, guilt, and fear – I'm bounced off the wall and wanting the good feeling again with renewed hunger. Chasing my tail. Stuck in the duality of exchanging the bad feeling for the good feeling – something thought to be deservedly earned, a reward for time spent in bad feeling. Stuck in a rut on the consumer treadmill without any belief in anything beyond that. Seemingly there's no choice, earning just enough money to pay for what it takes to make me feel good for a short time, then I'm feeling bad again. All I really want is some peace and calm but it seems to be so hard to find.

Loving kindness and compassion for those in Suffering. The system creates the predicament. Most people think there's no way out, even though the opportunity is there. It's like the example of being locked up in a prison cell for years. Then, one day somebody comes into the cell and gives you the key to the door, so you can open it and you're free. But instead of doing that, if you're a 'believer', you put the key in a special place and pray to it every day, believing you'll be able to endure all the hardships of your prison cell by worshipping the key. You don't know what to do, doubt, uncertainty, fear, confusion. Other people, 'non-believers', disagree with your worshipping; they say, *we don't believe in religion or anything*, so they decide the best thing to do is just get rid of the key and throw it out the window.

The key is not an end in itself. Just a key; meditation practice, mindfulness, just the intention to be mindful is enough. Back off from the automatic pull; the sense of something out there that I'm drawn towards... and the internal sense of 'me'. There's nothing there, only the Five *Khandas (Five Aggregates)*: form, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness. '*... stopping the mind, stopping the flow of thoughts that are proliferating, stopping the flow of moods that get drawn into either attraction or aversion. We return to a clear center, to awareness*' [Ajahn Pasanno, '*On Becoming and Stopping*']. No holding on to anything, no holding on to the teachings even. Learning how to use the key. Maybe it'll take a lifetime, but what else is there to do that's as valuable as this? Allowing everything to arise and fall away. Cessation. No remainder. Nothing whatsoever is to be clung to: *sabbe dhamma nalam abhinivesaya*.

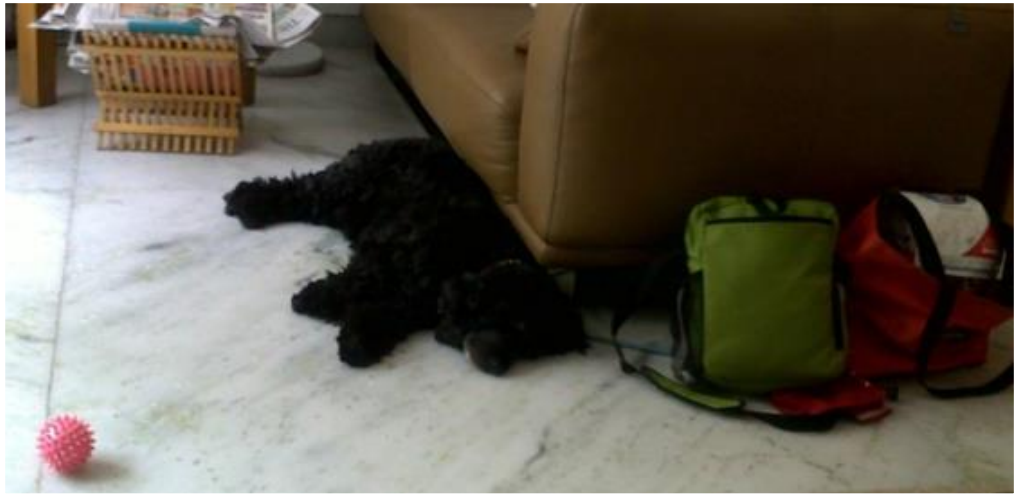


'We use the pleasant and unpleasant feelings to measure our success or failure. If we experience something pleasant, we think we've succeeded. If we experience an unpleasant feeling, we think we've failed. This comes from a place of becoming, what we have become through bhava tanha or vibhava tanha. We judge it in terms of the desire to maximize the pleasant and minimize the unpleasant.' [Ajahn Pasanno, '*On Becoming and Stopping*']

The story about the key comes from 'Religious Conventions and Sila Practice', Ajahn Sumedho, Cittaviveka 1992. Upper photo: the door to the roof terrace. Middle photo: sitting area on roof terrace. Lower photo: a plant called 'Ladies Who Wake Up Late' (flowers every day but late in the morning)

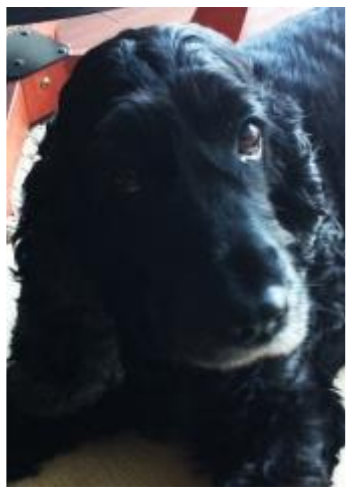
The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/June 21, 2013

Postcard 004/- Kiki



POSTCARD#004/: **New Delhi:** Kiki came to stay with us for a few days. Her owners went to Calcutta on business. Kiki is a black Cocker Spaniel, 10 years old in October this year and people say if you multiply a dog's age by seven, you get the equivalent age in humans; so she's like an oldish lady now. Kiki was born in Thailand, moved to Japan with her Japanese owner, then to Bangladesh, Vietnam, back to Japan and now she's in India. A much-travelled small dog, Kiki has her own immigration documents, a kind of doggie passport. I first met Kiki in Bangladesh 4 years ago and it's a bit sad to see she doesn't remember me at all. But she's older now, seen a lot, she's slower and can't be expected to remember everything. Kiki comes towards me with her little pink ball held in the mouth, drops it in a practiced way so that it rolls towards me. I pick it up and throw it and she runs to get it, but after about four throws she has to stop and have a rest.

We are given Kiki's things in two small bags, food, blanket, toilet equipment, ball and her owners say *bye-bye Kiki!* and leave. Kiki spends a long time sitting at the patio door looking out, waiting to see if they're coming back. But they're not coming back; I try to engage with her, I try to speak with her in a kind of doggie-speak, cute high pitched baby chatter. But it's not working very well because most of the time her owners speak to Kiki in Japanese. Kiki just looks at me, looks at Jiab, responds in a friendly way, but there's a distance. Jiab and I are just the faces of this moment; she knows we are the carers. Kiki has had carers speaking to her in Thai, Bengali, Vietnamese and Japanese and, anyway, she's limited because she's a dog.... Now she's just wondering which one of us, Jiab or me, is the alpha, the one to whom she will be answerable; which one is the main provider of food and taker-out-for-walks? And it's a new experience for us too, we don't know much about looking after dogs. So I'm wondering how this'll go, and thinking Kiki probably has that figured out already; the pros and cons of this situation, a naïve, abundant provider of tasty scraps from the table?



So we're eyeballing each other like this, a certain curiosity and interest in the air and Kiki is totally black like a photographic negative, I can't see any face, only a strip of pink tongue

hanging out. I'd be staring at her intently looking for a face then I discover it, see the black eyes, black nose and aware, all of a sudden, that Kiki is looking back at me! An encounter. Quite a lot of licking; affectionate doggie wetness – I put her food in the dish and there's great excitement but she doesn't eat, just sits there looking at it. I'm thinking maybe she doesn't like it... but then she turns around and looks at me, face to face, eye-contact, quite a meaningful moment. A recognition; is it about gratitude? I say something like, *go on then Kiki...* and she starts to eat, tremendous crunching noise, her bowl-shaped dish amplifies the sound, and the scrape and clatter of the dish sliding on the hard floor as it gets pushed along by a long black nose. Maybe the hesitation at the start was her saying: *look, I'm sorry, this is going to be noisy, okay?* Same thing with water, I'm sitting at the desk quietly and there's this huge *shlooshing, splooshing* sound.

The 'face' of Kiki got to be more and more of a significant element in our communication – no expression, quite plain, just a kind of awareness: non-verbal gazing at each other. At one point I say to her: *where's your ball?* and she immediately starts running around looking for it. I realise then that her Japanese owners must say that in English. So I get down on the floor and we are both looking under the sofa and the chairs. In the middle of all this, we look at each other, I'm on my knees, at her level. I say to her: *I don't know where it is...* hold that gentle look for a moment: *I don't know...* consider the enigma of our shared existence. There's something about this that gets my attention, she just looks. I come closer and look again at her dark face placed in a dark wooly body. There's a little movement of the head. I look under the sofa she's sitting next to and there is the ball! Difficult to reach because it's behind the bar but I can just get it, flick it out and Kiki runs off across the room chasing it. She catches it and comes back to me, drops it and I have to throw it again....

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/June 26, 2013

Postcard 003/- forbearance



POSTCARD#003/: *New Delhi:* Moving through the streets to get on the highway to the airport; rough and bumpy, chunks of road surface missing. Demolition and construction, the urban environment is getting knocked down and rebuilt. We stop at an obstruction in the road caused by a large lorry unloading bricks, sand, cement and all I can see is the rear end of all these small vehicles standing together, jostling to get through... transportation of goods and services; bits of pipes and fittings, cables and plumbing items. Packages wrapped in plastic, held with bungee cords on the back of motorbikes; components, textiles, items boxed in packaging. A cycle rickshaw with a refrigerator on the back, and another one blocking the space with a large plywood panel tied on with rope at an awkward angle.

Drivers getting upset, the sound of horns, people walking around this blockage and through the traffic, carrying things on their heads, dragging children. Pavements are not for pedestrians, there are obstacles, tree roots, missing paving stones, sometimes no pavement at all; heaps of rubble, deep holes below where the drainage system is seen. The earth is beneath the streets, beneath the tarmac and the concrete and the clay, a substance created by erosion, geological conditions. The 'developing world' – no such thing as the 'developed' world. All of it is subject to change.

Up above, there's a mass of overhead cables slung between high concrete posts, and a barefoot technician is up there on a bamboo ladder resting on the cables themselves, pushed out in a big stretch to accommodate the weight of him on the ladder. He's threading another set of cables through, his partner below holding the ladder and traffic gets past them like the river flows around the stones in its path.

The infrastructure of the city is in the centre of my vision, not hidden. Everything that the environment is made of; all this is seen, the inside of it as well as the outside. Systems, processes, how things are done – evidence that the world itself is a constructed thing, put together, assembled, built. It has an unfinished look, bits of it are missing, removed, or not installed yet, or just left exposed; somebody took away the screws that hold the cover plate in place.



Things are unexpected, uncertain, everything is so much not what we think it is, there are no assumptions. The Western point of view that it 'shouldn't be' like that – it 'should be' like this, is a concept imposed on a living organism, alive and moving. If I allow the organism to be as it is, I can disengage from the mind state where I think it's something it's not, and everything that's currently bothering me about that disappears. I choose to be with the uncertainty of it, more

and more; look at the dilemma of suffering without attaching to it; and challenge my tendency to see it in terms of a constructed self: *anicca, dukkha, anatta* – impermanence, suffering and no ‘self’.

Arrive at the airport, check in, and through to Departures, happy to be in these ‘normal’ surroundings ...*the flight for Bangkok is now ready for boarding...* I’m just a visitor, on my way to somewhere else. It’s difficult for me to have the infrastructure poking through into the way I choose to see things, because usually I have negativity and unpleasantness hidden away. Since childhood, my belief has been based on affirmative statements: the act of creation and the idea of a heaven... only pretty words. The truth is that ‘heaven’ is a reality beyond description – language doesn’t go that far. This kind of childlike ‘heaven’ is a fiction, not real in the sense that I am in the real world; the nuts-and-bolts of conscious experience, the present state of affairs. This here-and-now reality is fundamentally the same as it was 2,600 years ago, in the time of the Buddha, here in India.

What I’m trying to do now is to resolve the issue of fearful uncertainty by accepting the fact that there is an underlying sense of suffering (1. *dukkha*) in life and I need to contemplate this feeling with forbearance, rather than run away from it all the time. The direction this contemplation takes is simply to find out what it is I’m doing that’s causing the suffering (2. *tanha*), and stop doing that. It’s about letting go of whatever it is that’s causing it and I notice when that happens, the suffering stops (3. *nirodha*). This insight suggests there is a possibility I can stop the suffering completely and I follow the guidelines (4. *magga*) that show me how to do this consciously, in daily life. [[The Four Noble Truths](#)]

Time to go now, hand over the boarding pass to the Thai staff, she separates it along the perforation and hands me back the tab with my seat number. Goodbye India! I’ll be back in two months. Laptop bag on shoulder, and off down the passageway to the aircraft...

– G R A T I T U D E –

The subject matter and title of this post indirectly inspired by: Forbearance by Norman Fischer <http://standinginanopenfield.wordpress.com/2013/05/19/forbearance-by-norman-fischer/> Also mentioned in that site, a comment by Dominic724: ‘Without forbearance it’s just a pile of pretty words’. The ‘pretty words’ comment triggered a memory of the Joni Mitchell song titled: ‘The Last Time I Saw Richard’ (1970) and ‘pretty lies’ (When you gonna realize they’re only pretty lies ...). Lower picture image: Delhi Airport Departures

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/June 29, 2013

Postcard 002/- necessity of mindfulness



POSTCARD#002/: *Bangkok:* Getting into town from the airport is okay to start with, gliding along the elevated highway in a huge open landscape, and all the good-looking 21st Century buildings pointing up into the evening sky like some futuristic sci-fi heaven realm. Then, as we get near the exit, the traffic slowly starts to fuse together in a mass of end-to-end steel/chrome-plated metal units, creaking along like the glacier I visited a long time ago in Switzerland moving so slowly, the end of its 133 kilometer length is four hundred years older than its beginning. Struggling with the thought that I don't want it to be like this, causes and conditions, the traffic is like nature, the ocean, the weather. Reminded of the Ajahn Chah image of leaves in the trees blowing in the wind in a rising and falling motion for as long as the winds last. And how it's the moods of the mind blowing like the wind that cause the restless, uneasy feeling. In its original state, the mind is still and calm.



The next day I have to go to the eye hospital, blurred vision in the left eye, and procrastinating about that for a long time. Sometimes stumbling into things and I'm gently squeezing through the crowds at the skytrain entrance to get the ticket in the turnstile, remembering how it all works. There's an alertness, awake and mindful, I am a foreigner living in someone else's country. Getting off the train is complicated, it's a place I've not been to before. Not finding the correct exit because the signs are unclear, I can read Thai but I choose to go with the North/South orientation of the map, knowing that if I face the way the train is travelling as I get off, in this case North, and as I go down the staircases and escalators to street level, I'm always orientated in that same Northerly direction and the traffic will be going North. All this because doing a U-turn can be a lengthy process here; somebody said the whole of Bangkok is one large, U-turn.... A pink and white cab is waiting and I tell the driver where I'd like to go – will he take me? He thinks for a bit (doing U-turns in his head), yes, ok. So we're off.

At the hospital, it's a long session. They put some drops in my eyes to enlarge the pupils so their equipment can see inside the eyeball. The doctor asks me if there's anybody to take me home because the drops in the eyes will make things a bit indistinct for a few hours. Understatement. When I step outside the world is a blur, a smear, a sea of colour, yellow, green and pink taxis, red tail lights of vehicles in vivid splashes. No form or definition anywhere; I've lost my North/South orientation, having come in by a different door. Get on the first motorbike taxi that comes along and allow him to sort it out. We get up to a surprising speed going along what I believe to be the wrong side of the road, dodging oncoming traffic, weaving in and out of the other lane, wherever there's a space. A great whoosh of hot wind, noise and get to the Skytrain station so fast it's like we arrived before we set off. Give the guy a good tip and then it's just a

case of getting the North/South thing sorted out, following the crowds up the escalator, on to the train, and into the coolness of the AC carriage, with this wild wind blowing through the mind; *papañca*, proliferations arising from the single thought that I have an eye operation on August 9th. Necessity of mindfulness...



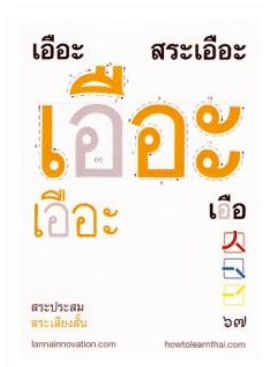
'To be mindful means to have metta towards the fear in your mind, or the anger, or the jealousy. Metta means not creating problems around existing conditions, allowing them to fade away, to cease. For example, when fear comes up in your mind, you can have metta for the fear — meaning that you don't build up aversion to it, you can just accept its presence and allow it to cease. You can also minimise the fear by recognising that it is the same kind of fear that everyone has, that animals have. It's not my fear, it's not a person's, it's an impersonal fear.'
[*"Mindfulness: The Path to Deathlessness: The Meditation Teaching of Venerable Ajahn Sumedho."*]

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/July 2, 2013

Postcard 001/- things backwards



POSTCARD#001/: Bangkok/Chiang Mai flight: Stone cold in Departures, AC has me chilled to the bone. I walk around the shopping area, just to be doing something, and go to the magazine and newspaper shop. They have packs of Thai alphabet cards – just what I was looking for! I can find the vowel set, but not the consonant set and I ask the lady at the desk if she has it. Stress on her face as I'm asking the question; she thinks she will not be able to understand... then she realizes I'm speaking Thai – a small jump in the air, joyful surprise. Wow! Okay, so... but she's forgotten the question. I ask again if she has the consonant cards. She starts looking but can't find them: *oh, no have, solee!* (sorry) Disappointed. I get the vowel cards anyway and ask her how much it is. She says 47 baht but when she rings up my money at the cash desk, she says 74 baht – checking my change afterwards, she was right first time, 47 baht – just said it round the wrong way (47 or 74?) seeing things backwards is a problem for her sometimes. No worries, everything moves along; flight is called and we are boarded. Stewardesses in lemon yellow costume, it's all doll-like, pretty and cute – the plane has a bird's face painted on the nose. You can buy gifts from a trolley coming along the aisle; do I need a vinyl blow-up inflatable airplane? Nothing to get heavy about, overly serious about; no need to get stuck thinking about anything hopelessly imponderable.



Even so, it's noticeable how the mind will attach to an object and hold on to it with the intensity of a velcro fastener bonding with its surface; the desire for adherence. The thinking mind presents a range of options; I can choose to 'be' something, contained in an acted-out scene from a movie I'm watching about 'my' life. It's birth in the Buddhist sense *jati*: the I-am-here thing. It's sometimes an uncomfortable, driven, locked-in state that arises through examining an event, and returning to it again and again, simply because I'm so used to seeing the situation from this perspective of holding on to it, I expect it to be the same starting point of my meanderings every time.

Mindfulness of this unaware habituality. Knowing it's like this means ignorance (not knowing) is gone, *vanish'd into thin air*. I enter the space knowingly, intervention in the probability sequence. Instead of the intensity of mind, there's just the intensity... a tightness of posture – maybe that's how it started – relax the neck, the forehead. No thought associated with it. No goals to which I'm compelled to strive for; what the eye doesn't see, the heart doesn't grieve for. Undoing all the knots tied in memory, letting the mind untangle itself from the problem: good, bad, whatever. Letting it all go, giving it room.



Reminded of Ajahn Pasanno's reflection on Ajahn Chah's teaching: 'A coconut tree draws nutriment from the planet; it draws elements good and bad, clean and dirty, up through the roots and into the top of the tree and then produces fruit that gives both sweet water and delicious coconut.' And Ajahn Pasanno describes how we don't need to be concerned about the different experiences that we have of the world, everything is drawn up through the 'roots' by way of the three-fold practice: *sila* (virtue), *samadhi* (concentration), *pañña* (wisdom). All experiences, good, bad, whatever, are transformed into insight, understanding, balance and sense of peace.

In-flight announcement: ... *we are now making our descent... please ensure your window shutters are up, arm rests down, seat backs forward and tables folded away* – a small cluster of prepositions. Plane lands and luggage collected, out into the clean Chiang Mai mountain air. Shortly after that I'm in a tuk-tuk headed down to the supermarket to get supplies.

Photo image upper: My plane to Chiang mai

Middle: Thai vowel/diphthong 'eu-ah'

Lower: Chiang mai tuk-tuk

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/July 5, 2013

Postcard 000- just this



POSTCARD#000: Chiang Mai: 05.30 hrs., ‘... down the long and silent street, the dawn, with silver-sandalled feet...’ daylight creeps into the rooms and it’s my birthday today! I suppose one’s birthday is something to be possessive about: ‘my’ birthday. I was born on this day quite a long time ago in the North of Scotland and now I’m here in the silence of a Chiang Mai morning in the North of Thailand. Open all the windows and a breeze blows through in all directions, curtains and fabrics that haven’t moved for a month in the stillness of this interior, flutter and flap against the walls – a sheet of paper flies off my desk, lands on the smooth floor tiles and slides away. It feels like the world outside is inside; all of a one-ness and this mind/body awareness (that is ‘me’) spreads out from here, through the trees, up and into the dome of the sky as far as the eye can see.

Skype call from Jiab in Delhi, *happy birthday*, and in the video window I can see our room, the place I usually inhabit. Jiab is at the desk where I normally sit. It’s still dark there, daylight here. Two people talking with each other but often occupied with the tiny image of themselves that appears in the Skype window, lower right. Eyes are sometimes directed away, *how does my hair look?* Jiab tells me the story about how she was born on the night of the full moon and so her actual birthday is not always on the same day. The family lived in an old forest area in the South of Thailand. Jiab remembers her father saying it was the light of the full moon that guided him through the trees to bring the midwife to their house. And a phone-call from M, *happy birthday Toong Ting!* She calls me that because she’s my 9 year-old niece. *Toong Ting, when you go to Inkland?* She asks me this, meaning ‘England’ but I like ‘Inkland’ (the place that makes ink?), so I tell her I’m going to Inkland on Saturday 13th, but it’ll be Sunday 14th by the time I get there. We have a discussion about the time difference thing and M knows about this, having visited Japan earlier this year. Only 9 years old, but she has an understanding of the world and systems that’s so much in the present moment it takes my breath away.



Children teach us about birth and the great mystery. About 10 years ago, there was an episode from a BBC series on the human body that showed a woman giving birth – so vivid, I suddenly

felt this immediacy of it happening to me: the blinding light, echoing sounds; the coldness, the impact of air entering the nasal passages? Revisiting the birth experience. Emerging into the world, the first total sensory consciousness sweeps through and the body/mind organism is turned inside-out. That TV film left me quite transformed... Now it's later, many years later, and there's 'me' and this old body, getting settled on the cushion for a 30 minute meditation sit on 'my' birthday. These are the same body parts, regenerated, expanded in a lifetime, worn a bit smooth, puckered up at the edges. Skin, muscle, flesh; soft rubberoid plasticity, and these mysterious organs held by ligaments bonded into solid bone. The whole thing maintained by the tremendous heat and energy processed from food, the fuel for the engine. And there's the fluidity enclosed in bubble-like spaces, gurgling away all the time. The breath enters the body as a kind of wind, gusting in and out. It comes back and blows everything all over the place, withdraws in a moment and it's gone again. Mind mesmerized by the form and function of the body, seemingly trapped in this limited temporality; cause/effect – then for an instant, seeing the truth of the *Five Khandas*. Thin skin of eyelid slides over surface of smooth eyeball and the dimly seen light entering my darkness; just this...

'Each and every mental and physical process (namarupa) must be observed as it really occurs so that we can rightly understand it in its true nature. That right understanding will lead us to remove ignorance (avijja). When ignorance has been removed, then we do not take these mind-body processes to be a person, a being, a soul or a self. If we take these mind-body processes to be just natural processes, then there will not arise any attachment. When attachment has been destroyed, we are free from all kinds of suffering and have attained the cessation of suffering.'
[Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw]

'...down the long and silent street, the dawn, with silver-sandalled feet...' taken from *'The Harlot's House'* by Oscar Wilde. Upper photo image taken from the WPN archive. Lower photo image: dreamstime. Gratitude to Rory and his post for the inspiration: <http://beyondthedream.co.uk/2013/07/05/tao-te-ching-28-keep-to-the-feminine/>

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/July 9, 2013

Postcard 001- a kind of alertness



POSTCARD #001: Chiang Mai: A slight breeze disturbs the wind chimes, tinga-tingaling... ting. An unfinished sequence of musical notes. It diverts my attention from these remembering, one by one, rushing towards me like a single wave quickly covers the smooth beach sand for a moment then recedes. The wind chimes again: tingaling-ting... ting, a sense of something suspended, isolated, uneasy – butterflies in the tummy – why should it be like this? The fact that I don't know why it's like this, causes the uneasy feeling to be there, 'a riddle, wrapped in an enigma.' Uncertainty, impermanence, the Ajahn Chah teaching, 'Not Sure' [mai nae]; poised on the edge of something – a kind of alertness. I'm going to UK, it's to do with that; leaving Chiang Mai tonight, only a few hours left. Flight to Bangkok, change planes and I'll be in London on Sunday morning – 5½ hours in the past. Thinking about *Inkland* (England, as *M* calls it), a great flood of memories and the revisiting of these times. I'm not feeling sure about it; *Inkland* is such a 'proper' place (compared with Thailand), not sure about being not sure and remembering other times when I was not sure.

Only two weeks in the UK and too many things to do; a sequence of events planned; connecting with trains often delayed, sometimes cancelled, and meeting people in places I don't know. So many things dependent on so many other things. And so much of it is unresolved until it unfolds, piece by piece and fits together in the right order. A handful of printouts of train tickets and hotel reservations, it's hard to keep it all in my head. I feel cramped, it's time to finish off planning for this event – the event is already here, it's happening now! Time to get ready to go to the airport. Tidy up this place; the Zen of housekeeping, inner peace, do the ironing...

Hot iron on freshly laundered fabrics, comforting, homely, perfumed smells. It has a soothing effect. Ironing out all these little wrinkles, the silvery nose of the hot iron smoothens them all away, warm to the touch. Place the folded packets of clothing in the suitcase. Peace and flatness. Being mindful of the 'not sure' thing, it's caused by my being not sure about it. As long as the uncertainty is out there somewhere, neither in nor out, it's uncertain. So I know I have to embrace it, give it a hug, be open to it and allow the uncertainty to enter – there's nowhere else for it to go. The willingness to let it in, leads to an immediate sense of release, inside and outside. Wind chimes go: tingaling again, joyful sound. Passport, ticket, wallet, I'm on my way. Goodbye house, *anjali*...

The above article first appeared in [dhammafootsteps.com/July 13, 2013](http://dhammafootsteps.com/July_13,2013)

Postcard 002- nothing extraordinary



POSTCARD #002: London: There's a crowd standing around the entrance to the Underground Station. It looks like an emergency, police cars pulled up on the pavement, and an area is cordoned off with white tape stretched across entry points to the station entrance. All traffic is redirected and pedestrians can't get through either. A policeman gives me directions to the Underground station entrance on the other side; so reassuringly calm, I'm made to feel convinced there's nothing unusual about this situation of flashing lights, bulletproof vests and loud crackling voices on the police audio system. Pay no attention if there's a slight urgency in the air and the world seems like it's falling apart, it's all being taken care of...



Strange circumstances, we all think, realising what we are expected to do is adjust to it, stay within the familiarity of 'self' mode, conventional reality. Mesmerised by strategies to keep the population from mass hysteria. *No, really, everything is perfectly alright sir...* and I feel a hesitation; it wouldn't be polite to ask the policeman what's actually going on here, to take up any more of his time with awkward questions – no, and thank you, you've been so nice about this, thank you very much – very English. You hear the word 'thank you' constantly; THANKYOUs are everywhere, staying with how it appears to be; nothing extraordinary here, no, no... but I

sense something catastrophic; a great yawning chasm opening up beneath my feet. Things are clearly not alright and there's this sudden desire to be absent, distance myself from this location ASAP.

Depending on a self that's seemingly in 'here' creates the objective state – I am inside looking out through the eyes; seeing what's going on out 'there' – a world separate from where 'I am'. Duality. It's an illusion, and part of this illusion is that the mind is maintaining the illusion. The policeman is maintaining the illusion, media, culture, everybody I meet reinforces the illusion because we're all doing it. Even when I can see there's no self to speak of – nobody at home – the mind is always telling itself there is a 'self' in here. And this is the situation; seeing past the ordinary self where there's a 'me', a GPS locator: YOU ARE HERE. This is how it is that I arrive at the Underground entrance by way of the small backstreets, following the crowd. Then down two long escalators, deep under the ground, down and down to the depth of what feels like a ten storey building. At the very bottom of this is the tunnel and the track. Heavy old metal train careering in with a great whoosh of tunnel air, I get into the carriage and we're off clattering through the blackness of the underground network, *rattle-bang-clink, rattle-bang-clink, rattle-bang-clink....*

Upper photo: Newcastle Rail Station, lower photo: London Underground train

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/July 28, 2013

Postcard 003- a small island



POSTCARD #003: London: Writing this on the new iPhone I bought in Apple Store, Covent Garden. Takes some getting used to. The keyboard is tiny; index finger placed on the letter key blocks out the whole letter – fingers too thick. The letters ‘O’ and ‘P’ are difficult, and when I type ‘M’, I hit the backspace instead. Jiab can do it okay, she has fingers as thin as flower stalks. Maybe I’ll give it to her...? A friend fixed me up with a blue-tooth keyboard and small projector (Optima). I’m using the image on the wall like a screen. Uploading the post to WordPress is possible with wordpress mobile but only with a good Wi-Fi connection. Interesting to work in miniature like this – there’s something about the smallness of it that suits things here in UK.

We’re in a tiny hotel room, just enough space for everything. The streets outside accommodate pedestrians on the pavement, and a narrow road allows the big black taxicabs to rush by. Could be a claustrophobic feeling if you think about it too much, compressed, economy of space provision. Don’t think about it. Japan is the same, squeezed into a little country. It is a small island, travel across from East to West and you come to the sea again – I am marooned. Geographical aloneness. The world is out ‘there’. I remember the separateness; the belief in a ‘self’ but seeing only the lack of it, and nearly a lifetime is taken up with looking for the answer to this conundrum – seeking. Now coming back from Thailand where I’m living in somebody else’s country, an outsider, and finding that it’s been so long since I was in the UK, where I was born, I’ve become an outsider here too. Can’t relate to this culture; holding on to a UK identity and there’s really not anything to support it, just my attachment. Most people I knew then are gone, I’m a homeless person, staying in hotels, staying with people I met in Buddhist groups, friends, and at Buddhist monasteries on the way.



Pretty nearly everyone here is an outsider, a visitor. So many different languages: Italian, Japanese, French, South American and others – where are the English people? It’s the holiday season, maybe they’re in someone else’s country too, being outsiders there? All the staff in hotels, restaurants and shops are East Europeans. Visitors come here and what they see is a system run by other visitors to England. A picture of England; a picture of reality – when was it not like this? Buildings and statues of eminent Victorians, a solitary man standing alone, high up there on a plinth, pigeons sit on his head. Splendid isolation, tourists take pictures of each other standing next to the man’s name carved in the stone of the base of the statue’s plinth and up above he’s there, looking out at other statues. I feel I should know who he is, I’m British, I should know... but you’d have to have studied history to know that. I can’t remember, it

couldn't have been important to me. All I see here is a monument to 'self', the grandeur of it escapes me. But it was made to be important to the people of that time; statues, ornate buildings, the opulence and wealth of the Empire recorded in history. Such a great achievement, such a small country. This was. Can't help reflecting on the fact that mostly it was all a fiction created by the storytellers of the day about a reality somewhere else, far away – *samsara*, stories from a small island.

'There is a path to walk on, walking is being done but there is no traveller. There are deeds but there is no doer. There is no self. The thought of a self is an error and all existences are as empty as whirling water bubbles, as hollow as the plantain tree. There's a blowing of the air but no wind that does the blowing. There is no self, there is no transmigration of a self; there are deeds and the continued effect of deeds...' [Ramesh S. Balsekar, 'Advaita, the Buddha and the Unbroken Whole']

Optoma projector on gorilla tripod keyboard and iPhone

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/July 31, 2013

Postcard 004- suspended disbelief



POSTCARD #004: St Andrews, Scotland: It's a sharp bright light, different from the sunshine of South East Asia, comes at a lower angle; the sunbeam seems to shine straight into my eyes. Quite blinding in the early morning, I'm dazzled and have to shade my eyes to look up at the ruins of the nave of St. Andrews Cathedral, against the Northern sky. A great emptiness, 12th century mediaeval folk saw it as the 'Glory of God', projecting a 'self' onto empty space and if there was an intuitive sense – a normal inquiring mind – that something about this is not quite right; the sense of lack, unconvinced, doubting – could it really be God? If it was like this, they were living in fear of their own natural thinking processes and reasoned that it must be because 'we are all sinners' and the Church is there to 'save' us. Religion was/is power; the Church of Rome, then the Scottish Reformation claimed all the wealth of the Cathedral of St Andrews. Not much in history about the spiritual life of those who lived in that place, studied, prayed, meditated; their compassion, or loving kindness...

I see the door arches and passageways, people walked through here and lived their lives, breathed this air. How was it then; the existential reality of these 12th Century Britains? Conscious experience was the same in mediaeval times as it is today: outer object triggers inner recognition/desire. Example found in the Old Testament: Adam sees the apple: *I want that...* Dependent origination (*paticcisammupadda*) in an Old Testament format: there's an apple out there and I want it but there's conflict in the mind, associating a fictional self with a normal response; *sorry this apple belongs to someone else and you can't have it*. How to resolve this? The response to the apple is normal, the process of human consciousness must be universal – there was never any time when people didn't react/respond like this. Today we can apply understanding; how does the process work? In those days, no other way to understand it, you have desire for the apple, you are a born sinner, believe in God, and have your sins forgiven... and that was it – no other instruction. Thank goodness I discovered Buddhism.

It's daylight until very late at night here, a long twilight going through to dawn the next day – really no darkness at all. The morning gathers momentum and we're flooded with sunshine, day after day, everybody stumbling around in a state of astonishment, suspended disbelief. The sense of being on an island doesn't seem to be here in Scotland, we are not held, contained, more like we are dispersed, all the way to the Northern region; Orkney, Shetland, Faroe Islands, the Arctic Circle and beyond...

Ignorant of their ignorance, yet wise in their own esteem, these deluded men, proud of their vain learning, go round and round like the blind led by the blind [Mundaka Upanishad 18]

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/August 4, 2013

Postcard 005- recognition



POSTCARD#005: Harnham Monastery, Northumberland: The monastery is situated on top of a small hill; guest accommodation is down the road a bit. I walk up to the main building for the one meal of the day; sunshine, a cloudless sky, and I meet one of the monks at the door. How long has it been, more than two years? He looks different. Faded brown/tangerine robe, shaved head, exposed face, features looking at me. The whole presence of a person, eyes in the centre of a field of vision – it seems like an immense identity just living here quietly... my perception of how things are, looking back at me. Recognition is a selective thing, matching moments of experience with what's in the files inside the folder marked: *THE MEMORY OF OTHER THINGS SIMILAR TO THIS* – select/match, the mind-body organism default. It's not what it is, it's only what it appears to be.



Chanting, food, wash dishes and walk back down to the guest accommodation again. Huge daisies on the edge of path, everything is swelling up in blossom on top of this solitary hill and the panorama of Northumberland landscape all around. Unknowingly, I'm manipulating my perception of things to see the world as I want to see it without any real understanding of why I'm attracted – a huge habit of indulgence that I think is simply normal. I don't understand desire, I just respond to the experience of it. Now on top of this hill, looking at a lifetime of seeking after what I want and rejecting what I don't want without really knowing why. There's this experience of dissatisfaction at the base of it all... normally I'm pretending it's not there. It's a hunger – a hunger for what? Caused by what? Is there a way of ending this hunger? There's a name for it. It can be identified. *Dukkha*, (suffering), the First Noble Truth. Knowledge enters and ignorance is pushed out. I couldn't see it before; too much thinking about how much I dislike the idea of suffering, an obstacle is created by my aversion to it; the desire for it to not be there. Strategies of avoidance, and lost in experience, agreeable/disagreeable. Caught in the momentum of seeking gratification or holding on to unhappy states of mind believing that this is my reality. The deluded self, 'me' and 'mine'. This is the obstacle – the only reason it's there is that I linger with the idea of it....

Returning again and again to the same starting point means these unhappy states of mind are reinforced more and more. Recognition is not informed by 'clear knowing', it's seen through the clouded prism of unawareness, [avidyā](#) not-knowing (ignorance). What's required is mindfulness, applied recognition, *Right View*, and the undoing of all the little knots tied in memory, habitual reactions over many lifetimes. Bit by bit, letting it all go...



'If we have faith in the Buddha's teaching and are inspired by the great teachers, we can direct our interest into not just avoiding suffering, something we have spent a long time doing, but finding a skilful way of directing our attention towards recognising it, here and now. What is this 'self'? How is this 'me' and 'mine' manifesting itself here and now?' [Ajahn Munindo, Entering the Monastery, 22 July 2013]

– G R A T I T U D E –

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/August 8, 2013

Postcard 006- constructed reality



POSTCARD#006: Bangkok: Standing outside the house in the shade of a large tree, waiting for the taxi to the airport. The brightness of the sun is tremendous, colours are vivid, the world is a high resolution Photoshop enhancement. After the eye surgery I feel like a nocturnal creature, squinting in the daylight, a quiet presence behind sunglasses. I have an attachment to darkness, I'd like it to be dark, dull and rainy today but instead it feels like I'm in a television studio. The light penetrates everything. There are no real seasons in Thailand, no markers in the calendar to say where we are in the annual cycle. The weather is the same every day. Night comes at 6pm, instant darkness, then at 6am, instant daylight and each day is pretty much like the one before. The days become weeks, weeks become months, months become years. The whole thing is just one very long, continuous day, and night is the blink of an eye.

Time disappears, people are startled to discover they have aged... wake up one day to discover they're old – life has gone. Rip Van Winkle fell asleep and woke up with a very long beard. The story is based on an Orkney folktale about an inebriated fiddler, late one night on his way home, hears some wonderful music and discovers a group of magical beings dancing in a circle. He plays his fiddle with them for a while and continues on his way home. When he arrives he discovers fifty years have passed; people have died, his daughter is middle-aged, her children are grown up. We don't see the true nature of the world. Reality is thought to be what is out 'there', perceptions based on received sensory data input: what we see, hear, touch, taste, smell – and what we 'think' it is. What we recognize as a particular colour, is seen by an insect as ultra-violet, by a snake as infra-red. Who are we to say our view of the world is exactly what it is? The ground appears to be solid, *terra firma* even though the planet is spinning around, hurtling through outer space at thousands of miles an hour. Things are not what they seem to be.

A bright pink and white taxi approaches the house, enters the driveway and fills my vision. Bags inside, door slam, reverse out and we're gone.

'... there are no colors in the real world... there are no textures in the real world. There are no fragrances in the real world. There is no beauty; there is no ugliness... Out there is a chaos of energy soup and energy fields. Literally. We take that and somewhere inside ourselves we create a world. Somewhere inside ourselves it all happens.' [Sir John Eckles, Nobel Prize winner in physiology and medicine 1963]

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/August 31, 2013

Postcard 007- Lonesome highway



POSTCARD#007: Bangkok: Travelling along the highway to the airport in a taxi that has past its best – seen better days. It’s veering off to the left, trembles for a moment then corrects itself. There’s another problem, the driver has it revved-up because the engine stalls when we slow down, so the sound is a bit alarming. We stop at the tollway to pay the fee, engine stalls, driver gets out to push. Fortunately there’s a little slope at the tollbooth and the car moves forward easily. Driver jumps in, ignition on, and the engine comes to life. Big sigh of relief, driver apologizes to me: *koh tod khrap*, polite. A nice guy, just trying to earn a living with a rented vehicle that’s barely roadworthy. The Thai compassion for this kind of predicament means it’s tolerated more, I think, than it would be in other Asian countries.

In a moment we’re accelerating down the road again with this huge noise and there’s still about 20 km to go. I’m thinking that if the engine fails, we’ll have to stop at the edge of this long and lonesome elevated highway with nothing around except sky up above... this really is the middle of nowhere. I drop into a state of alertness; being mindful is exhilarating, the inclination to be awake, watchful. All senses switched on, an awareness that sees also, at the edge of this, some anxiety – the Buddhist term: [samvega/pasada](#) describes it – a sense of urgency. There’s clarity too, even though things are not looking good at all.



It’s like a death, just stopping at some place on the road, anywhere’ll do and that’s it, engine conks out. Nothing extraordinary about death; we die and come to life again from one moment to the next. Physical death comes along and instead of coming to life in another moment, we find ourselves in another lifetime. This is how it is, according to what I’ve read, and it could be time’s up for our taxi, it’ll die anytime now. Worst case scenario is waiting in the heat of the tarmac with no air-con running because there’s no engine and hoping another taxi will come along – unlikely... empty taxis don’t normally go out to the airport. What to do? Ah well, miss the flight, I suppose, go tomorrow – yes, but I’m getting ahead of myself here, it hasn’t happened yet.

In the end, the taxi holds on to life and we arrive at the airport okay. Get the bags out of the car with engine still racing and the last I see is the driver heading off in the direction of Arrivals; hoping he’ll pick up another passenger and make it back to the city again. I wheel my luggage into the cool airport and go look for the check-in row. Doorstep to the world. Goodbye Thailand, next stop Delhi...

‘The universe I’s (using the word ‘I’ as a verb) in the same way that a tree ‘apples’ or a star shines, and the center of the ‘appling’ is the tree and the center of the shining is the star, and so the basic center of self of the I’ing is the eternal universe or eternal thing that has existed for ten thousand million years and will probably go on for at least that much more.’ [The Essence of Alan Watts, Vol. 4: “Death”]

*Upper photo: approaching BKK tollway. Lower photo: BKK airport departure gate area
The above article first appeared in [dhammafootsteps.com/September 3, 2013](#)*

Postcard 008- the look of eyes (2)



POSTCARD#008: Bangkok/Delhi flight: Large men standing in the aisles of the passenger area look along the length of the plane in one direction, turn the head around and look in the other direction. Hold that for a moment, then look to the left, to the right, and back to the central position: *ok, so here we are on this plane...* Sensory receptors positioned around the face and the cranium spins around, up/down on its axis, moving in response to received vision, sound, smell. The mind coordinates, thinks about things... '60,000 thoughts per day by each and every human being on the planet.' [Deepak Chopra]. No wonder it's such a novelty to discover a space where there's no thought, no stories unfolding in the mind.

Maybe it's something cultural; the male authority figure standing there like a tall pillar and everyone else is seated. I'm reminded of Meerkats, these cute creatures who stand up on their hind legs and look at everything in a kind of philosophical way. See and be seen. I catch the look, and glance away... a brief encounter, not held; no dialogue: *hi how are you today?* No, no need for that; no language required to interpret events and engage the mind. Just the look of eyes, and our shared space up here in thin air; a passenger jet travelling at 600 miles per hour, 10 kilometres above the curvature of the Earth.

Bundles of conditioned reflexes squeezed into the volume of a body, the experience of being a human 'being' – only this. Seeing the events without the story, like screenshots in a sequence; a few gestures, the meaning is not quite there. It creates a pause, taking a moment to receive that data before mind gains control and 'self' gets a hold; before 'I' perceive what it is, or what it could be; pleasant, unpleasant, neutral – how should I feel about that? Maybe no feeling at all... It's as if there's a small seed of wisdom buried deep in the layers of unknowing; lying there, dormant, waiting for things to evolve and the right conditions to be there, in order to wake up. But it hasn't happened yet... contemplating the noble truth of waking up in some future lifetime.

I can't read text, cross-eyed vision after an operation on the left eye. It'll be okay after the operation on the right eye. Mildly deafened by the white noise of air pressure systems and the

velocity of the plane displacing the air. And there's a stewardess announcement: *the plane is now making its descent, this concludes our inflight service, thank you....* [Link to: [the look of eyes \(1\)](#)]

“And what is the origination of the world? Dependent on the eye & forms there arises eye-consciousness. The meeting of the three is contact. From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling. From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving. From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging/sustenance. From clinging/sustenance as a requisite condition comes becoming. From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth. From birth as a requisite condition, then aging & death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. This is the origination of the world. [[Loka Sutta: The World](#)” (SN 12.44), translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. Access to Insight, 17 June 2010]

The above article first appeared in [dhammafootsteps.com/September 6, 2013](#)

Postcard 009- a kind of analogy



POSTCARD#009: Delhi: The flight from Bangkok arrives at Delhi mid-morning. I'm identified, processed and out in the crowd. *Shym* is waiting with the car, bags inside and we're in the huddle of traffic. Not so much give-and-take, more like push-and-shove. They're opportunists; mindfulness is a necessity. Same old thing. Looking around, what's different? An unusual brightness, it's the lens implant, the operation on the left eye in Bangkok. I have to put up with this one-eyed vision only for a little longer. Next week I go back for the second op. All these flights are possible, fortunately, due to some free airmiles we have to use before the end of the year. And coming back to Delhi means I'm noticing the difference in vision here. So nice, much clearer now through the left eye, it looks... clean? What I thought was urban pollution, may have been obscured vision – or what I'm seeing now is an enhancement, a brightened-up version of everything. Close the left eye and look through the right; that's how Delhi used to be, a dull, indistinct, old, yellowed photograph. Close the right eye and look through the left again and it's like the Nat Geo channel, as clear as the iPhone5 retina display, 326 pixels per inch; using the techno-device metaphor to describe reality.

The world is an analogy, a figure of speech, the conceptual metaphor. In my case the lens in one eye is plastic, not God-given – the same as having an artificial leg or a dental crown. Nothing special about it except that you walk around with an artificial leg, you chew with a dental crown but I'm seeing the world through this artificial lens. There's a difference. The world is coming in, 'seen' through the plastic. The lens is a functioning part of the cognitive process.

Light passes through the lens, images appear, mind figures it out based on received experience of similar images, and says, *there you go, what you see is like this*. It resembles something I know, so I accept it, and that's what it becomes. The metaphor pushes the whole thing over the edge; one thing becomes another. There's that thing out there and 'me' in here, looking at it; so 'I' must be on the receiving end, somehow.... the link creates the metaphorical self; conscious experience 'is' individual identity: 'I think, therefore I am.'

The assumption is that everything coming through the senses is real; sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, cognition – and it's all coming to (((me))). That's reality, that's the point of the exercise. I like it, I want it, I want more of it, and so closing the door on other ways of seeing things. Saying this is how it is, means I get all the joy and pain, the good with the bad, love and hate, heaven and hell – thus I have to spend a major part of my life (maybe many lifetimes) trying to control this craving and desire [*tanha*] that I accidentally created, thinking I was doing the right thing.

"... craving the ensnarer that has flowed along, spread out, and caught hold, with which this world is smothered & enveloped like a tangled skein, a knotted ball of string, like matted rushes and reeds, and does not go beyond transmigration, beyond the planes of deprivation, woe, & bad destinations." [Tanha Sutta]

What to do? How to not be a slave to it? Just the intention to be mindful is enough, the tipping point, sufficient to disengage from the automatic reaction. Not caught up in the experience of it, far enough back, one step removed, just knowing it's there; that's all. Knowing it takes the place of not knowing it. Step by step, learning how to do it....

'... look upon the events occurring in your mind-and-body with the very same impartiality that you would look upon clouds floating through the sky, water rushing in a stream, rain cascading on a roof, or any other objects in your field of awareness.' [Ken Wilbur, *No Boundaries*']

Gratitude to Roger at *One Garden* for The Ken Wilbur quote above

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/September 12, 2013

Postcard 010- intuitive design



POSTCARD#010: Delhi: Going to visit my neighbour who says she can help me with a new sim card for the iPhone5. I got the phone in the UK, and need a Nano SIM for India, the tiny one, rather than the standard size for the Nokia I had before. When I was in London, I had to wait 24 hours for this new NanoSIM(4FF) to be activated – why? I don't know. Difficult to be without your contacts for that long. But that's how it is there, no flexibility – in other countries there's less control. In Bangkok, for example, I needed a Thai NanoSIM for the local network and was thinking it would be the 24 hour waiting thing again but they looked at the screen, clicked a couple of times, went in the back of the shop and came out with the new NanoSIM(4FF). Removed it from the backing card and put it in... working!

Now in Delhi, I need a local SIM and I heard that if you take it to the phone shop and pay Rs.100/- (US\$ 1.55) they have a special cutter and it's done immediately, *snip...* you're connected. My neighbour says you can just cut the old SIM with a knife, save the Rs.100/- and it's better than going downtown in the heat and traffic. I'm hesitating, decide to Google it first. You're supposed to do a bit of measuring and create a paper template to cut around carefully and then finish off with a piece of sandpaper. Well, my neighbour has a blade, saying, it's not very sharp but let's see; I think it'll do.

I watch as she starts to cut the sim; doing it by eye, no measuring, she has to hack at it a bit with the blunt cutter and finishes off with the kitchen scissors – cut off the little corner bit. Yes! Looks like the real thing. So try that... but it doesn't fit into the slot in the phone! Why? Because she was thinking it was the MicroSIM(3FF) for the iPhone4 – that's what she has and thought it's what I had. But the NanoSIM(4FF) for the iPhone5 is smaller than that... *oh-no, what to do now?* Worry-worry. But no problem just cut off a bit more to get it to fit. It's like you offer someone a piece of cake and they say, oh that's a bit too much for me, can you make it a bit smaller please? No science required. I'm amazed that it's possible to do this. How come I didn't know about it? There's a feeling that I've been making life unnecessarily difficult when, in fact, things are quite simple.

Walking back to my place, and nobody pays any attention to me, except the gardeners and ordinary folk who stop and look at me as I pass; an anomaly in their world. It's a direct gaze, gentle, curious: *there goes one of these foreigners, look!...* children laugh and run away. White adult male, a colourless being, transparent eyes – comes from a different planet. So far away from the actuality of the human experience, dependent on the employment contract that enables all the support mechanisms. Not much of an idea how to do anything except the job and outside of that, wash the car on Sunday, cut the grass, watch TV. I'm dependent on others who have the basic skills I don't seem to have. Meanwhile, somewhere inside, there's this feeling that all it needs is the intuitive leap... and I don't know how it happens or why it's like

that, the solution just comes to me – like seeing the whole picture all of a sudden, and knowing what it is.

'Intuition is the supra-logic that cuts out all the routine processes of thought and leaps straight from the problem to the answer.' [Robert Graves]

Photo: the finished home-made NanoSim(4FF)

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/September 16, 2013

Postcard 011- non-aversion



POSTCARD#011: Delhi: There's a wasps' nest in the bathroom at the end of the corridor. I've been away for two months, didn't know it was there and didn't notice it at first, in the half darkness of 5.30am, walking along to this bathroom we don't normally use. And wearing glasses because I've always worn glasses but since the eye operation it's all a blur. I forget, put them on and in the darkness, can't see any difference. Switch on the light in the bathroom, look in the mirror; is this really 'me'? An awareness of a low humming sound; a multi-frequency buzzzzzz, just on the edge of hearing. Something crawling on the window, what's that? I have to take my glasses off to see, a strange reverse action I'm not used to, then wait for a moment until vision gets in focus... wow, a wasps' nest in the bathroom, not good. Back out of there fast, close the door and get as far away as possible from it – closing all doors between me and it. Seeing imagined wasps in faulty vision.



It's full daylight in an hour and I go back for another look... some kind of large-bodied heavy duty, Indian-wasp-like species; googled it later: *ropalidia marginata*. The nest is not actually in the bathroom, it's built on the underside of the top part of the bathroom window, outside... thankful for that, but still kinda scary, even though there's mosquito mesh on all doors and windows and they can't get inside the house. I go outside to take a photo but nervous about all the activity so the pic is not clear. The wasps are transparent orange, the nest is grey, a truly colourless grey; remarkable because of its absence of colour. Kind of supernatural, like dust, or ash.

A species so distant from where we are, there's a reluctance to look at this, yet a fascination with it; more like science fiction than real. The Queen wasp and attendants, baby wasps, larvae, that will emerge from all these small hexagonal openings. Yeh, well... somehow it's difficult to think of them being cute. *Wiki* says the females contend with each other for the position of queen. They've evolved through aggression and hostility. How to understand this? I don't know, but keeping a safe distance from it, and mindful of that action – not pushing away. The contemplation of aggressive aversion and the tendency to create a category for things I hate; enemies, difficult people, personality issues at the office – all kinds of other situations worse than that. Social conditioning has made me critical; looking for the fault in people, where to lay blame. Living in circumstances I don't always feel comfortable with. Seeing what's wrong, not able to see what's right. *Metta*, loving kindness, isn't a case of: "I love this person, but I don't love that one." *Metta* is non-discriminatory love, all beings have conscious awareness, a shared subjectivity....

Metta is unconditioned love; you don't have more metta for the nice things and not as much for the bad things, it is evenly distributed: our beloved friends and our detested enemies. The action of metta is unconditioned, it is patience and non-aversion. We accept the pain, disappointment, failure, blame, persecution, abuse and all the experiences we can have in a lifetime. We begin with: 'May I abide in well-being,' starting with yourself. It's an attitude of acceptance and patience with the way it is; accepting the anger, resentment, aversion, or the little petty things.'
[Ajahn Sumedho]

Lower photo from the *Wiki* page

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/September 20, 2013

Postcard 012- limitations



POSTCARD #012: Delhi Airport Departures: Time to go, I have to finish my coffee... hold cup to lip, tilt head back to drink the last drop, eyes sweep upwards with the movement, and there's a man standing in the roof structure. He's cleaning the window glass or doing something. I didn't notice he was there. Nothing special, it's just that if we were in Europe, there'd be warning signs, black and yellow tape, fluorescent high-vis vests everywhere, a restricted area below, *we apologise for any inconvenience caused*, and more staff with their hi-vis vests and hard hats asking the public to keep back. All the necessary precautions to comply with health and safety standards. Over here, the man just climbs up into the roof structure, holding on with his hands, dressed in navy-blue overalls and he does have a hard hat but no more than that. And nobody feels there's any danger. People are sitting in the coffee shop below and it works okay, relax no problem.

Fine with me too, I like the pragmatic way things are done, intelligent, improvised solutions; repair and maintenance developed to the level of aesthetics, extraordinary to the point of being innovative. It's a relief to not have the same old limitations imposed on us that we live with in the West: security procedures, systems that back-up systems to protect against liability. What's left unsaid is that the systems, designed to protect us, create the perceived threat in the mind. Precautions against a hypothetical danger lead to what is thought to be a real danger in present time. A created anxiety, unintended folks, but there you are, we're really living on the edge here. No need to *WORRY*... thanks to professional security systems installed at your request, it's all being taken care of.

Things are not what they seem. The world is an illusion, *maya*, look in the mirror: consciousness embodied in human form but what I see, more than anything else, is a face, an identity – can this really be me? *Wow*, a fascination with the concept of self, everybody looking at each other as mirrors of themselves. A lifetime spent chasing elusive sensory yearnings; nothing seen beyond the basic mechanisms of being human. Getting free of it for a moment is enough to understand how it works: mind gets caught up in identifying with the activity. The magician is not tricked by his own magic. Take away all the associated systems, the action is carried out, the maintenance man does his job and what's so surprising about that?



I take a photo of him just before leaving for the flight departure gate. He has a narrow leather belt, I didn't notice before, and secures this around his waist and round the roof supports as he climbs up or down to the next section. Then he unclips the belt and works freely. He's obviously skilled. I can't imagine there'd be on-the-job training for this kind of profession. More likely it's an inherited thing; he's descended from a lineage of South Indian toddy palm climbers, elevated in palm tree branches high above the ground considering questions of a philosophical nature. Time to get on the plane and prepare for the long climb up to 37,000 feet. Strangely comforting to know that when I'm 2700 miles over the horizon, and descending at Bangkok, the maintenance man will still be clambering around in the roof structure at Delhi, simply doing his job.

'Thus the illusioned soul identifies with the temporary body and everything connected to it, such as race, gender, family, nation, bank balance, and sectarian religion. Under this sense of false-ego (false-identity) the soul aspires to control and enjoy matter. However, in so doing he continuously serves lust, greed, and anger. In frustration he often redoubles his efforts and, compounding mistake upon mistake, only falls deeper into illusion.' [The Heart of Hinduism, Maya; illusion]

Lower photo from Wikipedia Commons

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/September 24, 2013

Postcard 013- uncertainty (mai nae)



POSTCARD#013: Bangkok: Raining heavily at the airport, poor visibility on the highway into town. Traffic moving steadily through the downpour, a large spray of water hits the windscreen, *splooosh* – like driving through a car wash. Reminds me of Scotland, wild, wet and windy; weather is unpredictable. You expect it to be one thing but it's something else instead; uncompromising in its insistence that it is what it is – and not what you think it is. Thai language/cognition is like this, so different from the West; making assumptions based on the Western model doesn't always get you where you want to be.

I explain to the taxi driver where I want to go, saying there are two ways to get there: he can go on the tollway but better to take the turn that gets us on to *vipawadi*. We come to the place to make the turn, but the driver doesn't go that way; we pass it.... It takes a moment for me to see what went wrong: he's thinking the *vipawadi* turning is the way I don't want to go, not the way I want to go. All it takes is one small slip in the logical sequence of the language and I get the opposite of what I intended. Ah yes, well, sometimes it's like that. No holding on unduly to things you expect to be 'right' when they prove to be otherwise. After two decades in Thailand, I suppose I'm used to it; a familiarity with not quite knowing what to expect. '*...many problems are the result of us expecting that there should be a solution.*' [Ajahn Tiradhammo]

Thai semantics are a bit elusive, the language doesn't stretch the way you'd expect it to. Anticipating reactions to a request, statement or question – not the best way to go. A structure created by words to explain a concept and the assumption is that the listener understands what I'm saying in the way I mean it to be understood, but it doesn't work like that. Words are just reference points; they're sort of out there, ready to be shared with everyone. People interpret them in the way they understand it best. Usually it's the meaning I'm hoping for, but not always. I try to be minimalist, the complexity of it reduced as far as it'll go. Allow the selected words to carry the meaning and if it's misunderstood, try to find an indirect way to approach the problem by letting go of the idea that it's somehow 'wrong'. This is 'the land of smiles', a

cultural tendency to not confront the issue – we become so focused on the ‘should’ we forget the ‘maybe’. The journey takes the time it takes, through the floods and downpour, but we reach the house okay, of course. The sky clears. Rainbows, green leaves in the trees drip crystal drops... soon after that the rain stops.

‘We can easily get caught up in thinking that life should conform to some definite plan. But by keeping a close connection with the truth of uncertainty we can soften the resulting frustration and negativity when the plan doesn’t unfold the way we think it should. We may even gain a clearer understanding of the real nature of plans: mere concepts about possibilities, rather than concrete programmes of actualities. Then whenever we find ourselves having to make plans we do it in pencil with an eraser in hand, and with the clear understanding that many other possibilities are available as well.’ [Ajahn Tiradhammo]

‘*mai nae*’, in the Thai language, means ‘uncertain’ – the living expression of the fundamental Buddhist teaching of *anicca*, or impermanence [Ajahn Tiradhammo]

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/September 27, 2013

Postcard 014- unforeseen



POSTCARD #014: Rutnin Eye Hospital, Bangkok: I just had eye surgery for cataracts and there's a protective eye shield with cotton wadding taped over my right eye, but I don't remember anything about it. I remember lying on a gurney in the operating room, and recall chatting with the anesthetist as he's putting the needle in my arm – then suddenly I'm back in my hospital room with the eye shield taped over the eye and no memory of it at all. I feel normal, the only difference is I know that a newer version of part of the eye mechanism has just been installed; I've had an upgrade. But the eye has to stay covered today, so I can't see anything, except when the nurses take off the shield every hour and I get a brief glimpse; they give me eye-drops then it's covered again. A great flood of liquid in the eye, slight taste in the mouth as it drains through the tear duct into the back of the throat; swallowing my tears, gulp, gulp...

They take the eye shield off next morning. I get dressed, go downstairs to the outpatients department and through to the exit. The décor in the waiting area is in shades of lime green and ice blue, colours are amazing. Unexpected. There's a completely clear perception of distance for the first time in many years. Fascinating. I'm distracted by colour and movement at the edge of vision, face turns in that direction, curiosity – an involuntary response. Head spinning like a child or a small animal, noticing all kinds of things. Sense organs filter incoming information. In my case, visual data enters through implanted intraocular lenses (IOLs). I see the world and assume it exists exactly as I perceive it, but I know the lens implant has, to some extent, created my version of the world; perception is subjective, reality is a construct in the mind. I can see a wide range of colours where insects see ultraviolet, reptiles see infrared, and cats and dogs see the world in only two colours. Viewed in this way, the world is suddenly endowed with great mystery; ask the question: 'what is reality?' and it takes you to a different place entirely.

Out of the exit, wait for a taxi, on to the highway system and step into a world that looks like it's been Photo-shopped, high resolution, multi-pixel display. If there comes a time in the future when I'm no longer able to see it in this way because the novelty of it has gone and

consciousness doesn't regard it as special anymore, then I can return here, read this post and remember how wonderful it was...

'Normally we human beings assume the world 'out there' exists just as we perceive it (by way of eye, ear, nose, tongue and physical contact) but if we consider these sense organs, it must become apparent to us that the world 'out there' is really dependent on our particular modes of perception. For instance, the human eye limits conditions, by its very structure, the objects we see. It is well known that a bee can see, as a colour, ultraviolet but we have no idea what such a colour looks like nor, of course, can we find any words to describe it. It follows therefore that our sense organs being differently constructed from that of a bee (or any other non-human being), our world "out there" is not necessarily the world as it really is.' [Phra Khantipalo, 'Buddhism Explained' 1965]

Note: Claude Monet had treatment for cataracts that left him with poor vision. He agreed at age 82 to have the lens of his left eye completely removed. Light could now stream through the opening unimpeded and he began to see – and to paint – in ultraviolet (Water Lilies series). <http://petapixel.com/2012/04/17/the-human-eye-can-see-in-ultraviolet-when-the-lens-is-removed/>

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/October 1, 2013

Postcard 015- story within a story



POSTCARD #015: Rutnin Eye Hospital, Bangkok: I'm back in the outpatients for a routine eye examination after surgery – the peppermint green and menthol coloured room, etched glass and white ceiling. Receptionist gives me a number, 109, and I look around for a seat. It's crowded in here today... are all these people in front of me? It'll be a long wait. What to do to pass the time when I can't read? I need glasses to read and have to wait 3 weeks for a new lens prescription; the eye has to settle after they take out the stitch – okay, let's not talk about needles and eyes... the eye of the needle? Easier for a camel to pass through the eye of the needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God... they don't make it easy. For 'rich' substitute 'greedy' *lobha* and it makes sense.

Generosity is the antidote for the 'holding-on' disease; fixating on a thing we think we need to make us happy. Apply the sense of generosity to the problem of being a compulsive reader and I should be able to let go of this reading habit – see what it's like to do that. For backup I have the basic *Kindle 6"* with the font set nearly to maximum; digital words, the physical substance of the book is absent – switch it off and there's nothing there. I like the emptiness of it, yet a whole library could be on this small device that fits in my pocket. Yes but I forgot to bring it with me today... terrific, so I have to learn how to sit in this waiting area doing nothing for maybe a couple of hours.

Language creates fiction – a story carried over from a former life, *kamma*, an extension of another story written long ago, once upon a time... a story within a story, in which one of the characters in the narrative will pause and say, '*this reminds me of a story...*' and goes on to relate a story inside the current story that the reader gets so immersed in the starting point is forgotten and it becomes just part of the whole; a vast structure of inter-related, nested stories enclosed by the original, frame story. Lost in the *samsara* of forgetfulness, caused by the holding-on disease, greed, *tanhā* (craving) passed on from former lives; seeking gratification in whatever sense object presents itself and wherever it finds rebirth.

'... if I were born again as a fruit fly I would think that being a fruit fly was the normal ordinary course of events, and naturally I would think that I was a highly cultured being, because probably they have all sorts of symphonies and music, and artistic performances in the way light is reflected on their wings in different ways, the way they dance in the air, and they say, "Oh, look at her, she has real style, look how the sunlight comes off her wings." They in their world think they are as important and civilized as we do in our world.' [The Essence of Alan Watts, Vol. 4: "Death"]

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/October 4, 2013

Postcard 016- nothing in particular



POSTCARD#016: Bangkok: Waiting for my number to be called... the figure 109 printed on a square of paper the receptionist gave me here at Rutnin Eye Hospital, outpatients department on the 2nd floor. People everywhere, very crowded today and only one seat available facing the white door that leads to examination room number 5. Fortunate because it's where I'm supposed to be – at least I'm in exactly the right place. Yes, but there could be 108 people in front of me... an endless time to wait; nothing to read, nothing to look at, just watching the time go by. The second hand spinning round on a clock on the wall, designed like the hospital logo; it looks like an eye – someone has taken care to create this icon; it's childlike, friendly, elegant.



I've been struggling with poor eyesight for years and, since the surgery, seeing the world through 'new eyes' means anything happening in the field of vision immediately calls out for attention; a movement, a colour – it has to be noticed. The world is a great diversity of things. I see a tiny patch of colour at the bottom of the door about half an inch wide, where a piece of the surface of the door panel has chipped off, probably caused by moving some heavy equipment into the room and the door was struck in the process. It's been repaired with something a slightly different colour and the coloured patch seems luminous, out of context with its surroundings... there's also the glint of something like mica, something metallic. For a moment I'm immersed in this although it's not important; it isn't anything, there's no attachment to it. It's just a coloured patch, yet it's fascinating. These days I'm often in the curious situation of having this intense visual awareness of an object and no subjective sense that it's worth paying attention to at all; mind is not inclined to engage with it. This is just an

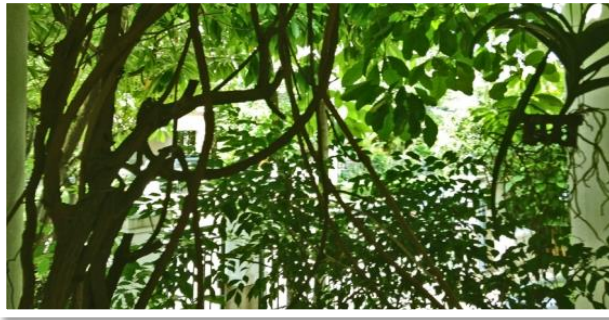
ordinary mark on a door, nothing in particular; I have no desire for it, no pressing need to possess it. There is sensory data input by way of the eye and eye-consciousness; receiving the world through the six sense-doors: eye, ear, nose, skin, tongue and cognitive functions, without the idea of it happening to 'me'. All that I'm aware of is a quiet presence, seen in peripheral vision and knowing it's there.

'... habitual desires manifest and condition awareness into a discriminative mode that operates in terms of subject and object held to exist on either side of the six sense-doors. These sense-doors open dependent on contact that can arouse varying degrees of feeling. Feeling stimulates desire and according to the power of desire, attention lingers... personal aims and obsessions develop and give rise to self-consciousness. That self-consciousness, mental or physical, once arisen must follow the cycle of maturing and passing away. When the mind looks into the sense of loss and comprehends (this) truth, the awareness is no longer bound by discrimination, the separation of subject and object is no longer held and one does not feel trapped behind or pulled through the sense-doors. There is freedom from desire... no personal image is created; there is nothing to lose, a sense of gladness, uplift, joy and serenity.' [Ajahn Sucitto]

Lower image: Rutnin Eye Hospital logo Note: Ajahn Sucitto's poetry link: dhammamoon.org

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/October 10, 2013

Postcard 017- spaciousness of being



POSTCARD#017: Nontaburi, Thailand: Here in this large house, surrounded by a garden of tall trees. Monsoon season, heavy rain all day, all night – oceans of frogs all around, hundreds of them, *l'amour*, croaking throughout the night in rising and falling waves as I sail off into sleep. Still raining next morning, then it stops about 10 o'clock, and the frogs are quiet now – I don't know where they can be... submerged in mud with a bubble of air to breathe in? Frog heaven. A time for quiet reflection, the actuality of just being here; conscious experience. I'm alone in an empty house, walking around the hallway, bare feet on cool marble tiles; *pita, pata, pit, pat, pata, pit, pit...* stop and look out the window; everything is totally wet out there.



Conscious of cold feet – an unusual feeling in Thailand, it's usually hot all the time. The skin sense (touch), contact with the world, consciousness of a physical object. Standing on the cool floor – the sensation. And the mind sense (cognition), *'I like this coolness'*, consciousness of a mind object. A pleasant wanting... hovering in a created sense of 'self'. A whole lifetime taken up with the body/mind's responses, reactions to the 'outside' world. Preoccupied with the doing of it, actively engaged with it; this is happening to 'me'. Everything I see, hear, smell, taste, touch, feel and think, received through sense organs mostly situated around the face, means the head is thus spinning around constantly to engage with whatever it is; the object of consciousness.

'A life guided by desire, a life contracted to the mind's thirst, seldom has the spaciousness of being. That pure awareness which wants nothing, which yearns for nothing, which simply takes on the shape of whatever form comes within its natural spaciousness.' [Stephen Levine]



There's consciousness of thought and consciousness of no-thought; consciousness of the cognitive function triggered by a simple curiosity: *what is going on here?* Unattached consciousness, released from sensory experience – awareness of the awareness, seeing the seeing, knowing the knowing. One way or another, conscious experience is what I'm writing about; an all-inclusive thing. I try to be minimalist, writing as if it were text messaging. No real 'story', no sequence of events; it lacks content, barely enough to hold the reader's attention. It just evolves, becomes something, gets broken down again and rebuilt. Often it feels like once it's been taken apart, it's not worthwhile putting it back together; everything in a state of disarray, prepositions and verbs scattered around, *'a small tribe of semi-colons nibbling at my ankles'*, no subject, no object; no actual finished state.

After another couple of days of just 'me' and the frogs in the rain, and I realize it must be Sunday because Naa J and Naa M arrive that evening with a take-out dinner. We talk for a while and they spend the night. Early next morning I hear the monks outside. Go to take a look, rain has stopped and it's dry again, *takbat*, offering food. Generosity, J and M have this kindness. An hour later I come downstairs, and they're gone...

'Awareness could be said to be like water. It takes on the shape of any vessel that contains it. If one mistakes this awareness for its various temporary forms, life becomes a ponderous plodding from one moment of desire, from one object of the mind, to the next. Life becomes filled with urgency and the strategies of fear, instead of lightly experiencing all these forms, recognizing that water is water no matter what its form.' [Stephen Levine , Ondrea Levine: *Who Dies*]

Note: *'a small tribe of semi-colons nibbling at my ankles'*, quote from Sue Vincent's *Daily Echo/Sharpening The Quill*. Thank you!

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/October 18, 2013

Postcard 018- the attributes of self



POSTCARD #018: Bangkok/Chiang Mai flight: They paint a face on the nose of the aircraft, the ‘cute’ concept – a Thai version of Japanese *kawaii* かわいい . It looks like a bird because the shape of it is beak-like but it’s recognizably a human face wearing sunglasses. Personifications, masks, fictional characters with human attributes respond in a childlike way to a world full of fear and joy. Goldilocks and the three bears finding the Buddhist Middle Way by trial-and-error: the first try is too hot; the second try, too cold; the third try is just right. Why not? This is a non-serious, one-hour flight; no sooner have we departed than we arrive. Smiling doll-like stewardesses in yellow costumes have just enough time to come up the aisle with a light snack in a paper bag for everyone, back down again to clear everything away and we’re descending into Chiang Mai.

Slightly bumpy, due to weather conditions, the vibration causes the luggage compartments to shake and creak for a moment. Sounds like something nautical; the rattle of rope harness striking the mast of a sailing ship... searching for something it resembles – something to account for this phenomenon of flying above the clouds at an incredible speed. Maybe I’m seeing the journey from Bangkok to Chiang Mai as if we were driving over something solid, bumps caused by an uneven road surface; a highway in the sky, an imagined bridge that spans the distance, 373 miles from there to here – a huge curved span in the sky. Logical mind attempts to create an explanation for it, based on what’s known, a figure of speech, something to help me ease back from contracting around the uneasiness, the unknown... that edgy feeling. Without the metaphor, all I’m aware of is tremendous velocity and a sense of vulnerability. The immediacy of the moment sweeps away all thought-constructs like the ground is gone from beneath my feet. Mindfulness of breathing, deeply in and all the way out...

Further into the descent I become a little deaf, it feels like being underwater, and no amount of swallowing or blowing of air into sinus cavities seems to clear it. Near to landing there’s the sound of the hydraulics, out go the flaps, down go the wheels and the earth rises up to meet us; 300 people contained in a structure the size of a building colliding with the surface of the Earth at 200 mph. A great yawning abyss of existential anxiety; I need something to hold on to – but there isn’t anything that’ll prepare me for such a colossal event; the roller-coaster experience. Aircraft wheels take the weight, first one then the other and the deep lurch, sink-down/bounce-back – for a moment it feels like we’re going to go out of control and disaster... then it’s okay.

There’s something about it being in a public context, we’re all in this together, and the sense of a letting-go of something tightly held: *woooooo!* The small ‘self’ is seen and relinquished; there’s nobody there... just this unattached feeling that couldn’t happen in any other circumstance. The Buddhist cessation – no words for it, consciousness doesn’t normally reach that far. No person, no identity. Before the Greeks created the Buddha image we know and accept today, there were only symbols, a riderless horse, the empty seat... footprints left behind in the place where he was.

‘... that dimension where there is neither earth nor water, nor fire nor wind, nor dimension of the infinitude of space, nor dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, nor dimension of nothingness, nor dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, nor this world, nor the next world, nor sun, nor moon. And there, I say, there is neither coming, nor going, nor stasis, nor passing away, nor arising: without stance, without foundation, without support [mental object]. This, just this, is the end of stress.’ [Ud 8.1]

Postcard 019- where I'm calling from



POSTCARD #019: Chiang Mai: *M* came to visit for the day, my Thai niece aged 9yrs, and her mum brought a bag of *pa tong ko* (Thai donuts) she got in the Saturday market. And just before we ate them all I remembered to take a photo [click this link for recipe]. But I'm getting ahead of myself, it began quite early this morning. I open my eyes and there's a sound, a Skype call – where's the phone? Stumble out of bed, follow the sound... phone has slid down the side cushion on the sofa, singing and buzzing in there; hello? It's *M*, hello? Her video appears – hello, hello? I can see the top of her head, she's watching a YouTube video at the same time as skyping me.

Where are you now Toong Ting? She calls me Toong Ting, a remnant of her baby-talk days. I tell her I'm in the condo, arrived last night from Bangkok; this is what it looks like, where I'm calling from, then slowly move the camera-phone around so she can see the interior of the room.

What you do there? She speaks English like text messaging – maybe social media is how she learned? I tell her I'm not properly awake yet and that's why my hair is all mussed up.

What's mussed-up mean? I tell her that I was sleeping, just woke. But it's difficult to hear what she's saying, I need to adjust the volume control. Where's the clicker? Can't see well with these glasses, I'll have to hold the phone so I'm able to see her face on the screen then put it to my ear to hear her voice – she's laughing because there's my big ear in close-up, filling her screen. Laughter...

Why you do that Toong Ting? The conversation lasts about a minute. She asks me, *Can I come stay with you today, mummy go out, OK?* I say yes; see you soon, bye-bye.



Shower, dressed, wash dishes, tidy up and in 1 hour, *ping-pong!* door opens, *M* is scooting down the corridor, running around the rooms and jumping on the sofa: *yaaaaay!* Her mum gives me the *pa tong ko* and some of *M*'s items in a bag and other food things, asks if I'm sure it's okay... yes, of course, and there's the handing over of responsibility with a few last words of caution to *M* and bye! Mummy is gone.

We put everything on the breakfast table, and taking the photo of the *pa tong ko* reminds me about the problem with the phone-camera earlier, with the sound – not finding the volume control and I tell her about this – can she fix it for me? *M* holds the phone in her small hands then clicks the little button with a tiny pointed finger.

I feel heavy and clumsy by comparison. She tells me I need to change the ringtone... so let's choose one together, okay? There's a long list, the names read like a poem; *apex, beacon, by the seaside, chimes, crystals, night owl, playtime, presto, radar, radiate, stargaze, summit, twinkle, waves* and we go through them all, one after another, like a strange inter-related

melody; a breathtaking journey through the diverse world of heavenly and celestial, twinkling ringtones.

Which one you like Toong Ting? I'd like to make a choice but it's like a kind of hilarious madness to me, they're all good... *M* makes her choice and I'm wearing my glasses to see how she's doing it. It's this that causes her to quit the ringtone selection as the discussion moves round to my recent eye operation.

What the doctor do? *M* comes close to my face and looks at my left eye, carefully, then looks at my right eye. She's a bit scared of the thought of it, yet kinda fascinated when I tell her about making a hole in the eye and sucking out the lens *shloooooorp!* then putting in the new lens folded over to get it into the hole and it's made of plastic, so it opens out *flap* when it's inside and lies down flat.

I see her small face and almond-shaped eyes absorbing the story into consciousness. It's a mirror I can see myself in. The 'I am' feeling – the sense of 'I-Amness'. All the way through one's life, the constant. It's the same today as it was when I was 9 years old. Absolute subjectivity.

'Consciousness veils itself from itself by pretending to limit itself to a separate entity and then forgets that it is pretending.' [*The Transparency of Things*, Rupert Spira]

We take other photos of the rest of the food things brought by *M*'s mum and here they are:

1. (below) Kao nyaow: glutinous rice cooked in banana leaves
2. (below) Ground nuts, the original version of the salted peanuts we buy in a can. They're actually a purplish-green colour.
3. (below) Thai kanom: a glutinous rice paste flavoured with panyan

References to *Absolute Subjectivity* taken from a Ken Wilbur video: Subject becomes object.

The title of this post: 'where I'm calling from' is taken from a collection of short stories by Raymond Carver

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/October 26, 2013

Postcard 020- gone is gone



POSTCARD#020: Delhi: Suddenly awake at midnight, the mind is busy with something... seeking gratification in the realization that I don't have to search for anything anymore – thus lost in the seeking for it. Trying to remember the dream from the parts of the jigsaw that are remaining. Maybe, as I'm looking for the lost pieces, I'll see what the story was about – the logic of the dream... In every new circumstance, reassembling the parts of who I am, and nothing seems to fit; searching for a 'self' to be satisfied with what's going on – or dissatisfied with how things are; or upset, or angry, confused, depressed, gloomy or sad

How did I get to be here? Arrived yesterday morning – flight from Chiang Mai to Bangkok, then another flight to Delhi; a cabin-pressured, air-conditioned day at 37,000 feet, cruising speed 600 mph; up and down again – twice. I'd been awake since 4am Thai time, fell asleep at 7.30pm in Delhi then woke again at midnight – the predicament of the dream, staring wide-eyed in the half-gloom of city night, deep purplish-black night-vision. Halloween season, all doors and windows shut to keep the ghosts out, enclosed in the concrete and steel of the present moment. Quiet, except for the refrigerator noise; *hmmmmmm*... masking out frequencies. When it stops, I become deaf in the silence. Small random sounds... the bark of a dog:

Death is drawn to sound

*like a slipper without a foot, a suit without its wearer,
comes to knock with a ring, stoneless and fingerless,
comes to shout without a mouth, a tongue, without a throat.*

Nevertheless its footsteps sound and its clothes echo, hushed like a tree. [Death Alone by Pablo Neruda]

Listening to the whisperings of stealth; a small lizard is investigating the kitchen, the tiny *clink* of something against a plate, rustling in the small trash bin on the counter... I switch on a few lights and it's gone. Start up the laptop, feel more comfortable with nocturnality, more at peace with the electric light of night, shadows and darkness. Draw all the curtains closed just before dawn, hermetically sealed. The day is an exhausting awokeness. I shall stay with the night, be a vampire; halloween and ghoulishness..

Deathlessness and the buddhist undead; mind hovering in a memory; the context of an event, somewhere between remembering what happened and wondering what could have happened after that – how it might have been and how the story unfolded from there. The thought exists in the mind, then it's gone. Curiosity, where did it go? Carefully take everything apart to find out where that thought went... everything irredeemably dismantled. It's gone. Gone is gone; when I'm gone, I'm gone and everything else will be going on. Just the same. Comforting, somehow, to shift the focus away from the confines of 'me' and out into the surroundings.

'... we are only dust. Our days on earth are like grass; like wildflowers, we bloom and die. The wind blows, and we are gone – as though we had never been here.' [Psalm 103, 14-16]

Reference to Psalm 103, 14-16: TheWannabeSaint.com – G R A T I T U D E –

Upper image: remembering this time last year when we went on the tour of Buddhist holy sites

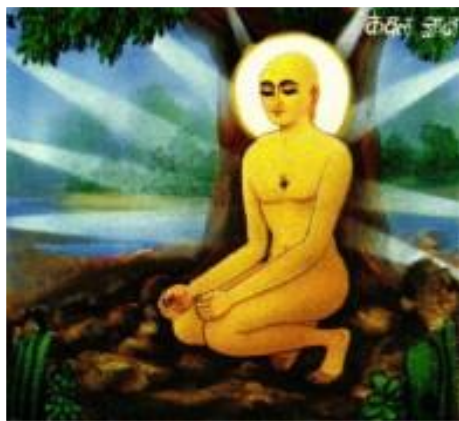
This post inspired by a website I recently discovered: Buddhism for Vampires

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/October 30, 2013

Postcard 021- diwali: an inner light



POSTCARD #021: Delhi: This year's 5 day Diwali festival begins on Sunday 03 November. Diwali is about celebrating the awareness of the inner light; that which is beyond the physical body and mind – pure, infinite and eternal. The light of higher knowledge that dispels the ignorance masking one's true nature, not as the body, but as the unchanging, infinite, immanent and transcendent reality. With this awakening comes compassion and the awareness of the oneness of all things. This 'higher knowledge' brings bliss, *ananda*. In the same way we celebrate the birth of a child – the birth of our physical being – Diwali is the celebration of this Inner Light. The story may vary from region to region, but the essence is the same – to rejoice in the Inner Light (*Atman*) or the underlying Reality of all things (*Brahman*).



The name Diwali, a contraction of *deepavali* (row of lamps), involves the lighting of small clay lamps which are placed outside the house and kept lit all through the night. It's about the triumph of good over evil; there are fireworks to drive away evil spirits going off all through the night – not possible to get much sleep – any lingering old thoughts of attachment are blasted out of their dusty little corners. You can't really pretend it's not happening... it's a social event, parties going on until late at night

For Jains, Diwali marks the attainment of *moksha* (nirvana) by Mahavira (a reformer of Jainism) in 527 BC. Interesting to note that the Buddha and Mahavira were contemporaries, and there's an odd similarity between Mahavira and Buddha; google their names and you'll get all kinds of info. Both were princes and renounced their kingdoms at the age of 30. Mahavira's father's name was Siddhartha (Buddha's name), and both attained enlightenment. They both practiced extreme asceticism, but the Buddha went on from there to develop the Middle Way. Jains believe in a soul, but for Buddhists there is no self, no creator of the Universe, it has no beginning and no end. There are many other similarities and I'll write a separate post about that one day.

Diwali is also celebrated by the Arya Samajists as the death anniversary of *Swami Dayan and Saraswati*. They also celebrate this day as Shardiya Nav-Shasyeshti. Diwali begins on the thirteenth lunar day of Krishna *paksha* (dark fortnight) of the Hindu calendar month *Ashwin* and ends on *Bhaubeej*. The Indian business community begins the financial year on the first day of Diwali (*Dhanteras*). Diwali is an official holiday in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Mauritius, Guyana, Trinidad & Tobago, Suriname, Malaysia, Singapore and Fiji. Diwali was given official status by the United States Congress in 2007 by former president George W. Bush. Barack Obama became the first president to personally attend Diwali at the White House in 2009.

Note: this post was created with excerpts from the wikipedia page. Upper image by Manish Jain spiritualartwork.wordpress.com. Middle image: illustration of Mahvira, a reformer of Jainism. Lower image: Swami Dayanand Saraswati

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/November 1, 2013

Postcard 022- synonyms for startled



POSTCARD#022: Delhi: “amazed, astonished, astounded, surprised...” looking for a word in the Thesaurus that describes the experience – but language doesn’t stretch that far. Diwali fireworks’ festivities are going on even though it’s after 22.00 hours and we’re just wondering how much longer before the fascination for fireworks fizzles out. I go for a look to see what’s going on outside. People in front of their houses, crouched over and busy with fireworks set up on the pavement; random explosions, fire crackers like machine-gun fire. It’s a war zone with no bullets, children laughing and running around in the smoke and glare. Fireworks displays are quite beautiful seen from some distance away, but here at ground-zero, the high volume, *bang-whoosh-crackle* is alarming; a struggle to be calm.



Back inside the house with all the windows closed because of the smoke and Jiab is talking about the Buddhist *upekkha* teaching: balance, equanimity, the state of being calm in the midst of difficulty; equilibrium, or *eequeleeblee-um*, as she says – a Thai articulation. This kind of balance leads to freedom from passions, desires, likes or dislikes. Sounds nice and I go through to sit on the meditation cushion for a while to see if I can discover this balance, be with my reactions to the sudden noises and focus on the nature of what’s actually happening.

Watching the breath in this way, things seem to be getting quiet, and I’m just getting settled into this sitting meditation when suddenly there’s a colossal explosion, *BOOM...* so loud it sets off a car alarm down the street. The glass, brick and concrete of the room resonate like a huge drum. Startled, is not the word – it’s the nearest thing to jumping out of your skin I’ve ever experienced – automatic response. Confusion in time... what happened first? Was it before it

happened that it seemed like I saw, in the darkness of mind-space, this amazing bright sky-blue colour appearing behind something like panels of intense black, falling away – parts of the structure that had been holding it contained – falling away in pieces, collapsing, and more and more of this lovely sky-blue colour is revealed.

The word: *bardo* comes to mind; the blue light of the *skandha* of consciousness in its purity, the wisdom of the *dharmadhtu*, luminous, clear, sharp and brilliant. I'm not saying this is what happened to me, it was more like a totally unfamiliar state, the mind doesn't know what to do – what does it resemble, what's it like, how can it be categorized? I'm amazed, astonished, astounded, surprised; looking for a word to describe it, but there's not anything. Fireworks chase away the demons; *papañca*, proliferating thought, conceptualizing and the constructed 'self'. The impact of it happening propels it all right out of here – *bang!*

'... the Brahma-viharas are the great removers of tension, the great peace-makers in social conflict, and the great healers of wounds suffered in the struggle of existence. They level social barriers, build harmonious communities, awaken slumbering magnanimity long forgotten, revive joy and hope long abandoned, and promote human brotherhood against the forces of egotism. The Brahma-viharas are incompatible with a hating state of mind...' [Access to Insight]

Upper image link to newspaper reports: www.thehindu.com/more-fire-incidents-in-delhi-this-diwali

Lower image link to: [Diwali wikipedia page](#)

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/November 5, 2013

Postcard 023- the forgotten thing



POSTCARD #023: Delhi: There's something cozy about having to have the lights on in the daytime; skies are quite dark, a curious colourless light. Feels nice, just pottering around in the house wearing indoor slippers; walking along the corridor to get something in the kitchen, *flip flop flip flop flip flop*... I arrive there and can't remember what it was I wanted. Strange, how a thought can simply vanish like that, leaving only the context of it. Walk back down to the living room and as soon as I'm there I remember what it was, ah yes... there's something about this action that seems to retrieve the memory. Walk back along to the kitchen, and, goodness me, I've forgotten again – pause for a moment... there's no memory of it at all.

A curious reality, the forgotten thing is associated with the idea it's a lost object and it'll turn up later, but when it does, how will I recognize it (if I don't know what it is)? Let it go and the thought has gone, taking with it the thinker of the thought... *thoughts without a thinker* [Mark Epstein]. Conscious experience is filtered through the conceptualizing process. Without that, there's no 'me'; there's nothing; a state of no 'thing-ness'. It's not the object, it's the space it's in; this 'something' within which things seem to exist, then unexist.

Shortly after that, I remember what it is I'm looking for; the eye-drop bottle – I have a schedule of eye-drops to take because of the eye operation. Walk back to the kitchen repeating the words: *eye-drop bottle, eye-drop bottle, eye-drop bottle*, and there it is sitting on the counter in plain sight – how could an object like that become invisible? Back to the living room where I'm distracted by other events for a while and when I look for the eye-drop bottle later on... can't find it, *oh no* (this is giving me a headache). Then it's there, sitting in the place where it was placed, an existential presence; *nature morte avec bouteille d'oeil-baisse*, "Still Life With Eye-Drop Bottle". It holds my attention now – have I taken the eye-drop already, or not yet, and feeling my eyes for moisture, trying to remember...

'The range of what we think and do is limited by what we fail to notice. And because we fail to notice that we fail to notice, there is little we can do to change; until we notice how failing to notice shapes our thoughts and deeds.' [R. D. Laing]

Upper image: floating small candle boats on the Ganges river, taken from last year's visit to the Buddhist sites

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/November 9, 2013

Postcard 024- a terrestrial ocean



POSTCARD #024: Delhi: It's colder here at this time of year. No fans, no ACs, people have their windows open and you can hear TVs, the clatter of dishes, cooking pots, *ding*, and bits of other people's conversations. A child crying, a dog barks, somebody calling a person's name in a language I can't understand. It dwindles down as everyone settles in for the night, silent breathing in all the labyrinths of rooms and apartments that surround us here; people asleep on the floor, in beds, in cots, in hammocks. That's how it was last night, then just after midnight, there was an earthquake.

Jiab wakes up, gives me a shake, 'earthquake' she says (Jiab is a linguistic minimalist). It takes me a moment to realize the house is trembling, bed is shaking, floor is like a sheet of tin stretching out from here to everywhere, connected with all other houses in the community... and the uneasy sensation of it *undulating* slightly; a flexibility, like the surface of the sea – a terrestrial ocean. Voices of neighbours outside, shouts and kerfuffle.

After a moment it settles down and the urgency passes. Trying to be mindful but I feel like I could go back to sleep maybe, just lying there, waiting to see what'll happen. Then there's another tremor, and we're back into the unstable feeling again; louder shouts of voices, and more commotion outside... *hmmm*, the idea of death just going to arrive one day, any day, could be a Tuesday, for example, or a Thursday, yes, nice if it were a Thursday.

Falling into a half sleep; there's that Donovan song 'Jersey Thursday'... did he mean the pullover or the island? Another tremor rocks the bed slightly and the gentleness of it helps me to drift off a little bit more. The day I die will be an ordinary day, nothing different about it. The moment after I'm gone the next moment will come along; that'll take place, and there'll be the next day, the next week, the next month, the next year.

No more holding on to 'me', the identity; who's who or which is 'what' and 'where', 'how' and 'when' and 'why'... particularly *WHY?* How to answer that? It's *M's* favourite question, she's only 9 years old and has this curiosity about everything. Well, it's just the way it is, you know? It's all happening for its own sake, the inevitability of circumstances – things moving along of their own volition and whether they continue or discontinue doesn't seem to be a question. (*'The sky is just blue. M looks at me: '... yes, but WHY?'*) It's like a story that I may think will, one day, come to an end... the final curtain: *THE END*, but it starts again and the period of 'ending' becomes a defining characteristic of it all: it ends sometimes and then it begins again. More like an epic anthology of short stories: 'as old as we are able to imagine' and going on forever, *the panchatantra*, the great cycle of it is always there. All the way out of this tiny space and knowing I'm an integral part of the whole universe.

It's 4am, can't sleep, get up and go through to the front room. Start up the laptop and google 'earthquake'... amazing, the news is there already: *'Four earthquakes (in Delhi) within a period of 4 hours, measuring 3.1 (12.41am), 3.3 (1.41 am), 2.5 (1.55am) and 2.8 (3.40am) on the Richter scale respectively. No reports of any casualty or destruction of property received so far.'* [reports: NDTV]

Upper image by Manish Jain

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/November 12, 2013

Postcard 025- the 'now' moment



POSTCARD#025: Delhi: Traffic stops. A great noise of beeping horns and eventually we can see it's caused by cows crossing the road. Unusual to see cows being herded in the middle of the city – there must be a **cowherder at the end of the column driving** them, and others to clear the path through the traffic. The cows do seem a little anxious now, hurrying along. Usually they're relaxed – placid is the word. I see them sometimes, sitting at the side of the road, cars moving around them, or they're at rest on a traffic roundabout, ruminating, gazing out at the world.

The presence of the bovine mother, with its horns and all its wet-nose, smooth-hide, *cowness*, creates a kind of out-of-context NOW moment for me, a foreigner in this part of the world – although really, it's 'now' all the time. 'Now' is not located anywhere in particular in time or space, it is always 'now' – the whole thing is 'now'. The cow with its long eyelashes and good-looking face, just uncompromisingly 'there', is part of the environment and events taking place in the flow of occurrences, always in the present moment. I'm kinda blown-away by the immediate here-and-now reality of traffic flow around a seated cow, like a river moves round the boulders in a stream of tiny moments linked together, a seamless whole; cause becomes effect, what happened before it becomes what happened after that, and out into every available space in the city. It's everywhere at the same time.

Usually I don't see it; caught up in the thinking process; watching a movie in my head, driven by the requirements of a constructed 'me' and seeing the world in these terms. THINKING ABOUT THINGS so much...

[Editor's note: I'm drawn to these strange moments when there seems to be no thought at all. The mind just stops, allowing the space where thought was situated, to be a place of consciousness. An awareness that's different from the basic functions of interacting with the world of sensory stimuli.]

I don't pay attention to the 'now' moment, the small period of pause that occurs... that empty space where nothing is happening, just before the next thought arises – a kind of non-event. Focus on it and everything stops shifting around, gradually settles down; time begins to stretch out in a vastness, reaching out over the horizon on all sides.

Interactive Link- This contextual paragraph is linked to a paragraph in [Postcard 28](#).

Surrounding traffic is somewhere down below, locked-in, waiting for the cows to pass through.



This lasts as long as it takes for me to forget what I'm doing, attention wanders, and a passing wave of thought spins me off in the thinking process, the automatic default that brings me back to the functioning of the mind-body organism. The "self" getting in the way, feeling it didn't quite have what it should have had, wanting this, happy with that, glad there are signs of movement at last and the 'now' moment is changed to something else. We're on the road again, the cow obstruction has gone. Revving car engines, horns *beep-beep*, jostling for space. Car bodies like brightly coloured Lego pieces fit together to create a form, then immediately separate themselves and become a different form; join with other forms and larger constructs fit together with surrounding pieces. Traffic roars, screaming horns, it all begins to spread out, moving as one, then it's quickly dispersed into separate units, more acceleration, and we're away like a wave rushing back out to sea. The speed is breath-taking....

'The human body is not a frozen sculpture fixed in space and time. The human body is a dynamic bundle of energy, information and intelligence that constantly is renewing itself and is in exchange with the larger field of energy, information and intelligence that we call the universe. In fact if we could really see the human body as it is, not through the artifact of sensory experience, you would see it to be much more exciting.' [Deepak Chopra, *'The Basics of Quantum Healing'*]

Source for lower image: Martin S. Gotfrit

The above article first appeared in [dhammafootsteps.com/November 15, 2013](http://dhammafootsteps.com/November%2015,2013)

Postcard 026- a kind of ignoring



POSTCARD#026: Delhi: Putting in eyedrops and I'm not used to it, eyelid reacts just as the drop is coming, blinks before the drop hits the eye, face is wet with eye-drop fluid. Try again... drip. Same thing happens. I've just started a two week schedule of eye-drops because of a dryness in the eyes after *the recent operation*. Hoping it'll get easier and learning how to not-react, to resist the body's automatic knee-jerk response to whatever it is that's coming into the eye. There's this natural tendency to reject, to refuse, to say 'no'. The mind has it figured out but the body is still unconvinced.

It's something like a deliberate not-seeing; the not-wanting-to-have-anything-to-do-with-it thing. Not wishing to engage; a kind of ignoring. It's denial... "Who me? ... in denial? I'm not in denial!" (denial of denial). I'm not going to pay attention to what you're saying about me ignoring you. Pretending it's not there and maybe it'll go away? Ostrich-head-in-the-sand syndrome [see note1 below] The 'self' illusion itself, is a trancelike state. Even though it's really obvious, people are conditioned to ignore basic truths that conflict with the habitual way of doing things. 'We don't look at things, we overlook things' [Alan Watts].

Ignoring the truth about climate change, seemingly unconcerned about what kind of future we're passing on to future generations. Ignoring deeply held misgivings about wars created by politicians, weapons of mass 'distraction', *'slipperiness, underhandedness, cunning ploys and guile:'* [Ajahn Sucitto]. Ignoring the 1st Noble Truth of Suffering; tolerating the suffering permits a sort of attachment to it? Or maybe we are genuinely searching for another way to live our lives, but we're sidetracked by Television, consumer goods, and fall into the world of 'choices' and 'preferences'; burdened with these dependencies. So we might say: NO, this is not it at all... go to the doctor, tell him about it and he says take these pills, something to get us back on track – education cleverly teaches children there's only one option: consumerism, and to engage with that you need to learn about career, job, debt, house, rent, marriage, car, bills... It's doesn't say *WHY* (ignore that question). Consumerism is what people believe in; consumerism is 'God'.

Try another eye-drop... head back, look at the ceiling. The eyelid flutters, blinks involuntarily, and an eyelash deflects the intrusive drop, fluid trickles down the cheek like an actual tear drop and falls into the ear. I wipe it away with a tissue – this action triggers a memory of something emotional – why am I crying... trying to do something I can't, and don't know why. It's the squeezing of the bottle between thumb and forefinger, a small intense muscular action, that's in conflict with the feeling of vulnerability. Reluctantly I see, in close-up, the bubble of the drop emerging from the point of the bottle and glance away from it, anticipating the tiny impact on sensitive eyeball... *splash!* I have to learn to look elsewhere – a skilful ignoring – and focus on something like the ceiling fan, a light bulb, the flaking piece of plaster in the corner of the cornice.

Mindfulness and being calm. Earlier today, I downloaded 11 hours of Tibetan Healing Bell Chimes and as I'm writing this now I'm already on hour 5. It's playing quietly in a different window; sweet random sounds, intentional wind chimes; the IS-ness of it. Meditation practice

means I can gently ease back from the intensity the mind creates for as long as it takes to see what's going on; this action feels right – I'm able to emerge from ignorance into the knowing. A wonderful emptiness or the wholeness of it? A great peace in the space of the mind.

'The sensation of "I" as a lonely and isolated center of being is so powerful and commonsensical, and so fundamental to our modes of speech and thought, to our laws and social institutions, that we cannot experience selfhood except as something superficial in the scheme of the universe. I seem to be a brief light that flashes but once in all the aeons of time—a rare, complicated, and all-too-delicate organism on the fringe of biological evolution, where the wave of life bursts into individual, sparkling, and multicolored drops that gleam for a moment only to vanish forever. Under such conditioning it seems impossible and even absurd to realize that myself does not reside in the drop alone, but in the whole surge of energy which ranges from the galaxies to the nuclear fields in my body. At this level of existence "I" am immeasurably old; my forms are infinite and their comings and goings are simply the pulses or vibrations of a single and eternal flow of energy.' [Alan Watts, *The Book: On The Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are* (link to downloadable pdf)]

Note 1: I discovered that, in fact, the ostrich doesn't bury its head in the sand when there's danger, it's digging a hole and covering the egg with sand and, seen from a distance, it just looks like that's what it's doing.

Note 2: 'If You Are Having Trouble Getting The Drop Into Your Eye: Lay on your back, and place a drop in the inner corner of your eyelid (the side closest to the bridge of your nose). Tilt your head, open your eyes slowly, and the drop should fall right into your eye.'

Note 3: 'slipperiness, underhandedness, cunning ploys and guile' taken from Ajahn Sucitto's 'Parami: Ways To Cross Life's Floods'

Note 4: *Listening to 11 hours of Tibetan Healing Sounds in Zen Flash*

Note 5: Reference to: 'career, job, debt, house, rent, marriage, car, bills, children...' taken from blogpost: *What Do You Want?* by Jack Saunsea

Note 6: *Upper image taken from the series: "Only In India"*

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/November 19, 2013

Postcard 027- filled with emptiness



POSTCARD#027: Delhi: It's like this sometimes... nothingness, the state of there being not anything to attach to at all – like when you switch off the TV suddenly and there's this absolute silence. Reality comes crashing in, everything is filled with emptiness, boundaries and walls collapse and, for a moment, it all falls into a state of awe...

Scenes from the past flicker across the mind for a few moments then pass and, one by one, are replaced with empty space – the *kamma* of emptiness inherited from earlier times, maybe – it's not the kind of thing you'd notice. I should make a note about it in my diary. A regeneration of empty spaces from the past invading other places where events are situated. The *kamma* of emptiness may return again in a future time and out of nowhere, all of a sudden, there'll come this feeling of nothingness again and I'll say to myself, how about this déjà vu familiarity? Where did this nothingness, out-of-nowhere feeling just arrive from?

And when that comes around I may have forgotten about this moment where I am now – but if I remember, I'll see it from that new location and say aha! this is the result of that empty space then; I made a note about it in my diary, let's see.... And finding the handwriting on the page, I'll remember the circumstances at the time, knowing that was the cause of my present recognition of it in this place where I am currently seeing the world. It somehow seems easier seen in the past, in hindsight, after the event – all that, and everything has passed, has been experienced, and there's a sadness about it now; gone forever. I can split into two and look back on the event, reflect on that from where I am now, divided between here and there. I can look into the future and predict events that may occur and what that'll be like... See it all as something happening 'out there' at different points in linear time. But wherever I've been in my mind, the return to 'now' takes place; the reel winds me in, there's always the coming back to the point of reference, the present moment. It's always now.

Maybe sometime next month I'll be somewhere else, and next year in some other place – eventually it'll be in a future time, distant but not too far away, and I'll be lying in a bed with clean white sheets, hospital equipment and the people I see will all have names I seem to remember when they were children. It won't matter, nothing will matter because I'll be travelling through memory, revisiting times gone by: *how did that come about? When did that happen... how long ago was it? Who was there and why am I remembering this now?* And the answer will be that it had its origin at this specific point in time because I can see it writ; faded handwriting on the page in the diary, and I'll reflect on the quality of that moment, this moment here now. Gratitude.

'It is not that enlightenment will occur "when the time comes," for "there is no time right now that is not a time that has come."' [The Path of No Path, David Loy]

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/November 22, 2013

Postcard 028- 'self' is a sensory experience



POSTCARD028: Delhi: Thinking about things in the darkness. Stories come and go, pondering over this and that, and the awareness of being caught up in the thinking thing gets included in the meanderings – searching for a way out. If I start thinking about how to stop thinking, the mind gets busy looking for a solution; finding something and comparing it with other reasons why I can't stop thinking. Thinking has its own momentum, takes time to slow down; that's the way of things. Letting it all fizzle out until it can go no further and everything evaporates for a moment.

[Editor's note: It was somewhere around this time, I noticed the mind thought...no traffic of thinking, just a sense of the vastness remaining. See below and click on the interactive links to see other examples of this]

In that instant there's no thinking and the mind is alerted... an empty space opens up; a great mirror showing Mind looking at itself – the awareness of being aware. Silence and emptiness, held on 'pause'. There's the desire to be actively thinking, and I see the invitation to be involved with thought, self is a sensory experience but, right now, I don't need to engage with that. Interactive Links- Return to the paragraph in [Postcard 025](#) or [Postcard 029](#).

The breath coming from the nostrils, so faint and light it stirs only the tiniest thing; a single strand of hair. There is no other sensory input the mind needs to be engaged with; no sense object activates the chain of events and all that remains is the mind's cognitive function.

A wave of thoughts comes rushing in, stays for a moment and goes out again. I see it as an observer watching from some hidden place. Then the observer disappears and only the awareness is left there. Another wave of thoughts comes rushing in. Forms appear and disappear and in their place, a sequence of obscured mental events, each one linking with the next; small bursts of energy are seen rising up and falling away. Fainter and fainter. Soon after that, sleep comes and the whole world disappears...

'Mindfulness is what keeps the perspective of appropriate attention in mind. Modern psychological research has shown that attention comes in discrete moments. You can be attentive to something for only a very short period of time and then you have to remind yourself, moment after moment, to return to it if you want to keep on being attentive. In other words, continuous attention—the type that can observe things over time—has to be stitched together from short intervals. This is what mindfulness is for. It keeps the object of your attention and the purpose of your attention in mind.' [Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 'Mindfulness Defined']

– G R A T I T U D E –

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/November 26, 2013

Postcard 029- seeing with alertness



POSTCARD#029: Delhi: Large birds of prey slowly circling above; they make a sound like the mewling of cats. I'm on the roof terrace, watching them. They've seen something and I'm curious to see if I'll witness the dramatic plunge to Earth to catch the prey.

Reminds me of a time I was in Pondicherry, South India, walking through a quiet district in the French-speaking Tamil part of town. Not much going on, turn a corner and on the other side of the path there's this mother hen fussing around agitatedly with her brood of little chicks: chee-eep, cheep, cheep, cheep, cheep. And the hen is making loud cluck-cluck, cluck-cluck noises, strutting around, strangely fast, unusual body movements; it was like a dance – and didn't look right somehow. The mother hen was dashing about, jumping backwards and forwards and the little chicks were falling over themselves trying to keep up with her. Wow, what is going on here? I stopped to watch.

Then suddenly there was this huge SWOOP down from above. A movement of the air and a large bird of prey with outstretched talons was 'falling' from sky to earth in a great wide arc; at its widest point, so near to the ground, going at a tremendous speed. I saw it further down the road sailing back upwards in the momentum of its fall, and up in this large curve then winging it's way back into the higher altitudes. Amazing... an almost silent whoosh of feathers and outstretched talons just in front of me.

But it missed its target! It didn't get what it was after, the mother hen had saved the chicks with her strange dance. And it's possible that my being there, having just turned around the corner at exactly the right instant, had caused the bird of prey to misjudge the distance to its target; the kamma of the moment – a fortunate turn of events for these cute little chicks. Mother hen and her happy brood went on with their day: cheep, cheep, cheep, story with happy ending.

But the feeling of a narrow miss was like I'd received an electric shock; the sharp talons of the Great Bird of Prey – a dreadful image, yet an indescribable exhilaration!

My mind was transparent, a large empty space; nothing there, no object of attention. Just this 'clear comprehension,' and seeing with alertness – detached from it, knowing it's the configurations of thinking that creates the fearful shape. Without that there's this energized awareness in its place.

[Interactive Link](#) -Return back to the paragraph in [Postcard 28](#).

This is understood in a moment and after that mindfulness disconnects the automatic thinking.

When I think of it now and see these birds of prey suspended in the air, they're without malice. When I'm not caught in thinking, there is no fear and dread. The birds hold my attention, their patient observing ...

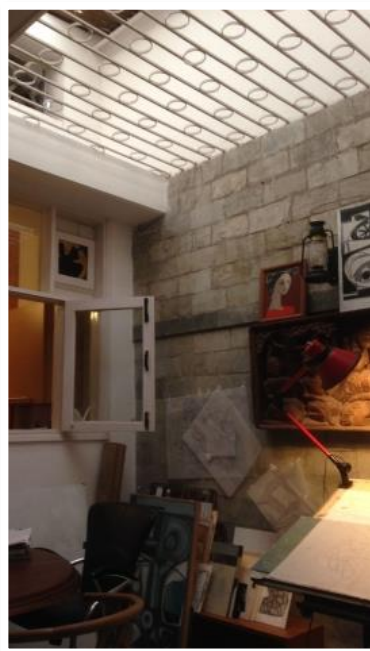
'This awakened consciousness, as pointed out by the Buddha, is not conditioned as with the six kinds of consciousness (the six sense-doors: eyes, ears, nose, mouth, body or mind), neither being part of the natural world (earth, water, fire, and wind), nor having size, being neither long nor short; it is without texture, being neither fine nor coarse; it is without moral quality either, being neither pure nor impure; neither is it psychological in nature (nama) nor physical (rupa). It is invisible, limitless, and radiant.' [Ajahn Sumedho, 'Awakened Consciousness']

Postcard 030- cold denial of winter in the north



POSTCARD#030: Delhi: Gone are the barefoot days of summer, the short-pants and silly Tshirt. It's cold now. Ah, that warm memory; sunny weather and things that don't matter. If I'm going around dressed like a clown, how can I take life seriously? It's okay here except it gets hot like an oven for three months of the year, peak temperatures at 46°C and higher. Now, though, our world is sliding down slowly into the chilled foods section of the supermarket, colder and colder – still warm during the day, but cold at night. Temperature dropping and I'm struggling slightly with this shut-in feeling, like maybe I'm ill or something? There's got to be some reason for this heaviness, burdened by the weight of clothing.

Dark grey skies in the morning seen from this old house, through these large single-glazed windows, loose fitting and draughty, high ceilings, marble tiled flooring and small electric heaters on wheels that run across the smooth surface. It's good enough for rented accommodation, single storied; a large roof window in the middle of it where I set up my drawing board. Nice overhead light but when it's raining the sound is deafening and in this cold weather it's as cold inside as it is outside. I wear a scarf indoors, a wooly jumper, and pause to consider the novelty of socks... wiggle the toes.



Jiab is ok about it, she's from Thailand where it's blue sky every day and this dullness is quite interesting for her; comes over to me with her sleeve rolled up and holds out her arm for me to look at: *'see?... it's that thing again, what you call it?'* I say 'goose bumps' (supplier of English vocabulary), look closely and sure enough, the skin is reacting to the cold. Different though from my experience of childhood in 4° below zero in Scotland most of the winter; memories of a snow drift against the side of the outhouse, frozen until the springtime. I am the escapee. It's so dark there, they use special lighting to treat Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), 'winter depression' and set up mirrors to reflect the sun: heliostat skylights. People are skilled in staying cheerful, shut inside small rooms for a third of the year, blazing coal fires in the hearth.

The gloomy ponderings of winter; the closed concept around things, setting boundaries around what is really open space. And it doesn't have much meaning to the folk who live there if you say that nothing is permanent, all things arise in dependence upon multiple causes and conditions.... *ah well, ho hum: one thing leads to another, is that it? Yes, well so what?* There comes a time when it's all been kind of said before and words run out.

I try to be alert, sensitive to what's happening now... switch off the video in the head; be mindfully aware of the present. I want to deny the presence of winter, stay unattached and free, switch on all the lights in the house. It feels warmer and there's a 300 watt halogen bulb in the standing lamp I can sit under to read a book and it feels like summertime, still...

'... something like a level, a dimension, realm or sphere of truth, or a reality, things as they are. 'The all-encompassing space' (Trungpa Rinpoche), the element of space contains everything, contains all existence. This is the wisdom of the dharmadhatu. This word 'wisdom' means, perhaps, 'gnosis'; it is knowledge which is nondualistic, knowledge which is completely one with the thing it knows, complete understanding, complete absorption into that knowledge...'
[Francesca Freemantle]

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/December 5, 2013

Postcard 031- generosity is letting go



POSTCARD#031: In Buddhist countries, babies are taught when they are about six months old to put food into the monk's alms-bowl. The whole family applauds as the sticky rice drops from that little hand into the monk's bowl. The kid gets the idea early on: when stuff leaves your hand, you get this happy feeling. It feels good to give.

Everything the Buddhist monk receives is a gift, an offering; the monk is a mendicant, and lives entirely on the generosity of others: *'Our bodies are fuelled by the food that is offered to us. In fact, scientists say that all the cells of the body are replaced every seven years, so any (monk) who has been ordained for that long has a body that is completely donated. If it were not for the accumulated kindnesses, efforts, and good will of countless hundreds and thousands of people, this body would not be able to sustain itself. Kindness is the actual physical fabric of what we think of as 'me.'* [Ajahn Amaro, *'Generosity in the Land of the Individualist'*]

Generosity is cultivating an inward disposition to give, a glad willingness to share what we have with others. Give it away, we have more than enough. Ease the discomfort of being driven to fulfill that urge to 'have', to 'possess', a hunger created by always wanting more. All of it is gone when you're generous. Brainstorm the word 'generosity' and you come up with loving-kindness, compassion, empathy, well-being, freedom. You find gratitude, grace, honour, motivation, encouragement. Generosity is everything. It's nature is to share, recycle, circulate; it can only be given, never taken.

Generosity, is a mental, emotional letting go; releasing the tenacity of holding on to things; all that baggage we burden ourselves with is removed in one single act of generosity. Generosity means not holding to the self-concept, the separateness applied to things that are really 'in context'. Seeing it all as process, ever-changing; a connectedness with the outer world. Generosity leads to wisdom – the truth is without bias. The cultivation of generosity directly debilitates greed and hate, and facilitates the kind of mind that allows for the eradication of delusion.

'There was a seeker and a wise man. The wise man had a most incredible jewel and the seeker was absolutely amazed by the jewel. He asks the wise man if he would give him the jewel. And the wise man gives it to him. The seeker is very excited and afraid that the old wise man is going to change his mind, so he hastily says goodbye and goes off. A short while after that he comes back, approaches the wise man with great humility and respect, lays the jewel down in front of him on the ground and says he'd like to make a trade. He'd like to exchange this jewel. And the wise man asks him what he wants to exchange it for. The seeker says he would like to exchange the jewel for knowledge of how to gain the sort of mind that could give up a jewel like that without a second thought.' [This story appears in Khanti – Patient Endurance]

Sources include: *Dana: The Practice of Giving*

Excerpts from an earlier post: *More Than Enough*

Upper image is from the Wat Pahnanachat collection

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/December 7, 2013

Postcard 032- here and there



POSTCARD#032: Delhi: 05.00 hrs. Power cut, lights out and the laptop screen darkens a little as it goes on battery. I can hear the generator outside starting up with a polite cough *hmm-hmm*, clearing its throat like a car engine throttle, then into the familiar, *thud-thud-thud-thud....* This happens nearly every day, same old thing. Other generators in the neighbourhood start up too and in a short while it's like a fleet of helicopters have landed. I can go on at the desk for a while, the internet is still connected because the router is on the backup line – but it is noisy. Go lie down on the sofa, try to absorb the sound rather than feel it's disturbing... the acoustics of the room, the darkness is pleasing, watch the breath, and listen to the quality of this particular noise.

Thinking of Kiki, now on the ANA, Delhi/Japan flight. Kiki is the little black dog, a cocker spaniel, who stayed with us for a few days in June [[Link](#)]. She was here last night with her owners to say goodbye, then to the airport. It's a 10 hour flight, so Kiki is still flying. She is out 'there' somewhere in the high-altitude darkness. I can 'see' Kiki in her doggie crate in the cargo hold, and the plane zooming along like a streak of light at 600 mph. I like to think of her facing the direction of travel; long spaniel ears flapping in the wind, hair ruffled and tail blowing around behind.

It's as if it were a Skype call, the location is seen, hard to believe, but there's a picture of it in the window. The environment of the aircraft is the same there as it is here; the air there is not much different from the air here. Okay, it may not be exactly as I'm seeing it in the mind's eye, but how different could it be? The image seems so clear, maybe because it's a bit unusual to think of a cute dog flying to Japan... it's like she's not far away at all. There's the *mmmmmm* of engine sound, the *ssssssss* of cabin air pressure, and I'm in a house in New Delhi surrounded by the noise of thudding generators. Conscious experience is pretty much the same for me and Kiki at this moment, distance is the only difference. I can 'see' her small black shape, lying there quietly or maybe she gets up and turns around and lies down again, gets comfortable at 28,000 feet above the surface of the planet. I can picture it, she's 'there'... and she's also here.



Reminds me of the Curiosity Rover landing on Mars in August, last year. And the world paused for a moment... where is this place that wasn't there before, but we seem to have a consciousness of it now? Mars? Awareness goes off in search of this new location, natural human reaction, there's an idea of something very distant; yes but also quite near. It is 'here' –

in the same space of consciousness where we all 'exist'. It's somewhere in the known universe; in the sky obviously, and the mind looks for a way to incline towards that place, move in that direction. I can see a part of the sky through my window, in the early morning light, go over and have a look: Mars is out there somewhere. And I know Kiki is in the sky too – a very clear feeling, a kind of 'seeing'.

Shortly after that all the lights come on at the same time; generators shut down, one by one. Power cut is over, back to normal. The silence seems close, as near as my face and a sense of great distance. Over 'there' is the same as right 'here', it's all a oneness leading down from my door and out into the world as far as the eye can see.

Upper photo: *Ancient freshwater lake on the surface of Mars – lettering removed with Photoshop clone tool*

Lower photo: Kiki in Japan

Note: Excerpts included here from an earlier post: *Landing on Mars*

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/December 11, 2013

Postcard 033- Postcard 33- flying time



POSTCARD#033: Delhi-Bangkok flight: Travelling at hundreds of miles an hour but it feels like the aircraft is standing still. A curious sensation, there's nothing to indicate we're moving, only this pleasing *hmmmmm* of the aircraft, and *shhhhhh* of cabin air pressure. Daylight enters into the small space of my window seat, a fold-down table, colourful papers, books and everything has the familiarity of being in a small room, brightly illuminated with a warm, happy, sunny light. I'm unaware of travelling across the sky in a passenger jet that observers in a different location might see as a streak of light. In another location they might see the aircraft seemingly suspended. I've seen it like this, sometimes, in the car going to the airport; a plane is taking off and if you're coming towards the ascending aircraft, it looks like the plane is just hanging in the air. It's this same feeling now, only I'm in it – a strange illusion; the various speeds all around are synchronised and the impression is that everything has stopped. I feel like I should hold my breath...

It's an illusion... isn't it? Einstein's Theory on Special Relativity; everything inside this enclosed capsule is relative to itself. I'm up here, looking out the window and trying to understand this experience... soft, pale white-blue sky above the clouds stretching over the curvature of the Earth. After five or ten minutes, the horizon of clouds is still the same – it feels like we haven't moved. Suspended in the air and the Earth is spinning on its axis below. The plane is going in an Easterly direction, parallel to the Earth's rotation, like a boat on a river going in the direction of the current and there's no sense of movement.

There's an awareness of space below, an awareness of space all around and the vastness of the situation. Awareness of breathing; the in-breath and the out-breath. The action of releasing the out-breath seems associated with the direction the aircraft is travelling in. It appears to move the entire environment perceptibly forward in a very small way. A sense of something having passed by, I saw it for a moment as it slipped into the past. There's an awareness that a thought was there and the awareness that it's gone now, forgotten – no awareness of forgetting, only the awareness of the awareness.

The 'now' moment is like the boat on the river going downstream with the current, it's only when the trees on the riverbank are seen that there's an idea of relative speeds. I can distinguish things from their time, a local sense, there's a 'before' and an 'after', but I can't separate myself from time. Time is what I am, together with everything in the context of this aircraft. I remember the past but I'm remembering it now – I see into the future but I'm seeing it now. I am what space and time are doing here and now.

I get up and walk along the aisle and notice that walking in the forward direction (the direction we are travelling) is easy, swimming with the current, like walking downhill. Walking back to my seat (opposite to the direction we are travelling) is like swimming against the current; walking uphill. Then sitting in this small window seat, with the familiarity of my breathing, focus and mindfulness as we career headlong through space at 600 mph. The environment of the plane, the presence of noise and proximity of engines... powerful beyond belief.

'Our awareness is like the air around us: we rarely notice it. It functions in all our waking moments and may even continue in sleep. Usually we are caught up in the content of our awareness, preoccupied with what we think, feel, and experience. Becoming aware of awareness itself is Receptive Awareness, very close to the idea of a witnessing consciousness. Resting in receptive awareness is an antidote to our efforts of building and defending a self: the assumption that there is "someone who is aware" falls away. Self-consciousness falls away; the distinctions between self and other, inside and outside, perceiver and perceived disappear. There is no one who is aware; there is only awareness and experience happening within awareness. We learn to hold our lives, our ideas, and ourselves lightly and rest in a spacious and compassionate sphere of awareness that knows, but is not attached.' [Insight Meditation Center, Chapter 27: 'Receptive Awareness']

Note: Excerpts from other posts on the experience of flying included here: *Suspended Stillness*, *High Altitude Sunset*, *Meditating at 600 mph*, *somewhere over the rainbow*

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/December 14, 2013

Postcard 034- where there is no christmas



POSTCARD#034: Bangkok: No snow here, of course, winter is just a slight coolness that happens once a year. It lasts about a week. There's no Christmas either because it's a Buddhist country. I am the only thing resembling a real *christmasee* here. Christians in Thailand amount to 0.7% of the population. Yet there are Christmas carols playing in all the malls, and also in the supermarket where I was this morning: '*... the ho-lee bible says, mary's boy-child, jee-sus christ, was born on christ-mas daay...*' twirling around the fruit and vegetables and frozen food section. Gift-giving as purchasing incentive, the season of goodwill has a place here even though the population are 95% Buddhist, 4% Moslem. Thai society is joyful, they like to share everything. They like playfulness – the word in Thai is *sanuk* (fun), everything has to be *sanuk* and if it's not, it's *mai sanuk* (seriously boring) and that's bad style. I was downtown yesterday, saw the yellow duck wearing sunglasses stuck on the red taxi, took the photo. The Thais recognise the 25th December as a happy event but it's also an ordinary day. People go to work, government offices are open, mail gets delivered, transport systems are normal, it's all open for business, same as usual.

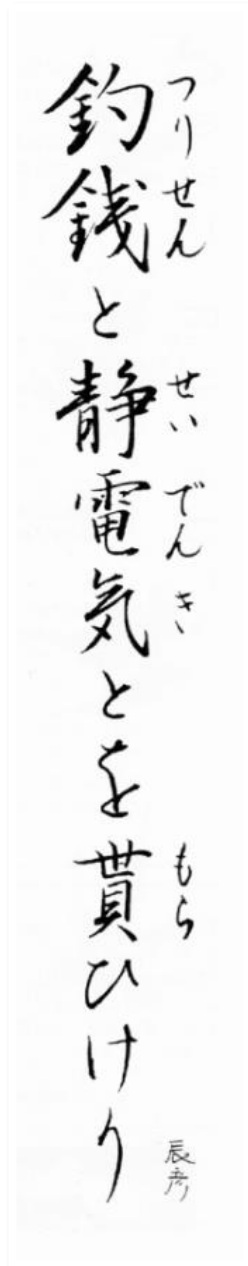
Heavy rain last night woke me up, and the room is cold this morning. Don't need any fans, no air conditioning and without the slightly deafening sound of these machines it's strangely quiet in the house. I'm noticing noises coming from the neighbours; a clatter of sounds enters through the open windows. Screen door opens, and there's an interval of time to allow someone to enter, then screen door closes again. I get up to see who came in... but there's nobody there, it's not this house – it must be the house next door. Somebody else's cutlery; plates go *clink*, voices echoing off the tiled floor and cement plaster walls... in which house? A dog barks, a child cries; it feels like everybody out there is in here.

I can feel chilled air in my ears; in the tiny inner surface of the eardrum. There's a coolness in nasal passageways, emptiness of mouth cavity, tongue stuck in the wetness of the upper palate. The surface of the eye is cold. The body is a sensory organism in the environment of this room; four walls, the ceiling. The smooth wall surfaces holding the enclosed space like a 3 dimensional photographic negative of the room. The shape of motionless space within which things exists. Open the door and the volume of the room escapes. This is how it was when the sound of the rain woke me up this morning in the darkness. I went to sit on the cushion and the whole thing suddenly came crashing into consciousness as if it had been waiting all night for me to wake up.

'... have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them.' [Rainer Maria Rilke, Letters to a Young Poet #4]

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/December 18, 2013

Postcard 035- static electricity haiku



POSTCARD#035: Chiang Mai: How to explain Static Electricity to a nine-year-old who speaks English as a second language? *M* my Thai niece, jumps in surprise when I'm handing her some coins and it happens: *ZAP!* Looks at me, like I just played a trick on her or something: "What's that *Toong Ting?*" (for some reason she has called me *Toong Ting* since she was a baby) It's electricity, *fai-faa sà-tit* ไฟฟ้าสถิต in Thai. *M* looks suspicious of me, "Yes but what is it?" she says. Okay so that still doesn't make sense; I say it's like a small spark... *What does spark mean?* So I start to speak about positive and negative electric charges inside our bodies, and eyes glaze over... losing the audience, I'm not making a very good job of the explanation, say it's like lightning in the sky and make a big gesture with my arms. Thinks about that for a while, this has her attention... *Yes but why?* I tell her it's like this strange thing that happens in the cool season, you unexpectedly get *zapped* when touching a doorknob – like an electrical charge, and sometimes it happens when you touch nylon clothing – it happens during the cold dry season. In countries like Thailand that are hot and humid most of the year, you notice it more than in cold countries. But this doesn't really answer the question either, so we look it up in Google. There are all kinds of examples of it, still kinda hard to understand, I decide it has to be more like an experiential thing, learning from the feeling of it.

It reminds me of the haiku written by my friend Andosan, in Japan. 'Static Electricity' is a haiku seasonal word *seidenki* 静電気 and it's thought to be quite charming – maybe because it's quite mild in Japan, less of a shock than in the Western world. Usually experienced when buying something from the station kiosk, receiving coins or touching hands. Contact between people creates this small spark, it's a surprising, instantaneous, friendly and communicative thing. It creates a link between people; a moment when we can't explain something and share this small

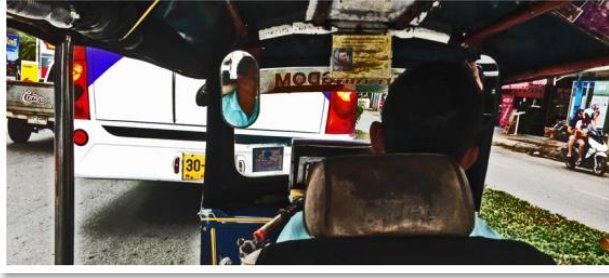
event that we can't get any further with than "What was that?" A glance down at the coins held in the fingertips, conscious awareness; the mysterious feeling of the spark somehow becomes the physical reality of the coins in the hand.

[Haiku translation: I receive small change/ and I am very surprised/ I have been given/ static electricity]

Haiku by Tatsuhiko Ando

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/December 21, 2013

Postcard 036- maya & christmas



POSTCARD#036: Chiang Mai: Going around town in a *tuk-tuk*, seeing all these new shopping areas getting built and a huge shopping mall opens here soon called MAYA – a Sanskrit word meaning illusion. In Thailand the word *maya* is applied to the lifestyle of movie stars who have everything money can buy and their lives are thought to be unreal. In an intelligent way, everybody knows what *maya* is and what ‘reality’ is. But in the shopping mall context *maya* is presented as an attractive idea; it’s appealing, even though it’s an illusion, we’re partly agreeing with it; complicit in its being there. We might say well, okay it’s an illusion, but what’s wrong with that? Nobody wants to see it as calculated corporate planning to create a market for consumer goods... that would destroy the pretty illusion. Nobody wants to know that the local population, sons and daughters of rural/urban migrants, and naïve hill-tribe folk are likely to be swept away in the wave of purchasing choices. Unseen, built-in strategies contained in an imported Western model that doesn’t suit this culture... and we’re not willing to say there’s anything wrong with it because we’re all in some way compromised.

A kind of tacit approval of consumerist schemes embedded in our lives that has resulted in our losing so much of our inherited cultural traditions. The Christmas festival is layered over with the *maya* of *santaclausisms* and the Jesus Teachings are nearly lost in it. It’s as if the essential part of our spiritual Truth got forgotten along the way and consumerism came along in its place. It’s a mystery really, why it should be like this, but for some reason the early Church disapproved of the *gnosis* (knowledge) part of the teaching. Out went the pragmatic instructions on seeing the constructed nature of appearances and the stepping-through to discover the non-duality between ourselves and God. *‘His disciples said to him, “When will the kingdom come?”* ^[117]~~[SEP]~~ *Jesus said, > “It will not come by waiting for it. It will not be a matter of saying ‘here it is’ or ‘there it is.’ Rather, the kingdom of the father is spread out upon the earth, and men do not see it (113).”* [Nag Hammadi Manuscripts].

After an extended period of study and contemplation, one simply ‘wakes up’ to the Truth of it; the reality that surrounds us all the time; Brahman, the Oneness, the God state that’s here and now. You’ll notice I’m presenting the Jesus teachings as an instance of the Advaita experience, sourced in the Upanishads [I wrote another post about this, link to: [Jesus and Advaita Vedanta](#)]. I’m also including the Jesus Teaching in a oneness of spiritual teaching centred in that geographical region where the three Abrahamic religions arose: Christianity, Judaism, Islam and the connection with Brahmanic religions and Advaita Vedanta. Others related to this include Buddhism and Jainism. That region, from North India through to Israel and the Mediterranean, a distance of about 3000 miles, say from New York to San Francisco? I see it like a highway of knowledge, wisdom and information. All of it coming and going along the route many centuries before Jesus was born and many centuries after. All the world’s religions arose here.

Somewhere in this context lies the actuality of our Jesus experience; only traces of it remain – enough to know there is this huge feeling of goodwill towards all beings in the world and the universe.

Merry Christmas friends and fellow bloggers ~ Christmas 2013

Excerpts from: *meta-narratives*

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/December 24, 2013

Postcard 037- patient understanding



POSTCARD#037: Chiang Mai/Hat Yai journey: The Chiang Mai flight to Hat Yai was discontinued just before our departure date, so the journey had to be made in two parts; the first flight to Bangkok the second to Hat Yai – a bit frustrating, yes, but that’s how my Western thinking can be fixated on the way things ‘should’ be, and not how they are. This is Thailand and no upset, just the sense that people were a tiny bit miffed about it. Then we discover the baggage can’t be checked through either, it means we have to collect everything from the luggage belt at Arrivals when we get to Bangkok then to Departures and check in again for the next flight. There were a lot of bags, and we had little *M* with us who is 9 years old and she’d have to be guided through the crowds safely. I felt I was beginning to lose it at that point but still no reaction from the others, just a kind of ‘no comment’ attitude and the sense of something being ‘held’.

I go along with the way everyone else is doing it; *chai yen yen* (keep a cool heart) *chai ron mai dai* (being angry is no good). Patient understanding, putting up with it quietly; *othon*, in Thai, it’s about accepting things as they are and not fuelling the fires. There’s a cultural tradition of this kind of inhibition of anger in public. It’s a big no-no. Why? Because when people really lose their cool they can go crazy. The word in Thai is *baa*, a kind of madness; political demonstrations with crowds running into a hail of bullets and not stopping until the cease-fire. So, we don’t want to go there. Thais have acquired the skill of abiding in the suppressed anger state so that the feeling can be allowed to pass and there’s sufficient clarity of mind to see what action can be taken.

We arrive at Bangkok, wait for the luggage at the belt, I get it all on to two trolleys, with little *M* sitting up on top of the bags and we make our way through the crowds to the elevator. Up to the second floor and enter through security and the baggage X-ray machines to the check-in desk again. There’s not much room and a large congestion of luggage trolleys. Tense pale faces, no anger, only the difficulty that people are having suppressing it. Sweat forming on the forehead, no expression, a tight smile when required, a mutual understanding and a calm appearance. Tread carefully, the fear of becoming angry makes the whole thing kinda fragile.



Recent political demonstrations highlighting the underhanded manipulative strategies that take advantage of this cultural quietness are an example of there being suddenly a legitimate reason for everything to go totally irrational. In this case, organised public protest against a Prime Minister who was put in place by a group of behind-the-scenes bad guys; a situation not unlike the period of George Dubya, the 43rd U.S. president. Both leaders were puppet-like, inarticulate, and the public fell into a kind of embarrassed silence; *how can our leader appear to be so hopeless like this?* This odd acceptance allowed the controlling group to manipulate events behind the facade. It was tolerated for a while due to the cultural ‘holding’ behaviour, then it exploded. These public protests pull things back into balance because Thais value peace.

Anarchy and lawlessness are a scary alternative – almost like insanity. There will be stability, but only for a short time, it seems. Sadly, it's likely to break out again. An impossible cycle...

We get on the next flight, take-off and up into the clear blue sky again; out there, where there are no problems, the beautiful great curvature of the Earth. One hour and fifteen minutes later we descend into Hat Yai. The outer arrivals section full of Thai muslims in colourful head scarves and matching costumes, children running around. Into the car and out on the great North/South highway that connects Thailand to Malaysia and all the way South to Singapore.

“In essence, the process of division is a way of thinking about things that is convenient and useful mainly in the domain of practical, technical and functional activities (e.g., to divide up an area of land into different fields where various crops are to be grown). However, when this mode of thought is applied more broadly to man's notion of himself and the whole world in which he lives (i.e. to his self-world view), then man ceases to regard the resulting divisions as merely useful or convenient and begins to see and experience himself and his world as actually constituted of separately existent fragments.” [David Bohm]

The David Bohm quote above comes from *The Ptero Card Post: I Fall to Pieces*

– G R A T I T U D E –

Upper photo: Don Muan airport Bangkok

Lower photo: part of the whistle-blowing anti-government demonstration passing through the Siam Paragon shopping area in Bangkok

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/December 29, 2013

Postcard 038- evenness of 2014



POSTCARD#038: A village near Hat Yai: Here in a house surrounded by trees above window height on the ground floor and in the daytime everything is seen in a translucent green light. It's an old rubber plantation, with some palms and huge banana trees. Now it's night and I'm pretty well seeing double having been staring at words all day. Struggling a bit to stay awake to see the coming of New Year – thinking the number 14 is somehow nicer than 13 and also the number 2014 has a pleasant evenness about it? But maybe I'll go to sleep, it doesn't seem right to be awake when all the small creatures in the forest are either asleep or being strangely nocturnal and kinda scary in their stealth. I feel a bit obvious here with all the lights on in the house.



Cannot see well, the spellchecker rejects all the Thai and Pali words and onomatopoeias and my spelling innovations; and when it doesn't know a word I've been clicking the 'Add' option so much it'll render the spellchecker obsolete eventually. It's getting difficult too because small insects attracted by luminosity of screen are walking around in my vision seemingly dotting the

letter 'i' and crossing the 't' or making an ending to a word that isn't there. Cannot understand how they get through the mosquito mesh on the windows. I notice that the larger insects stop flying around when you put the lights out because they bump into things, it takes them a few moments to stop where they are, anywhere'll do and just immediately go to sleep. I'll do that too, have to call it a day and shall set this Post so it'll go out at midnight, and it'll be the New Year then, Thai time: +7hrs GMT. So, all that remains is for me to say thank you friends and fellow bloggers for visiting me here in the year 2013, and best wishes for 2014. Metta, Loving Kindness, may your year be one of Mindfulness and Letting Go



– HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ONE AND ALL –

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/December 31, 2013

Appendix (Complimentary Postcards)

Complimentary postcards, that were not labelled when the blog was being written are stated within this section

Layers



Bangkok: Falling out of the sky, jet-lagged and inert. A 12-hour flight from London; they gave me an upgrade to business class, nice. More space, better everything and a larger seat. Able to stretch out in the prone position, yes but also a huge selection of videos so I watched movies for 12 hours and no sleep. Now in a state of hypnosis here at the house, lying on the sofa in another time zone. Early morning in Bangkok and I'm watching the FOX channel. There's only one English language channel on TV in this place so it simplifies things: *NCIS*, *Bones*, *The Bridge* and others. The stories merge into one all-inclusive narrative, a complex and improbable plot. Good-looking actors in expensive cosmetics play characters that migrate from other crime series into this one, the central story, all roads lead to one end, catching the bad guy, variations on a crime scene theme. The pace of it is intense, camera shots hold for about 3 seconds then change. Background audio has a percussive, mechanical sound then it'll switch to something calm; a picture of domestic reality, beautiful interior, elegant lighting, lovely fabrics – I wish I had a room like that. Slow piano notes played meaningfully, like steps taken through the memory of something that happened once. I'm lulled into acceptance; the way it unfolds is the way it is. I become the story.

I could switch off the TV but there's a reluctance; a pleasing attachment, something that appears more difficult to let go of than it is. Resisting the emptiness, the deep knowing there's nothing there that triggers the reaction to fill the empty space with a self-construct, or an image, a movie celebrity, a child's doll, the sphinx, the totem pole, dependency on a perceived creator. I mute the sound, allow the engagement with it, following the story as it transforms, watching the present moment until it changes – how did that happen? I didn't notice it take place, only after it occurred. There's the sense of something applied. Consciousness seems like an unconnected series of screenshots, a random sequence of events; things without substance appear and fade away. Rest in this fictional state... it's just the way things are. Mindfulness is at the base of it all, in every way. Sleep shuts off the system; down through the layers, comfort, familiar surroundings. Crash out on the sofa in flickering TV light...

'Like fish that cannot see the water they swim in, we do not notice the medium we dwell within. Unaware that our stories are stories, we experience them as the world.' [David Loy, *The World is Made of Stories*]

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/August 13, 2013

7th the beholder (Eye Operation Post 1 of 3)



Bangkok: The world seems different, everything suddenly seen in clear three-dimensionality. Reflected light, rich, deep colours and a strange familiarity, objects in the environment become somehow known. I've seen these things so often before but now seeing them with an expanded awareness. It sounds visionary, you could say revelatory but it's the result of eye surgery, rather than insight... nonetheless quite astonishing. I have this clarity in one eye only, vision in the other eye is like an old yellowed photo, dull and indistinct. The operation on that eye will be in October, back to the *Rutnin Eye Hospital* in Bangkok. The surgeon makes a hole in the eye and puts in a tool that uses ultrasound to emulsify the lens. The lens becomes liquid and is sucked away, then a plastic foldable lens is inserted in the place where the natural lens used to be. That's it, done. Local anaesthetic is enough, or general if you feel claustrophobic about the covers over the face. After the op there are different kinds of eye-drops that go on for about three weeks and it feels a bit itchy but that's all.

I'm amazed that it's possible to do this; the plasticity of the human body, parts can be taken out, replaced; systems are deconstructed, reconstructed, subject to change. It all supports the idea of *anatta*: no abiding self. There's an underlying flexibility about the mind/body organism *namarupa*. One example of this is that I have a very refined piece of plastic in my eye instead of a natural lens. And, looking at the world, I find an affinity with clear-wrap, cling-film, transparent plastic food packaging – the way the plastic surface refracts the light. In this strong sunlight in Thailand, I notice the reflections on chrome and glass – the clarity is sparkling and beautiful. Also these enhanced colours, reds mostly, and an overall bright clear blueness in the white areas. It has the quality of an iPad screen, retina display, high density pixels merge into one – an extraordinary brightness.

Faces of friends and family are seen as if for the first time. I notice small expressions now I didn't know were there, maybe because everybody is looking at my new eye, intense Thai faces examine my new eye, and I'm looking back at them looking at me, seeing subtleties in their features that I've never seen before. It's all quite new, a curious reality.

So, I'll be going around for the next few weeks, looking at my surroundings and considering the phenomenon that I am experiencing this. Can it really be so? *'Beauty is in the eye of the beholder'* (Margaret Wolfe Hungerford). The expression always seemed a bit mean and divisive to me, *'I think it's beautiful but 'you' might think it's not;* beauty becomes a matter of opinion... In Buddhism, the 'beholder' sees the world and identifies the self, 'me'. If 'I' am inside the body, in 'here', I must be separate from everything else out 'there', isolated, alone, anxious – *wrong view* a fundamental error. The attachment to a perceived self and craving for it to become real, creates suffering. Language has a naming function, creating an apparent identity. Anything that is stated is always missing the point because of these characteristics of language. Better to think of it in terms of what it is not, rather than what it is: *'... the remainderless fading & cessation, renunciation, relinquishment, release, & letting go of that very craving. (the noble truth of the cessation of dukkha)' [SN 56.11 (dukkha nirodho ariya sacca)]*

Photo image: Skyline at Ploenchit Bangkok.

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/August 16, 2013

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Plasticity (Eye Operation Post 2 of 3)



Chiang Mai: Holding the inverted eye-dropper bottle close to the eye, head back and squeeze a drop... it goes in, blink, and overflows, trickles out of the corner of the eye down the cheek like a tear drop and falls into the ear. I wipe it away with a tissue – the action triggers a memory, something emotional. I have new vision now, eye surgery for cataracts. The left eye is done, the right eye will be operated on next month. I'm seeing everything with such clarity; hard to believe the natural process of seeing that I've taken for granted all these years now involves a plastic lens. I see the world refracted through a man-made device and it doesn't make any difference – well it does make a difference, of course, it's very much better. My glasses don't do anything any more; in the good eye the lens distorts vision, in the bad eye it enhances some things but it's dull, blurred and yellowish in colour. I've had an overhaul – like taking the car to the garage to have new parts fitted. Or it's how the system gets updated, the latest version is now installed. I feel renewed.

There's this plasticity about the human body (and mind) that allows all kinds of changes to take place. I'm a Buddhist and I'm inspired by the thought that things can adapt, evolve, move on. It feels like there's no such thing as getting stuck with anything or any state of mind, because we can learn to 'unstick' from it. In the same way, we can study a new subject; we put our minds to it, get interested in it and learn how it works. If I'm stuck with something, I'm attached to that thing in a strange kind of way; a locked-in response to adversity – more of a driven, unaware action than something done knowingly, mindfully. It's a deluded attachment to habituality and I'm inspired by the very real possibility of working towards being free of this; acting always in awareness, seeing clearly.



Metaphors like 'clouded vision' describe *tanha*, habitual craving for something thought to be deservedly earned because of the endured hardship seemingly required to get there, unaware that one gets lost in the getting-there and there's no end to it. Because I don't normally understand things as they truly are, usually it's how they're seen habitually, I choose to see everything according to what's already known; apperception, understanding newly observed data in terms of past experience. Before I get stuck in the delusion that it's unavoidably like this, an opportunity arises to escape the cycle at Step 7 *vedana* in the *paticcasamuppada* (Cycle of Dependent Origination). Interrupt the causality sequence, go to the door leading to the emergency exit, aware that in the Buddhist sense of 'no-self', the habituality of mind's perception of itself as the central actor in its own world, personality-view (*sakkaya-ditthi*), is the root of the problem. Step out of the cycle and I'm free...

Then later that night, walking to 7-eleven to get a few grocery items and I leave my glasses at home because they don't help – I've worn glasses for most of my adult life and this is the first time I'm going out without them and at night time too. It's been raining, there's the glare of car headlights, and street lights reflected in large puddles. Only a short walk and arriving there, I notice some of the tiles on the floor of the lobby forecourt at the supermarket are shiny, glossy, and these must be new ones, replacements for the ones that were damaged? Why am I seeing this? I cover the good eye and look at the tiles with the old eye, no it can't be seen, but I can see them with the good eye. It's a repair I'd not have noticed before. People must think I'm acting strangely, better move along. So many discoveries about the world, and I'm stumbling around like this, seeing everything for the first time...

'Instead of starting with a perception or a conception of anything, the Buddha established a way based on awareness, or awakened attention. This is an immanent act in the present. It is sati-sampajañña, an intuitive awareness that allows the consciousness to be with the present moment. With this attention, you begin to explore personality-view (sakkaya-ditthi) in terms of the perceptions you attach to as yourself.' [Ajahn Sumedho, *The Problem of Personality*]

Upper photo: Interior of Chiang Mai songteaw (public transport vehicle). Lower photo: Night Market, Chiang Mai

The above article first appeared in [dhammafootsteps.com/August 20, 2013](http://dhammafootsteps.com/August%20,2013)

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passive voice



Bangkok: No taxis available at the airport, and all trains into town are seriously crowded. I am one of a very large number of individuals caught in the rush on a Friday evening. Somebody said later it's because all the international schools start again on Monday. No other way, it's decided for me, okay, I accept, I am subject to the system, the public transport system and I have no control over it. I am being 'taken', it's about the process, rather than any particular person controlling the process. I could create a Controller in my imagination like the bosses, the management and blame it all on them/him/her/it, but it's better to not do that.... There's not a 'self' in the equation – *the deed is done but there is no doer*, using the Passive Voice language function to express the Buddhist Truth of no-self (*anatta*), and I came across an interesting post about this the other day [[Link to: Just A Little Dust](#)].

The 'self' is absent. Sounds are heard, food is tasted, the chill wind of September is felt upon the skin. And there's nobody there that feels it, unless I consciously put together an identity composite, in which case I feel the chill (Active Voice). Language tells a story, creates a fiction that I can get lost in; only partially aware that it's a constructed thing and most of the time I'm clinging to a concept of selfhood, an assumed identity. Thankfully, in the Passive Voice, there is no doer, things are done; the cognitive process is about 'how it works' rather than 'what it is'.

The world is seen – I had an eye operation recently and what I didn't expect was that it turned out to be an opportunity to contemplate this phenomenon of the experiencer. There's the experience of visual stimuli entering the eye through a lens created by means of an industrial process and somehow the 'me' part of it is not there like it used to be. The lens inside my left eye is made of plastic, there's a particular clarity in the colours, the quality of light and a fascination with the way plastic surfaces refract the light; plastic food wrapping, mineral water bottles, car windscreens. It's all very new and quite interesting – maybe because I still have the 'old vision' in the untreated eye, something to compare it with.

I can see the world through the old eye as well as the new eye. It's like the linguistic 'voice' can be both passive and active and I've understood it mostly in the active form; the process of selfing is grasped at as an entity and identified with – a controlling thing. In the West it's a 'belief'. My difficulty with *anatta* has been extricating myself from the Judeo-Christian conditioning that assumes the existence of an eternal soul. I notice Thais don't have this problem. Even after 30 years in the East, I still struggle with my Western conditioning; an everlasting identity, the idea of it still lingers; a shadow of reality. A couple of hours and I'm at *Morchit BTS* near *Chatuchak* standing in the rain and *D* comes to get me in the car. The thought arises, the car is driven but there is no driver....

'Where water, earth, fire, & wind have no footing; there the stars don't shine, the sun isn't visible. There the moon doesn't appear. There darkness is not found. And when a sage, a brahman through sagacity, has realized [this] for himself, then from form & formless, from bliss & pain, he is freed.' [*Bāhiya Sutta*]

The above article first appeared in [dhammafootsteps.com/August 24, 2013](#)



Bangkok: Near Asoke, downtown, on my way to the eye hospital for an appointment at 3.20pm. I have a lens implant in the left eye and the surgeon is going to take out the stitch that's been in the eye for 2 weeks. Today's the day... *dum-dee-dum*, sing a song and forget about that (resistance to the thought of needles and eyes). A space in the mind opens up for a moment, and I take refuge in there, calm abiding; if a feeling is not present, I am not aware of it. Thoughts return, the fragility of things; eyeballs and eardrums, taste buds and nerve endings, vulnerability, perishability, finely tuned, limited lifespan. Get involved with my surroundings; crowds of browsers in the Asoke shopping area, a wealth of attractive objects. There was something I was supposed to get but I've forgotten what it was; new input replaces existing memory. How much time before the eye appointment? The memory comes back again... somewhere else, the needle-and-eye situation is happening to some other person, not me. Abide in the space of no-thought, remembering about the thing I'm looking for that I'd forgotten (I'll remember what it was later), and just contemplating the empty space where it used to be.

It's not just forgotten, it's not there at all; replaced with a kind of consciousness I can't identify, an awareness of the seeking? Seeking leads to the sense that something is missing, the suffering caused by wandering in a created world of being lost. The mind that seeks is restless, searching for things endlessly but never finds what it's looking for. Always, always reaching out for something beyond the here-and-now: the sense there's got to be something that's better than this. There's a place somewhere else where I'll find the thing I'm looking for... but how will I recognize it if I don't know what it is... *ho hum*, depending on the belief there'll just be some kind of extraordinary familiarity and recognition? Somebody wise said: *'What we are looking for is that which is looking...'* The mind that sees this relentless searching sees that other mind that seeks this; two minds. What am I seeing? Mindfulness and the curious situation of just seeing the seeking – and there's no object. Seeking non-objects means seeking the seeking itself; seeing 'the seeing', the situation before the question arose, the motionless space in which everything exists; context and content.

Walking through the doors of the eye hospital as if in a dream, wait in the waiting area for my number to be called, then into a cubicle. Lie down on the bed, stare at the ceiling and the nurse bathes the eye with antiseptic eye-drops every 5 mins for 30 mins, then into the surgeon's

room. Lean back and more eye drops, anesthetic this time. I sit facing the ophthalmologist, a lady, *place your chin here*, she says and there's a kind of binocular device for seeing into my eyes in an adjustable stainless steel structure with chin-rest and my head is held in the steel frame. I tell her I'm nervous, *Painless*, she says, *it's painless...* and smiles at me reassuringly. I hear a sound like plucking violin strings, *pizzicato*, in the upper registers, *'ting, ting'*. Am I really hearing this small musical sound? I catch a glimpse of the surgeon's tiny cutting tool as it releases the cords of the held stitch. She says it's over... can't believe it.

Sometime later that day, I remember what it was I'd forgotten in the Asoke shopping area*. I'll have to leave that until I come back for the next operation on September 20th.

'... eternity is realized at the cessation of striving for any event, looking for nothing' – not looking for anything? Not looking for anything reduces the constant searching for it, so you can discover it was there all the time...' [David Loy]

I wanted to buy a jar of Chyawanprash at the Indian market near Asoke

This post contains references to the Betty Edwards text: 'The New Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain' and the text 'The Path of No-path: Śaṅkara and Dogen on the Paradox of Practice' by David Loy.

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/August 28, 2013

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9/11: a buddhist reflection



The root cause for such an inhuman act is a fundamental lack of wisdom and understanding of the human condition. All human beings are companions in birth, in old age, in sickness and in death. Buddhists may train themselves to cope with that type of situation through stillness, wisdom and reflection.

[Excerpt from 'A Buddhist Reflection on the Tragedy of September 11' by Ajahn Jayasaro, 2001]

Buddhism considers the quest for a direct experiential understanding of the human condition as the heart of spiritual life. It employs a vast array of skillful means and ways of reflecting on life, which people of other religious traditions or indeed people of no religious tradition, might benefit. The more profound our understanding of our existence as human beings is, the more we are protected from blind identification with narrow categories, whether they be social,

ethnic or religious. We all as human beings have the capacity to reflect on experience, to learn from it. Whatever religion we profess, we can for instance, look at the effect on our mind of the strong attachment to ideas of *us* and *them*. Theists, atheists, polytheists are equally capable of observing how the idea of *us* and *them* affects how and what information we absorb from our surroundings, how we interpret that information, and how we express ourselves in our actions and words. We can begin to notice our tendency to believe in the labels we attach to things, and what strong negative emotions are conditioned by those beliefs.

As Buddhists, we devote ourselves to learning how to maintain clarity of mind, fundamental compassion and intelligence, as a constant inner refuge. It is not so difficult to be clear about issues which don't personally affect us, or those which provoke no strong feelings. The real challenge is to be awake even in the midst of a hurricane of emotions — when we are hurt and betrayed, angry and afraid. Clarity of mind means that when things get rough we can still receive the blessings of the principles we uphold. Inner clarity is thus the ground in which the dignity and meaning of life can grow.

An inner refuge does not come easily. It can only be brought about by a thoroughgoing commitment to this life education, a training of the way we live internally and externally. Buddhist teachings are seen then, in summary, not as dogmas to be believed in (or rejected), but tools to be made use of. We use the teachings to understand ourselves and our experiences in life, to understand other people and the world we live in. Then basing ourselves on that understanding, we seek to create as much authentic happiness and benefit for ourselves and others as we can.

It is very easy to brand people who do terrible things as being evil, and perhaps almost as easy to assume that because we find evil acts repugnant, that therefore we are good. But when we look more closely, we see that our bogeymen, the so-called “evil people” sometimes act well and “good people” may, on occasion, act cruelly.

There is no fixed entity, “the evil person”, who is evil 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year. Similarly, (apart from fully enlightened beings), there is no unchangeably good person. That being the case, the most constructive response to the suffering that human beings inflict on each other is surely to seek to understand and affect the factors conditioning the arising and cessation of good and evil in the human mind.

Armed with this knowledge we may then look at ways of reducing the power of evil wherever it arises, no matter whether it be in the group of people that we consider as them, or within the group of people that we consider as us. At the same time, we must be constantly looking to develop and support those qualities – both within that group we consider them and that group we consider us – which are good, wise and compassionate. Our most pressing task though, because nobody else can do this for us, is to look within our own hearts. *[For another excerpt from Ajahn Jayasaro's talk, click on this link: 9/11 (2012)]*

The above article first appeared in dhammafootsteps.com/September 9, 2013

Dependent Origination, the Twelve Nidanas

Patīcasamuppāda (Pali) Pratītyasamutpāda (Sanskrit) has been translated into English as dependent origination, dependent arising, interdependent co-arising, conditioned arising, and conditioned genesis.

All phenomena in this universe are relative, conditioned states and do not arise independently of supportive conditions. A phenomenon arises because of a combination of conditions which are present to support its arising. And the phenomenon will cease when the conditions and components supporting its arising change and no longer sustain it. The presence of these supportive conditions, in turn, depend on other factors for their arising, sustenance and disappearance.

The twelve Nidanas (steps)

01 of 12 Ignorance: Avidyā

Ignorance refers to ignorance of the teaching that there is no "self" in the sense of a permanent, integral, autonomous being within an individual existence. What we think of as our self, our personality and ego, are for Buddhists regarded as temporary assemblies of the *kandhas**. Failure to understand this is a major form of ignorance.

02 of 12

Volitional Action: Saṅkhāra

Ignorance produces saṅkhāra, volitional action, formation, impulse or motivation. Because we don't understand the truth, we have impulses that lead to actions that continue us along a path of samsaric existence, which sews the seeds of karma.

03 of 12

Conditioned Consciousness: Viññāṇa

Viññāṇa is the basic awareness faculties of the six senses (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind). There are therefore six different types of consciousness in the Buddhist system: eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, smell-consciousness, taste-consciousness, touch-consciousness, and thought-consciousness.

04 of 12

Name-and-Form: Nama-rupa

Nama-rupa is the moment when matter (*rupa*) joins mind (*nama*). It represents the artificial assembly of the five skandhas to form the illusion of an individual, independent existence.

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The Six Senses: Āyatanāni

Upon the assembly of the skandhas into the illusion of an independent self, the six senses (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind) arise, which will lead onward to the next links.

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Sense Impressions: Phassa

Phassa is contact between the individual sense faculties and the outer environment. The contact between faculties and objects leads to the experience of feeling, which is the next link.

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Feelings: Vedana

Vedana is the recognition and experience of the preceding sense impressions as subjective feelings. For Buddhists, there are only three possible feelings: pleasantness, unpleasantness or neutral feelings. They are the precursor to desire and aversion--the clinging to pleasant feeling or the rejection of unpleasant feelings

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Desire or Craving: Tanha

The Second Noble Truth teaches that Tanha--thirst, desire or craving--is the cause of stress or suffering (dukkha). If we are not mindful, we are perpetually being pulled around by desire for what we want and pushed by an aversion to what we don't want. In this state, we heedlessly stay entangled in the cycle of rebirth.

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Attachment: Upadana

Upadana is the attached and clinging mind. We are attached to sensual pleasures, mistaken views, external forms, and appearances. Most of all, we cling to the illusion of ego and a sense of an individual self--a sense reinforced moment-to-moment by our cravings and aversions. Upadana also represents clinging to a womb and thus represents the beginning of rebirth.

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Becoming: Bhava

Bhava is new becoming, set in motion by the other links. In the Buddhist system, the force of attachment keeps us bonded to the life of samsara to which we are familiar, so long as we are unable and unwilling to surrender our chains. The force of bhava is what continues to propel us along the cycle of endless rebirth.

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Birth: Jati

The cycle of rebirth naturally includes birth into a samsaric life or Jati. It is an inevitable stage of the Wheel of Life, and Buddhists believe that unless the chain of dependent origination is broken, we will continue to experience birth into the same cycle.

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Old Age and Death: Jarāmaṇa

The chain inevitably leads to old age and death--the dissolution of what came to be. The karma of one life sets in motion another life, rooted in ignorance (avidya). A circle that closes is one that also continues.

In the usual sequence of events, when there is contact with forms, sounds, odors/fragrances, flavors, or whatever at one of the sense-doors (salayatana), that contact is phassa. This phassa develops into vedana (feeling). Vedana develops into tanha (craving). Tanha develops into upadana (clinging). Upadana develops into bhava (becoming). Bhava develops into jati, which is "birth", and following on from birth there is the suffering of old, age, sickness and death.

The way to prevent the usual cycle of events from taking place is to apply the neutral response, not allowing Dependent Arising to take place; cutting it off right at the moment of Phassa with a neutral response (neither wanting it nor not wanting it). If there is no arising at Phassa, there is no vedana at the next step, then there is no birth of the craving and clinging that is the "I," "me," and "mine". And if there is nothing but phassa itself, then everything is stopped... there is no way for the self illusion to arise.

* kandhas: See the next post, The Five Khandhas

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The Five Khandhas

Source: O'Brien, Barbara, the five skandhas 450192

These are the five aggregates (groups) of clinging (Pañcupādānakkhandhā), the five material and mental factors that take part in the rise of craving and clinging. The component parts of the khandhas create the sense of a single self, or an "I," but it is an illusion. There is no "self" occupying the khandhas. Understanding the khandhas helps us to see through the illusion of self.

The First Khandha: Form Rupa

Rupa is form, the aggregate of matter.

The Second Khandha: Feeling, Vedana. It is the sensation experienced through the contact of eye with visible form, the ear with sound, nose with odor/fragrance, tongue with taste, body with (touch) tangible things, mind (manas) with ideas or thoughts.

The Third Khandha: Perception, Sañña

Sañña is the faculty that recognizes. Most of what we call thinking fits into the aggregate of sañña.

The Fourth Khandha: Mental Formation, Saṅkhāra

All volitional actions, good and bad, are included in the aggregate of mental formations, or saṅkhāra.

The Fifth Khandha: Consciousness Vinnana

Vinnana is consciousness of one of the six faculties with one of the six corresponding phenomena. For example, vision consciousness – eyesight – has the eye as its basis and a visual item as its object. Aural consciousness – hearing – has the ear as its basis and a sound as its object. Mental consciousness – a thought – has the mind (manas) as its basis and mind responses as its object.

The five kandas are not "you." They are temporary, conditioned phenomena. They are empty of a soul or permanent essence of self.

Clinging to these aggregates as "me" is an illusion. When we realize these aggregates are just temporary phenomena and not-me, we are on the path to enlightenment

Source: Britannica

skandha, (Sanskrit: "aggregates") Pāli Khandha, according to Buddhist thought, the five elements that sum up the whole of an individual's mental and physical existence. The self (or soul) cannot be identified with any one of the parts, nor is it the total of the parts.

All individuals are subject to constant change, as the elements of consciousness are never the same, and man may be compared to a river, which retains an identity, though the drops of water that make it up are different from one moment to the next.

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Glossary

The following words are mostly in Pali, the language of the Theravada Buddhist scriptures and chants, except where noted. They are brief translations for quick reference: these are not exhaustive or refined definitions. Not all the foreign words found in the talks are listed below, as many are defined at the point of use. Note: most Pali diacritics have been omitted here and within the book, as few people are familiar with the specialised pronunciation conventions.

Words	Meaning
arahant	an enlightened being, free from all delusion
ariya sacca	Noble Truths. Usually referring to the Four Noble Truths that form the foundation of all Buddhist teachings
Bhikkhu	male alms mendicant; the term for a Buddhist monk
bhikkhuni	female alms mendicant; the term for a Buddhist nun
Bodhisatta	(Sanskrit: Bodhisattva) a being striving for enlightenment. A term referring to the Buddha his awakening
bojjhngas	seven factors of enlightenment: sati (mindfulness), dhammavicaya investigation of Dhamma), viriya (energy, persistence), piti (delight, rapture), passadhi (calm, serenity), samadhi (collectedness, concentration) and upekkha (equanimity)
brahmavihara	divine abidings: loving-kindness, compassion, empathetic joy and equanimity.
Buddha	'One who knows'; one who is awakened, who represents the state of enlighten ment awakening; the historical Buddha, Siddhatta Gotama
citta	heart or mind.
Dhamma	(Sanskrit: Dharma) Truth, Reality, Nature, or the laws of nature considered as a whole. The term is often used to refer to teachings as well as the truth to which they point
dhamma	phenomenon, physical or mental
Dhammapada	the most widely known and popular collection of teachings from the Pali Canon, containing verses attributed to the Buddha
Dhamma-Vinaya	the teachings and discipline taught by the Buddha as recorded in the Pali Canon
dhutanga	(Thai: tudong) ascetic practices; the Buddha allowed thirteen specific duthanga practices for his monastic disciples, for instance: wearing rag-robos, possessing no more than a set of three robes, eating only alms food collected on the day, eating only from the alms bowl, sleeping in the open, and not lying down to sleep
dukkha	imperfect, unsatisfying, 'hard to bear', disease; one of the three characteristics of all conditioned existence
jhana	(Sanskrit: dhyana) deep state of meditative absorption
kamma	(Sanskrit: karma) intentional action or cause leading to an effect
karuna	compassion
kalyanamitta	wholesome companion, spiritual friend
Koan	(Chin: Kung-an) 'Case study'. A paradoxical question, statement or short dialogue concerning the Dhamma. In the Rinzi school of Zen Buddhism koans are systematically used as meditation themes designed to push the mind beyond conceptual thinking
kuti	(Thai) dwelling of a samana
Luang Por	(Thai) Venerable Father, respectful way of addressing or referring to a senior teacher
magga	path, way
Mahasatipat-thana Sutta	the Buddha's principle discourse on mindfulness
Mara	evil and temptation personified; a powerful, malevolent deity ruling over the highest heaven of the sensual sphere; personification of the defilements, the totality of worldly existence and death
metta	loving-kindness
mudita	empathetic joy. Happiness at witnessing another's good fortune
nekkhamma	renunciation
Nibbana	(Skt. <i>Nirvana</i>) freedom from attachments. Enlightenment
Pali Canon	Theravada Buddhist scriptures
Patimokkha	the bhikkhu's code of discipline, core of the vinaya
pañña	discriminative wisdom
Parami	(Sanskrit: paramita) the ten spiritual perfections: generosity, moral restraint, renunciation, wisdom, effort, patience, truthfulness, determination, kindness and equanimity. Virtues accumulated over lifetimes manifesting as wholesome dispositions
pindapata	(Thai: pindapaht) almsround
puja	devotional meeting to make offerings at a shrine. In Buddhist monasteries the gathering of the community to pay respects and make symbolic offerings to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, usually consisting of the lighting of candles and incense, as well as the offering of flowers and devotional chanting
puñña	merit
samadhi	concentration or one-pointedness of mind
samana	one who has entered the renunciate life
samanera	a novice Buddhist monk
samsara	the unenlightened, unsatisfactory experience of life
Sangha	the community of those who practise the Buddha's way
sati	mindfulness
sila	moral virtue
sukha	pleasure, happiness (opposite of dukkha)

sutta	a Buddhist scripture or discourse
siladhara	an eight-precept Buddhist nun
tamat	(Thai) dhamma-seat, elevated seat from which traditionally Dhamma talks are given
Theravada	the southern school of Buddhism
upasaka/upasika	male and female lay Buddhist practitioners
upasampada	ceremony of acceptance into the bhikkhu sangha
upekkha	Equanimity



Words Fall From My Eyes

October 3, 2013 at 4:07 am

You're so right the world exists in the hold of perception...

Reply by tiramít

October 3, 2013 at 4:49 am

...thanks for your comment, and for this: 'the world exists in the hold of perception.' A starting point for contemplation.

bert0001

August 19, 2013 at 12:48 pm

.. great post, ... and thank you for linking to namarupa on viet.net

Reply by tiramít

August 21, 2013 at 2:20 am

... the posts are about the links - creating a context for the link, inspired by events in the here-and-now...

kronomulus

028- December 6, 2013 at 3:35 am

Beautiful. This is something I believe to actually be indescribable, but your words do the experience more justice than anyone else I have ever read.

Reply by tiramít

028- December 6, 2013 at 4:06 am

Thanks for this encouraging comment, it's an observation arising from personal experience and dialogue with fellow bloggers.

The Retired Seeker

#29 (Seeing with alertness)

November 30, 2013 at 1:34 pm

Thanks. Your posts always help me "stitch" my short intervals of mindfulness closer together

Reply by tiramít

#29 November 30, 2013 at 3:27 pm

Interesting, the intervals are stitched together... an incredible patchwork quilt of scenes from our whole life. Thanks for this nice comment

