

# THE ZEN FREETHINKER

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Issue #33

First of 1991

Formerly Known As the "Cloud-Hidden Friends Letter"

Our Pages Are Your Letters

The Zen Freethinker is devoted to a more natural and free spirit in Zen, with an emphasis on the way of the individual, rather than the way of an organization, temple, or sect.

Such a spirit is perhaps best exemplified by Daisetz T. Suzuki, Alan Watts, and Nyogen Senzaki, three important early pioneers of Zen in the West. Although they greatly loved traditional Zen, in their own lives they each chose to go a more free-ranging and individual way, remaining unallied to any particular organization or sect. Nor did they seek some lofty religious title, no doubt in the spirit of Rinzai's phrase "A true man of no rank". They then might indeed be regarded as being Zen Freethinkers.

There are of course also others with such a spirit, such as Paul Reps, R.H. Blythe, Christmas Humphreys, and no doubt some of the members of the Kyoto School, although they did not themselves use the term Freethinker.

In the Western religious tradition there also have been many important Freethinkers, such as Edward Herbert, Voltaire, Rousseau, Spinoza, Thomas Paine, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson. Although they are often scorned as being a bunch of atheists and deists, to us this seems an illustrious heritage. To describe so free a tradition is hazardous, but it might be said that "Freethinking trusts most deeply in natural religion, and in the natural divinity which is the inmost nature of everyone. A Freethinker is then free from dependence on revealed truth, or external religious authority."

Combine such a definition with an equally hazardous definition of Zen, and you have a Zen Freethinker.



*Manjusri (Monju Bosatsu)*

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# THE ZEN FREETHINKER

Issue #33, The First of 1991

## NEWS & NOTES

1) With this issue we begin the eighth year of our uncertain existence. Hopefully there will be four issues in the coming year, although such plans are flexible. We also greet the New Year with a new title for our periodical. Close to half of your comments were in favor of keeping our old title "The Cloud-Hidden Friends Letter". It was then not an easy choice to make. The intent here is partly to give greater definition, but this is more in a philosophical sense than a sectarian one.

Our subscription policy remains basically the same. For our "fee" we request a letter from you now and then for our pages. However, if even sending us one of your favorite haikus is too much to ask, we might accept instead a small contribution to help cover our costs. We also would greatly appreciate your pledge to personally correspond with some of the ZF subscribers.

Sample copies are available upon request. It would help greatly if you were to spread the word to a friend or two.

As editor, I could produce a better-looking periodical on my computer, although we are wary of slick professionalism. An 8 1/2 11" format may be best. Your comments would be appreciated.

2) There have been several criticisms concerning Ed Star's last letter. I should mention that Ed was worried about his letter, and actually requested that it not be printed. He felt that it was perhaps far too negative and judgmental, and I gather from your responses that a number of you would agree. Ed then was right, and as editor I should have listened to him. I then owe an apology to anyone who might have felt offended. Do note, however, that the opinions of our subscribers are not necessarily those of the ZF itself.

3) Another Zen pioneer has passed away. Paul Reys, well-known author and an occasional contributor to our periodical, died on July 12 at the age of 94. He was truly one of a kind. I wonder what he would say about our new title "Zen Freethinker". Certainly that is how I think of his spirit. A tribute to him appears in this issue.

4) The letters that appear in this issue are from:

Basco

Ananda Dalenberg

Jerry Bolick

Kanya McGhee

John Boyd

Cal Steimetz

Robert Breckenridge

Tom Thompson

Ananda Dalenberg, Editor

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Often this last year  
Alone in my house on the mountain  
Awaiting friends and relatives  
Who seldom came to visit  
I saw in my aloneness  
The image of rejection  
The humiliation of the outcast.

Read some psychology books  
Joined a Men's Group  
Sought therapy and healing  
Told my tale of lost love  
Confessing to loneliness and shame.

Heard my companions - all mostly mated  
Speak of cold beds, hot tempers  
Frustration and struggle  
In marital relations.

Began rising again  
Each morning before dawn  
As in years past  
In temples and hermitages with others  
But now in my small house alone.  
Like hermit mystics of old.

Build fire, brew tea, light incense, bow.  
Take a rebellious, reclining position  
Meditate and contemplate ....painlessly  
In dark, warm, delicious, solitude.

Scraggly bearded, raggedy clothed, Han Shan  
Left this poem among hundreds  
Scattered on cold mountain:

"Born thirty years ago  
I've wandered a million miles  
Along rivers where green grass gathered  
To the frontier where red dust swirled  
Concocted drugs, sought immortality in vain  
Read books and chanted stories  
And now retired to Cold Mountain  
To lie in the stream and wash cut my ears."

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And whirling dervish Sufi Master, Rumi,  
Writing to his dead lover  
Gone from the world  
But alive in his heart:

"I stand up and this one of me  
Turns into a hundred of me.  
They say I circle around you  
Nonsense. I circle around me."

So, now, I, Robert, embrace aloneness  
Longingly, achingly, blissfully  
Take companionship as it comes  
Leave it as it goes  
Occasionally turn down invitations  
Snuggling into myself  
For morning meditations.

Praise God, Praise Tao, Great Spirit, All  
Feed the black and white cat  
Teacher of self sufficiency  
Eats on my porch  
Looks me in the eye  
Never lets me get close.

Oh, yes, of course  
It really is more nourishing  
To chew my own food  
Than suck on an empty tit.

Robert Breckenridge  
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Brisbane CA 94005

Toronto, December 1990

Dear Cloud-Hidden Friends:

Once again, having all but given up on the sustainability of our CHFL fellowship, I was delighted to receive our joined issues #30 and #31, confirming that we are indeed still alive and well! Great, and thank you Ananda for not giving up just yet.

Your suggestion that we change our name to "The Zen Freethinker", sits well with me, though I would not wish to argue very strongly either way, as I think that our openness of mind and spirit in matters pertaining to how and where we might find our own path, is by far the most precious thing governing our fellowship, and I would trust that any change of name would not affect this. The words "friends" and "letter" also feel appropriate in our current name, for surely friendship through the exchange of letters is a big part of what we are about? What about "Zen Freethinkers Friends Letters (ZFFL)", but then again, what's wrong with our existing name? So totally free from any hint of sectarianism - besides I've always liked the image of hiding in the puffy white clouds that I used to fly through when training to be an R.A.F. pilot at #3 B.F.T.S. in Miami, Oklahoma, back in 1945!! More importantly perhaps is our acknowledgement of those who's free spirit we aspire to uphold - namely D.T. Suzuki, Thomas Merton, Alan Watts, Krishnamurti, Nyogen Zensaki and perhaps Thomas Berry, who's voice currently cries out so clearly - if we are looking to be a little more eclectic in our chosen inspirational pedigree. There are of course, as you mention in your "news and comments", others who might also fit the noble ranks of a Zen Freethinkers model.

I don't think that the word "religion" belongs in any definition of Freethinking, which, as you more or less say, is simply "an affirmation of the natural divinity that is present in the innermost nature of everyone". How well our Aboriginal people understand this.

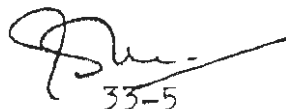
I also agree with your statement that in order to find "the highest truth (or wisdom) one must turn deeply within". Surely one of the greatest of all illusions is that we can ultimately "find it out there", presumably cloud-hidden in someone else's doctrinaire teachings....these alas, can only be useful stepping-stones at best, yet they are also capable of becoming powerful instruments for our own entrapment, from which it is then extremely difficult to break loose - as in the case of all established religious forms.

Judging from the various comments made in response to your questionnaire, it would seem that most of us harbour powerful residual cravings or desires to become affiliated with some kind of easily identifiable form, no matter how much we might also (paradoxically) wish to be freethinkers! It seems that our deep need for identity, for defining who and what we are, for belonging, is constantly urging us to don labels of some kind - to cover up our basic existential nakedness and vulnerability! It certainly seems to be a big part of our essential nature, yet I personally regard the ability to transcend ALL heavy-duty labels of affiliation used to define our sense of identity and self, and which seem to promise us security so seductively (as I have often stated), to be a necessary prerequisite for anyone seeking to really know/experience unity consciousness or the ability to actively embrace unconditional love and compassion in their lives. What do you say good friends?

Here is an observation/comment/question for our CHFL circle of friends, based on the enormous diversity that I see in our individual points of view and the way we have expressed these in our letters over the years. Why is it that we are only able to speak/talk/write from the deep subjectivity that keeps each one of us in our chronic states of separation (aloneness) and which so dominates our personal views of what constitutes reality? I am always impressed by the great diversity in what we have to say and the way we choose to say it, particularly given that we share a substantial common ground (perhaps this is itself an assumption based on illusion?), by the mere fact of being interested in things/matters pertaining to Zen Buddhism?

Isn't it fascinating how many paradoxical puzzles life presents us with at every turn in the road? It seems to me that a deep acceptance of this fact is essential, and it helps to illustrate how a good question is always worth more than any answer!

In friendship,



John H. Boyd.

AN ESSAY

The greatest gift of Buddha is light. The best gift one of us can give to friends especially now, during this season of joy, is light.

I have a "wandering" clay Buddha in my room whose eyes I perforated so that the changing color light from the base of an ornamental lamp, whose fiber optic strands are missing, can shine through them. The Buddha's eyes change from blue to amber, to red (like our perception of a non-changing world; where mountains are mountains and rivers are rivers, and deserts are deserts). It's my version of a votive candle. Chinese use red lights, Xmas type bulbs attached to imitation candle holders painted gold, with a golden dragon, frozen in flight, sliding down to a holder's box. The flight of eagles or the flight of dragons...

I wish the X-mas spirit or Buddha's spirit would move us to show some light on what might unfortunately be our motivation to send so many lives to possibly die. Instead of sending so many tons of turkey, so many cans of cranberry and nuts, we might start by saying something like this: "Dear Fellow Americans, Sons and Daughters, we are sending you there to protect the American way of life; so that we back home can continue to drive our Chryslers, BMW's, Lincoln Continentals, and Mercedes Benz's. You are expedient, because we are a nation with many children and blood is cheaper than oil; but if you die on the morrow, we assure you, a monument will be erected to your heroic memory for generations to see. After such a speech our troops would raise their voices and M16's in unison to exclaim, as did the gladiators in the arena of ancient Rome, "Ave Caesar qui muribus te salutamos!" (Hail Caesar, we, who are about to die, salute you!).

Will Buddha's light shine fiercely from one eye to evaporate the gift of blood from the desert sand; Buddha's other eye closed in a gargantuan mischievous "blink"?

"Let there be light, and there was light!" Let there be knowledge, and there was knowledge, which like a susumi shall sweep away the barricades of sandbags erected by the ignorance of our times.

Basco

(Editor's note: We would also invite other thoughts and perhaps differing views on the subject of Kuwait and Iraq.)

Let me end with a few quotes which I think of as being in the Freethinking spirit, plus some thoughts on the New Year.

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Dear Cloud Hidden Friends:

Haya Akegarasu celebrated both the blooming of flowers and the blooming of the human ego -- he saw both, equally, as natural expressions of the truth of Buddha Dharma. I believe he would say that as humans we separate ourselves from the very essence of our existence, not because of our unquestioned assumption of the correctness and righteousness of our own thoughts and emotions, but because of our unswerving determination to defend and promote those thoughts and emotions far beyond the point where they cease to have any connection with the reality or truth of the present moment. Over time, then, we become stiff and unyielding to our real (present) self, we suffer and we die, in the very midst of our living. At first blush, the celebration of the self seems to run counter to the Buddhist teaching; but I find in Askegarasu's work a very compelling ring of truth, mostly of careful consideration ( if I do say so myself).

Brothers and sisters, I invite your comments, observations and, or criticisms.

From Akegarasu's "Shout of Buddha":

#### FIRESIDE CHAT

Several days ago, sitting by the fireside, a friend and I were discussing various matters. Suddenly, without thinking, he began to criticize our mutual friend Mr. N.: "N. keeps classifying everyone he meets as good or bad. That's why he'll never make a real leader." Even though the comment was made without much thought, it intrigued me.

A person like Mr. N. uses his own hidebound system to evaluate the people he meets. If someone measures up to his standards, he calls him a fine person, believer, enlightened man. And he doesn't just say this but believes it from the bottom of his heart. If someone doesn't measure up, he calls him a terrible person, unbeliever, unenlightened man. Again, he not only says it but believes it completely. As a result, he can become one with some people but never with others. And once he has made up his mind on a judgment, he keeps trying to stick to it forever.

The mind of such a person is filled with "enemies" and "allies." So there is always a fixed, though hidden, hard feeling in his mind, and he senses himself a stranger even to his own life.

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From this state of mind come the religious and political bickering in this world of ours. People with minds like this may make up fine rationalizations, but they are simply trying to manipulate the consent of others or get it by force, wanting others to agree to their particular understandings, thoughts, assertions, faiths, or awarenesses. Because they live in a dualistic world, they try to be conquerors. And they do conquer the timid people and put them in the prison of their own experience, study, faith, isms, and assertion.

In the past I wanted blindly to have friends who believed the same isms and faiths that I did. Not only did I want such friends but when I didn't get them I felt that everyone was a stranger, alien to my own way. Whenever I have my own ism or faith I can't help being like this. That's why I used to fight to get followers and members and captives. Occasionally even now I have this feeling but it is rare now, because I have become an ordinary person who has nothing of isms, fixed ideas or faiths. To me my own living is the most important thing. I long for life; therefore I see life and adore it in all things.

Various people live by this thought, that ism, the other religion or faith. Don't think that I hate them! I think of them as I think of a variety of flowers blossoming. If the ideas really live in them, then this ism and that religion are fascinating. But I myself never become the follower of any ism or religion, not even my own! Of course I too think, feel, believe! But I don't want that to alter my life either. My life moves on continuously, freely. I seek only this, love only this.

In my last letter I told you I loved plants. You wrote back: "Why don't you transfer your love from plants to the sutras?" I know you don't see things as I do, but to me flowers and human thoughts are the same--except perhaps that human thoughts and isms sometimes have no life in them, while the flowers are always filled with life, which is why I respect and adore them. White plum-flower, yellow flower of pheasants-eye, blossoming so solemnly next to my desk--how lovely they are! How worthy of respect! Their life beats with the same pulse as mine. The plum has no isms. It flowers in white, but never forces others to become white. The pheasants-eye has no particular faith. It flowers in yellow but never demands that others become yellow. The plum is spontaneously white; all of her world shines with her whiteness. The pheasants-eye is by nature yellow and all of her world shines with her color. One who is filled with life has such power.

In order to get work done or anything else of that kind, we have to get together under one premise or ism or way of thinking--but this is with regard to work. A business or political organization is doing work, so it's natural that one ism or assertion should be used to organize people into a unit or party to



fight other organizations. As soon as a man becomes a propaganda agent for one religion, he will naturally reject other religions. But all of this has to do with work.

I don't want to be merely an entrepreneur. I respect my own life more than my work. I want any work or job that I do to be the manifestation of my own life. Therefore I'd rather as a naked man dig into life deeper and deeper and become one with all naked things, living and non-living, than do the work of organizing and fighting other organizations. I want to shove aside these stiffened curtains of reserve, these experiences, isms and faiths, which make for such a difficult separation between people. I want to embrace all, warm skin to warm skin. I want to see all, shining eye to shining eye.

In order to do any organizational work, it's convenient to have order and promises and rank. I am not advocating an unreasonable destruction of everything! But as a human being I enjoy, more than these organizational matters, the warm, living communication, as if the same blood flowed in all. My friend, don't mistake this as a manifesto-- I'm not making the remark as an assertion but just letting you know my life as it is. My life is not that popular "Life" discussed by contemporary philosophers and writers. It's not so difficult to understand as that. No, it's very ordinary, this life of mine. It goes on its way quite naturally--life as such. This is not the Life philosophers and writers define and talk about.

But I've wandered off the track. I just wanted to tell you: To throw away the judgments and criticisms of self and others that result from fixed and hidebound rules of Good and Bad-- this is to enjoy the life of "leaving artificiality and coming back to reality."

There is no fixed enemy or fixed ally.

I just wanted you to know the enjoyment of my life as it is, as an ordinary person, warmly touching skin to skin, after discarding those external coverings made up of thinking the environment is or is not suitable or the assertion does or does not conform.

Just longing for, just adoring!

In my room is a picture of Gautama Buddha's Nirvana scene, drawn by Yamada Yusen. An atmosphere of deep solemnity pervades the scene. All human beings are in mourning, and all animals, and trees, and grasses. Such a feeling of longing fills it! My room is heavy with the fragrance of the polyanthus flowers. The sun shines through dark clouds like a flower of light. Whatever I look at, the feeling of longing brings me close to tears.

Dear Friends:

It has been a long time. The other day when I received the CHFL, it was like hearing from an old friend. You all have been with me through alot- and alot more has just happened in the last year that has led me from Connecticut to North Carolina.

About eight years ago I co-founded the Woodbury Yoga Center and moved there with my four year old daughter, Kelly. The Center is located on 38 acres of woods, fields, streams and lawns. In the last few years we've built a beautiful two story meditation hall called Mukti Dham (place of liberation) which can hold about 120 people meditating. Our original idea for the Center was for it to be eclectic and open so people of all faiths or lack of faith could study the spiritual sciences of Yoga and Meditation without having to believe or accept anything. The proof is in the pudding, so to speak. The Center became succesful and as it became successful, all sorts of stuff began to happen. There became more "shoulds" and "have tos" and the place definetly took on an Indian Hindoo atmosphere. There began the subtle messages that those really in the know take this or that initiation or retreat. Now my own attitude towards spiritual life is similar to sixth patriarch Hui-neng's and J. Krishnamurti's and even U.G. Krishnamurti's, (any of you folks familiar with U.G.?) Basically, one only has to believe in those things that aren't true- because if something is true, then its true and one doesn't have to believe in it because it is what is. Truth cannot be impacted by either belief or disbelief- thank god that human beings are incapable of doing anything to the truth other than occasionally awakening to it! At any rate, I seemed to be teaching people how to examine, inquire into everything while the other teachers were teaching that asking too many questions indicated lack of faith in god, guru and self. More and more I began to feel out of place.

And then my mother died last March. Death, as Natchiketa discovered, is a good teacher. My mother's death clarified alot of things for me and I realized it was time to move on and be free of the organization. There were many other reasons for moving on such as being close to my very sick father, and my older brother who also lives down here( and is getting married Dec8- Buddha's Awakening day according to the misinformed Japanese)(but then we are about Jesus's birthday too!). And so here I am. Although I retain custody of Kelly, at 13 she has chosen to live with her mother in Watertown, Ct. which is fine with me. We are extremely close and because of

that I feel no need to clutch at her and control her. She will be here with me for Christmas and in the summer. She also plans to go to Duke for college. She sure has a better chance of getting in than I ever did.

I continue to teach and do counseling here. I am amazed at how much cultic stuuf sets into one's subconscious without one's even knowing it. I'm doing stuff for Hospice and the local cancer support group- and if Richard Boerstler is reading this-Dick, everyone's reading Letting Go and benefitting from it. Hospice is offering meditation training to its members and one of the methods they'll be instructed in is the co-meditation!

I'm also with a sweet, gentle, wonderful woman (Bonnie) who did about ten years in a christian cult. She has extremely sensitive radar for cultic thinking, behavior, games, rackets, etc. And it abounds everywhere-in Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity- and even you and me! If you all haven't read it yet, I highly recommend Mary Lutyen's Krishnamurti-The Years of Awakening. I especially recommend chap.33-Truth is a Pathless Land.

Our home here is wonderful and has more of a Zen atmosphere than a Hindoo one. We have a dojo for the Hara Training and Hatha Yoga classes, and other classes, a Meditation room and I have my own office, which is lovely. And even a typewriter which I'm gradually learning to use.

Mystudents are my friends-no-one's head above or below anyone elses. There are no inner or outer circles, nothing to join, and I have once again been blessed with wonderful friends/students. And so it goes.

I'm enclosing a couple of columns I did for my father when he was sick. Perhaps they may be useful to some of you-they were useful to me as I wrote them.

Hope you all have a wonderful holiday season. I look forward to hearing from you all in the next CHFL.



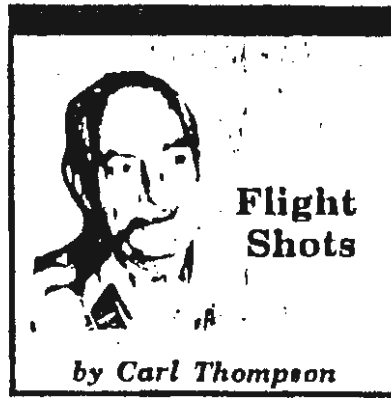
My best-

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This week, and perhaps some of next week, I'm going to take some time off and make someone else do my column! As you shall see shortly, that someone knows time — off, on and always! He may have learned some of it by watching me waste or spend my time, whichever I was doing. Yes, he's my younger son, Thomas Edward, who gives me some of his time, trying to improve mine! He has now left Woodbury, Conn., and settled here.

So now I turn the rest of this over to:



### Time is Life

by Thomas Edward Thompson

One of the reasons I enjoy living in North Carolina over New England is the slower pace. Most people here seem to have the time to smile and be friendly even when they are busy in their day.

Just a few days after I moved into my new home, I was out wandering about in my driveway when the person who delivers the mail actually stopped, got out of the truck and introduced himself to me. A friend. He said if I have any problems with the mail to let him know. I lived in the same place in Connecticut for eight years and I haven't the foggiest idea who delivered my mail except sometimes they didn't.

As we get older, we begin to realize that time is our most precious commodity. Time is life. Each one of us is meted out just so much time. How we use it is up to us. Unfortunately, many of us waste it on petty little grievances and arguments or watching the reruns of Gilligan's Island. And then suddenly we realize we are almost out of time. If only we could do it over again!

To master time is to master your life. Since time is our most precious commodity in life, then how do we want to spend our time? Do we want to hold on to it like a miser, never sharing it with anyone or do we wrecklessly throw it away, never really investing in life? Or do we find a middle way? This means we invest our time well and spend our time well. And we don't waste much of it in the petty little problems that seem to pop up everywhere.

It is not easy to know how to spend our time wisely. After all, our lives are so different from one another that what may be wonderful for you may not be so wonderful for me. I may want to spend my time on the golf course and you may not. How can we be clear about what is the best investment of time for each one of us? There is a method I've used many times that is extremely effective. In fact, it was by using this technique that helped me decide to move South.

The method is based on realizing that the most honest advisor we have in our life is our own death. As I have sat with dying people in their last days or hours, so many of them have had regrets about how they've lived their

lives. If they could do it over, they would never have done this or that or they'd definitely not worked for that organization for 30 years or whatever.

What I began to realize is that it would be wise, while we still have some time left, to place ourselves on our death beds and take a good, hard look at our life and see the ways we are wasting our time doing things we really don't want to be doing and not doing the things we really want to do. We often come to the startling realization that we are not in control of our lives nor our time. We may be spear carriers in someone else's soap opera.

One of the things often realized is how we are always living into the future, waiting for a particular event to occur before we can really begin living. The event may be getting a better job, getting a Ph.D, getting married, retiring, getting divorced, winning the lottery (do you all have lotteries here in N.C.? Half of Connecticut is living for the day they win the big one), getting well, having a baby, leaving home for college, finishing college, making your first million. You fill in the blank for whatever it is in your life you're waiting for before you can really begin to live. And so we put our life on hold waiting for the day when ... and then suddenly you are on your death bed and the games over! When you use death as your advisor you realize that today, just the way it is, is as good as it gets. Yes, I know sometimes it does get better and sometimes it is worse but the bottom line is today is today and this is as good as it gets. Don't spend your life waiting for Godot. He may not be coming. Today is a tremendous gift. Don't wait until your death-bed to realize this.

(But wait for next week for the rest of "TIME!")

Another way of wasting time is by having that pressured feeling that we don't have enough time! We feel we have so much to do and so little time to do it in. We rush about trying to get it all done only to find out that there is much more to do. It is a never-ending vicious circle.

Most people who feel this way (there are many of us but fortunately most of us are still living up North) are what is known as A-type personalities. A-types are intense, abrupt, pressured, overwhelming, direct, serious. They not only get ulcers and various forms of heart disease but also tend to give them to others.

When you are around an A-type, you tend to feel you should hurry up and get done what you're doing so you can get on to the more important serious stuff that needs to be done, according to the A-type person. The myth the A-type lives into is that if they work harder and faster they'll finally get it all done. And so they work harder and faster until

they drop in their tracks. On their death beds, they look back into their lives and see it still isn't all done. If they had to do it all over again, they wouldn't sweat over the small stuff. And from the death bed, almost all of it is small stuff.

Your life is your time. Invest in yourself. Invest time in taking excellent care of your body, your mind, and your spirit. One hour a day is minimum. There are 168 hours in a week. The average American adult spends 30 of them watching television so we all really can afford an hour a day invested in ourselves.

A car doesn't travel far if you don't take time to put gas in it. A saw doesn't cut well if you don't take time to sharpen it. And we don't live well if we don't take time for nurturing our body, mind and spirit. Then take some time for your family and friends. Someday, perhaps lying on your death bed, you'll be glad you did!

Dear Ananda--and Cloud-Hidden Friends:

First, the matter of a name-change. I vote for continuation of Cloud Hidden Friends Letter. "Freethinker" is another **category**, Cloud-Hidden suggests something beyond that. And Zen has a sectarian ring, however well one might know that the word should ultimately be transcended. Letter and spirit, letter vs. spirit, balance needed, all those mental struggles emerge when we try to determine when Thinking is or can become Free, or how to avoid "stinking of Zen." Clouds are beautiful and vague, mobile, and that which is Hidden can only be imagined, fleeting though often moving dreams.

Ananda: you have been patient. Years have passed without my having paid my dues, with only one weak response to your notes inquiring if I should remain on the mailing list. Now I sit at the typewriter without a clear plan, no outline, when it seems that I more than most, need to become compact and avoid rambling, yet, almost mediumistically, I do best when I am not planning, when I do what I remember others recommending for me--"just write!"

My earlier perusals of the Letter were propelled by having long ago shared the spirit of the Suzuki-Watts-Merton mystique. A contemplative nature and a search for spiritual universalism carried me to this on a raft of Buddhist perspective. But in reading those earlier issues I felt that I was out of my depth. I was fascinated by what was being said and I thought I was open, but I realized that my understanding was not focused. Or to put it another way, "What are these guys trying to say?" Are these rays of light illuminating great Truth? Are these cries for help? Am I ideally "joining" or am I being encouraged to continue drifting? I thought in any case that I should wait awhile and see if I could get into focus. Issues #30 and #31 brought me some glimmers of fellow-feeling from behind the Clouds.

The Theravada path is sometimes called Fundamental Buddhism, and Mahayana, Developed Buddhism. Sometimes it seems that Mahayana is well-termed "Embroidered" Buddhism. It has become very complex and lavish with the speculative capacity of the human mind. At this point I wonder whether I am condemning or admiring, perhaps a little of each. A man must do what he feels really attracted to do, even though the Buddha seems to have said "better you don't..." and this "permission" applies also to what Dave Kiebert pleads in the matter of "sensuous pleasure, and love of life" as hopefully not being all foolishness. I think I understand some of this. That is the drama, the mystery, the passion. But often along the line come the shocks, the great sorrows, leading to the great transcendence and renunciation (organ music with shaft of light). But anyway: Thich Nhat Hanh strikes a chord with me when he says that Mahayana Buddhism is often too complicated, and refers us to the old **suttas** on **vipassana** meditation. Yet he is a Mahayana bhikshu who brings meditation closer to lay life while upholding a monastic ideal. Beauty for him, yes. "Social gospel" on the one hand, gardening on the other, but mostly, meditation. Beauty is simple. Buddhism is essentially simple.

Perhaps what I suspect in reading CHFL is that I am too simple-minded and don't understand the "real issues." I read and reread, trying to understand. I think the best thing for me now is to expose myself and solicit critical response. So I venture to write, at last.

My history in a nutshell: Born 1925 in Barton, New York, grew up in Chicago during the Great Depression in a fairly dysfunctional family, not well socialized. Learned guilt-fear in an unchurched but yet Protestant religious guidance with encouragement to "read the Bible"--which I did toward my current grateful familiarity. Traveled as attached Navy crew (signalman) to merchant ships, mostly Atlantic/Mediterranean, though Pacific as far as Saipan/Tinian later. Merchant seaman-intellectuals opened my eyes, as well as my travels to North Africa, and another culture, basically Arab-Berber/Islamic but overlaid with European (French). Provincialism, naive-realistic Christianity departed me. Back on shore and especially on the West Coast before discharge and return to Chicago, I was nurtured by the Unitarians. But much of the insecurity I felt about meaning and ultimate-resource, in the highly humanistic Unitarian terms, seemed insufficient and John Boyd's critique of religion in this way is clear to me. In the Chicago area I continued a search which led to embracing the Baha'i Faith, which I endured for about 15 years. It provided the idea of a direct revelation of God through an infallible High Prophet with the foundations of a new world civilization, the apocalyptic and messianic coming of the Kingdom on Earth, the whole, designed to be fulfillment of the expectations of all great historical religions. But it was, authoritarian in this way, guarded, guarding, with a tendency to be protectively inquisitorial. Here is where I finally realized that I was ready for a humanistic and non-authoritarian approach. I was living in Casper, Wyoming by that time, drawn to Buddhism, accelerated by a copy of James Bissett Pratt's **A Pilgrimage of Buddhism** followed by my writing to Buddhist Churches of America Bookstore and correspondence with Hiroshi Kashiwagi, and a series of books by D. T. Suzuki with its Zen orientation. But I also began to visit the Shinshu temple in Denver, fell in love with the Japanese and Japanese-Americans, especially the farmers who came from afar for the high-holidays; and I was nurtured also by Reverends Tamai and Tsunoda. I was a bit surprised at the idea of not keeping precepts and especially by the "way they could and did drink" alcoholic beverages of all kinds, ministers being some of the "champions". But I was so well received and so well used, and so willing to see what seemed "an easy way" that I remained involved and connected to this day. I married Etsuko Sawada soon after my arrival in Berkeley and our children, Satoshi, Keiko, and Seiji, were raised in

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"the church." I have traveled to many points in the BCA realm early-on, and with Etsuko's work within the system, in background-support, to many more places where I was already well known and had family-feeling.

Amida-pietism was appealing though I did not deal seriously at first with problems of demythologizing and/or remythologizing, which seemed to relate to making Shinran Shonin's version of the Pure Land School an attractive challenge to the general population with its "practice of no practice" with pews, organ music, no real meditation, but "just listening" --to sermons--all very like Christianity, from which it seems to need to be distinguished. And all the talk about total depravity and sin, and a Lutherish doctrine of "grace alone." I simply enjoyed uncritically for a long time. Gradually, however, I began to feel that it was insufficient, that discipline is what is needed, especially meditation, and it would seem that a few clerics have allowed that some truth exists in that and have set up Zen-Shin Sanghas and such. Rev. Masao Kodani excited me greatly with his Kinnara movement and retreats and we practiced to a degree, meditation with Rinzaï Roshï Sasaki. But later I learned from Mas, whether as a matter of change or original intention I am not sure, that meditation was practiced to show what use or good it was **not** (!) And more and more I became aware of the heavy line that was drawn by most between the rest of Buddhism, even the rest of Mahayana Buddhism; I noticed that the Shinshu establishment had little interest in expressing fellow-feeling with Buddhists of other schools or denominations, of which there are many in Berkeley, with the exception of Rev. Toshïo Murakami who is now **socho** in Canada; and former U.S. **socho** Kenryu T. Tsuji now of the Washington D. C. area.

I have known Elson Snow from I think about 1960 when I came down from Portland to Pacific Grove for Pacific Seminar, and on to when I settled in Berkeley where I've been since 1962. He is a very unique and special person and his understanding of Jodoshinshu has always warranted my respect, as far as I could follow his thought. He strikes me as being very erudite while a very unpretentious person. I have the idea that he is not a hide-bound kind of sectarian, though certainly committed (which is important) since he has such an admiration of Nichiren and has spoken of him with such warmth, while a devout Shin-follower.

I have had varying degrees of closeness with Institute of Buddhist Studies (BCA/Shinshu pre-seminary now under the umbrella of Graduate Student Union, Pacific School of Religion, University of California) and have, back to the days when it was Buddhist Study Center. Back to Ryukyu Fujimoto-sensei; and Rev. Ryosetsu Fujiwara's times. And thanks also to Rev. Masami Fujitani, whose friendship continues to this day.

I followed with some interest the coming of new students to IBS. Greg Gibbs, also of these pages, I have met, had little interaction, though that is not his fault. There was one extended encounter, however.

I was sitting outside on a "break" from my desk on the campus of the University of California, where I am employed in a clerical capacity at the Counseling Center. I was reading some Buddhist Publication Society pamphlets on a nice bench. These are Theravadin and from Sri Lanka. I was surprised by the hailing approach of Greg Gibbs and Chas. Niimi and laughed happily to point out that I was discovered reading "pious literature" when a couple of seminary-types should come along. My literature was examined--and severely castigated. "Abominable doctrine!" I had not thought it was that extreme, though there were inklings in the past and more indications, however gently put, in even more fresh disclosures.

As I grow older, I am decreasingly of an argumentative mind--though perhaps that is belied in these lines of "finally writing." Therefore I will hope at some indefinite future time come to grips with what Greg and others might really mean (as against the way "I took it?"), but I feel myself sliding away from all the precious disputes and atmospheres of negativity and division, and I want in these my coming years of retirement, to privatize without total withdrawal.

In embracing John Boyd's #30-31 p. 5 letter, I refer readers back to it rather than my starting to quote this and that and even most of it. John asked in the final paragraph "...if others share my concern with these distinctions?" This a response of sorts.

At this point I am not sure whether I really had nothing to say, or if I said too much. But this is my leap into the unknown.

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*Cal*

An Article for the ZF

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Dear Cloud Hidden:

If there is one "cloud-hidden" Truth I am now sure of, it's that all religions tell the one common Truth about the SUN! Under different names, it is all the same, especially the story of the birth of Jesus Christ etc. which is the enclosed story - and if you were to ever read the book "Antiquity Unveiled" by Atty. J. M. Roberts, 1878, you would then understand in full - including the truth about Judaism, Buddhism, Zoraster, Hercules, etc etc.. I then want to share the following with you:

**Christian Story is the dramatization of Natural Phenomena**

From earliest times mankind has depended upon our great central Orb, **the SUN**, center of our planetary system to create and regulate all life on our particular place of residence, **the Earth**. To those who cared to do their own thinking and analysing, **the Sun** governed with unfailing accuracy the length of the days and seasons in every clime. **Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter** followed each other with such regular punctuality that man attributed divine power to **the Sun** which never ceased bestowing food and warmth through the productivity of **the Earth**.

To the thinker, **the Sun rescued man** from the severities of the Winter months and therefore was considered a **Savior**; and as life was re-activated in the Spring, **the Sun assumed the role of a Creator**; and then as the **Great Preserver** in the Summer and Autumn months as food and comfort were supplied to fortify and provide for man's future.

Through the ages, and among most peoples, as mankind came to realize its complete dependency upon **the Sun**, this magnificent "Orb of Day" became the **Great Benefactor** or "the son" of **God** and the center of **Worship, by priestly direction**.

The part played by **the Sun** is most strikingly to be observed in the Christian Religion. For demonstration's sake, let us assume that **the story of Christ**, as expressed in the modern text, is a **parable for the Sun's activities**. The birth takes place on the 25th of December. **The Sun** in its annual circle through the signs of the Zodiac, or the months of the year, shines upon **the Earth** in regular orderly manner between the **Tropic of Cancer** on the North and the **Tropic of Capricorn** on the South. December 21st of each year the Sun reaches its lowest point of declination at the Tropic of Capricorn.

It then remains, seemingly motionless (**Sol, the Sun**, "stands still" **Sol-stice**) the 22nd, 23rd and 24th, and then **on the 25th of December (Christmas)** it has noticeably started its return North toward the Equator and therefore is "**born again**". (Perhaps this metaphor will be more easily grasped when the phenomenon of the New Year replacing the Old year is represented by the **tableau** on the stage by a young child's entering as an old man exits on the opposite side).

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In Christianity, **Jesus (I-ES+us, the one ES-sence or the Sun)**, born again every **December 25th**, is portrayed as a babe because at that time of the year its power is weak. Beginning December 25th, the Sun's northbound progress is depicted in the increase of daylight; that is longer and longer days until on the 21st of March, the **Vernal Equinox**, when the Sun has reached the Equator, the length of the days and the nights is equal. On the 25th of March the **Sun** has progressed Northward into the Northern Hemisphere and **has therefore impregnated that section of our globe** with the fertile seed; and plant life activity becomes more visible everywhere, in our part of the world.

This **natural annual occurrence** on March 25th checks accurately with the religious story because exactly nine months later, December 25th **the son (Sun) is born**. Astronomers tell us that one minute after midnight on December 24th the **constellation Virgo** rises above the horizon with its bright star, **Vindimatrix** (located in the figure's elbow), of major propensity and clearly to be seen, **gives evidence of the birth's being virgin**.

Referring again to March 25th the days begin to be longer than the nights thus signalling the triumph of "**Light**" over "**Darkness**". This physical astronomical phenomenon is celebrated in the Christian churches by the designation of a particular Sunday called **Easter**.

In symbology, **the Moon is considered the wife of the Sun** and therefore **Easter**, at present, **is the first Sunday after the first full moon after the 25th of March, (the Spring Equinox)** that is, after the Sun crosses the Equator. (Nine months later in the religious story, the "**Holy Mother**" has the child).

The **Summer Solstice**, when the Sun has reached the **Tropic of Cancer** in its northern trek, takes place the 21st through the 24th of June, and on June 25th the days begin to grow shorter as the **Sun's path (the Ecliptic)** descends Southward to the **Equator** which it crosses the 25th of September.

In the religious story this is called **the second crucifixion at Golgotha** where the god is crucified between two thieves and mention is made of the presence of a hand maiden. (**Virgo, the Virgin**). After this the Sun's journey continues Southward to the Tropic of Capricorn which it reaches on December 21st and the annual phenomenon is repeated. (**The ever repeating "Crucifixion of the Lord, the SUN!"**)

Just as children would continue to believe in the myth of Santa Claus, so would, and so do human grown-ups believe in **the priestly concocted religious stories** until they, the humans, turn their **searchlights of thinking and reasoning** upon what they have been "fed" since birth and compare them rationally and reasonably to **the phenomena of Nature occurring continually before their eyes**.

### **"Ye Shall Know The Truth: And THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE!"**

Just as the 20th Century was accurately designated by W. E. B. DuBois as "**The Century of the Color Line**" or Racism, so do we see the 21st Century as "**The Century of The Truth' about the World's Religions**". But it will not take a full century with today's technology to fully disclose the truth which will in turn bring about the Earth **truly** turning into "**A Garden of Eden**" with Mankind clearly recognizing the same Central Energy pulsating through all that lives! (And **everything** is alive!)

**Finis**



An Article for the ZF

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Dear Friends:

I wrote this recently in honor of Paul Reps, who died not long ago. It is reprinted with permission from the "Wind Bell".

**Paul Reps**

by Ananda Dalenberg

Another pioneer of Zen in the West is no longer with us. Paul Reps passed away on July 12, 1990, at the ripe old age of 94. Reps visited us frequently at Zen Center over the years, and he was a good friend. His presence was always a delight and joy.

Zen can be overly serious, and to remedy this there could be no better antidote than Paul Reps. At a lecture he gave some time ago at Zen Center, he was faced with a very serious crowd sitting quite stiff and proper. He began his lecture with "Who says we Zen students can't have fun, huh, who says?" That really broke the ice. And it also was quite a challenge, particularly for those who recently hadn't really had much fun at all. He then proceeded to invite everyone to take some more comfortable posture, and to follow him in doing a Reps version of some special centering and relaxation exercises. This soon had everyone loose and laughing, and feeling oh-so-good.

In another lecture, he once commented that although Buddhism teaches the truth of suffering, what the Buddha actually came for was to liberate us from suffering, and certainly not to burden us down with even more of it. That seems a simple and obvious truth, but when everyone is always oh-so-serious, and when a playful spirit such as that of Reps is not around, it tends to be forgotten.

Reps also urged a more creative and flexible approach to zazen. For example, he was a great advocate of "ten minute zazen," which he felt was a kind of practice that anyone, regardless of age or lifestyle, could easily manage. He felt that if one whole-heartedly gave oneself to that ten minutes, it would prove to be as valuable as much longer periods, especially if the latter had become a mostly dull and lifeless chore. He even hoped to some day shorten it to just one minute, but that perhaps was too difficult a goal, even for such as Reps.

Paul Reps wrote several fine books on Zen. He also was close to Nyogen Senzaki. The two of them collaborated in writing *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, which has long been a favorite of many. Some of his essays appear in *Square Sun, Square Moon*. And for some of his delightful picture poems, see *Ten Ways To Meditate*, which in the words of Aldous Huxley, "will take one further towards the realization of the ancient self-knowledge than all the roaring or pathetic eloquence of generations of philosophers, theologians, and moralists."

Although Reps is often labeled as Zen, his spirit was a free and broad-ranging one, and he refused to be pinned down so easily. But it also might be said that a spirit such as his actually represents the true spirit of Zen, and with this he might agree. But then suddenly, just as you are about to pin him down once more, he will be off again, laughing and ranging free.

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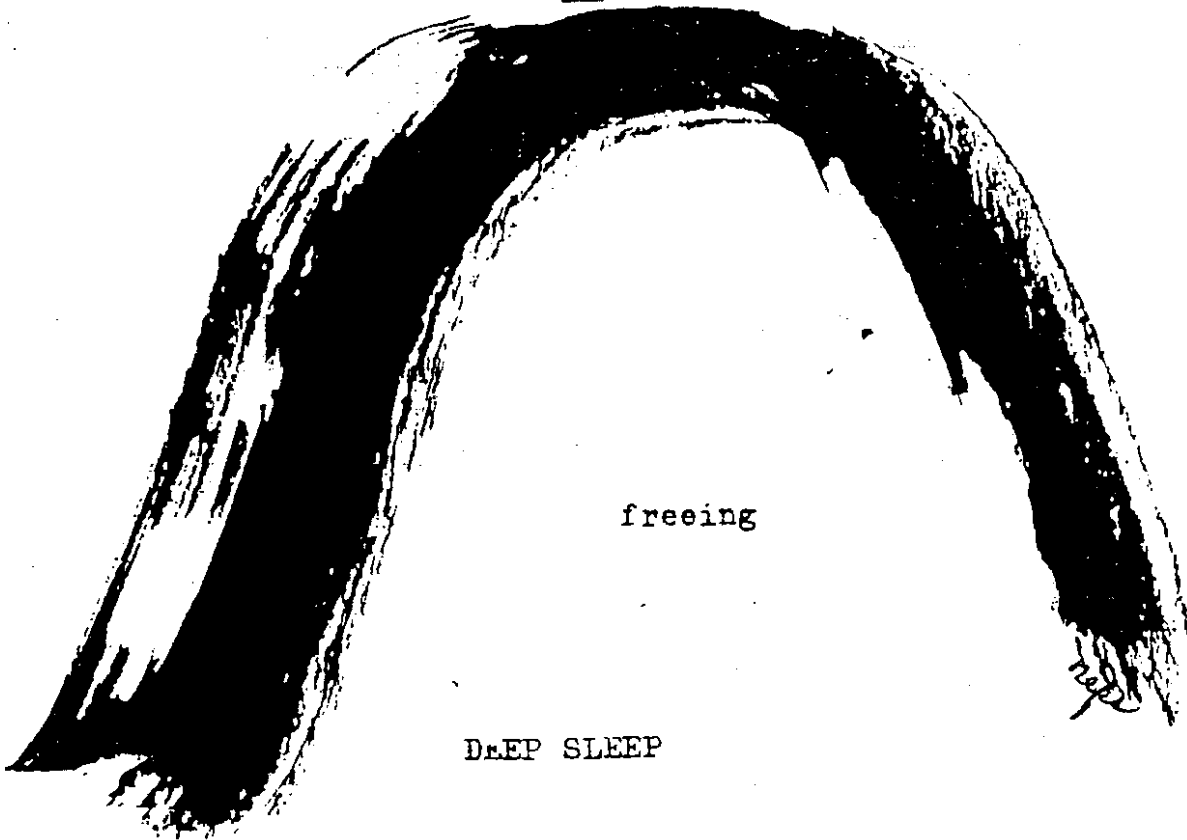
DEEP WAKING



freeing

ordinary

suffering



freeing

DEEP SLEEP

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From Paul Reps  
Reprint from Issue #14

Let me end with a few quotes which I think of as being in the Freethinking spirit, plus some thoughts on the New Year.

From Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass", 1855 edition:

"This is what you should do: love the earth and sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to everyone that asks, stand up for the stupid and crazy, devote your income and labor to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God, have patience and indulgence towards the people, take off your hat to nothing known or unknown or to any man or number of men... re-examine all you have been told at school or church or in any book, dismiss what insults your own soul, and your very flesh shall be a great poem."

Carl Jung writes from his retreat in Bollingen: "At times I feel as if I am spread out over the landscape and inside things, living in every tree, in the splashing of the waves, in the clouds and the animals that come and go, in the processions of the seasons. Without my piece of land, my life's work would not have come into being."

Albert Einstein in his later years said, as I remember, "There is only one really fundamental question, and that is, can the universe be trusted". (Anyone know where this might be from?).

#### A HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL

Let us celebrate New Years Day as a glorious and joyful holy day, as it was in days of yore. We need more jubel trumpets, hymns, Odes to the New Year, Odes to the birth of the world, new resolutions, new hopes, meditations, universal prayers, mummings, conch shells, and much divine nonsense. And let it be in a universal and harmonious spirit, so as to truly honor and adorn the birth of the New Year.

Also let New Years Day be a glorious universal birthday for everyone, for the earth, the sun, and the moon, for deer and seagulls, and of course also for each one of us, as has been the ancient tradition in China and many lands.

Also Lo and Behold, and just as it should be, our holy day is a great celestial event amongst the planets called Perihelion Day. It is the day in the elliptical orbit of the earth around the sun when the earth is closest to the sun, on or about Jan. 1.

New Years Day then is all about the great cycles of cosmic renewal and rebirth. It is also about our own rebirth, and the joy, suffering, profundity, and mystery of birth itself. It is about the sheer wonder that the world is here at all, and doubly amazing, that we are all here on this old planet-earth together.

It is then a time for merriment, but also for meditation and prayer, including perhaps a silent New Years Eve walk alone, contemplating the mystery of the stars.

Ananda