A Leaf in the Wind

A LIFE'S JOURNEY

Adrian Feldmann
(Thubten Gyatso)

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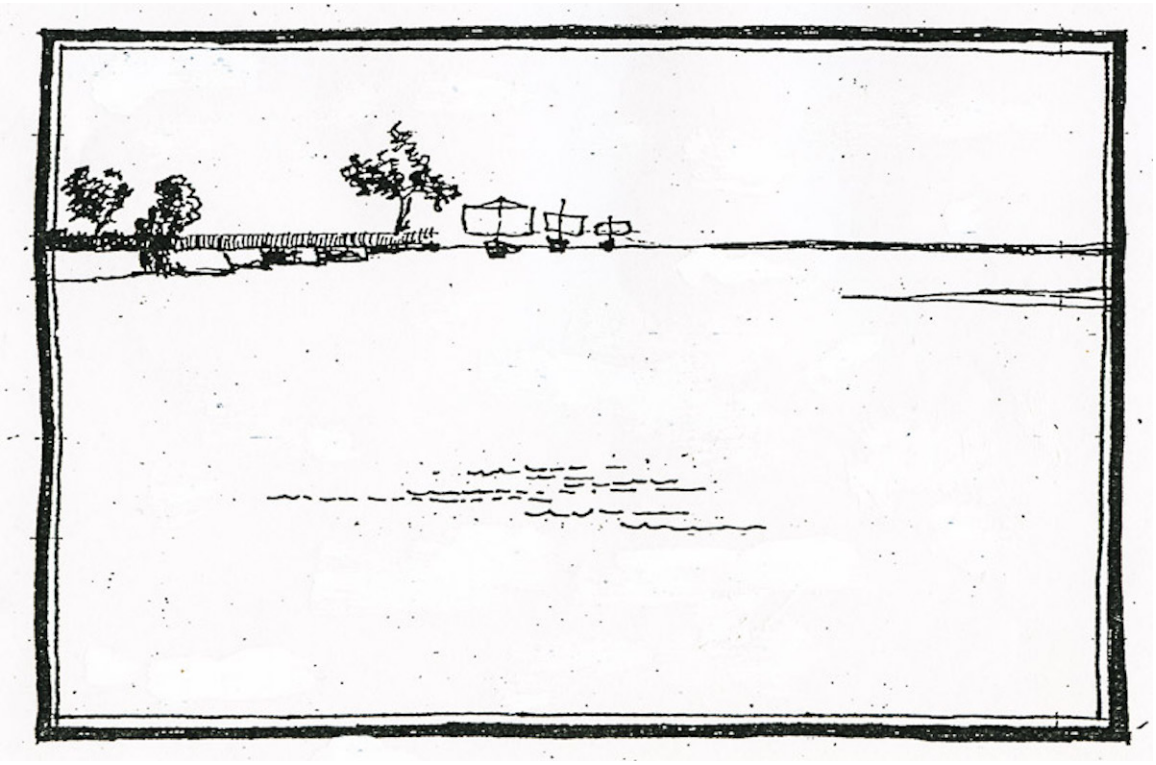

Venerable Thubten Gyatso

(Adrian Feldmann)

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INTRODUCTION

I have always been an observer, a thinker, and a dreamer. Even as a small child I was sorting out the world and, as I grew up, it gradually became clear to me that beneath the complexity of our lives the common theme that unites us all, humans as well as animals, is that we simply want happiness and don't want to be hurt. And yet we so often spoil our happiness and increase our misery through plain, selfish stupidity. In an atmosphere of fun, competition brings many laughs, but as soon as we get serious, the game is over and the tears start to flow. Just watch any group of children at play and see how quickly the magic disappears and discord arises when their egos are bruised. Adults are no different; we are just big kids. Our games are more complex, but our egos are no less sensitive.

Violence, from gross physical hurt to verbal and mental abuse, has always been abhorrent to me, but it has also been within me. I didn't want it, but I didn't know what to do about it. Sometimes it felt easier to justify anger and hatred because that's what everyone else seemed to do. But the bad taste it left behind poisoned my pleasure and didn't alleviate my unhappiness. On the other hand, I noticed that people who act out of kindness are happy and have few problems. These may not appear to be particularly profound observations, but they pose the question: 'If happiness comes from being kind, and unhappiness comes from being selfish, why is happiness so elusive and why are we ever sad?' In other words, 'Why can't we love others and abandon selfishness?'

This book tells the story of my search for an answer.

When I met the Buddhist teachings, they confirmed that selfishness is the root of unhappiness. Selfishness gives rise to pride, greed, and anger – emotions that block our attempts to find happiness. Most importantly, the teachings give a method to overcome selfishness: as the problem is in the mind, the solution is in the mind. We may agree that these poisonous emotions are undesirable, but our behaviour contradicts that knowledge. We become angry as soon as things don't go our own way, and we keep pride and desire in our hearts as if they are our closest friends. When people and possessions don't live up to our expectations we easily find fault in them. We rarely see, or admit, the mistake in our own attitudes. Just as knowing the cause of an illness is useless if we don't take the right medicine, knowing that selfishness is the root of unhappiness won't help unless we cultivate its remedy: wisdom and loving-kindness. To do this, we need to know how our minds function and how to overcome the obstacles that arise as we attempt to stop bad mental habits. In everyday terms, it's like playing a computer game within the mind. In moving towards our inner goal, we must recognise and destroy the unexpected mental obstacles before they harm us. If the search for the Holy Grail is a metaphor for one's advance towards perfection in mystical union with God, then the Buddhist Holy Grail is the unification of wisdom and loving-kindness within our mind. Indeed, I believe that union with God and the cultivation of wisdom and loving-kindness are one and the same thing.

In my own quest for the Holy Grail, I am about to retreat into complete isolation from society for three years. It could be longer, or even shorter. I will have no communication whatsoever with the outside world. Even the people who supply my fresh food will be neither seen nor heard. A wall around my earth cabin will be the limit of my movements, and I shall not waste time with gardening, reading, writing, or decorating. These activities

would only hinder my mission, which is to see things as they are, undistorted by the veils of preconception. With mindfulness, alertness, and effortless concentration as my aides, my task is to navigate the river of emotional turbulence within my mind and enter the calm sea of wisdom.

. . .

The historic Buddha was born as a prince in India about 2,500 years ago. According to the Tibetan tradition, he was already an enlightened being, beyond death and rebirth. He chose this way of birth as a method to inspire others to go beyond suffering and attain true happiness. Through his own example and his patient teaching, he indicated that renunciation, great compassion (bodhicitta), and the wisdom seeing reality were the path to follow. Showing that the first step on the path is renunciation of desire for sensory pleasure, Buddha turned his back on the luxury and pleasures of the palace and became an ascetic yogi. Then, by learning and practising all that the greatest religious practitioners of the time had to teach, he indicated that, by not knowing the real cause of suffering (self-centredness), they did not have the complete cure for suffering.

He meditated beneath the Bodhi tree at Bodhgaya and revealed his enlightenment by teaching the four truths: there is no real satisfaction in our lives; this is because we are under the control of poisonous emotions arising from self-centred ignorance and the effects of our past actions (karma); all suffering can come to an end (nirvana); and the path that leads to the cessation of suffering is the wisdom seeing the final reality of the self. This wisdom is the direct antidote to self-centredness because it knows there is no ultimately existing self. The self exists merely nominally, nevertheless, it has the potential to attain Buddhahood. Then, by gathering a vast circle of disciples and teaching for many years, the Buddha showed that non-discriminating concern for the welfare of others supported by this wisdom was the method to realise our potential of enlightenment. To achieve this goal, we need a qualified person to guide us out of the jungle of self-importance.

My meditation retreat comes after nearly thirty years as a Buddhist monk, during which I have studied and meditated with many great teachers. Some people have accused me of being selfish by planning to cut myself off from the world, but for me there is no other way. Wisdom undistorted by intellectual ideas cannot be acquired from books or from others; we can only attain it by meditating under the guidance of a qualified teacher. At first, our teacher's perfect example inspires us to maintain the pure ethics of not harming others. Then we gain an intellectual understanding of reality and, especially, we train our minds in loving-kindness. After that, the isolated retreat conditions are essential for cultivating the special wisdom that directly sees reality rather than the wisdom that simply knows about reality. Retreat is not selfish: its purpose is to become a qualified teacher helping others, just as the Buddha did.

Sometimes I do wonder if my aim is realistic. After so many years as a monk my mind is still not free from self-importance. I cannot maintain concentration for more than a few seconds and desire and anger still rage out of control. There is no guarantee that after three, or even thirty, years I shall emerge as a qualified teacher. But only death will prevent me from trying. And even if I don't enter the calm sea of wisdom, the experience of trying will benefit others. I recall how a friend of mine was amused by a sign outside an office in India, which

read, 'Sanjit Roy LLB (failed)'. My friend was compelled to go inside and ask about it. 'To have studied law and failed,' explained Mr Roy, 'is much better than to have never studied at all. I do have something special to offer my clients.'

Even if I do not manage to attain the Holy Grail, I will have something special to offer.

What I now have to offer is the story of how I reached this point in my life. The idea to write this story first came to me in the 1980s when I was in charge of transforming an old French mansion into the first Tibetan Buddhist monastery for Westerners. I was replacing broken tiles on the roof when an early model Mercedes pulled up. The driver, a man in his thirties, switched to English as soon as he realised my French was not up to scratch.

'Is this a Tibetan Monastery?' he asked.

I looked around. A more typical rural French scene could not be imagined. 'Yes, this is a monastery, or at least the beginnings of one.'

'Is there a Tibetan lama here?' he asked.

There was. While drinking tea with our abbot, the man told us his story. He had once seen a vision of a god-like being who told him that in seven years' time there would be a Tibetan Buddhist Monastery near his home in the south of France. He was to go there and give the resident lama a jewel that had been in the family for several generations. It was now seven years since that vision. He handed our abbot a small package and left.

The abbot and I looked at each other in astonishment.

'Let's have a look," I said with a smile.

The abbot unwrapped the package to reveal a rectangular green object, about an inch and a half long. It was surely too large to be an emerald.

'Oh, it's just glass,' I said dismissively.

'No,' replied the abbot, 'this happened all the time in Tibet. When we were building monasteries, *dakas* would come out of the mountains and give us precious jewels.' Dakas, with their female counterparts, *dakinis*, are beings with high levels of attainment on the spiritual path. While completing their own paths in magical abodes, they also assist us mere humans in our practices. In this respect, I presume they are equivalent to the biblical angels. 'We must see how much it is worth,' the abbot went on.

We took the man's gift to a jeweller's shop in Toulouse. The jeweller held it up to the light and examined it closely. 'It's an emerald,' he said. 'Nobody in Toulouse can afford to buy this. You will have to take it to Paris. Rich Arabs like to collect large stones such as this.'

As we left the shop, I again asked the abbot to show me the gem. Now it glowed in my eyes. 'Wow, it's beautiful,' I said, and we laughed together like small boys who had successfully raided the pantry.

That evening I reflected on what had happened. My scientific scepticism had been greatly softened by Buddhism and I had learned to take such incidents in my stride. Whether our benefactor was a daka, or simply a generous person, I did not know, but my mind was open to both possibilities. It occurred to me then that I should write down the story of how my world-view had become so accommodating.

Even before discovering Buddhism, my search for truth had led to many unusual adventures, including a remarkable journey when my friends and I sailed down the Indus River in Pakistan. That voyage had given me the courage and the determination to change my life forever, and I decided to write down my story beginning with the record of that journey. Later, in 1999, at the request of my teacher, Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, I went to Mongolia to help the Mongolian people rediscover their Buddhist heritage after seventy years of communist repression. During my fourth Mongolian winter, having written forty or more articles on Buddhism for the local English-language newspaper, I completed this story. It describes the sequence of events that led to my abandoning an ordinary if unconventional life as a doctor and becoming a Buddhist monk. My tale is more than a chronicle of events. It reveals the inner and outer changes that have brought me to the threshold of the most important event in my life: my three-year retreat.

I have written this story for those who don't have the same freedom to travel that I had in the 1970s, but who are asking similar questions. Hopefully, they will find something to help make sense of the world and give meaning to their lives. The frightening advent of international terrorism, and the equally frightening use of violence to combat it, have generated a sense of helplessness in the world. What can we do to stop the senseless killing? How can we maintain peace? There is a danger that cynical indifference will lead to our abandoning the thought to help others and, instead of trying to improve social conditions, we will pour our energies into self-indulgence.

I am convinced that all hope for society lies within its individual components – ourselves. If, through a sense of personal responsibility, each one of us works to combat our own selfishness, greed, and hatred, there will be a chance for things to improve. World peace depends upon a foundation of non-harmfulness in the minds of the people. It can never be achieved through violence. Politicians of a non-violent nature can bring an end to the insanity of war. Let us become those politicians.

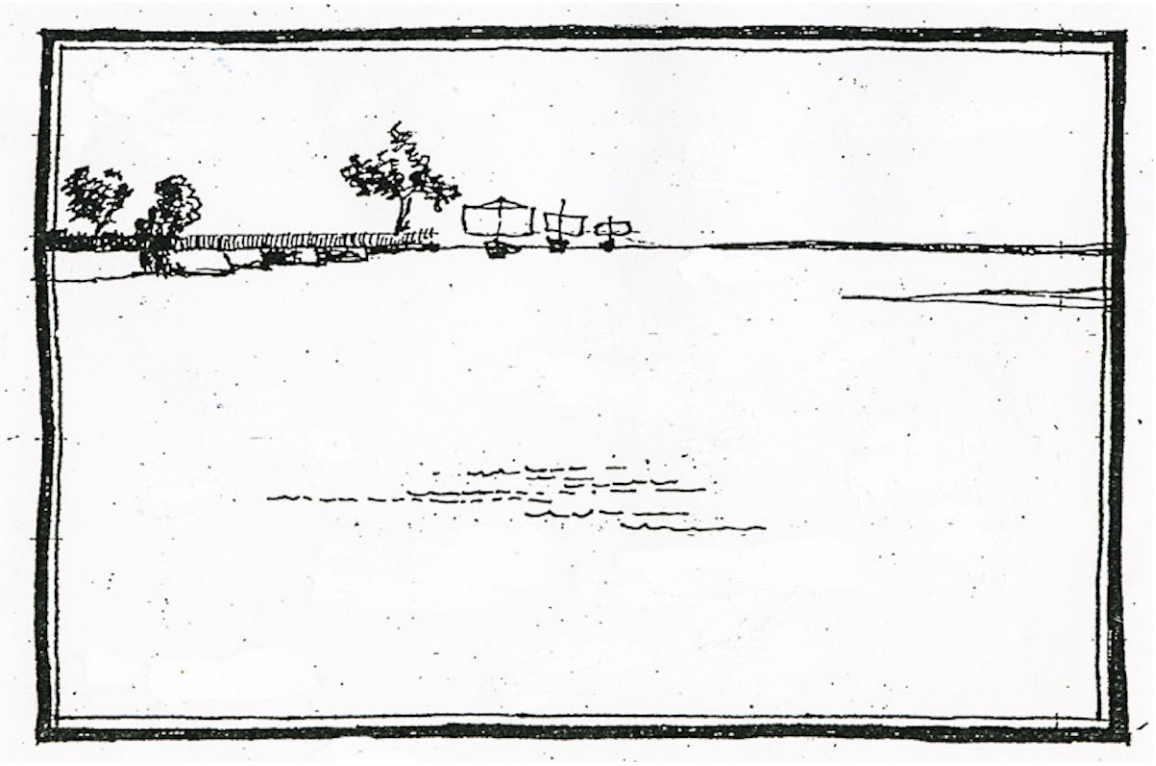
Disharmony in the external world is a reflection of the disharmony in our minds. Our efforts to achieve inner peace are continually frustrated by self-importance, and yet we blame others. For our own happiness we depend upon our partners, our possessions, our reputations, and the love of others. But none of these things is reliable. Even our own bodies cannot be trusted to not get sick or not show the signs of ageing. Fulfilment repeatedly slips from our grasp. In our never-ending pursuit of happiness, we need an inner method to subdue our self-centredness. War cannot create inner peace, but inner peace can prevent war.

This story describes my search for inner peace.

MAP OF AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN

MAP OF THE INDUS RIVER

PART ONE: ON THE RIVER



BIRTH OF THE WANDERLUST

My paternal grandparents were Jewish. My grandfather, a descendent of the Khazars of southern Russia, was born in Odessa and emigrated to Australia via South Africa in 1908. In the ninth century, seeking a religion that worshipped only one god, the pagan ruler of the Khazars invited scholars from the Jewish, Christian, and Moslem faiths to debate their beliefs. The rabbi won and the people adopted Judaism as their faith. This was a unique event in history: a civilised society that had protected Eastern Europe from the invading Muslims, that stood in defiance of Christian proselytising, had adopted a religion that had no political power and was persecuted by nearly all.[1]

My grandmother's parents brought her to Australia from Germany when she was a toddler. Her father, the best cigar-maker in Melbourne, had a tobacconist shop in Bourke Street, where my father, Jules Feldmann, was born and raised. In poverty resulting from the Great Depression and his father's gambling losses, Jules struggled to educate himself while at the same time working to help support the family. He won a scholarship to study arts at the University of Melbourne.

Apart from history and politics, my father had a reasonably orthodox Jewish education, although his parents were not particularly religious. He spent five years teaching Hebrew and could have studied for a rabbinical degree, but when World War II broke out he joined the Royal Australian Air Force. He volunteered for pilot training, but deafness in one ear ruled that out.

My mother's family, strong Methodists, emigrated from England in the mid-nineteenth century. During her last years at Methodist Ladies College, Lorna Stinton sold evening newspapers at her father's newsagency in St Kilda, where Jules used to buy the evening *Herald*. Wooed by the tall and handsome Jewish boy in RAAF uniform, she married Jules in 1941. The fact that Lorna wasn't Jewish disturbed some members of my father's congregation, but their objections meant nothing to him.

Soon after his marriage, Jules was seconded into the Australian Army Education Service as a founding member and chief writer of the army journal *SALT*. It prospered and by the end of the war, the readership was well over a million. The Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Allied Forces praised it as the best soldier's magazine, superior to the British Army's *Union Jack* and the American Army's *Stars and Stripes*.

My parents had four children. My older brother, Max, was born in 1942, I was born in 1943, my younger brother, Guy was born on Guy Fawkes night 1945, and my sister, Kate was born in 1951. My father referred to me as 'the scholar' when I was just five years old, not because I had any innate genius, but more to distinguish me from Max, 'the undisciplined scamp.' We lived in Melbourne's beachside suburb of Elwood until I was four, then the family moved to Sydney where Jules worked as a scriptwriter for the Commonwealth Film Division.

In Sydney, we lived in a flat at Bondi and I and my brothers were given the freedom of the streets. Our playground stretched from Bondi Beach on the ocean to Rose Bay on Sydney Harbour. My first school was right on the beach. Barefoot, I would leave for school early

and go for a swim or to watch the fishermen hauling in their nets and loading the fish directly onto trucks. During the summers we virtually lived on that beach and my brothers and I swam in the small 'bogey hole,' a rock pool at North Bondi. To prove our courage, almost as a rite of passage, we would leap into the men's bogey hole, a turbulent and dangerous patch of water amongst the rocks right on the point.

To the consternation of the ranger, one of the best places in our playground was the Royal Sydney Golf Course. Finding and selling lost golf balls was a lucrative treasure hunt. When we couldn't find any lost balls, we would hide in the bushes beside a fairway with a hill. Golfers driving from the tee couldn't see where their balls landed and we would sneak out and place a big Moreton Bay Fig leaf over the ball. When, in frustration, the golfers couldn't find their ball and played on with another, we would consider the ball legitimately lost and ours for the taking.

Another memory I have of that time is of our local Italian greengrocer, known by us as 'No Potates' because this was his usual greeting when Mother entered his shop. Potatoes were in short supply during the post-war years. Mr Taranto kept a grey rabbit in the yard at the back of his shop. We liked Mr. Taranto, but Max and I heard that he was going to eat the rabbit. Filled with pity for the animal, I stood guard while Max sneaked into the Tarantos' backyard and pinched the rabbit. With much satisfaction, we set it free on the golf links.

Getting by with little money and having to work hard looking after her family was difficult for my mother, but she was saved by her sense of humour and her good heart. She never had a bad word for anyone. At a Christmas party at the film studio where my father worked, a cameraman whose crazy humour had driven Jules to distraction introduced himself to her:

"Hello Lorna, I'm Hugh McInnes."

"Oh," she replied, "your first name is Hugh? After listening to Jules every night I had thought it was *Bloody*."

Hugh loved this reply, and from then on he and his wife, Rita, became close friends of our whole family. Jules had a tendency to be too serious and not a little angry, and Hugh's habit of taking the mickey out of him gave Lorna a fresh perspective and a method to deal with the intensity of it all.

During the war, Hugh had been a cameraman for Movie-tone News, an Australian-produced newsreel, and one of his jobs was to follow and record Chiang Kai-shek's movements in China. As the Nationalist Kuomintang leader emerged from a meeting and descended the steps of a town hall somewhere in China, Hugh McInnes, Australian cameraman and chief mickey-taker, was lying on his back filming him from a worm's point of view.

"There's that awful man again," remarked the great leader. For the rest of his life, Hugh wore that comment as a badge of honour.

Jules had joined the Communist Party in the 1930s and, even though the party was now banned, Lorna was very active. We kids had no idea who the furtive strangers were who appeared at our door in the middle of the night. The fact was that hidden in our lounge

room was a printing press. Our flat was the source of communist propaganda leaflets and other publications being distributed in Sydney.

In 1951, after my sister, Kate was born, the family moved to Hobart. Working for the Tasmanian Education Department, Jules was clOsely observed by the Australian security office, ASIO. Their recently released file on him indicates a high degree of absurd and unfounded suspicions. ASIO kept watching the family even after we returned to Melbourne where we moved into a new house in Ashwood on the eastern fringe of Melbourne.

In the fourth grade at Ashburton Primary School, I sat next to a boy called Garrey. He lived not too far from us and we became close friends. Garrey's home was not too far from where I lived and we became close friends.

With the intellectual atmosphere of my home, school examinations were never a problem for me, despite my aversion to formal study. I devoured every book in the children's section of the Ashburton library, and then moved on to the adult section. On reading Dostoyevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov* I identified with the youngest brother, Alyosha, the quiet dreamer, the lover of living things, the universal favourite, shy and respectful towards girls, one of the best students who never came first.[2] And Mitya, the oldest brother, independent, in conflict with his father and living an extravagant life, was Max. Even though I knew nothing about religion, there was something strangely appealing about Alyosha's wish to enter a monastery and become a hermit.

Both my parents were captivated by films and books, and they kept up with everything new. Jules was working in advertising, but he maintained his interest in films and was a judge at the annual Melbourne Film Festival. As a schoolboy in the 1950s, I used to accompany him to the film festivals at the University of Melbourne, where the meaning of many of the films went over my head but something stuck as I remained transfixed for hours. Later, the annual film festival became more popular and moved to the grand Palais Theatre in St Kilda. Tickets were prohibitively expensive for us, and so Garrey – now at art school – and his mates printed tickets for us all. There was always a big section of empty seats at the Palais.

In 1963 I entered medical school at the University of Melbourne. Most of my fellow students were from private schools and, while I envied their broad education, I think they envied my street-wise ways. I spent more time in the pubs than in the libraries, but managed to pass each year. With all the social change of the 1960s it was a good time to be at university. I may have been street-wise, but I was socially naive and a dreamer. With my books open in front of me, my mind was away on sun-drenched beaches riding perfect waves, catching perfect fish, or holding the perfect woman in my arms.

At art school, Garrey met Kris, a fellow student, who worked as a part-time life model for his class. She was young, shy, and very attractive with long dark-red hair. Dressed in her favourite shades of red and mauve, she radiated warmth and love. In their gradually maturing and occasionally turbulent relationship, I played a supporting role for Kris and we became very close. While playing our part in the downfall of the Establishment during the 1960s, all three of us cultivated a healthy disrespect for authority in any form.

I was shy with girls and had no steady girlfriends. Listening to my father's ranting at night had given me the resolve to find a relationship where love would not be tarnished by anger and its associated irrationality. Even observing that the parents of all my school friends had similar domestic disputes did not dampen my idealism, but it certainly made me choosy. I became sensitive to aggression and tried to avoid discord wherever it arose.

After finishing art school, Garrey sailed to England with his family. I wanted to take a year off and travel with him through India on his return, but my father wasn't too happy with the idea and there was no money anyway. Garrey arrived back from Europe with a copy of the new Beatles record, *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, that hadn't been released in Australia. He also had some LSD. At a peaceful beachside cottage with Garrey and Kris, the combination of the music and the drug changed our world forever. It was beautiful experience, beyond imagination. Intrigued by the mind's potential, I wanted to know more, but as a fifth year medical student I had to concentrate on passing examinations and I didn't take LSD again while studying. At the time, I read about an Irish professor of psychiatry who, in describing his experience of LSD, reported that the most lasting effect was that he had lost all interest in earning money. Luckily so, because the mere admission of taking the drug cost him his job.

My wish to travel was finally fulfilled when, after my own graduation, I obtained a position as resident medical officer at an Australian government base hospital in the Territory of Papua and New Guinea. In the town of Lae on the north-eastern coast, the spectacular environment and the even more exotic diseases I was seeing soon convinced me to specialise in tropical medicine. I delighted in the intensity of life on the equator. The child-like simplicity of the New Guineans and their natural sense of dignity taught me a new approach to life: notice and enjoy the small things and don't allow preconceptions to obscure happiness.

On the wards I had far more responsibility than any first-year graduate in Australia. There was a physician, a surgeon, a paediatrician and, occasionally, an obstetrician. A local general practitioner was our part-time anaesthetist. All were extremely proficient in their work and I learned much from them. Apart from malaria and other endemic tropical parasites, the most common illness was pneumonia. While I was in New Guinea, an influenza epidemic was killing hundreds of people in the highland villages. One poor woman, who had just lost her husband, thought her severe cough indicated her own imminent death and she tried to hang herself and her two boys. The tree branch broke and fell into a river. The boys drowned but she survived. After I conducted a post-mortem examination of the bodies at our hospital, I was flown to the highlands to attend the inquest. The mother, wearing a grass skirt and bound by chains, was sitting on the floor of the district officer's room. Guns were neatly stacked along one wall. In this terribly intimidating environment, she was charged with murder under Australian law. A few months later she was admitted to our special tuberculosis ward – this had been the reason for her cough, not the influenza.

On another occasion, a report came to us that a man had died after a fight with his own brother. This too had to be investigated. Our helicopter landed in the centre of a village of straw huts thatched with palm leaves. Not a soul was in sight – everybody had fled into the jungle. Our interpreter called out, and after several minutes the headman and some others appeared from the thick vegetation. The headman bore the signs of his office, a tattered old

army peaked cap and a silver handle from an umbrella. Their fathers had been cannibals and I wasn't too sure about our safety, especially as we had come to interfere with the dead. But, in apparently high spirits, they exhumed the three-day old corpse that had been wrapped in banana leaves and buried in thick red soil. The cause of death was almost certain; due to chronic malaria the victim probably had an enlarged spleen that would have been ruptured by a blow to the abdomen. But the law required a post-mortem. Wearing several masks to stop the smell, I pierced the bloated abdomen and looked at the spleen area. With the diagnosis confirmed, I had no intention of further examining the rotting corpse and I ordered it to be buried again.

I socialised with the other doctors on formal occasions, but they were older and quite conservative. Spending most of my free time with people my own age, I went skin-diving on the coral reefs and joined the sky-diving club that operated from the airstrip right beside the hospital. Garrey came and stayed with me for a few weeks and then left for Singapore. He was on his way back to London. We spent a lot of time exploring the botanical gardens on a hill behind the hospital. The vast collection of tropical orchids and a plantation of palm trees from all over the world inspired us with the vision of one day starting a commune where we could create our own botanical paradise. Garrey had already begun creating a botanical paradise in the garden of my hospital house by planting some marijuana seeds. The bushes grew rapidly and their leaves added a new dimension to my New Guinea experience.

One evening I was called to an emergency at the hospital. Upon leaving a party in a building at the airport, a man had driven on to the tarmac to see how fast his car would go. To avoid being seen, he did not use the headlights. As the speedometer passed 100 miles per hour, the car reached the end of the airstrip and plunged into the sea. At the emergency department I recognised the man, he belonged to my sky-diving club and he and his wife had wanted me to deliver their baby but I was not in town when the baby was born. He was unhurt, but his wife was dead. There was no sign of the baby, who had been on the back seat. Later that night I was again called to the hospital, the baby had been found and had to be seen by a doctor to confirm its death. Back home, I could not sleep. In the middle of the night another sky-diver came to ask if what he had heard was true. When he saw the tears on my face he knew the answer. Dealing with death is a natural part of hospital life, but this was my first confrontation with the sudden loss of someone close to me.

. . .

I returned to Melbourne at the beginning of 1970 determined to make my way to England for post-graduate study at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. My year in New Guinea had given me direction for my medical career: I wanted to work in a hospital somewhere in the tropics. My brother, Max, was studying law and among his circle of friends at the university a girl named Judy stood out like the first flower in spring. She was twenty-one, with shining black hair that flowed over her shoulders, and a sense of humour that picked out the absurdities in life. Her laugh melted my heart. A group of us drove to Boydtown on Twofold Bay in New South Wales where we stayed in tents and caravans, and Judy and I became very close. Everything seemed perfect, but our romance was curtailed when Judy's father helped me to obtain a position as ship's doctor on the *Delphic*, a Shaw-Saville cargo ship sailing to England. She was finishing her arts degree and couldn't come with me.

As the *Delphic* sailed from Melbourne, I stood on deck watching the ever-diminishing figure of Judy standing alone at the end of Station Pier. The radio engineer came up to me and said, 'I wouldn't leave a bird like that behind.' The enormity of what was happening hit me hard and the excitement of embarking on a new adventure faded away.

My mood soon lifted as I became accustomed to life on board ship. The officers were my own age or younger and I spent a lot of time on the bridge, learning about navigation and observing the changing weather patterns. The cook obligingly collected flying fish that had landed on the decks overnight and prepared them for my breakfast. The ship loaded cargo at several ports on the southern Australian coast and then we crossed the Indian Ocean to Durban. Letters from Judy were waiting for me at each port of call. And so our love for each other was communicated by mail, as it would be for the next two years. But the more we were separated by distance and time, the more our knowledge of each other strayed from the reality of our changing personalities.

In Durban, my cousin and his South-African wife took me to see a Zulu village and on returning to the ship in the evening I found some of the crew swimming in the harbour. I took one look at their grinning red eyes and asked, 'What have you boys been smoking?'

'Jeez Doc, how do you know?' I thought of Garrey's garden in New Guinea and smiled as I led them to the dispensary to treat the cuts on their hands caused by barnacles on the jetty. *Durban Poison*, as the local weed was known, is particularly powerful.

The Suez Canal was blocked due to the Egyptian President's War of Attrition declared against Israel the previous year, and so we were obliged to sail around the Cape of Good Hope and into the Atlantic Ocean. Although we were sailing directly into a force-8 gale, the current was so strong that the ship was moving at a greater rate of knots than at any other time on the voyage. Massive waves crashing over the bows damaged several containers lashed to the deck. I didn't leave the bridge until it was too dark to watch the exhilarating spectacle.

We entered the Mediterranean and unloaded some cargo at Valletta. There was little work for me and the *Delphic* became my travelling hotel. At Piraeus I had the opportunity to explore Athens at my leisure and see the Parthenon. One afternoon I went to a port-side tavern with the ship's boson. Conversation was entertaining at the beginning, but as we drank more bottles of beer, each bottle coming with a free glass of ouzo, the boson's contribution became reduced to frequent utterances of 'Woodja,' which I understood to mean, 'Would you believe it?'

I managed to get the boson to the ship, where two sailors had to carry him aboard, and the doctor's reputation grew to a great height as the man who drank the boson under the table. Woodja!

After three months at sea, we finally arrived at Liverpool. The *Delphic* was 25 years old and this had been her last voyage; a new crew took over to take her to the scrapyard. With several of the old crew, I took the train to London where I met up with Garrey and Kris who were living in an attic apartment in Kensington. London was still in its swinging sixties phase and I loved every minute of it.

The National Health Service sent me to a hospital at Oxford where I had to prove my command of the English language and competency in medicine, as every foreign doctor had to do. I passed the test and in my few weeks at the hospital I learned how and where to apply for a serious job. It worked, and I obtained a six-month position in casualty and orthopaedics at a hospital in Surrey. On my weekends off I took the train to London and stayed with Garrey and Kris. The months passed quickly and easily and, although still corresponding with Judy, I began a relationship with a radiographer from South Africa. My dilemma of being attracted to two beautiful women was resolved when my appointment finished and I moved to London to begin the course in tropical medicine at London University.

Postgraduate education was one reason for leaving Australia, the other was an inner conviction that the whole world was out there for me to discover. There was also something that had not been on the medical school curriculum. I was looking for a purpose in life other than the simple pursuit of pleasure. I knew nothing about Western religions, but the mere concept of a creator god who rewards and punishes good and bad was unacceptable to me. I believed there was too much hypocrisy in religion, and too great a history of bigotry and violence. I was looking for a rational link between science and my own insights into the mind. During bouts of loneliness in London, this search itself appeared irrational and I questioned why I had left Judy behind and abandoned the happiest period of my life.

After gaining my diploma in tropical medicine, I began work in paediatrics in Essex. It was a small hospital and I soon fitted into a pleasant routine of visiting the ward, the outpatient department, and, after work, the local pub. The best feature of the hospital was a croquet lawn in a secluded garden where I upheld Australian honour against the English. This was not difficult. The game has its rules and, like cricket, there are certain things that can be done but gentlemen do not do them. I was no gentleman.

Garrey and Kris left to travel overland to India and I inherited Norman, a white rabbit I had rescued from being served up as somebody's dinner and given to Kris the year before. Despite his obnoxious habit of leaping into the air and spraying piss in a circle, and the close to mortal sin of eating Garrey's marijuana plants, Norman was much loved. He quickly adapted to hospital life, living in a cage in my room and coming on ward rounds, to the delight of my young patients. On the croquet field, his presence among the brightly coloured balls and mallets made one wonder when the Queen of Hearts would appear and cry, 'Off with his head.'

During one ward round with the paediatrician, a nurse told me there was a phone call from Australia. It was my family, and Judy, ringing to wish me a happy birthday. The news got around and that afternoon the children presented me with hand-drawn birthday cards in which Norman and I featured strongly.

Judy's voice had stirred my longing to be with her and I wrote to tell her that I was thinking of returning to Australia when my term finished at the hospital. In her reply, she told me she was living with someone else and it was not a good time to come back.

The darkening autumn skies matched my mood. Needing somewhere to contemplate my future, I walked through the woods behind the hospital to the lake. It was a place of solitude

and beauty, recommended by Charles, one of the doctors and a keen bird watcher. He told me to look out for a flamingo that had been seen in the marshes.

On a hill overlooking the lake, I lit a pipe and lay on a carpet of forget-me-nots, with just a touch of warmth from the feeble sun retreating to the south. Withered sunflowers, their heads bowed, stood around me. Among the flowers I found a pheasant feather. It had the same colours as a dress Judy had once worn, and I admonished the forget-me-nots to stop playing tricks with me. Overhead, in a dome of clear sky above the purple mist, planes flew in a holding pattern, circling like vultures as they waited their turn to touch down at Heathrow.

I had to decide whether to stay in England, return to Australia, or follow the wanderlust in my heart. A quick return to Australia had just been ruled out. Reason told me I should stay in England to gain more experience in order to pursue my ambition of working in a jungle hospital. Reason, however, had a fight on its hands. I had also received a letter from Garrey and Kris who had reached Afghanistan and were living in a house in Jalalabad with a dozen travellers of various nationalities. Garrey had illustrated the letter with exotic images, both written and sketched, of the things they had seen and done. Taking another look at the enticing drawings, I made my decision, *I'm going to Afghanistan*. The wanderlust had won.

MAGICAL MYSTERY TOUR

In mid-January, 1972, I emerged from the customs area of Karachi airport and looked around. The sun had just risen and, for a moment, it seemed that everyone was still in their pyjamas, until I realised this was the Pakistani national dress. For men anyway. There were no women in sight. I stepped outside the glass doors of the terminal into an atmosphere of warmth, humidity, and odours that were very different from wintry London. And very exciting. It was like taking a breath of freedom for the first time in my life.

In his letters, Garrey had begun my education in the economics of the road. Rule number one was never to change money at banks: the black market is always better. There was no sign of a bank, and no black marketeers. While I was pondering this predicament my bags were picked up, whisked into the boot of a taxi, and I was bundled into the back seat.

'I have to change money,' I explained to the driver's companion.

'Yes, I change money, no problem,' he said as he closed my door and jumped into the front passenger seat. Garrey had not prepared me for this situation. As we drove away, he turned and asked, 'Hotel?'

'No, take me to the railway station.'

'What country are you from?'

'Australia.'

'Ah yes, Ian Chappell, very good batsman.'

'Yes,' I replied, too dazzled by the strangeness of everything to become involved in a conversation about cricket.

'How many dollars you change?'

'Twenty. What rate do you give?' Garrey's second rule was always to carry small denominations of American dollars. I had no idea of the worth of an American dollar in Pakistani rupees.

'Eighteen.'

'No, I can get better at the bank,' I bluffed, as if I had been doing this all my life.

'No, no, no, bank rate is only 12 rupees.'

I gave in. It was only $20 and I had no alternative, my head was spinning with tiredness, jet lag, and the amazing things I was seeing outside the taxi window. When the deal had been done the interrogation continued:

'You want hashish?'

'No,' I said, a little suspiciously. Having probably been ripped off on my first money exchange in Pakistan, I was not prepared to give away any of my expensive rupees on a dope deal. Unfazed by my rejection, the man produced a piece of hashish and gave it to me with a smile.

'*Baksheesh*,' he whispered.

The hash alone would have cost a lot more than $20 in London, so I accepted the gift and put it in my pocket, thinking they must have made a really good deal with the money exchange. The taxi pulled in at a railway station and they drove off, happily.

My map showed a railway line connecting Karachi with Peshawar, 800 miles to the north and the last city before the Khyber Pass and the border with Afghanistan. At the ticket window, I asked for a ticket to Peshawar.

'You have to go to Karachi railway station.'

'But this is Karachi.'

'This is Karachi cantonment, you have to go to the main railway station.'

I quietly cursed the taxi driver and his friend, and asked how to get to the main station. A local train was leaving in ten minutes. I bought a ticket for a few paisa and struggled to the platform with my heavy luggage. An empty and unbelievably dirty train soon pulled in and I sat on the wooden seat alone. It was still too early for the inhabitants of Karachi to be up and about. I looked around at the filth in the compartment, *even worse than the London tube*, I thought blackly.

Karachi railway station was definitely classier than Karachi cantonment, but it had seen better days. A thin old man with white hair and beard and wearing a shiny brass armlet inscribed *Porter Fee, 25 Paisa per Baggage* came to me and asked in a deep voice, 'Porter, sahib?'

The word *sahib* jolted me. I had thought sahibs were repressive colonial administrators and a thing of the past, but there was neither resentment nor servility in the way he said it. Gratefully, I nodded and he swept my suitcase and duffel bag onto his head in one easy movement that made me wonder why they seemed so heavy to me. I asked him to take me to the ticket office.

'First class, sahib?'

The third rule of the road was always to travel third class, but I desperately needed sleep and I said rather guiltily, 'Yes, first class.' I didn't have to tell Garrey about this.

The ticket office was not yet open so I sat on my suitcase and watched steam trains shunting back and forth, a wonderful way to pass the time. After about half an hour a Hindu lady appeared behind the ticket counter. Ignoring me, she shuffled and arranged her papers for a very long time and then, like a proud queen granting a rare audience to a commoner, she turned to me and asked if I wanted something.

'I would like a ticket to Peshawar.'

She shook her head. I was crestfallen – I didn't know that on the Indian subcontinent a shake of the head is a positive response.

'But they told me this was the main station.'

'*North-West Frontier Express* leaves from platform one at five o'clock in the afternoon,' she interrupted.

'Oh, is it going to Peshawar?'

Again, she shook her head. I was exasperated.

'But I want to go to Peshawar.'

'I told you this train is going to Peshawar,' she said, getting a bit exasperated herself. You did not, I thought, but I was not going to argue. I bought a sleeper for the cost of a taxi ride across London and then, miraculously, I found the left-luggage office to be open and was able to unload my heavy burden.

It was just after eight in the morning. I had nine hours to wait. Hesitantly, I walked out into the bright sunlight as Karachi slowly awakened from what appeared to have been a very rough night. A port on the Arabian Sea, and Pakistan's first capital after the country's secession from India in 1947, Karachi was a vital trade link. It was also a sprawling slum. With no sleep, unshaven, culture-shocked, hungry, and not a little frightened, I felt a mess. But compared to Karachi I was a picture of elegance. It was the dirtiest, dustiest, smelliest place I had ever seen.

Off the main road, a man with an ox-cart was delivering water contained in slippery, wet animal skins, with the legs and other orifices sewn up. The cart itself, seemingly as old as time, held my fascination, and the bloated, dripping bladders added such a grotesque touch that I simply stood there, trying to take it all in. My mind was not programmed for such sights. In the same lane was a seething mass of cats – ginger, black, white, and tortoise-shell – scavenging for food in a pile of rubbish. There was an air of wild desperation about them and they looked like one monstrous cat rather than a pack of individuals. Eroded brick walls leaning at impossible angles in defiance of gravity added to the sense of unreality.

I walked a long way, taking in new and exotic scenes at every corner, and keeping an eye on landmarks so that I could find my way back to the station in the afternoon. There was an amazing assortment of petrol, animal, and human-powered vehicles. I was hungry and thirsty but there was nothing resembling what I would call food, and the tropical medicine course that I had recently completed in London was too fresh in my mind. No way was I going to fill my intestines with the eggs of parasites that certainly existed in abundance in this place. I found a man selling Coca-Cola and thought that had to be okay. I drank it, and then found a walled park where I could sit on the grass and gain some equilibrium.

I needed to empty my bladder, but where? There had been piles of human faeces in the back alleys, and the whole city smelled of urine, but how did one relieve oneself with dignity? I

opted for a quiet corner of the park where there were some shrubs to conceal the act, and discovered that many others had used the same spot.

Back on my patch of grass I became immersed in Gurdjieff's *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, a book that Garrey had asked me to bring to Afghanistan.[3] Gurdjieff was a Russian mystic born in 1877. The stories behind his creation of the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man were to become the inspiration for my own remarkable Pakistani adventure.

The park was an oasis of security and peace in a strange city, and I intended to stay there until it was time to catch my train. Several young male students came over to ask questions that I soon realised formed part of the standard question and answer routine they had learned at school. Although their English was clear enough, the students were mostly unable to develop a conversation beyond my simple answers.

I was careful not to talk about the war, as my sympathies were with Bangladesh. Religious tension and territorial disputes between Pakistan and India had broken out recently and East Pakistan had just declared its independence as the new state of Bangladesh. I had expected signs of military mobilisation, but Karachi did not seem like a city at war. In fact, I wondered how anything could be accomplished in the run-down chaos I could see in every direction. An air of listlessness pervaded the people, the dogs, and even the kites wheeling above with mournful cries like lost children.

During a brief moment of peace, I emptied the tobacco from a cigarette, mixed it with crumbs from the block of hash, and refilled the cigarette. This was not a good idea. The dope only enhanced the sense of unreality in my surroundings, but it did add a touch of humour. It occurred to me that, apart from Queen Victoria at the railway station, I had not seen a woman during the entire day. My thoughts drifted back to Australia, and an image of Judy tightened the knot of loneliness in my heart. I yearned for her companionship, wanting someone with whom I could share the experience of travel. Without a companion, a soul mate, what was the point of doing anything?

When it was time to leave my refuge, I retraced my steps along the dusty road to the railway station, picked up my bags from the left-luggage office, and walked along the platform just as a magnificent black and green locomotive puffed, hissed, and screeched its way to a halt. *The North-West Frontier Express* had come to take me away on a magical mystery tour.

If only the industrial revolution had stopped at the steam engine, I'm sure the world would be a better place. Excited as a child, I allowed the cloud of steam to envelope me as the massive monster came to rest. A crowd of turbaned men fought for third-class seats at the rear of the train, thin brown limbs sticking out in all directions, and I was thankful for my prescience in buying a first-class ticket. Finding my empty carriage, I sank down with relief on the padded leather seat.

Still alone when the train began its journey, I became absorbed in the passing panorama of backyard Karachi, the sight of which invoked a feeling of familiarity from deep within my mind. I had seen it before, but when? And how was that possible? I did not believe in reincarnation. Perhaps I was experiencing what C.G. Jung called the collective unconscious

that reflects our shared past. Or perhaps it was the lingering effects of the hash. Either way, my reflections were interrupted by the carriage attendant, a lanky young man with a moustache.

'Tea, sahib?' he asked.

Are you kidding? I thought. The sahib would give 10 quid for a cup of tea, and the attendant obliged with a whole pot for only 1 rupee. As the sweet nectar energised my body, the attendant took my order for supper. I had not eaten all day and was more than ready for whatever there was. The curry was too hot, but I devoured everything and drank water to cool my throat, thinking that if it contained any cysts of amoeba or giardia they would be burned by the chili. That night, rocked by the swaying carriage and mesmerized by the clickety-clack of wheels carrying me closer to the Hindu Kush by the minute, I slept deeply.

THE NORTHWEST FRONTIER

I awoke early. The man who had boarded the train during the night was still sleeping. Feeling the stubble on my face I decided to let it stay. The transformation of the clean-faced doctor into a traveller had begun. I took a towel and a bar of soap into the toilet and washed my body as well as I could in cold water from the hand basin. Refreshed and now fully awake, I returned to the compartment to a pot of fresh tea and an omelette. Just what the doctor ordered.

I had become interested in Eastern philosophy when Bengt, a fellow student at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, lent me *The Way of Chuang Tzu*, Thomas Merton's interpretation of the poetry of the Chinese Taoist practitioner Chuang Tzu. These poems and anecdotes hinted at another way of seeing the world, a way that Garrey and I were beginning to notice.

My fellow traveller was now awake and introduced himself. He was an advocate and a philosopher. He told me how he felt about the conflict with India and then he talked about his philosophy. As I was to discover, all inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent are innate philosophers, the males anyway – foreign men rarely get the opportunity to talk to the females. I read to him some passages from *Chuang Tzu* and we discussed the meaning of Tao. I was not too interested in his equating Tao with God, but I enjoyed his enthusiasm as he recited poems by his own favourite poet-philosopher, Muhammad Iqbal. It was Iqbal who had first given rise to the concept of Indian Muslims having their own separate nation.

I was always interested in new ideas, but not in formal religion. With their socialist political outlook, my parents had raised their children without any religious indoctrination. We were always given freedom to follow our own inclinations in life. A statement on the biblical account of Creation in my high school Biology textbook had set my approach to Christianity: 'There is in history no more devastating example of the paralysis inflicted upon the human mind by undue reverence for the written word.'[4]

Taking advantage of a lull in the conversation, I went into the corridor for a smoke. The attendant was there and, even though he represented authority at the lowest rung, his uniform raised a note of caution in my mind. He was sitting in the open doorway with his legs hanging outside, smoking and looking out at the freshly ploughed fields and stately date palms that flashed past.

I sat down beside him and took in the soft outline of the countryside, all colour washed out by a pervading sandy yellow, like ground cardamom. It was completely opposite to the ugly drabness of the city. He offered me his cigarette, which smelled suspiciously of hashish. I had observed how people smoked here, making a fist with the right hand and putting the cigarette between the ring and middle fingers, then drawing in the smoke from the gap between the thumb and index finger. *Very hygienic* I thought, as I awkwardly took a deep inhalation, mostly of air, and passed it back to him. It did indeed contain some hash. We finished the cigarette in silence, watching the passing scene of pastel-coloured beauty and communicating in a way very different from my recent discussion with the advocate.

Lunch came, and the advocate gave me a lesson on how to eat Eastern-style, using my fingers to pick up the vegetables with pieces of chapatti. I knew enough to use only my right hand for eating, but I was yet to learn the art of using my left hand for the one activity it is allowed – in the toilet. Unfortunately for the environment, cleaning oneself with water will never catch on in the West; we have too many conceptual barriers against touching shit. But I do believe it is more hygienic than paper.

We steamed north. I intermittently read and sat at the open door, hoping for a bend in the rail ahead so that I could see the locomotive sending up its great plume of smoke and tooting at stray camels and goats, or just for the fun of it. The advocate departed, and a soldier in officer's uniform joined me. He was a Bengali. Because of the secession of East Pakistan he had been posted to the furthermost and loneliest place in West Pakistan. He was sad, unsure of his future and unsure of the safety of his family. I tried to comfort him, telling him that the whole world was behind Bangladesh – I pronounced the name furtively, knowing that it meant 'Free Bengal' and hoping that the name spoken by a Westerner would warm his soul.

After another night we arrived at Peshawar, an ancient frontier city in the fertile valley of the Kabul River. To the west was the Khyber Pass and Afghanistan; to the east was Islamabad, Pakistan's new capital since 1963. Later, I learned that the army of Alexander the Great had captured Peshawar in 325 BCE, and the culture of the region became a unique combination of Greek and Buddhist. The fusion of Greek and Indian art styles was to greatly influence the Mahayana Buddhist art of Tibet. Islam came to the region with the Turks in the tenth century, and the British made it a garrison town and the capital of the Northwest Province.

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I was glad to have arrived but reluctant to leave the security of my compartment and face the confusion I could see, hear, and smell outside. A crowd of men surrounded me at the station exit, competing with each other to snatch my bags and my freedom of choice of the various modes of transport. Remembering my experience at Karachi airport, I hung on to my bags grimly and selected a white-haired old man whose calm presence suggested an inner peace and wisdom. He was squatting over the shafts of a jinker. His horse, equally white, and probably as wise, had its mane, tail, and fetlocks dyed copper-red with henna, just like the old man's beard and fingernails.

'Bus station, Jalalabad?' I asked. He gave the negative shake of the head, which I now understood to mean yes, and, beaming in triumph at the rickshaw wallahs, he stowed the luggage of his prize catch on the floor and wheeled the jinker out into the traffic.

As we passed perilously close to trucks and vans, all sounding their horns in painful cacophony, the old man asked, 'Visa?'

'Yes, I have a visa.'

He nodded and whipped the horse into a gallop. I thought that at any moment the animal would slip on the cobblestones and we would meet our doom beneath the wheels of one of the highly decorated trucks painted with gaudy murals and hung with mirrors and everything

that glittered. We swerved in front of a bus, the old man standing and gesticulating with his whip. The bus stopped, everybody was shouting, and I had no idea what was happening. Then the passengers grabbed my bags and the driver pulled me on board.

The old man seemed satisfied with the rupees that I gave him, and I took a seat at the rear of the bus. Everybody was looking at me, including the driver whose grinning face I could see staring at me through the rear-vision mirror. *Where are we going?* I worried. Then I read in reverse the sign on the front windscreen: PESHAWAR – JALALABAD. In relief, I sat back and returned the smiles of my fellow passengers.

The bus trundled and beeped its way out of Peshawar into a rocky, almost desert terrain, and the road climbed towards an escarpment on the western horizon that signalled the Khyber Pass. We stopped at the town of Torkham on the border. Garrey had warned me that the Pashtuns of the Northwest Frontier were a law unto themselves and nobody drove through after dark. My passport was stamped and I went outside to be surrounded by a group of boys dressed in rags and holding fistfuls of money that was obviously not their own.

'Change money mister?'

'No thank you.'

'You like hashish?'

'No thank you.'

Even if I had said yes, they could not have been happier. Jostling each other to get my attention, they were enjoying themselves with a high-spiritedness that was to become familiar to me. Despite the lack of toys and other paraphernalia that we Westerners believe are essential for a proper childhood, the children of the East always appeared happier and sharper than most Western kids.

The bus rattled on into Afghanistan, passing across a wide rocky plain with occasional ploughed fields and orchards served by irrigation canals. I was surprised to see rows of eucalyptus trees, their familiar shapes and colours appearing like old friends. The farms with irrigated fields and fruit orchards had been developed and managed by Russians, whose presence lent a sinister air, real or imagined, to the country.

Then we were in Jalalabad, a village at the base of a mountain range over which the road continued on to Kabul. Invigorated by the crisp mountain air, I followed Garrey's map, ticking off the landmarks: the bazaar, the kebab maker's shop, and the ruins of the Winter Palace. Finally we came to the street where the house was located. I hesitated, unsure which house it was. My porter wanted to go ahead to a hotel, but I examined the high walls, hoping for a clue. A colourful group of Westerners came out of a door and I asked if they knew an Australian couple named Garrey and Kris.

'You must be Ade,' said one of them, shaking my hand. 'I'm Hans. We've been expecting you. Go inside, they're in.'

With no local currency, I gave my porter an American $1 note.

'Hey, that's a dollar,' said Hans in disbelief. It was more than a day's wages for a labourer, but I was not yet accustomed to the economics of the road, and I was so glad to have arrived that I would have happily given him ten.

BLENDING IN

Myself, Krissie, and the staff at Mohammed's Chai Shop, Jalalabad

The door off the street opened into a walled garden of clover surrounded by rose bushes. To my left was the house with an elevated patio looking onto the garden. I let myself into the main room. It was carpeted, but bare of furniture. Faded cushions flopped along the walls, and a wood stove made from an iron drum gave out some welcome heat. A few vegetables and primitive cooking utensils were laid out on shelves behind the stove.

As I was making the acquaintance of a friendly puppy, Kris and Garrey emerged from a door on the far side of the room. We embraced, and sat on cushions, drinking tea and sharing our news. I produced some treasures from England: several packets of Drum tobacco, European chocolate, and a bottle of *Drambuie*. The others returned, a chillum was stoked, and the party began.

Hans and his partner, Gert, one of the leaders of the gay scene in Amsterdam, had rented the house and it became known as 'the Dutch House,' as opposed to 'the Swedish House' a few streets away. They had planned to travel to India but the border was closed at Lahore because of the war and, while waiting for it to reopen, they took this house and others soon joined them. Soon the house was full. There were two other Dutchmen, an Austrian musician interested in the Sufis, a German student, Rita, whose time was running out and she had to return home, two Americans and a Canadian, who were in Peshawar to renew their Afghan visas, and an Englishman and his Swedish girlfriend exploring the north of Afghanistan in a VW camper. In a separate part of the house lived our landlady, a dark-eyed widow called Zekena, and her two sons, Myragai and Nadya.

'You sure gave me a shopping list,' I chided Garrey as I handed him Lao Tsu's *Tao Te Ching*, two cartons of Rizla cigarette papers, and a hundred doses of LSD absorbed onto tiny pellets called microdots.

'Fantastic,' he replied with a grin, handing out packets to everybody in the room. 'The cigarette papers here are completely useless.'

'Whoopee!' exclaimed Hans, and immediately used the papers to make a joint the size of a Cuban cigar. He passed it around with a gesture and smile that were to become very familiar. The hashish reminded me I had not eaten.

'Let's go into town,' said Kris, concerned about my hunger. 'You have to check out the bakery.'

In respect for local custom and to avoid unwanted attention from the men, Kris and Rita wrapped themselves in the large shawls that both men and women wore and which we called *chaderis*, a corner of which they held over their faces. Garrey too wore a *chaderi*, and a roughly folded black turban covering his long blond hair. They were at ease with their surroundings but I felt conspicuous in my blue duffel coat from an Oxfam shop in London. I couldn't tell whether the emotionless stares we received were a sign of hostility or not. The hashish was not exactly helping my orientation either.

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At the bakery, an open-fronted shop, five men sat cross-legged around the warm glow of a cone-shaped oven, preparing dough from grainy flour, moulding it into crosshatched shapes rather like old-fashioned tennis racquets, and placing them on the sides of the oven. As each man completed his part of the procedure, he took a long draw from a hookah and passed it on. The bakers hammed up their routine for their stoned and appreciative audience. We bought several fresh loaves and moved on to the milk shop where we ate the bread dunked in glasses of steaming milk.

We ended up at Mohammed's *chai* shop. In Afghanistan the teashops are like the local pub, a place where men gather to drink tea, smoke hookahs, and talk. The teashops also provide travellers with food and accommodation, the long benches doubling as seats for diners and beds for travellers. Our group had adopted Mohammed's as their 'local,' and the men who ran it had adopted them as their friends.

While drinking *chai sabs*, green tea, I was introduced to Karim, the kebab maker, and Mohammed himself. In the relative privacy of the teashop, Rita and Kris took off their scarves and allowed their henna-dyed hair to flow over their shoulders. Mohammed, smitten by the lovely Rita, could not take his eyes off her. He stroked her long locks, the limit of his permitted behaviour. I ordered a *qabli pulao*, a greasy mountain of rice covered in chunks of goat meat, chopped carrot, and raisins. It looked suspect, but the milk and bread had whetted my appetite and I didn't care.

That evening my tiredness overcame the hardness of the floor and I slept soundly. At the same time, within my intestines, germ scouts emerged from their cysts and signalled to their friends that there was no chili to fry them. I was to pay a price for enjoying the qabli pulao.

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My next few days were spent in getting to know the village of Jalalabad. The others had come overland from Europe and were familiar with the ways of the road, from bargaining at the bazaar to having hot showers at the village *hammam*. For a small fee, they told me, we could take a steaming shower at the bathhouse, much better than heating up a bucket of water and sponging ourselves in the cold air at home.

At the cloth section of the bazaar, Garrey bought me a piece of maroon material for my own chaderi. Then he made me a *jola*, a cloth shoulder-bag with pockets for the traveller's essential needs: money, passport, smoking equipment, food, and a book. With these accessories, and my beard growing more respectable every day, I began to blend in with the others and felt less conspicuous on the streets.

When the diarrhoea hit me, I became well acquainted with the toilet, a wooden platform with a hole in the centre over a revolting pit. When the mountain of excrement became too high, we paid Myragai to shovel it into an open ditch in the public park next door. At least we *had* a toilet. It appeared that most Afghans used the streets, leaving massive brick-red turds everywhere. I guessed that the great bulk and the colour of these droppings was due to the fibre in the bread; they must have had extremely healthy intestines. One notices these things when one has just flown in from London. Sad to say, it is not turds that you have to look out for when you walk around Jalalabad these days, it is landmines. But, by the look of those red monsters, it might be safer to tread on a landmine.

Zekena looked after her flock of hippies with a maternal eye, scolding us when we needed to be scolded, but mostly sitting in a corner bemusedly watching us at play. We usually ate in the village, but occasionally someone announced they would cook lunch or, more often, an evening meal for everybody. At night we gathered in the warmth of the living room to read, play music, or discuss Gurdjieff, Taoism, the Sufis, or tell stories of adventures on the road, all the while smoking prodigious quantities of hashish.

We hoped to understand the meaning of the tales in *Meetings with Remarkable Men* not only at the intellectual level but also through our lifestyle. We fancied we could deal with problems in Gurdjieff's unique style of gaining profit from every experience. Living in Gurdjieff country, we hoped, would assist us in discovering his own goal: meaning and harmony in life. His books hinted at the answers he had found, but he veiled his discoveries in mystery, forcing his disciples to learn through their own experience.

Smoking hashish was not the central purpose to our being on the road. We had seen that the happiness sought by straight society was superficial, difficult to sustain, and so often masked an underlying sadness. Even after dropping out and adopting non-conformist lifestyles, however, we realised that we were no different from others. Pleasure was still the main goal in our lives, but we only found dissatisfaction. Now we were seeking yet another alternative, or at least an explanation, and we felt the answer to the Western malaise lay in the East. An

attraction of Taoism was the idea of letting go of preconceptions and allowing one's actions to flow in harmony with the universal energy of Tao, whatever it was. We were trying to live in an unrestricted sphere of spontaneity rather than within the confines of rules. Sometimes this resulted in riotous fun, at other times it backfired. Our spontaneity still had a contrived nature and, although it was a promising lead, there was always something missing.

Travel was easy in those days. Apart from the recent trouble between India and Pakistan, there were few regional conflicts and Western travellers were still something of a novelty. New destinations were discovered as people met and exchanged information about places to see, cheap hotels, the best places to eat, and financial information about everything from black-market exchange rates to the price of dope. In this way the hippies, travellers, or freaks, whatever name they were given, soon opened up many of the more interesting regions of the world. Afghanistan was at peace, with no sign of the impending conflicts that would tear the country and the people apart.

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A fair was set up in the park next to our house. The first day was ladies' day, a rare occasion when women could dress in their finest and venture outside without veils. Men were excluded, but the older men standing guard around the outer walls could not stop the young bucks from climbing trees to take a peek inside. Three sisters of our friends arrived at our house to dress Kris in brightly coloured clothes, and make up her face with charcoal mascara, vivid red lipstick, rouge, and glitter. They took her and Garrey, apparently exempt from the ban on males, into the park where the village women were enjoying themselves on rickety swings and a primitive wooden Ferris wheel. Their appearance, however, nearly caused a riot when the men outside heard they were there, so she and Garrey thought it prudent to return to the house.

We took frequent walks into the surrounding countryside. Alarmed at these expeditions, our friends constantly warned us of the danger of *alibabas*, as robbers were called, but as a group we never encountered trouble. Hans told me about a young German who had bought a white horse and, together with his Alsatian dog, set out to ride through the mountains to Pakistan. A week later, he reappeared at the house on his horse, in tears and wearing only his underpants. Robbers had taken all his money and possessions, had shot his dog, and were about to shoot him when he was saved by the intervention of an old man. They did not take the horse because it could have been traced.

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On a visa-extension and mail-run to Kabul, we asked the officials at the Pakistan embassy when the border to India would open. The militant reply was, 'In one week, after we have crushed India.' At the Indian embassy, the dreamy answer to the same question was, 'Eventually, it is in the hands of God.'

The shops of Kabul were irresistible, but I avoided the temptation to buy a long Afghan coat. These inside-out sheepskins were all the rage in London at the time, but they would be useless in India and I was wary of getting anthrax from the poorly cured hide.

Back in Jalalabad, we were gathered around the stove as it rained heavily.

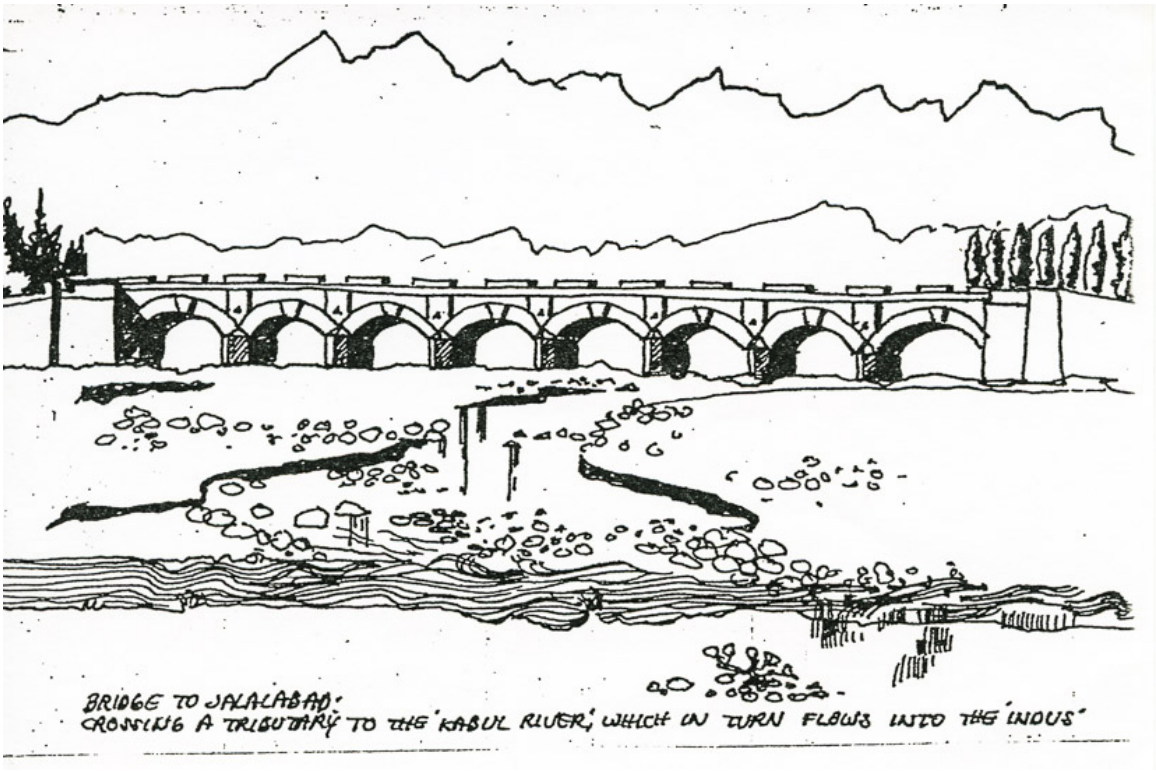
'It's so bloody cold, I think it might snow,' I commented.

'No way,' said the North Americans and Europeans, who knew all about snow, 'rain never becomes snow.'

Later, I went outside to watch the downpour. Enormous raindrops were falling from a deep purple sky. Some seemed to fall more slowly than others and, on the ground, blobs of slushy ice began to appear. Over the next ten minutes the noise of rainfall gradually abated, and the raindrops became giant snowflakes. Apart from the gurgling of water in the drains, the only sound was the gentle slushing of a massive snowfall. Without explaining, I told the others to come onto the patio. One by one they looked around in disbelief. I stood with my arms crossed and a smug smile of *I told you so* on my face.

The snow fell for two hours and reached nearly a foot in depth. The intense silence in the village was broken by sharp cracks and thuds as snow-laden branches snapped off trees and fell to the ground. Alarmed, we climbed onto the flat roof of our house and shovelled off the heavy burden of snow. The electricity had failed and it was totally dark. Garrey and I walked into town, listening to the muffled sounds of snow falling off branches and stepping over power lines that lay across the fresh, white snow. At Mohammed's teashop they told us collapsing roofs had killed several people. Nobody in Jalalabad could remember such a snowstorm.

Snow in Jalalabad



At medical school I had once been ordered out of an obstetrics lecture and told to 'get a chromosome count.' The idiot professor (I have to get my own back, don't I?) was sarcastically suggesting that I was a woman because my hair overlapped the collar of my shirt. It was a battle, but long hair for both men and women eventually became acceptable in Australia.

Not so in Jalalabad.

'Let's face it, we look as if we've dropped in from another planet,' Garrey said, as a stone whizzed past his ear.

Kris tried to merge into the background by wearing a cross between the nomadic dress and the Punjabi women's outfit: a long-sleeved smock dress over loose baggy pyjama trousers gathered in at the ankle. She was given away, however, by her choice of red material for the dress, a purple chaderi, and her brightly henna'd hair that flamed in the sunshine.

'Haven't they heard about the Age of Aquarius?' she exclaimed, as we quickened our pace to get out of range of the children's missiles.

We were on our way to spend a night in caves on the opposite bank of the Kabul River. These were the ruins of the Buddhist cave monastery of Dauranta, once a place of great religious significance with many *stupas*, one of which is said to have contained a tooth of the Buddha. As usual, our friends at the teahouse had warned us of robbers, but we felt

confident that our group was sizeable enough to deter any bandits, and the lure of the caves was strong.

We walked out of Jalalabad and onto the road to Kabul, where a few patches of ice were all that remained of the snowfall. The usual stir arose as we passed by hamlets on the way to the river. Shouts of 'Hey mistah, *come here*,' and 'Hippieee,' were called out in mocking tones, and children would let fly a barrage of stones whenever we came too close. Puppy, on her first big adventure, was not happy with the attention she attracted from the village mongrels. Once we were clear of the villages, the classic appearance of a camel train silhouetted against the snow-covered Hindu Kush mountain range elevated our mood.

At the river we found the ferry, a wooden raft buoyed up by inflated animal hides with the limbs tied off, just like the water containers in Karachi. The ferryman's eyes lit up with dollar signs. Holding up five fingers and pointing to one person, Hans, he indicated the extortionate price of five Afghanis a head. Hans, our expert in Farsi, was able to reduce the fare to two Afghanis and, even though the ferryman threw our coins in the sand in feigned disgust, we knew he had made a good deal.

The caves were still an hour's walk upstream. Each of us took a microdot and we followed a path through the sandy gravel. The air was chilly, but we were warmed by the sunshine and our exertion as we crossed the barren landscape. We rested on a knoll above the river; behind us a wide, rock-strewn plain flowed down from the mountains, a desolate scene. The microdots were beginning to work and our senses were in the strange no-man's-land between normality and the psychedelic state.

Continuing on towards the caves, we passed a group of mud-walled houses and met the headman of the village.

'You are really going to sleep in the caves?' he asked in perfect English.

'Yes,' we replied, smiling broadly.

'It is dangerous, there are many robbers in the hills.' He drew his hand across his throat.

Even before taking the LSD we had discounted that risk. Now, having passed the initial phase of anxiety, we were confident of being able to handle anything that might happen.

'We'll be careful, please don't worry about us,' we told him happily.

'There is much to worry about.' But his concern fell on deaf ears.

Afghanistan raft on inflated animal skins crossing Kabul River Jalalabad

We left our gear in the largest cave and spread out to explore the place, and our minds. The cliff face was composed of round alluvial rocks packed in clay – firm but easy to dig, ideal for a cave monastery. In our base cave, the monks had excavated a large hall that encircled a massive central pillar. In the walls were a series of narrow entrances that opened into cavities big enough for one person to meditate. Beside the entrance were two larger rooms with windows that allowed light to penetrate most of the interior. Carved into the walls were niches for statues. An aqueduct cut into the cliff face had once carried water to all the caves.

'Wow, pretty good plumbing system,' I said to an empty cave. Perhaps the ghosts were listening.

Above the cliff were more structures that might have been storehouses. They were pits in the ground covered by cone-shaped roofs of rocks and mud. Scratched onto the interior walls were symbols like hands. We did not know their significance, and they seemed to have been made after the monks had departed. For the whole afternoon we explored the caves and the surrounding countryside, or lazed in the sun. I was pleased to find a miniature rhododendron bush that had escaped the goats that were fast eliminating all traces of green and turning the land into desert.

Alone by the river, I watched the cold, clear water flowing swiftly eastwards. Gurdjieff and his companions had built a raft exactly like the one on which we had crossed the river. He had sailed down a tributary to the Chitral River that flowed into this very river, which, itself, joined the Indus River in Pakistan. I tossed a stick into the current and imagined its journey to Pakistan and all the way to the Arabian Sea.

Then an idea began to formulate in my mind. Many travellers were heading for Karachi to catch a boat that carried cargo as well as workers returning from the Arabian Gulf to Karachi and Bombay. We had decided to reach India that way, but I wanted to see more of Pakistan, and the idea of how we could do this lit up my mind like a surge of electricity. *This river is going to Karachi. Why not go along with it?*

'Man, you are crazy,' I said aloud and with a laugh.

But the idea remained. We could build a raft and float down to the Indus, exchange the raft for a sturdier vessel, then sail the length of the Indus to the Arabian Sea. My mind was on fire. This concept was in accord with Gurdjieff's principle of resolving problems by doing the unpredictable. And giving ourselves up to the flow of the river, the stream of life, was pure Tao. It took an hour to quiet my enthusiasm to the point where I could rationally explain the idea to the others. I felt sure it was not just a wild acid fantasy, but I had to share it with them to make certain.

'Gaz, I've got an idea.' Mustering all my ability to speak coherently, not an easy task in those circumstances, I put the plan to him.

Garrey and Kris listened in silence, their eyes sparkling. Finally, Garrey said, 'Why not? It's not every day you have a real life adventure.'

'Yes!' said Kris, and it was sealed.

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There was a lot to think about, but, for the time being, we put the idea aside and began preparing for a night in the caves. Our minds were settling into a more balanced state but our stomachs were complaining. The bread and oranges we had brought with us were insufficient, so Hans and the other two Dutchmen, Ron and Theo, trudged back to the village with the English-speaking headman to ask for food.

A crescent moon and a million stars gave birth to another idea in my fertile mind. 'Listen,' I said to the group, 'we're all searching for meaning in our lives, so why don't we gather here again when Halley's comet arrives, take acid, and share our discoveries?'

There was enthusiastic agreement, but when the comet made its miserable appearance in 1987 Afghanistan was being torn apart by civil war. Although several of us were still in touch, it was impossible to meet at the caves.

While Hans and the others were still away, two men appeared out of the darkness. A ripple of tension flowed amongst us; were these the bandits we had been warned about? One put a cigarette in his mouth and motioned for a light. As Garrey lit his cigarette, we broke up laughing. Here we were in the middle of the desert and a guy appears out of nowhere to ask for a match. The men went away, their curiosity satisfied, and the others soon returned with a bundle of warm cornmeal scones. The villagers had immediately offered us part of their freshly cooked evening meal and refused to accept money. There may have been bandits around, but this hospitality to travellers was in accord with true Islamic practice.

After we had eaten, Jamian, who had stayed alone at the caves the previous night, began to dance with his shadow that was outlined on the cave wall by candlelight. Jamian belonged to a group of wildly gay guys staying at the Jalalabad Hotel. They called themselves the Wandering Gypsy Rainbow Light Dancers. Among them were Curtis and John, who both had roles in Fellini's *Satyricon* – playing themselves no doubt. I watched Jamian's dance with a mixed feeling of amusement and disgust.

The performance threw me into an introspective mood. It came across as a dance of loneliness and despair, and I wondered if we all were not dancing with illusions. We had the freedom of our upbringing and wealth to do what the Afghans could never dream of doing, and yet, for myself, and probably all the others, our fun simply masked deeper troubles within our psyches. What was more real, our playing games with philosophy or the poverty of the people around us? And what was more important, us finding intellectual satisfaction or them having full bellies and proper medical care?

The candles melted into the rock and we curled into our sleeping bags on the dirt floor. My melancholy slipped away as I thought about the Indus River, becoming so absorbed in planning that a scorpion sting on my foot hardly bothered me.

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The residents of the Dutch House began to disperse. Hans and Gert had decided to go their own ways. Hans would come with us. Bev, from Canada, and Rich, from America, dearly wanted to come, but were on their way to Kathmandu. The others expressed admiration for the idea but intended to follow their own directions. Some went back to Europe, others towards Pakistan, India, and Nepal. Parting from our Afghan friends was surprisingly emotional, as we had become well known in Jalalabad and the people returned our friendship with deep sincerity. Attala, the medical student, who used to entertain us with long and lofty tales of Pakistani and Afghan folklore, was horrified when he learned of our plan to sail down the Indus. He warned us of treacherous rapids, of giant boulders that bounced along with the current and could smash a boat into a thousand pieces, and, of course, the ever-present alibabas who would rob and kill us without hesitation.

The workers at the teahouse bade us a tearful farewell, especially Mohammed who was grief stricken to see Rita leaving for Europe. Then there were the brothers, the two mechanics, who hugged and kissed us goodbye. Their faces were cut and bruised from a fight that we later learned was in defence of our reputation in the village.

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We had chosen to begin our journey in Pakistan rather than risk the rapids of the Kabul River. Hans, the youngest of our group, was a lovable rogue who masked his fine intelligence and sensitivity with an air of clumsy innocence and unrestrained indulgence in pleasure. Fluent in several languages and rapidly picking up Farsi, the lingua franca of the Middle East, he was to become our main communicator. Garrey, Kris, and I were extremely close, a relationship that Hans found hard to fathom and, unfortunately, was to cause him confusion during our trip down the Indus.

Crossing the Kabul river on inflated animal-skin raft. Jalalabad

SPIRIT OF THE INDUS

On the bus to Peshawar, Hans sat next to a one-legged old man who turned out to be an important Afghan official. Hans was quite a scholar, and their long conversation impressed the old man. His presence enabled us to pass through the five border controls at the Khyber Pass with minimal delay.

Peshawar, sprawling, dirty, and noisy, was very different to rural Jalalabad. The British influence indicated that we had advanced into a new century, but the past lingered. On a wall near the post office, the crudely painted slogan, CURSH INDIA, was the only evidence of conflict with its neighbour.

'With spelling like that, it's no wonder they lost the war,' commented Garrey.

'Well,' I replied, '*you're* one to talk.' Garrey's spelling was notoriously off the mark. Our amusement soon faded when our attempt to post excess baggage back to Australia foundered in a maze of regulations. The British influence again. We resigned ourselves to the reality of carrying our unnecessary things with us.

The manager of the Salateen Hotel welcomed us with a big smile and an eye for Kris, looking cute in her red dress and jingling with bracelets. 'Oh my friends, I am very much pleased to see you.'

'Thank you,' we replied, as we unloaded our gear in the big room he'd given us. I was very much pleased to see the luxuries of a soft mattress and a proper toilet. My transformation into a seasoned traveller had only just begun, and I still appreciated a flushing loo.

Exploring Peshawar on my own, I moved through the streets like an observer in a time machine, seeing but not participating in a strange new world. In a back street I came across a crowd of men buying tickets at the rear window of a movie house. They were clambering on top of each other with the desperation of a pack of wolves tearing at the carcass of a recent kill. This pocket of furious action contrasted so vividly with the surrounding air of somnolence and lethargy that it seemed to be street theatre put on for my benefit. It was certainly nothing like the docile queues of London.

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At the American Information Centre in Peshawar, we found an old copy of *Encyclopedia Britannica*, from which we learned that the Indus River flowed out from the Himalayan foothills and onto its vast flood plain at a town called Kalabagh, where a barrage had been built to dam the river. From there it was navigable all the way to the Arabian Sea, 900 miles to the south. Massive floods occurred every summer as the Himalayan snows melted, and early spring was the best time for navigation.

'Fantastic,' I said to the others, 'we can do it, and our timing is perfect.'

Photographs of fishing boats on the Indus fed our imagination. Logic had prevailed against building a raft and, instead, we were thinking about a small fishing boat, but it was all

guesswork as we had not yet seen the river and had no idea what type of vessels would be available. According to my *Bartholomew's Map of the Indian Subcontinent*, the nearest large town on the Indus was Dera Ismail Khan, about 100 miles south of Peshawar.

'There must be a bus. Let's go,' said Hans.

The next day we were on the bus.

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As usual, our group was the centre of attention. The person with the best command of English sat nearby and proceeded with a cross-examination: 'What is your country? What is your profession? Are you married? Do you have children? How much do you earn?' Our answers to these questions were relayed down the bus in various dialects and other questions would be relayed back.

'Why would you be wanting to travel in this poor country?'

'Because you have something special that we want to learn about.'

'But you are educated, you can earn much money and have a beautiful family, what more could you want?'

'Money and families do not always bring happiness.'

'Oh, I am thinking you must be hippies.'

The magic label 'hippie' brought smiles and nods of understanding all along the bus. Pakistanis were more tolerant than the Afghans, but they could not comprehend that Western economic success was not a guarantee of peace and happiness.

At a district border-post, police boarded and searched the luggage. We were worried they might find our hashish, but they left without discovering anything. A Catholic nun sitting across the aisle leaned over to me and whispered, 'They are looking for matches.'

'You're kidding,' I replied.

'It's true, there is a tax to be paid,' and she showed me two cartons of matches she had hidden in the folds of her habit.

A beautiful old man with a white beard and moustache, cheeky brown eyes, a shotgun and a bandolier of cartridges over his shoulder, seemed to understand us. We were playing it cool and not smoking any joints, but he kept passing us cigarettes filled with *charas*, hashish. Our fellow passengers took no notice of our indulgence; it was considered normal. The old man invited us to visit his village. So close to the Indus, however, we had to refuse.

Meanwhile, Hans had been conversing with a man named Abdul Jellile. He was dressed in the usual Pakistani garb of baggy trousers and long-tailed shirt. He wore an apricot-coloured turban and carried a quail in a cloth cage. We stopped at a teahouse for lunch and Jellile

arranged for plates of rice and curried meat to be brought to us. While we were eating, people subjected us to the usual questioning routine. Indicating the skydiving emblem on my denim jacket, a young man declared, 'You are not a tourist, I can see that you are a fighter pilot.'

Basking in the glory of my suddenly elevated status, I went along with the idea. Fortunately, we were bundled back onto the bus before they began to wonder just what an Australian fighter pilot was doing disguised as a hippie in the middle of their country at war.

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The desert landscape gave way to vistas of green irrigated gardens, wheat fields, palm trees, water buffalo, camels, and workers in the fields. Late in the afternoon, the bus stopped for the passengers to make their devotions to Allah. The men lay out strips of cloth on the sand dunes, took off their turbans, and bowed towards Mecca, beyond the setting sun.

We sat in the sand at a distance, impressed by the power of this simple desert ritual that united a busload of strangers. I wanted to know what they were feeling, but could not imagine ever giving myself up to an external power. And yet my fortress of defence against religion was beginning to give way to the recognition that there was something these people possessed that soothed and invigorated their minds. Islam seemed to give them an appealing attitude of calm and kindness, especially towards travellers such as ourselves.

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Dera Ismail Khan was hidden in a shroud of darkness. Unable to see our hands in front of our faces, we found ourselves in the middle of a jostling crowd unloading luggage from the top of the bus and throwing bags onto horse carts that loomed up and nearly ran us over. As we stood in confusion, not knowing where to go, Jellile appeared. We thought he had left the bus 40 miles back, and his sudden reappearance surprised us. Most Pakistanis who had befriended us were so overbearing that their company soon became exhausting, but there was something special about Jellile. His manner was gentle and strong, without a trace of the fawning that others showed when they thought they could get something out of us.

Jellile took charge and stopped two horse-drawn carts. Garrey and Kris boarded one with most of our luggage, and Jellile, Hans, and I climbed onto the second. Despite his friendly presence, we were still suspicious of Jellile's motivation, but we had no choice. He was in control for now.

I felt sorry for the emaciated horse and gave it a compassionate pat on the neck, only just managing to avoid being bitten as a reward for my kindness. *Stuff you, horse*, I thought, and took my seat. With hooves skidding on the road, we slowly gathered momentum and the miserable creature even managed a reasonable pace. We did not have far to go. Jellile directed the driver down an alley as dark as Satan.

'Be careful,' I whispered to Garrey as we stopped in the courtyard of a *serai*, a traveller's inn. A man let us into a large room that smelled of livestock.

'At last,' said Kris, falling onto a charpoy. 'That bone-shaker of a bus nearly killed me.'

'Hey, do I smell food?' exclaimed Hans with a grin of delight.

A man appeared at the door with bowls of curry, dhal, and yoghurt. Jellile had ordered the food without our knowing. We ate hungrily, tearing off pieces of roti, the unleavened wholemeal bread that is the staple food of Pakistan, and using it to scoop up the vegetables. Sweet milk tea washed the food down.

Jellile spoke no English. Through sign language and a smattering of Urdu that Hans had picked up, we established that he was a silversmith and had been to Peshawar to sell jewellery. We tried to explain our aim of finding a boat. Garrey even drew a sketch, but the concept of sailing down the Indus seemed to be beyond Jellile's comprehension. He did recognise our tiredness and stiffness, and called in an old man, a masseur.

'Ow,' yelled Hans as the man set to work on his back, 'this guy really hurts.'

Our laughter at Hans's discomfort increased when he put on a mock expression of hurt for being the object of our ridicule. He was a great actor.

Then it was my turn. It was painful, and I was afraid the old man's powerful technique might tear the ligaments from my joints. Apart from Kris, we all had a massage and then began preparing for sleep. Jellile took off his loose turban, lovingly hung the quail's cage on a nail, and lay down on one of the beds. We had expected to be left alone and were still wary of his joining us. Garrey kept guard and slept more lightly than the rest of us.

Jellile woke us up very early with milk tea and a delicious sweet dish that looked like semolina and tasted like golden syrup. Fussing like a mother, Jellile then organised us to go to the bazaar. In our imagination, Dera Ismail Khan variously existed as an exotic Arabian city, a sleazy den of thieves, or a riverside resort. As always, the reality was completely different. In the daylight, the city appeared neither majestic nor threatening; the streets and buildings were dusty, bleached of colour, and looked old and worn-out.

At a chai shop, Jellile introduced us to several of his friends, and the word quickly got around. As we drank our tea, more and more people came in to meet us or just to stare. Once again we told Jellile we wanted to see boats. Understanding our wish but not our urgency, he led us through the bazaar. The city was well off the usual tourist route and we were never free from crowds of thirty or forty curious people who materialised from nowhere. The children had probably never seen foreigners before. Our dress was half Western and half Afghan, which would have confused them because in Pakistan one's clothing indicates one's social class and even the district and village to which one belongs.

We came to a silver workshop where friends of Jellile were melting old pieces of silver in a crucible, the tiny coal furnace fanned by an electric hair-dryer. After more chai, we were taken onto the roof of the shop. From this perspective, the town was much more attractive. The dry desert air had preserved the carved decorations on the buildings, each beam was a precious antique. Complementing the soft greys and ochres of the mud-walled buildings was a backdrop of dark storm clouds with lightning flickering in nervous frenzy.

The men released a flock of pigeons. The birds wheeled and tumbled through shafts of sunlight that bathed the buildings in brilliant light, in contrast to the menacing clouds. The pigeons were called home by the waving of scarves and, as the flock approached, the birds dipped behind a nearby building and reappeared in another direction. Again they approached and repeated the procedure. On the third circuit, they slowed down at the very last moment and enveloped us in a flutter of whistling feathers as they entered the loft.

'There's the Indus,' exclaimed Garrey.

'Jellile,' he commanded, pointing to a line of dark green vegetation, 'Indus, boats.' His patience was running out, and at last Jellile took us towards the river.

The sandy road wove between vegetable gardens lined with date palms and bright flowers. We almost broke into a run as we reached the top of a levee, and there it was, the mighty Indus, a vast waterway branching between fertile mudflats and sandy, scrub-covered islands and disappearing into the southern horizon. We stood without talking, spellbound by the stark beauty of the enormous expanse of vibrant energy before us.

Then the Spirit of the Indus spoke. The intense stillness suddenly transformed into a furious driving wind that whipped up a sandstorm, stinging our faces and causing us to run for cover. In the lee of some old wooden hulks beached on the sand, we wondered about our presumption in taking on this awesome river.

. . .

After lunch, Garrey said firmly, 'Now, can you show us some boats?'

Jellile repeated the word 'boats,' smiled, and led us in a direction away from the river.

'Oh no, we're going to be paraded in front of his friends again,' I said.

Jellile pacified us by holding up his hands in a calm gesture. Ashamed at our lack of control in the face of his peaceful demeanour, we followed him like lambs. In the poorer part of town, small children ran away in fright, but the older ones followed us. Dark, feminine eyes peered out from partly opened doors and windows. Jellile opened a wooden door and ushered us into a quiet courtyard, away from the mass of children. It was the home of his relatives. We waited outside while he went in and hustled the women away. Kris was invited into the kitchen to meet them and they made a great fuss over her, examining her clothes and lifting up her dress to see what she was wearing underneath. Resigned to the fact of being on display again, we could not express our resentment because our hosts were so genuinely friendly. How impatient we were. Our intention to emulate the Eastern way of life was forgotten the moment things did not go our own way.

Once again in the street, Jellile cleared a space by threatening the children with a brick. They moved back as one, grinning with the knowledge that it was only a game. There was no joke, however, in the murderous way Garrey was looking at Jellile. Unperturbed, our guide calmly led us to the end of the lane, where we came upon another levee bank. Instead of going away

from the river as we had thought, we were once again on its banks. Jellile turned and gave us such a sweet smile that our anger melted away in embarrassment.

An old fishing boat about thirty feet long, its line sweeping in a crescent from elevated bow to stern, was moored at the levee. Polished by time, the unpainted timbers could have been a hundred or a thousand years old. We immediately fell in love with it and climbed aboard. The cabin, built into the stern, was easily large enough, but our initial enthusiasm faded as we realised it was just too big. There were shallows downstream where the Indus fanned out into rivulets, and this vessel was designed for times of flood or for those parts of the river where the channel was deep.

Following the levee, we came to a series of wooden hulls anchored in a line and supporting a wooden bridge. Ox carts and gaudily decorated trucks crossed this bridge to a wooded sandbank and then another boat bridge to the eastern bank, a long way off. Later, we were told that during the summer flood the boat bridges are dismantled and the river can only be crossed by ferry. There are three such bridges across the Indus, and we were to meet them all.

We crossed the first section of bridge and, with fists raised in mock threat, scattered the last of our young retinue.

'Catchaloo, catchaloo,' they called out as they disappeared into the wheat fields.

'What is this catchaloo?' I asked Jellile. We laughed when he explained through Hans that it meant Potato Nose, which is what they call all Europeans.

. . .

As the afternoon wore on, Jellile stopped to wash his face and hands in the river. He brushed his teeth and cleaned out his nostrils and ears, and we understood he intended to say his prayers. Hans passed around one of his classic joints and we lay on our backs in the warm sunshine, closed our eyes, and listened to the dips and crescendos of the skylark's song, the notes raining down upon us like Lucy's diamonds. Having threatened us with her morning windstorm, the Spirit of the Indus was now seducing us with her music. Jellile finished his prayers and brought us out of our personal reveries, quietly moving from one to the other and kissing us on our foreheads. Saying his only English word, 'darlings,' he called us together to continue our journey. Much later, we found out that he had learned 'darlings' from a scene in a popular Punjabi film, an epic of dozens of corny plots woven into one long story.

The building we had been approaching turned out to be a magnificent old paddle steamer on the main channel of the river. The engineers who maintained the ferry during the winter season were sitting on grass mats smoking tobacco from a hookah. On board, a brass plaque showed that the ferry had been built in Glasgow and brought to India in the 1920's.

At this point the river was about two hundred yards wide. A flock of ducks flew past and there were herons at the water's edge. We sensed the power of the river, and our hearts quickened as we imagined that strong current carrying us into the wilderness.

A gnarled old man, looking as ancient as the river itself, offered us tea. He told us there were some boats at the village about two miles downstream, but they belonged to fishermen. He advised us to go back upstream to the town of Kalabagh where boat-builders could make us our own boat.

'That will be too expensive,' Garrey said to me. 'There must be something around here we can buy.'

There was. Another man remembered a boat for sale, and told us it could be brought to the ferry the next day. This news delighted us. We arranged a time, and returned to Dera Ismail Khan in high spirits at having made so much progress in one day. The day, however, was not yet over.

MR BIG

After the evening meal, Jellile gave each of us, including Kris, a scalp massage. Tired, we were preparing for sleep when we heard a commotion in the courtyard followed by heavy knocking at our door. I opened the door and two men pushed their way in. One was a heavily built individual who spoke English. We had met him briefly during the day, one of the many people who had stopped us in the street to ask the usual questions about our country, our business, and so on. Now he was reeling drunk. He had a dirty-looking bottle of moonshine whisky that smelled like a mixture of aeroplane glue and boot polish. His friend was a small, nervous, ineffectual man with a stupid grin on his face.

'You *Engleesh* will have party with me,' insisted Mr Big, as we later called him. We remained calm, but annoyed at his intrusion.

'Thank you, but we do not wish to drink alcohol,' Garrey replied.

'You *will* drink with me,' he responded aggressively, his small, bloodshot eyes beginning to blaze with anger as he thrust his bottle beneath our noses. Our refusal to drink brought on a flood of curses and he threatened to kill or rape us all. Garrey's hand moved to the neck of a heavy earthenware pot. I understood his plan and looked around for a weapon of my own. I didn't like violence but we had to protect ourselves.

'*Bas*! Enough!' Garrey snapped. 'We are tired, we want to sleep and you must leave.'

At this, Mr Big only became more menacing. Hans, oblivious to any danger, lay on his bed stroking the thigh of the second man. I sent him a fierce glance and then tried unsuccessfully to order Mr Big out of the room. Jellile, sitting behind Garrey and Kris, remained silent, his flashing eyes observing the proceedings with intense alertness. I was interested to see how he would reveal his hand.

When our unwanted visitor produced a knife, Garrey and I thought we had better placate him by having a drink.

'All right, give it here.'

Garrey took one mouthful of the foul liquid and immediately spat it out. Thinking it imprudent to follow his example, I managed to swallow a small amount. Unfortunately, Mr Big was only just warming up. He wanted a party and he wanted sex, no matter with whom, but his beady eyes kept falling on Kris. Seeing that her participation in the argument was only exciting him, she pulled her chaderi across her face to become less visible.

'Then, you smoke with me.' Mr Big threw a block of charas onto the table.

Again we refused. The tension was becoming unbearable. I thought the police must arrive soon because the shouting and swearing was so loud and there were no other sounds in the streets of Dera Ismail Khan, once again wrapped in its shroud of darkness.

'All right, we'll have one pipe.'

I watched Garrey fill the pipe. I was shaking with fear, waiting for the right moment to crack Mr Big on the head with his whisky bottle if he made any move to harm us. The repulsive man glanced at Jellile.

'Why do you stay with this man? He is low class rubbish.'

If Jellile is low class, you're the pits, I thought. Mr Big had made a mistake. Knowing that in the event of a fight Jellile would be on our side was reassuring. Our visitors had no chance.

Then Mr Big made his second mistake. Producing a soiled packet of white crystals, he demanded, 'Do you know what this is?'

'Yes,' said Garrey, 'it's cocaine.'

'You will take some,' he insisted.

'Can't you understand? We don't want your drugs. Just go home and leave us alone.'

I sent Garrey a look that said *let's humour him*, and we poured some crystals into the space between the thumb and forefinger. With sharp sniffs, we inhaled.

Maybe it was the cocaine running through my brain, I don't know, but my fear dissipated. Realising what needed to be done, I moved across the room and sat next to Mr Big. Our aggression was only making the situation worse and we had to change our approach.

'Listen man, you are a good person but the alcohol has taken away your reason. It makes you behave like a child. We are tourists, we have come to enjoy your beautiful country and the Koran teaches that you must look after travellers. You should be helping us, not frightening us.'

His head dropped. I knew I was gaining ground. Speaking in a voice that surprised myself by its power, I put my arm around his shoulders in a show of friendship and said, 'Come on, it's time to leave, you need to go home to sleep.'

As I escorted him to the door, the Australian in me broke out and, showing a threatening fist to his friend, I pointed to the door, and growled, 'You too sport.' He didn't know what a 'sport' was, but he got the message.

Garrey locked the door after them and we hugged each other in relief. Jellile nodded approvingly, then flashed a look of reprimand at Hans. I wondered about this remarkable silversmith. He had helped us so much without any sign of wanting anything, and he was obviously hurt by the bad behaviour of his countryman. At about 3.00 am, a last pipe was passed around and we went to sleep.

. . .

The next morning it was time to move. Jellile said we would be safe staying at the inn, but we insisted he show us a good hotel.

'Hans, you stay with Kris, and Garrey and I will go with Jellile to find a decent place.' I was still a bit short with Hans after his behaviour the previous night.

Carrying his quail as usual, Jellile stopped at a boot-maker's shop. A hookah was passed between us and one of the boot-makers brought another quail from the back of the shop. Evidently a contest had been arranged for our entertainment. I was disgusted and tried to stop Jellile from allowing his bird to fight. He either did not understand, or did not want to understand. The other quail beat his bird, and when blood appeared from the side of its beak, Jellile stopped the fight. He licked the bird's face clean, and put it back in its cloth bag. He lost 40 rupees, a considerable sum in that poor country.

It was not a happy morning. We drank tea at the same chai shop we had visited the day before and then Jellile took us back to the inn. I was becoming impatient and spoke to him firmly.

'We are *not* staying at the inn one more night, we do not want any more tea, we do not want to see quails fight. We only want to see a hotel.'

'Aacha, yes,' he said despondently. But for half an hour he took us on a circuitous route and we ended up back at the inn without seeing any hotel. I was thoroughly fed up.

'Stay here,' I ordered Jellile, and asked Hans to come with me. We took a new direction and, just around the corner, was a clean, quiet hotel with guest-rooms opening onto a sunny courtyard with flowering bougainvillea. The friendly proprietor showed us a room with four beds. It was perfect. On our triumphant return to the inn, we found Jellile about to leave. He kissed us all goodbye, and we never saw him again.

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People at tables in the courtyard stared as we moved in. Needing to be on our own, we declined an invitation to join them. We drank tea in our room and the conversation turned towards Jellile.

'It was so sad to see him go away like that,' said Kris.

'He was like one of the remarkable men in Gurdjieff's life, the wise men who appeared from nowhere and helped him to solve problems,' added Garrey.

'Yes,' said Hans, forgetting his behaviour of the previous night, 'he was like a Guru showing us how to live.'

I remained silent. These observations seemed true and I was feeling guilty for having been so abrupt with Jellile that morning. In our rush for security, we had failed him.

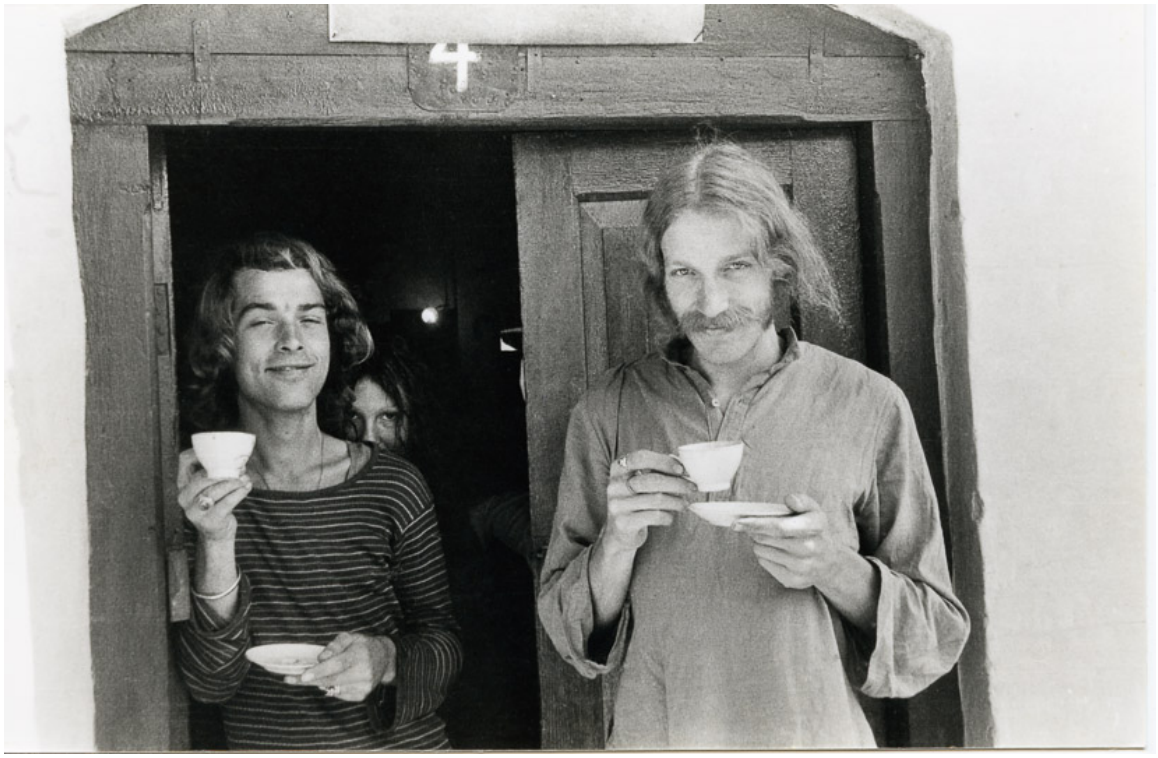
Lunch arrived and we ate the spicy dhal, vegetables, and roti outside in the sunshine. A group of young men had gathered at the hotel to discuss politics. They were university students on holiday and staying with their families. They all spoke English and when we explained our plan to sail down the Indus their eyes lit up. Immediately they began to organise our affairs; this was something we were to meet again and again in Pakistan.

They are more English than the English, I thought with amusement. Their accents, their expressions, and their conservative views reminded me so much of some people I had worked with in England. Although their talk was revolutionary, soon they would be preserving the status quo in their chosen careers. The saddest thing about their political posturing was their blindness to the beauty of the countryside and the poorer classes who lived off the land and the river. Their real aim was to escape to the West. I pitied them for this attitude, and I pitied Pakistan.

That afternoon, two of the students eagerly accompanied us to the ferry. The boat from the fishing village was even larger than the first one we had seen. We explained it was just too big for our purpose. The fishermen knew the state of the river further downstream and they simply nodded in agreement. It became clear that we had to go to Kalabagh. Having made that decision, we relaxed and spent a few days looking around town and getting to know the students and their families. We were treated to wonderful meals prepared by mothers and sisters, who were concealed from all eyes but Kris's.

On one of our walks, I stopped to buy cigarettes from a street peddler. When I rejoined the group, Garrey asked, 'Didn't you see who it was?'

I looked back at the cigarette seller who was peering at the ground in embarrassment. It was Mr Big. Much to his relief, we continued on our way.



Garrey and Haus at Dera Ismail Kahn

Boats on the lake at Kalabogh

We left most of our luggage with the family of one of the students and set off on a bus to Kalabagh. It was a travelling circus. Adults, children, sheep, and chickens jammed tight, people staring at us, and high-pitched Pakistani music blaring from speakers above our heads. The adult males wore shotguns on their backs, and at every stop boys clamoured at the windows, selling fruit, drinks, and other delicacies that Hans invariably bought and handed around. Kris pointed to the crudely painted murals of sand-dunes, palms, and camels on the inside walls of the bus and commented, 'That's just in case we can't see outside.'

The desert scenery gave way to steep hillsides and rocky ridges; we had reached the village of Kalabagh. Houses and shops were built on top of each other on a steep mountainside at the edge of a lake created by the Jinnah barrage. French and English engineers had built this dam across the Indus in 1947 and named it after Muhammad Ali Jinnah, revered as the founding father of Pakistan. Trained as a lawyer in England, he worked as an advocate in the Bombay High Court and then moved into politics. At first, he worked for Indian independence from the British, then, concerned about Hindu oppression of the Muslim minority, he strove for partition of India into separate, autonomous states for Hindus and Muslims. It was through his determined leadership that the state of Pakistan was born. Unfortunately, he died of tuberculosis not long after the formation of Pakistan.

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'Rickshaw, rickshaw,' two enterprising young boys shouted, offering to take us into town. Eager to show off their special passengers, they tooted their horns far more frequently than necessary. Friendly shopkeepers waved to us from their stools in the street, where an abundance of fruit and vegetables was on display. We stopped at a *serai* in the centre of the village. Looking and sounding like a large, amiable Anthony Quinn, the proprietor showed us into a thin-walled extension that jutted out onto the street. We were told it was the only accommodation in town. It was dirty and small, with four charpoys taking up all the space.

Our host had served in the British army in Italy and he spoke to us in Italian. Our linguist, Hans, answered him. We sat on the beds to take stock of our situation and interrogate our new companion who had materialised from nowhere. Suddenly, there he was, drinking tea and offering us cigarettes spiked with hashish. I don't remember his name, but I will call him Jean because he spoke to us in the broken French he had picked up while working for French engineers on the barrage.

Jean walked with a stick. He had sustained an ankle injury while working on the barrage, and it had never healed. He had chronic osteomyelitis and I advised him to go to the hospital. He gave me a resigned look that meant either no money or inadequate medical care at the hospital. Jean was young, his arms were muscular, but the expression on his face was bitter. Fortunately he had a good sense of humour and his frequent laughter revealed a handsome face. He showed an unusual sensitivity to people's feelings, and possessed an inexhaustible supply of joints that he was always passing around.

And he owned a boat.

A hundred yards from the teahouse were six rowing boats moored to a stone jetty beside a mosque. Garrey and I looked at the boats and then at each other, 'Perfect,' we said in unison.

Jean helped us into his boat and rowed out to the middle of the lake. Kalabagh stretched out before us, carved into a steep, orange and mauve mountain range. At the water's edge, classy mansions with lush gardens gleamed in the afternoon sun. Hans wanted to have a swim, and in the process of diving into the water he nearly tipped us all in. Garrey looked at me, 'Can't he get anything right?' We were so intolerant of Hans's boyish enthusiasm.

Rowing with the current, Jean took us beneath a bridge and about half a mile down the lake to the barrage. We were relieved to see a lock through which we could take a boat down to the river below, a vast sheet of water that disappeared into the desert. A man in uniform was catching fish from a water race meant to help the fish migrate past the barrage, but which provided easy pickings for him. He gave us a parcel of fish, and then Jean began the long row back.

An orange sunset reflected off the still water and the only sounds were the squeal of hemp rowlocks, the dip of the blades, and the tapping of wavelets against the bow.

'Let me row,' demanded Hans, standing up and nearly upsetting the boat again.

Jean shook his head and continued his steady pace. Flocks of ducks and cormorants rose, circled us, and returned to their roost on an island. The peace and the quiet were almost tangible.

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The next morning, we found papayas on sale in the bazaar. Apparently they only grew in Kalabagh and Karachi; our fondness for them soon caused the fruit sellers to inflate their price. My confidence in bartering was growing stronger, but I still felt uneasy in bargaining something down to half the asking price when even the original price was ridiculously low. There was more money in my pocket than the merchants could earn in several years.

Overnight, the lake turned red and seemed to have risen a few inches in depth: another of the Indus's surprises. There must have been a tremendous rainstorm somewhere in the Himalayas. Amused at our surprise, and unaware of the ominous meaning his words held for us, Jean nonchalantly said, '*L'indonation arrive*,' the flood has come. He rowed upstream, keeping close to the shore to avoid the main current. I could see why his arms were so strong.

On a path at the edge of the lake walked a tall, proud, and beautiful woman without a veil. Jean called out in Urdu, she shook her head and they both laughed. He told us he had invited her to join us. Such a relaxed exchange between male and female seemed so out of place in Pakistan. It was good to see. The students in Dera Ismail Khan had openly admitted the frustration of sexual segregation, never seeing a female face other than their relatives. They told us it was a universal practice for young men to sleep with boys until they were married, and often after marriage as well.

Mosque and village of Kalabogh from the lake

Jean beached the boat at the head of the lake where several boats were visible, some still under construction. We had come to the right place. Garrey and I wanted to look over the boats immediately, but Jean led us along a dry riverbed, away from the lake. Not wanting to offend him, we followed, casting wistful looks behind us. He led us to a pile of the orange and mauve rock we had seen on the cliffs above the village. It was the salt mine, Kalabagh's proudest industry.

Deep inside the mountain, miners with candles in one hand chipped away at walls of salt. Wooden carts filled with blocks from the wall were hauled to the surface by stunted ponies. Our guide maintained a stream of information, but his words were lost on us as the charas we had smoked began to work its wonder. The tunnels became jewelled caverns. We broke off some stalactites of pure salt, and the workers gave us giant, perfect crystals. With shining eyes and armfuls of diamonds, we waved goodbye to the friendly miners and finally went to inspect the boats.

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As in Dera Ismail Khan, the boats were fashioned out of heavy, unpainted planks with ornate carving on the sides and stern. Smaller boats, more suitable for our purpose, were valued at 1,200 rupees. We knew the asking price could be substantially reduced to a reasonable selling price, and, in order to not appear too enthusiastic, we promised to return the next day.

The word had gone around. That afternoon, a man offered us a boat for 1,000 rupees asking price. The boat, moored at the stone jetty, appeared old but solidly built. We looked it over with sneers concealing our approval and returned to the teahouse for the game of barter. The man appeared nervous and dropped the price to 800 rupees almost immediately. We agreed, and gave him 10 rupees to seal the deal on the provision that a proper deed of sale were drawn up in case we met trouble downstream.

At the police station, our fruitless efforts to obtain official documents attracted a crowd of giggling onlookers. We were about to give up when two men in Western-style clothing stopped to talk.

'Hello my friends, may we assist you?'

The older of the two was an official on the town council. His friend, Mr Shah, was an engineer for the Highways Department. They both spoke good English and listened to our story with increasing amazement.

'You mustn't live at the teahouse with so many robbers and low-class people. You must come and stay with Mr Shah at the Highway's Department rest house.'

We flinched at the blatant class-prejudice, but the thought of better accommodation was appealing.

'And 800 rupees is robbery. You must stop this business and we will find you a boat for the correct price.'

'But we have already made an agreement,' I said.

'Bah, that is nothing.'

Garrey and Kris went with Mr Shah and Mr Secretary, as we called him, to inspect the rest house and look into the possibility of another boat, while Hans and I went to ask the engineer in charge of the barrage if our boat would actually be able to pass through the lock.

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Halfway across the barrage we lingered to admire the overflow that thundered into a wide river on its journey to the Arabian Sea. Leaning against the railing, we listened to the call of the river, and wondered what lay in store for us. South of Kalabagh, the west bank of the river bordered tribal territory, a region where people governed themselves with no police or military presence. Everybody claimed that these people were robbers and murderers and our intended journey was simply suicidal. We ignored these warnings because we were beginning to learn that local lore did not always fit the facts. Our travels were already teaching us that preconceptions are the greatest barrier to meeting people, seeing places, and gaining knowledge from such experiences.

We wanted to experience things for ourselves. This was the method we had gleaned from Gurdjieff and Lao Tzu, and it meant we should try to experience the river with unbiased minds. Unfortunately, our prejudices were to prove stronger than we realised. Bias-free

states of mind are difficult to achieve. On the few occasions when we did approach such states, we were not aware of it at the time, only realising in retrospect what had occurred.

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This was one of the rare occasions when Hans and I were alone together with neither of us being stoned. We talked about our lives and ambitions. Hans had just turned twenty-three. His mother had grown up in Indonesia, where she and his older brother were imprisoned by the Japanese during the war. His father, an officer in the Dutch navy, had become a prisoner of war after his cruiser was torpedoed during the battle of the Java Sea in1942. Hans grew up in Holland, apart from three years in the Dutch Antilles. He did well at school and went to university in Amsterdam to study medicine. It was the swinging sixties and, freed from a bourgeois naval upbringing, Hans became immersed in a wild life of free sex, beer, dope and acid-trips. He experimented with homosexuality and changed his studies from medicine to psychology. Then he dropped out and he and his boyfriend, Gert, went to the East. Their Land Rover broke down in Turkey and Hans went on alone. Gert caught up with him in Kabul and their relationship resumed but remained difficult. They parted again in Jalalabad. I was impressed by Hans's knowledge of psychology and Eastern philosophy. Beneath a self-indulgent exterior he was intelligent and sincere in his interest to learn more. Still burdened by my adherence to science as the only acceptable body of knowledge, I knew nothing about Eastern mysticism.

'Hans,' I asked, 'I have always assumed the mind to be part of the nervous system. How is it seen to exist in Eastern philosophy?'

'Hah, that's the big question.' He laughed, 'you have the materialistic view of science. You can't see mind existing beyond the physical world. Easterners have a more dualistic view that mind and body are different things but are still capable of interacting with each other.'

'You know, in all my years in medical school, I never asked the question, *what is mind*? We were taught that was something coming from the brain, something obviously affected by hormones and drugs. Mental things, such as aggression and lust, had to be genetically determined as they were main factors in assuring the survival and propagation of the species.'

'What about morality?' Hans asked.

'You mean religion? That's what has fucked us up,' I replied indignantly.

'Not quite. You told me you have no religion, and yet you still control your instincts for aggression and lust, don't you?'

'Sure, I'm repressed, I'm fucked up by society.' I laughed, then continued more seriously, 'Okay, I don't always act upon my impulses. Maybe it's through fear of being punished, but I do have a sensitivity to the feelings of others. I don't like to cause hurt.'

'Does that sensitivity have survival value in evolution?'

'Maybe not in terms of propagating my own genes, but it helps the species to survive.'

'Then, if such sensitivity is genetically determined, the trait should be eliminated because you would not pass it on.'

'So, I'm a bloody throwback am I?'

'Not at all. From the Eastern point of view, aggression and lust are attitudes acquired with the mind from past lives. They are considered to be undesirable because they only bring unhappiness. Things such as compassion and kindness are positive attitudes that can come from past lives and can also be acquired during the present life.'

'Why is compassion considered to be positive?'

'Because it increases the general level of happiness in oneself and in society.'

'I can see that, but I'm still not sure what mind *is*. If it's not the brain, what is it?'

'I don't know Ade.' Hans shrugged, and we continued our walk in silent contemplation.

. . .

Our route followed a disused railway line that ran beside the main irrigation canal, carrying water from the Indus to the great irrigation network of the Punjab. The day was warm, still, and silent after the deafening roar of the barrage. Rainbow-coloured birds sent Hans into ecstasy – he had never seen anything like the bird life here.

The chief engineer wasn't in. We were shown to his assistant's office in a building with a distinctly colonial flavour, set in a garden. The assistant engineer was doing paperwork at a big desk. Apart from the man who had shown us in, the place was deserted; the only sound came from birds in the garden. *What a paradise*, I thought, remembering the constant background noise of traffic in London. I wondered how many millions of people in the world would live their whole lives without ever experiencing such peace as existed in the assistant engineer's office.

The engineer was as calm as his environment. Without a hint of surprise at seeing two long-haired Europeans marching in from the wild, he ordered his servant to bring chai.

'Good afternoon gentlemen. What is your purpose for being here?' he enquired.

'We would like to know if we can take our boat through the lock on the barrage.'

'My goodness! There are thieves and murderers on the river, you cannot go.'

'We will be careful.'

'Alright then, the lock can be opened, but you must give me twenty-four hours notice.'

It was all so easy. Because of the war with India we had doubted if a boatload of foreigners would be allowed to travel unaccompanied through the heart of the country. But the war was no obstacle. A few times we saw jet fighters scream overhead but otherwise there was no sign that the country was in conflict with its neighbour. On the bus back to town, I was so pleased with the success of our mission that I did not mind standing astride a sheep and hitting my head on the low roof at every bump in the road.

. . .

'You have to see it,' Kris bubbled with enthusiasm. 'Beautiful rooms, a flower garden, and a *real* bathroom.'

Garrey, with a grin as wide as the Indus, added, 'There's a balcony at the edge of the lake and a landing where we can keep the boat.'

It was not difficult to leave the teahouse. Our amiable proprietor had not charged rent as our meals were payment enough and our presence had increased his clientele by a few hundred percent. The flies were like we'd never seen, and that's saying something for Australians. And there were no washing or toilet facilities. Kris had discovered an immaculately clean loo that belonged to the mosque, but infidels, particularly female ones, were not allowed to use it. Like everybody else, we used the street. It's no fun to crap in the open, especially when you are already the centre of attention in town.

Seeing that his services would no longer be required, Jean became sullen and demanded an extortionate sum. After his request had been sorted out, he brightened up and agreed to take us to the rest house.

We rowed downstream to a concrete landing shaded by a willow tree. Steps led up to a wide patio and a magnificent house. Hans and I stared in disbelief. Mr Shah and Mr Secretary were there to meet us. They showed us into a big room with four beds and an adjoining bathroom. We showered, shaved, and used the flushing loo with whoops of joy, behaving like four ducks encountering water for the first time. As we finished our ablutions, there was a knock at the door and a creaky voice called 'sahib.' It was the gardener, a withered old man with glowing eyes and a smiling brown face bordered by a white beard. He had a posy of flowers for the memsahib. Later, we discovered that his glowing eyes were due to an opium habit, and he was to blow his cute image by making an awkward grope at Kris.

That evening, Mr Shah, Mr Secretary and his wife offered us a meal prepared by the rest-house cooks. Cleaner than we had been for months, with newly washed hair and wearing our best clothes, we felt very smart, although we would have raised a few eyebrows in London. I wore a cotton Pakistani outfit, the shalwar kameez, consisting of an ordinary shirt-like top elongated to mid-thigh, and baggy harem trousers. I had commissioned a tailor in Kalabagh to make the outfit, and this was the first time I had worn it. The wife of the secretary dispensed with her veil, so at last we had the opportunity to talk to a woman.

Our hosts poured out their hearts to us. They were frustrated with their lives and low wages and longed for a Western lifestyle. Inwardly, we disagreed with them: they were rich in comparison to most of their countrymen, and their environment was more tranquil than

most Westerners could ever dream about. We tried to make them feel better by offering heartfelt praise of their people and their country.

. . .

By now we had run out of rupees. Hans volunteered to go to Peshawar to change dollars, while Garrey, Kris, and I settled down to enjoy a few days of luxury. We wrote letters home, and I found my thoughts drifting back to Judy. Distance and time had not overcome my attachment to her and, in male-dominated Pakistan, I was missing the company of a woman.

One evening we were introduced to a rich man who drove us to the cinema at Mianwali to the east of Kalabagh. Bandits were said to be active at night and the all-male audience must have taken the threat seriously as they wore rifles and shotguns over their shoulders, obliging us to view the screen through a forest of gun barrels. The Punjabi movie was the very same film that had taught Jellile the word 'darlings.'

The rich man offered to find us a better vessel, and arranged for the same man who had tried to sell us the old boat to bring a newly-built boat. Without any sign of embarrassment, he offered it to us for 600 rupees. We agreed to take it. The boat was 18 feet long and, like all the vessels we had seen on the Indus, the gunwale ran in a sweeping curve from elevated prow to stern.

We set about equipping the boat for the expedition. Garrey built a cabin over the rear half and, at a nearby fisherman's house, we bought a mast and sail for 40 rupees. The mast consisted of three pieces of wood strapped together with fencing wire. The sail was a true marvel. Fifteen feet wide and eight feet high, it was made of hessian, patched with cotton print in floral and tartan patterns. It was tied onto spars that were also made up of several pieces of wood lashed together. For steering we fixed a sweep oar onto the stern. On the bow, Garrey painted the name that I suggested our noble vessel should bear: *Tao Indus*.

. . .

Hans returned from Peshawar with a pleasant surprise. He had met our genial Austrian friend, Udo, at the Salateen Hotel and had no trouble in talking him into joining us. We were delighted to see Udo again, with his quiet ways and his musical talent. With the help of Hans and Udo, we were almost ready to depart. Kris, our cook, supervised the purchase of stores for the galley. She did not buy too much as Garrey and I fancied ourselves to be pretty good fishermen. Apart from depending upon fish, we knew there would be more barrages and boat bridges where we could take a bus into the nearest town to buy food. The villages were built well away from the river banks to avoid the summer flood.

. . .

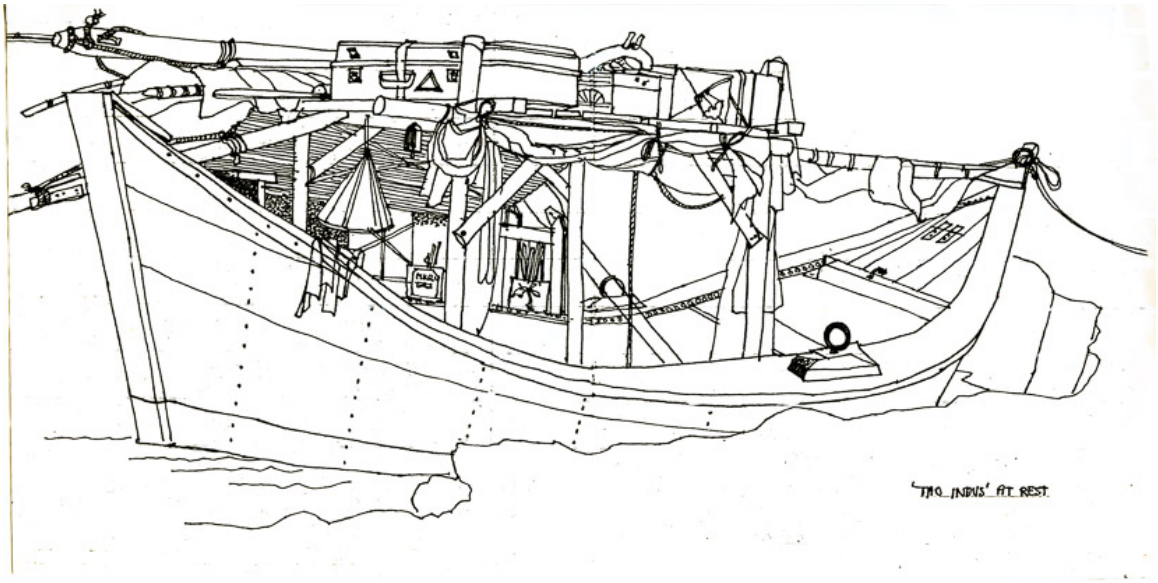
One day Hans burst into our room in excitement, 'Everybody, you must come, the Kuchis are here.'

Taking an early morning walk along the lake he had met a tribe of nomads who owned no land and recognised no borders. For centuries the tribe had been herding their animals in the

mountains between Afghanistan and Pakistan. We followed Hans to the lake shore where a curious circle of men and women surrounded us. Naked children broke away from their frolicking in the water and came to look. Even the sheep and evil-eyed goats joined the crowd, all staring in wonder at the long-haired Westerners, just as we were looking at them. The women wore no veils, their faces and hands were tattooed, and wherever silver ornaments and coins could possibly hang, they were hanging. Their garments had tiny flowers printed on black or deep red backgrounds. Hans joked and laughed with the Kuchis as if he had known them all his life. This was the happy side of Islam. The contrast between the Kuchi people and the ghosts in chadors with their frustrated menfolk in the towns was like the difference between day and night.

Hans was clearly relieved to have Udo for company. Garrey, Kris, and I had complete trust in each other and acted as a unit. We did not consciously exclude Hans, but he felt it. Later, my lack of awareness of Hans' emotions, and Garrey's agitation at his bungling enthusiasm, were to cause some disunity on the river.

In a short time we had made many friends. The town policeman wanted to come with us, and others flocked around. It was surprising how many had never been away from Kalabagh. We were actualising their wish for escape and adventure. Despite frequent warnings about the tribal area south of the barrage, we remained confident of being able to handle any dangers that could arise. If we had known we were going to be shot at on the very first day, we might have had second thoughts.



Tao Indus under sail

Negotiating the lock was a comedy of errors but once *Tao Indus* was safely below the walls of the dam our spirits soared. The engineer had been four hours late, and it was too dangerous to enter the tribal region, so we made camp. Our destination, Chasmah Barrage, was 40 miles downstream and would take a day's journey. That night, light rain put a slight dampener on our enthusiasm but a campfire beside the river and Kris's vegetable stew made us feel better. Garrey had a fever and did not sleep well. The rest of us, crowded together on the deck, were lulled to sleep by the distant roar of the barrage and the gentle lapping of waves.

At first light, we rowed into midstream, erected the mast, and unfurled our multi-coloured sail. A spontaneous cheer arose as *Tao Indus* instantly surged forward, with Garrey in charge of the sweep oar at the stern. We quickly left the barrage behind and headed across a broad expanse of water that cut into the scrubby desert. I stood at the bow holding onto the forestay, watching for sandbars and giving directions to steer port or starboard. Now that we had become sailors, we were using the few nautical terms that we knew. Every bend in the river brought something new and I could have remained there all day. Silently cutting through the water, we intruded upon great flocks of ducks that rose from the surface with quick, whistling wing beats. Herons and cranes standing along the banks were more interested in their prey than in us, and two pairs of pink and black flamingos slowly rose into the air and circled overhead. There were black-crested terns, masters of flight, and several species of kingfisher, including black and white speckled ones that came very close, hovered, and dived into the muddy water, emerging with flashes of silver in their beaks.

The dorsal fin of some creature broke the surface in front of us.

'There's a fish as big as a bloody dolphin,' I shouted.

Then it appeared again and again. It *was* a bloody dolphin, riding in front of us just like its ocean-living relatives. Dolphins a thousand miles inland! A school geography text I had found in Peshawar mentioned a unique species of dolphin that lived in the Indus and the Ganges. They had been in those muddy waters for so long that their eyes had become vestigial. Lack of sight did not hamper their ability to find food. On several occasions we saw dolphins leap out of the water and catch fish in mid-air, locating them through sonar alone. The Hindus regard these dolphins as holy animals and, during our journey, they appeared so often at times of strong emotion that we began to see them in this light. It seemed that they were always with us, acting as our guardians just beneath the surface of the opaque river.

. . .

The sail blocked Garrey's view of our course and, as well as the sweep oar, he had to control two ropes that adjusted the angle of the sail. The boat had no keel and it was extremely difficult to maintain a straight course. As we headed towards a sandbank, I yelled out, 'Starboard, right, right!' but it was too late and we ran onto the sand.

'Give me a go.' Hans demanded.

Garrey looked at me with a sly smile and said softly, 'This'll be rich.'

Sitting high on the stern with a joint hanging from his mouth and a serene grin, the Flying Dutchman took us into midstream, then a little further, and further.

'Left, left,' I shouted as a new sandbar appeared. Hans pulled on the wrong rope, the dolphin abandoned its station and headed for deeper water. We ground onto the sand and the sudden stop nearly tipped Hans overboard.

When the mirth had settled, and with Udo at the helm, the others chopped vegetables for Kris to make lunch. It was too risky to go ashore, and the kerosene stove functioned well in the annex made by Garrey. With such a good wind behind us, we were confident of passing through the dangerous region by nightfall. Garrey showed me some spots on his skin; he had chicken pox, which explained his fever of the night before.

One of the times we ran aground I stepped into the water to take a photo of Tao Indus under sail. We could see herdsmen and their goats and cattle on the right bank near two boats. They were a long way off and we felt quite safe, but the main channel began to veer across and we had no choice but to follow the stream and sail directly towards them. We were right in the middle of the badlands. When they saw us the men shouted and signalled for us to pull in to shore. We maintained our course and waved, calling out, '*As'salaam aleikum*.' Peace be upon you.

They were not in a peaceful mood. When we gave no indication of stopping, they began to run along the riverbank, shouting ever more aggressively. The situation felt very dangerous and I feared they might dive into the river to apprehend us. Then we ran aground on a sandbar.

'I think they want to offer us tea,' said Hans, and began calling the men to come and help us.

I thought Garrey was going to hit Hans on the head with the oar.

'Get out and push you idiot,' I shouted, as Udo and I leapt into the water to push *Tao Indus* off the sandbar. For a moment it seemed we were stuck. Then, to our immense relief, the boat slipped into the deep channel and we scrambled aboard. Fortunately, the breeze was still reasonably strong and we quickly picked up speed.

The herdsmen, several of whom were carrying guns, were now running along the bank just behind us and shouting angrily. We prayed for the wind to blow harder. A shotgun blasted and I heard Garrey leap onto the deck from the stern.

'Garrey, are you alright?'

'Just making sure I stay that way,' came the muffled reply.

The breeze finally took us out of range and we left the last runner behind, standing and looking at us in frustration. So much for Hans's tea party.

. . .

The first stage of our journey was going to plan. We had left the tribal territory behind and, that evening, we saw the Chasmah barrage, a line on the horizon. To be completely safe, we moored Tao Indus on a sandbank in the middle of the lake behind the barrage. The air was still and the sky clear; in the distance the barrage was lit up with electric light. The sand was too wet to sleep on, so all five of us squeezed together on the deck of *Tao Indus* for the night.

The next day there was no breeze. In the hot sun, we took turns rowing across the lake, making our way towards an elevated section that indicated the lock. We had to avoid the centre of the barrage where the strong current would have swept us onto the overflow. Our passage was slow and we tried fishing, but nothing was interested in the sticky dough we used as bait. Tortoises poked their gnarled heads out of the water and looked at us in curiosity.

When we reached the pier next to the lock, Hans, Udo, and I went ashore to find the engineer. He was willing to help, but dubious about our chances.

'It is not safe for you. Last week the gates were damaged and now they are not closing properly.'

We looked at the water pouring through the gap in the gates.

'What do you think?' I asked Garrey.

'I think we can make it, I certainly don't want to lift the boat out and carry it.'

With two men on board to help, Garrey and Udo took the boat through the lock. Hans, Kris, and I, with a crowd of silent onlookers, watched them negotiate the turbulence.

'Phew, that was close,' said Garrey as he tied up below the barrage, 'but it would have been a lot easier without those two.' He pointed to our proud helpers who had been more of a hindrance than anything else.

'Chai,' they offered, wanting to celebrate their achievement.

'*Shukriya, shukriya*, thank you, but we must be going,' we replied, rowing out onto the river.

We picked up the current from the main overflow, then shipped the oars and allowed *Tao Indus* to drift at her own pace as we settled down to enjoy the sun and the hot tea that Kris produced from the galley.

Departure Day from Kalabagh - Hans, myself, Kris, the gardener, Udo

THE MAGIC FLUTE

Garrey and Udo with Hans in the water

The river grew deep and narrow between vertical walls of sand, 15 to 20 feet high. Basking in the hot sun and floating in silence, the sound of a flute came from somewhere in the fields of tall, green maize above the cliff-top. Udo took up his flute and began playing the same tune, adding a slight variation. The unseen player stopped, then repeated Udo's variation, to which he replied, and they continued in this way for several minutes as we slowly drifted around a bend and out of earshot. We wondered what the invisible flautist must be thinking, and whether she or he could even see us. The spontaneity and beauty of the moment almost moved us to tears. This was what we had been looking for.

We drifted into a broad, slow-moving stretch of water. The day became even hotter and we stripped off and rolled overboard to float alongside the boat. *Tao Indus* eventually beached herself on a sandbank, where several deep pools might contain fish stranded from the river. Using Garrey's chaderi as a net, he and I waded through the pools to see if we could catch something. The two of us had done the same thing to catch goldfish in the pond at the drive-in cinema near our high school many years before. We caught two tortoises, which we could not bring ourselves to kill, and a few hundred tiny fish and shrimps.

Further downstream, we moored alongside a broad stretch of clean white sand, and again tried our luck at fishing, using the small fish as bait. This time we managed to hook some big fish but they fell off just as we were about to pull them out of the water. So much for our survival skills. Two men and their dogs approached and stayed at a safe distance, checking us

out. There was no hostility in their manner and they soon went away. We felt safe. The people at the barrage had told us we were now out of dangerous territory. We had seen several groups of people on the banks during the day, watering their animals or cutting reeds for thatch, and they had taken no notice of us.

Hans and I gathered a pile of driftwood and we lit a fire as the sun was setting. Kris fried the fish and the shrimps, and we ate them with boiled rice, lying on the warm sand beneath a clear sky ablaze with stars. There was no need for words; our dreams had come true. Udo played his flute softly, and distant jackals howled the call of the wild.

. . .

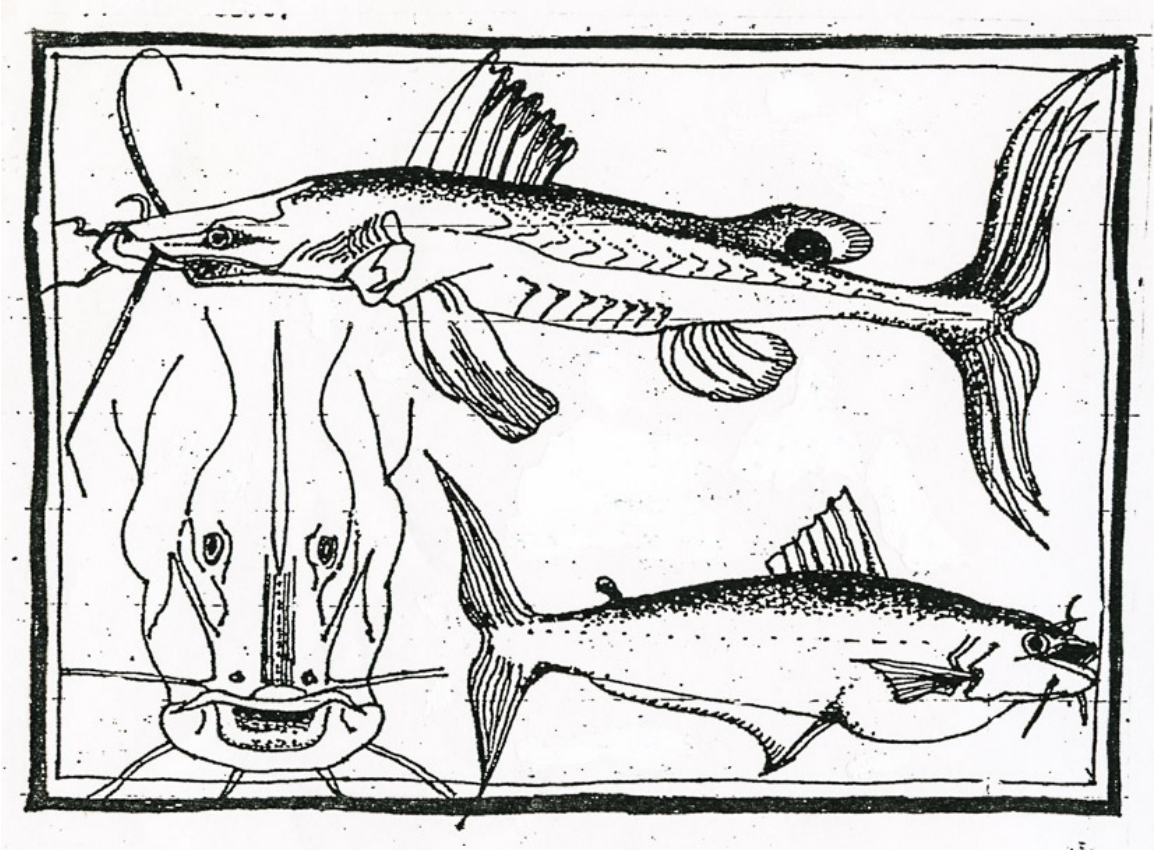
Day after day we would row into midstream, ship the oars, and allow *Tao Indus* to find her own way south. Garrey and I looked at each other and wondered why our lives had taken so long to reach this point. We discussed future trips in *Tao Ganges, Tao Amazon, Tao Mekong*, and decided to spend the remainder of our lives sailing down the great rivers of the world.

One morning we saw a large vessel the same faded brown colour as the water, the banks, and everything around us. On the deck were two similarly coloured pyramids. Coming closer, we saw it was a ferry, powered by two men placing long poles onto the river bottom and then walking the length of the gunwale from bow to stern, where they would lift the poles, return to the bow, and repeat the procedure. The pyramids turned out to be camels squatting on their haunches, heads lifted in haughty pose, chewing the cud and pretending they were not frightened. We passed silently by, ignored by the boatmen and receiving disdainful glances from the camels.

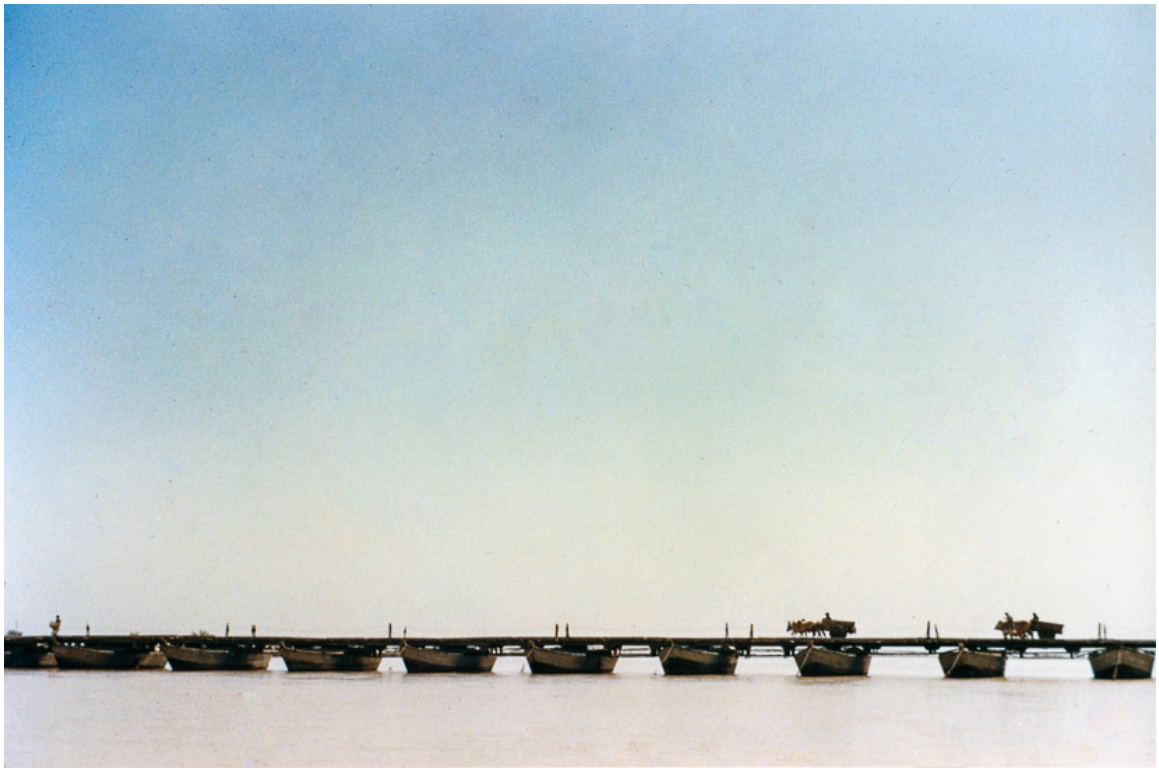
Although we made good progress that day, I was unable to enjoy the pleasure of swimming and eating because I had a high fever and severe diarrhoea. We tied up beside another pristine sandbank in the late afternoon and Garrey went upstream to try fishing while I lay exhausted on the sand, sipping boiled water to avoid dehydration. My energy and appetite were so depleted that, to Garrey's astonishment, I could not muster any interest in the landing of, or eating, our first fish. It was a strange creature that looked like a cross between a catfish and a shark. We caught two more fish the next morning and it seemed we had now established our main source of food.

We were close to Dera Ismail Khan, and by midday we reached the boat bridge, which presented us with a new problem. Our cabin was a few inches too high to fit beneath the lowest beams of the bridge. Not wanting to dismantle it, we began working our way underneath the bridge by rocking the boat from side to side, gaining a small distance with each shift of weight. Just as we were in the middle, a loaded bus passed overhead and threatened to push us beneath the water. Our shouts went unheeded but fortunately no damage was done and we were not sunk. We emerged from beneath the bridge with relief and continued down river, along the channel on the right that we knew would take us to Dera Ismail Khan.

We moored beside a road about half a mile from town and, leaving Garrey to take the first eight-hour shift at guarding the boat, the rest of us headed off to the hotel, and food. My appetite was returning and I eagerly anticipated the menu.



LESSONS ON THE RIVER



Boat-bridge across the Indus

We took turns at guarding the boat. The day shifts were beautiful, the stillness punctuated only by birdcalls. Young boys sometimes came aboard, taking everything in with wide eyes. The nights, however, were torture as clouds of mosquitoes made sleep impossible. We had not encountered mosquitoes on the main river, but the backwaters were their breeding ground. I didn't know if malaria existed in the area, but I gave everybody anti-malarial tablets just in case.

'Look, quails. And only 50 paisa each.' We were in the bazaar shopping for supplies. 'Just like Jellile's, but they can't be very brave. A good fighting quail costs 1,000 rupees.'

I bought one and presented it to Kris. 'Here, company for you, and she can be our mascot.'

Kris laughed and accepted the quail in a cloth bag supplied by the mystified shopkeeper. 'We'll call her Mrs Q. I hope she gets along with Perry.' Perry was our rubber penguin mascot.

There was no sugar anywhere in the bazaar. Rice, flour, and vegetables were easy to find, and there was an abundance of mandarins and guavas. The flavours of these two fruits combined perfectly, and we bought many in order to keep the dreaded scurvy at bay.

The time had come to say goodbye to Udo. He wanted to explore the Sulaiman Mountains to the south-west. We told him to stop at Jellile's place, the village of Tankh, which was on

his way. The battered old bus carried him away into the desert and we were never to hear of him again.

With our food stocks complete, our student friends saw us off early one afternoon. As *Tao Indus* glided past the grassy bank where we had listened to the skylarks while Jellile said his prayers, we fell silent, thinking about what had happened since then, and the ease with which our plans had materialised.

'Hans,' I asked, 'do you think the way things have gone so well is because we are following the Tao?'

'It could be, I don't know. There are things such as destiny and karma,' he replied.

'Or maybe just good luck,' my rational mind added.

'What is good luck?' asked Hans with a smile.

'It seems to me,' said Kris, 'that we are actors in a play and the script has already been written.'

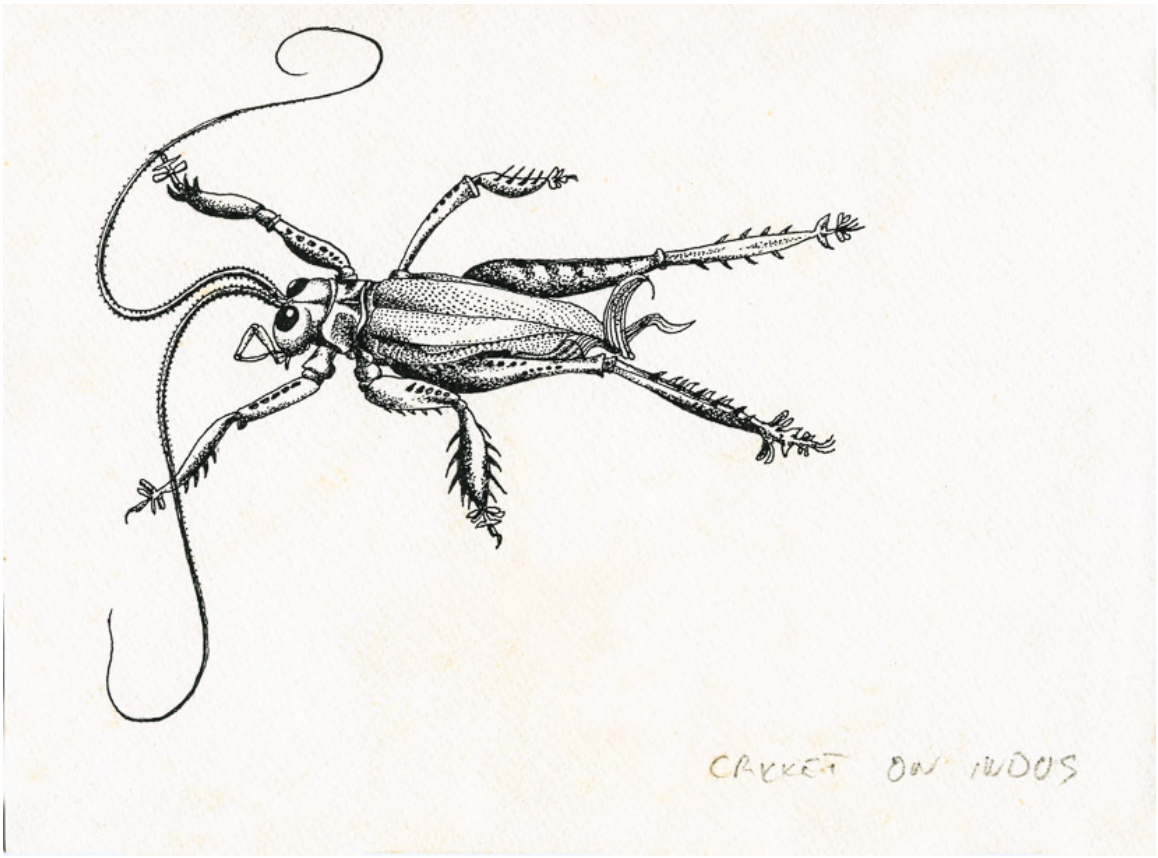
'Who wrote the script?' asked Garrey. 'I think it's because we are living in the moment without letting the past or the future interfere, just as Gurdjieff taught.'

I reflected on Garrey's comment. The ache of loneliness in my heart hurt more when I dwelt in the past or imagined a future. And no event on the river, no matter how wonderful, could ever erase that pain. *Can I ever live in the moment*? I wondered.

. . .

Our attempts to catch fish once again proved fruitless, so we lit a fire to cook dinner. A family of desert people passed by with their flock of goats, and a circle gathered around us. A young girl put her listless, dehydrated baby in my hands. It had pneumonia. I showed her how to spoon-feed the baby with boiled water, and to give penicillin mixed with her own breast milk. Grandmother, watching closely, sent a boy away with our saucepan. He returned with a full pan of fresh goat's milk. Payment rendered. But that wasn't enough. Another boy was sent to the water's edge to bring three triangular wedges of dried mud. A man took our cooking pot off the burning sticks and placed the pieces of mud around the fire. Then he sat the pot in perfect balance above the flames. So simple! What use was our Western technological superiority if we did not know how to make a cooking fire? The family moved on, leaving us to enjoy our gourmet meal of rice, vegetables, and lentils flavoured with spicy garam masala. Tea made with fresh goat's milk rounded it off.

The only sounds were the cries of night creatures and the soft hiss of sand falling into the water as the Indus eroded banks it had deposited the previous year. Each night the river level rose an inch or two in response to the spring thaw that had begun many miles north in the Himalayas.



One morning we took microdots and settled into comfortable places, waiting for the show to begin. Insects and skylarks provided the music. As the sun rose, and our minds rose even higher, we slipped into the water and floated alongside *Tao Indus*. Abandoned by her crew, she looked like the *Marie Celeste*; a strange sight for anyone who might happen to see the boat float by.

Back on board, we passed the green edge of a wheat field. Date palms gently arched over thatched huts and colourfully dressed people tended their animals and fields. The men were tall and slender, dressed in bright shirts and turbans of their tribe. The women shed their veils and exuberantly laughed and joked with each other.

Due to the rising water level, giant whirlpools greedily devoured the sandy banks. We'd been caught in one before that sent us into a sickening spin. Now, we remained at a safe distance and watched in awe. Eating into the loose sand of a ten-foot bank, a whirlpool was causing a continual flow of sand and stalks of green wheat into the river. As the field broke up, clouds of insects rose into the air, to be snapped up by scores of birds, mainly black-capped terns, wheeling around in the sky. Everywhere else, the river and countryside were their usual placid selves, but here we were viewing the apocalypse. The earth, together with the fruits of human labour, was dissolving into the river and the insects were dissolving into the birds.

We fell quiet and introspective as *Tao Indus* drifted away from all signs of human habitation. In tears, Hans spoke about his relationship with Gert, 'I don't know what went wrong. I gave him everything, whatever he wanted, but he stopped communicating with me.'

I was at a loss for words. I had never counselled a gay guy and I was in no state of mind to help Hans sort things out. Besides, my own thoughts were in Melbourne with Judy. Hans curled up with his head on Kris's lap and she soothed him with sisterly love. Garrey and I were incapable of switching on the feminine qualities of our minds to give Hans the attention he sought.

Everybody cheered up as we camped for the night and tried fishing. Fortunately we caught nothing. In our mellowness we could never have killed a fish. A driftwood fire kept us company as the sun descended through a sky of blood-red and turquoise. Garrey saw sinister shadows swimming across the river.

'There's something coming,' he warned.

'Yes, a hippopotamus,' declared Hans.

'Bunyips,' concluded Kris, and fell into a contagious fit of giggles.

I, of more rational mind, suggested hyenas, and the next morning we found dog-like tracks in the sand.

. . .

We lived simply, drifting, swimming, and reading. I lay on the sand, my thoughts immersed in *The White Goddess* by Robert Graves.[5] Reading his description of how the original alphabet had been treated as a precious secret, I reflected on the importance of words and communication in general. Correct communication of ideas gives creative strength, while mistaken communication is so often the cause of conflict. The common theme of a white goddess in diverse cultures fitted my growing appreciation of the wisdom of the East. Equal in our humanity, we must learn from each other and avoid cultural isolation.

In its own way, the river too was becoming our mentor. Just as life moves from one event to the next, each bend showed us something new, bringing another lesson. In the midday heat, a man appeared from the shimmering desert. Carrying his possessions, including a rifle, in a bundle on his head, he entered the river astride an inflated animal skin. He came quite close to us, and responded to our '*As'salaam alaikem'* as if we were passing each other on a London street.

Later that afternoon, after a swim, we heard the tinkling music of a herd of cattle approaching the river. The animals wore crudely fashioned bells that rang at different tones. The sound of the bells was accompanied by the lowing of the cattle. As they entered the water, the music diminished into silence. Then the leaders emerged onto the first sandbar and the bells began tinkling again. The music grew into a crescendo, and once more subsided as the herd crossed the sandbar and entered the next channel. The rise and fall of this river music was repeated as they swam to the next sandbar, and then again as they crossed to the far bank. Finally, it faded away as they disappeared into the desert. The crossing took about twenty minutes and we took in the entire performance without moving or speaking. In the absence of machines, sounds had gained a new dimension. Birdcalls, the lapping of water,

even the whisper of the river itself, were always with us. We spoke rarely and, when we did, our voices were hushed.

. . .

The wind began in the morning. By noon, we were sailing in a dust storm. The banks disappeared and the sun, almost obscured by the haze, was a diffuse ball of light that reflected off the water as a silvery sheen. With our giant sail bulging, we planed at terrific speed across a mirror-like lake. It was so exhilarating that we continued on, heedless of the occasional grinding stops that threatened to snap the mast as we ran aground. Without landmarks, and in the middle of a thick haze, it was like flying through a cloud.

As the wind died away, we drifted onto the lake formed by Taunsa barrage. Sand cliffs rising up like ochre giants were being attacked by whirlpools and massive slips were plunging into the river. Nature always reclaims her own. How long would it be before the Indus took back the nearby village itself? Oblivious to the cliff drama, the village residents were dancing to music. A festival was happening and we drifted past, unnoticed.

FAREWELL TO HANS

Fishing family on the Indus

Coming from the peace of the river, we had no desire for company, but there was no choice. At an ugly concrete building not far from Taunsa barrage we met a group of men in Western-style attire, drinking 7Up in the garden. They invited us to join them in the shade of a mango tree.

'My goodness! Where are you coming from?'

'Good afternoon gentlemen, we have just sailed from Kalabagh.'

'Surely you are joking?'

'No, see, there's our boat, and we would like to take it through the lock.'

'Yes, yes, no problem, but first we must talk.' And they offered us tea.

The barrage engineer had been entertaining his friends, a teacher, a policeman, and some others. We suffered polite chitchat, then Garrey mentioned that we needed to buy food supplies.

'Certainly, you must go in the car.' A driver and the policeman took Garrey and Kris to a nearby village.

'I'll stay here,' Hans offered, as a bottle of whisky appeared, giving life to the 7Up.

'I'll guard the boat then,' I said, and went off to examine some new varieties of plants I had seen growing near the barrage.

. . .

Night fell and the others hadn't returned. I was alone at the boat until Garrey appeared with another man.

'Sorry, things got a little out of control. Come and eat. This guy will look after our things.'

In the dining room of the rest-house, the smell of beer and cigarette smoke hung strongly in the air. Seven or eight corpulent men lounged on easy chairs. Hans was entertaining them. A servant cleared the remains of a feast and served me curried chicken and rice. The teacher passed me some charas, concerned that I should catch up on the general state of inebriation. Memories of Mr Big were still painfully clear and Garrey and I held back from the whisky and beer. Hans did not have the same reservation. He was dancing with the nawab, a man of high importance in the district. Whether Hans was making a fool of himself or the nawab wasn't clear, both were very unsteady on their feet. Hans saw the disapproval on our faces and broke away. Like a naughty boy, he sat next to Kris, who supported him once again with her gentle empathy.

. . .

The engineer opened the lock seven hours behind schedule. Too late to sail, we secured *Tao Indus* below the barrage and accepted an invitation to another party. The nawab and several wealthy men, *big guns* as they proudly called themselves, had come to see the foreigners. We felt repulsed by their arrogance and clumsiness, but had no option but to accept.

'How can they live so close to the river and yet not be affected by its power and serenity?' I wondered.

'The servants are cool, they know where we're at,' Garrey replied.

At first light, we shared a pot of tea with the cool servants and then sailed away. It was good to be in control of our lives again, but we were not achieving harmony among ourselves. The Tao continued to elude us. We were expecting to hold it in our hands, like a piece of charas, but it was not like that. Among the crew, only Kris had good communication with Hans. Subconsciously, Garrey and I were excluding him; the worldly ways of Amsterdam did not match our Australian attitudes. We were too critical. We all had problems. Garrey and Kris had to work on themselves and their relationship, and I was far too attached to them both. As much as I enjoyed travelling with them, we needed to separate. I had to face up to and solve my own hang-ups alone. I realised that our journey was only just beginning: each of us would have to find reality in our own way.

. . .

The next town downstream was Dera Ghazi Khan, with another boat-bridge that we expected to meet in two or three days of easy sailing. The Indus, however, had more lessons in store. The light grew dull, lightning played in the distance, and sandy banks constantly collapsed into whirlpools. Too dangerous to tie up there, we continued downstream until dark. On a flat promontory we moored *Tao Indus* safely away from whirlpools. Garrey and Kris slept on board while Hans and I settled down on the sand dunes about thirty yards from the boat.

I awoke to the roar of a sandstorm. Continuous lightning lit the sky but I could see nothing through the sand. I groped my way towards the boat. It was gone. I called out to Garrey and Kris but it was useless, I could hardly hear my own voice above the wind's howl. With a sense of dread, I crawled back to my sleeping bag. Hans was still asleep, no point in waking him.

In the morning the wind had dropped. I lay still for a while, wondering what had happened to Garrey and Kris. Hans arose, mystified by the sand covering his sleeping bag. He went to the water's edge and came running back.

'Ade, the boat's gone.'

'It's been gone for hours, you missed a hell of a storm.' I shook the sand out of my hair.

'Where are they?'

'The mooring broke loose in the wind, they must be downstream somewhere. Let's go find them.'

My confidence that Garrey and Kris could handle most situations was tinged with fear that they had been caught in a whirlpool and swamped by falling sand.

A mile downstream, we climbed a bluff and saw the river sweeping round a wide crescent of sand. *Tao Indus* was safely moored beside a boat of similar size, and Garrey was walking towards us.

'Had a bit of an adventure did you?' I asked with a relieved smile.

'You've no idea,' said Garrey. 'I got up to fix the jib sail, it was flapping like crazy, and then I noticed that the boat was out on the river. It was pitch dark and we were terrified.'

He grew silent. I pictured their fear and sense of helplessness as the boat was tossed around by waves and wind in complete darkness.

'How did you manage?'

'Kris helped me get the mast down, then I tried rowing but I had no idea which direction to go. Water was coming over the side so we just kept bailing. Thank God Claire gave us that torch when we left London. With its light I made a rough sea-anchor from the rope and spare sail. Then we just hung on to each other and waited for something to happen. We

couldn't believe our luck. The wind blew us into those shallows down there. We tied the boat fast and got some sleep."

Overcome with emotion, Hans gave Garrey a hug, 'Oh man, I'm so glad you're okay.'

'Who's that in the other boat?' I asked.

'It's a really nice fishing couple. They gave us some fantastic tea this morning and he showed me how to moor *Tao Indus* properly. We need strong poles at both ends.'

I hugged Kris who looked tired and vulnerable after the night of terror. She hugged me back.

The fishing couple were the first river people we had met, and they made us welcome. With a kind smile, the wife served us roti and curried catfish. It was a storybook ending to what could have been a calamity. I looked up and saw an ancient galleon beached high and dry.

'What's that? Noah's ark?' I asked, incredulously.

It was the home of the extended family of our new friends. About twenty people, from old men and women to newborn babies lived on it. The grey, unpainted timbers were carved in the style we had seen before. Square mirrors set into the stern were either decorations or charms to ward off evil. The barn-like space beneath the deck contained ovens, shotguns, bicycles, family photographs, chickens, and goats. In a pool beside the boat was a cane cage filled with catfish. Kris took photographs. I had run out of film; how stupid I'd been to think I could buy film anywhere along the river. We thanked our friends and said goodbye.

The boat bridge at Dera Ghazi Khan was too low to pass beneath, and nobody would open a section for us to pass through.

'We can't stay here for the rest of our lives, let's take her apart,' said Garrey in resignation. 'Help me, Ade.'

We dismantled the cabin and reassembled it on the other side of the road after taking the boat under the bridge. We could now catch a bus into town to buy supplies.

Hans volunteered to go into Dera Ghazi Khan to exchange dollars, and I took the opportunity to tell Garrey and Kris what had been on my mind.

'We have to talk about Hans. He's so unhappy and I've been thinking it might be better for him to go off on his own.'

'He told me he wanted to return to Europe,' said Kris. 'What do you think Gaz?'

'I agree it's not working, and the tension is affecting us all.'

'It won't be easy, but I'll have a talk with him when he gets back,' I offered.

. . .

The day passed and Hans didn't return. Garrey and Kris were about to go into town to look for him when a car stopped. It was the advocate who had befriended us at Taunsa barrage. The trip into Dera Ghazi Khan was abandoned as he took us to meet his friend, the engineer in charge of the boat-bridge. The engineer, a big man with a wide moustache, entertained us with dubious stories of his wrestling and hunting prowess. The advocate said he had caught wild pigs with his bare hands. We drank Four Feathers whisky mixed with 7Up, and his servants brought us rice and curried meat.

Hans returned on the first bus in the morning. No banks would change dollars but he had sold his portable radio for 200 rupees. When we were alone, I explained the previous day's conversation between Garrey, Kris, and myself. It was a difficult task – we were virtually asking him to leave – but luckily he had reached the same conclusion himself.

His face lit up with enthusiasm as he spoke eagerly of travelling on his own. 'The nearest place I can change money is Multan and I'd really like to go there. I can pay Garrey the rupees I owe him, all I need is the bus fare.'

We all felt relieved that the issue had been resolved amicably. Hans remained to guard the boat while Garrey, Kris, and I went shopping. The advocate showed us through the bazaar and took us to the cinema. A long epic of love, tragedy, and comedy had the audience thrilled but we were bored. The film finished after dark and we ended up spending the night as guests of the Bata shoe retailer. The next morning the man let a hog deer into the room to wake us up. We had to laugh at this novel method of being roused from slumber. After another round of the bazaar we finally managed to catch the bus back to the river.

Hans had packed his belongings and was ready to leave. Freshly shaved and wearing clean clothes, he looked unusually smart. We saw him onto the bus and arranged to meet in Karachi, at a hotel frequented by Western travellers of our ilk.

"Good luck" herons used by fishermen at their nets

TWO WEDDINGS AND AN ISLAND

Tao Indus at rest

Mrs Q, the quail, had been liberated among reeds, safe from circling hawks, and we were drifting towards Mithankot. As *Tao Indus* eased onto the soft sand, without speaking, Garrey and I took an oar each and rowed into midstream. We made a straight course, dipping the oars in perfect harmony and then shipping them in unison. Words would have destroyed the moment; in silence, we resumed our places, fully aware of what had just happened. Perhaps we had briefly met the Tao.

'Let's stop here.' Garrey pointed to an island of pure white sand and grassy tussocks. Black-capped terns nestling in the sand were not disturbed by our presence. A pair of eagles cut through the blazing sunset, no threat to our remaining mascots Perry the penguin and a wooden parrot from the bazaar at Dera Ghazi Khan. We named our refuge Bird Island. Soon, the river would submerge the island, and its components would recombine further downstream. The Indus was showing us the way of all things.

Lit up by rays of gold, Kris summed up our mood, 'It's so beautiful, what more could we want?'

'Hmmm, a joint wouldn't go astray,' said Garrey, half joking. Our charas had run out.

Kris threw sand at him, 'You and your bloody dope.' She was also half-joking. We all laughed.

'I can't imagine doing anything *normal* ever again,' I said reflectively. 'All the crap that goes on in peoples' lives. Not only back home. Here too, people are so caught up in themselves they can't see the beauty all around them.'

'I think it should be compulsory for every house to have a sunset-viewing platform on the roof,' suggested Kris.

'And dope plants in the back garden,' added Garrey, and he received more sand from Kris.

In the fading light I was looking at my *Bartholomews Map of the Indian Subcontinent*.

'Look at this! The Brahmaputra River goes right across Tibet and down through India and East Pakistan to the Bay of Bengal. Can you imagine doing that in *Tao Brahmaputra*?'

I felt that at last our lives were in our own hands. It was to be a short-lived feeling.

. . .

At our next camp, a man appeared out of the heat-haze.

'*As'salaam aleikum*,' we called out.

'*Waleikum as'salaam*,' he responded, remaining at a distance.

'I'd better go see what he wants.' Garrey walked across the sand and spoke with the man, then returned with a smile. 'Great, we can get some milk, give me the billycan.'

He soon reappeared with a billy full of milk. 'An old man milked his goat for us, and didn't want any payment.'

Another man visited us the next morning, just as we were about to leave. 'A very good morning to you my friends,' he said in good English.

We offered him some tea.

'If you are requiring supplies you can purchase them at our village canteen.'

'Maybe he's got a point. We need some sugar and some smokes,' Garrey said.

'You two go,' I told them. 'I'll stay and watch the boat.'

Reading my book, I did not notice the man until he stopped his horse at the boat. He dismounted, the shotgun over his shoulder looking dangerous, and handed me a note from Garrey. *Ade, there's a couple of sick people here, come to the village with your medicines. This man will guard the boat. G.*

With a big smile, the man handed me the reins. She was a scrawny old mare without a saddle. Pretending I had been riding all my life, I mounted and pointed the horse in the direction the others had taken. The old girl went slowly, which was just fine by me.

I had no idea where they were. The heat-haze obscured the village, so I let the horse find its way. At a wide stretch of water there was no alternative but to cross. The water was not very deep, and on the other side was a field of wheat. My mount plunged into it, grabbing mouthfuls of ripe ears of grain with each step. The mare was so skinny that I did not have the heart to stop her from eating. She took me into the village courtyard where I dismounted with the nonchalance of a stockman and gave the reins to a boy. Garrey and Kris were sitting in the shade, drinking chai. Two men were brought to me, both going blind with cataracts. There was nothing I could do.

'This can be fixed by a small operation at the hospital.' They shrugged their shoulders in the 'useless' gesture. There was either no eye doctor or they couldn't afford it, I wasn't sure. My next patient was the village headman, reclining on a bed beside the table. He spoke some English.

'I have stomach trouble,' he said in a resigned way.

In his abdomen I felt a cancerous mass. I looked him in the eye and it was clear that he knew the problem.

'You must make peace with Allah,' I told him, and he nodded quietly.

'*Ji ha*, yes.'

The villagers offered us a meal in a mud hut with a thatched-grass roof.

'Please, you must stay the day with us,' they cajoled, but we shook our heads. The English-speaking man was paying too much attention to Kris. We returned to the boat alone, to swim and cool off.

. . .

In the late afternoon the man was back.

'You must come pig-shooting with me.'

'Sorry man, we're leaving early tomorrow and wish to rest.' Our patience was wearing thin.

He didn't listen. First thing the next morning he was back with another man and a horse. They gave us more fresh milk.

'*Sahib* and *memsahib*, now you must honour us at a wedding party.'

'Take our congratulations, we're leaving now.'

'The village headman says you must come,' they insisted.

'Looks like we can't get out of this one,' Kris murmured. 'We'll make it as quick as possible.'

'Okay, and I can buy some rice at the store,' agreed Garrey. They left with Kris mounted on the horse, showing her prowess as a rider.

Near the village, the men said they would take Kris to the home of the bride and Garrey should go on to meet the groom. Uneasy about this arrangement, Garrey agreed nevertheless. His concern increased when he found nothing happening at the village. He bought the provisions and was relieved to see Kris coming through the fields on the horse.

'Come on, let's go,' she said urgently.

'What about the wedding feast?'

'I'll tell you when we get out of here.'

She bid a hasty and unfriendly goodbye to the villagers and she and Garrey set off towards the river.

'Kris, what happened back there?'

'Nothing, thank goodness. As soon as you were gone they propositioned me. I wouldn't get off the horse and I mentioned the name of the advocate at Dera Ghazi Khan.'

'Did they touch you?'

She shook her head. 'I quoted the Koran, about how they should give protection to travellers. Then I threatened them with the wrath of Allah. They backed off pretty quickly. Then I grabbed the reins and rode off.'

. . .

I had spent a lazy morning reading. The moment I saw their faces it was clear that something had gone wrong and, as we set sail, they told me the story. We thought about what might have occurred and realised we could trust nobody. The culture gap was just too great.

We made little progress that day, just far enough to find an isolated place to stop for the night and try fishing. As usual, we caught nothing to add to the vegetables and rice, our normal fare. Sometimes Kris made chapatis, and we still had plenty of mandarins and guavas, but there was a distinct lack of protein in our diet and Garrey and I were getting very thin.

A stowaway had boarded at one of our previous stops. We tolerated Mr Rat until he made the fatal mistake of feasting on our precious guavas. A trap baited with roti soon brought the rodent to his doom. We felt terribly guilty as his corpse floated along in the water beside us.

. . .

My *Bartholomew's* was surprisingly accurate. It showed that we were approaching the conjunction of the Indus with two other great waterways, the Sutlej and the Chenab. The Indus itself has its source on the northern slopes of Mt. Kailash in Tibet. The Sutlej arises

from a lake on the southern slopes of the same mountain, and the Chenab comes from the mountains of Kashmir. In anticipation of this meeting of the rivers, we took microdots and settled into comfortable positions on deck to observe the passing parade.

The river flowed in a vast crescent. We seemed to be caught in a circle, but that was the LSD playing tricks with our senses. There were not two, but scores of tributaries flowing in at right angles to the arc of the main river. Until then, we had mostly passed through desert, now there was an intense throb of life. Trees and lush grasses grew to the river's edge. Long-legged water birds probed the muddy shallows for lunch, parrots screeched in the trees, and flocks of ducks rose into the air. A huge snake dropped into the water from a tree, a luckless bird in its jaws.

Basking on half-submerged logs were hundreds of tortoises, their shells looking just like the helmets of German soldiers. We were all thinking the same thing when Garrey turned and said, 'Don't look now but we're surrounded by Germans.'

Our laughter rocked *Tao Indus* and sent Jerry scuttling into the water. We laughed even more.

With the spell of silence broken, and our minds in the psychedelic jetstream, we stood up to catch the faint breeze. On shore, people were harvesting wheat with sickles, laying out the sheaves in fans to dry. Silent and unnoticed, we floated by, awed by the beauty of this pastoral scene. Closer to the river a man, clearly the village idiot, began waving his arms to attract the attention of the others. They took no notice, just as they had probably always ignored his ravings. For once in his life he had seen something truly incredible, and nobody would ever believe him. The pathos touched our hearts and we waved as he stood open-mouthed, watching us float away.

. . .

A long, drawn-out cry came from the forest, repeating over and over again. I looked at Garrey.

'He's calling to us.'

'You're right, let's go further on.'

We were looking for a good place to stop for the evening. The haunting call continued. Whoever it was seemed to be following us, but the undergrowth was too thick to see. Eventually it stopped and we guessed we had left him behind. We made fast beside a bank of clean sand where heaps of driftwood promised a good fire.

Just as we finished bathing, the voice sounded again, much closer. We were reluctant to meet anyone, but made a quick decision to stay. I walked forward to meet whoever it was crashing through the undergrowth. A wild man emerged from the scrub. Dark-skinned and fiery-eyed, a shotgun on his back and an enormous bundle on his head, this fearsome apparition was completed by a white bullterrier on a lead.

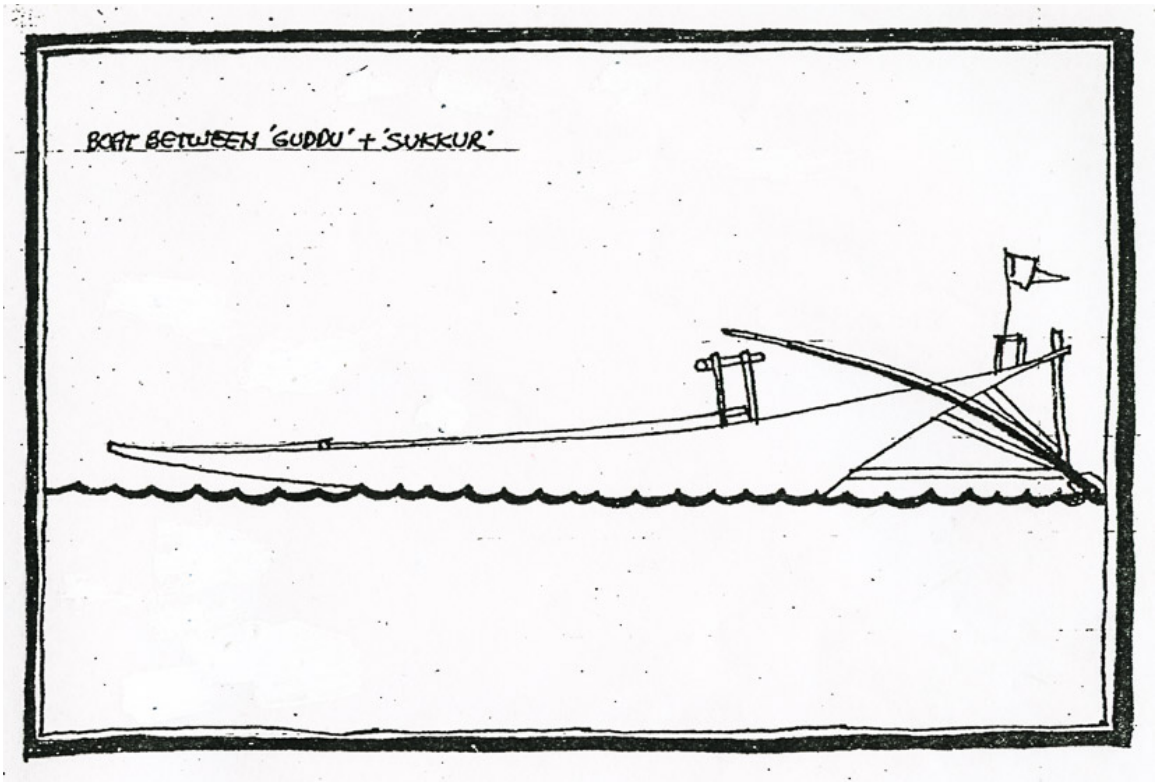
Having followed us for over an hour, the man was sweating and exhausted. I must have looked as strange to him as he looked to me and he took a few moments to regain his composure. Then he spoke in a stream of Urdu that I couldn't understand. His family gradually emerged from the forest, all carrying bundles of belongings, and I realised he wanted us to take them across the river. I could hear Kris giggling in the background. It was like a scene from *Gilligan's Island.*

There was no choice but to load the entire family, their dogs and baggage, onto *Tao Indus*. With just a few inches of freeboard, Garrey and I took the oars and pushed off, with the wild man guiding us. The setting sun reflected mauve off the water and two dolphins followed our wake.

This was a genuine wedding party. The bride, about fourteen, was wearing a shocking pink lace dress woven with gold thread and ornate embroidery. The heavy khol from her eyes ran in sweaty streams down her cheeks. She and two other women glittered with silver jewellery in their noses and ears. A young man in smart clothes and fluorescent plastic jewellery seemed to be the bridegroom. A very old man perched alone on the bow. He was living in a different time and place.

A long way downstream they finally disembarked on an open stretch of wet sand. We politely declined their offer to cook us some roti and, in single file, they set off into the darkness. We prepared food and slept on board, a far cry from the dry sand and driftwood fire we had hoped for.

Trippers contemplating on "Bird Island"



The following day we reached the boat bridge at Mithankot. Garrey and Kris took the bus into the bazaar while I remained with the boat.

'You look exhausted,' I commented when they returned.

'That's how we feel.' Kris dropped onto the deck next to me. 'People followed us everywhere, we couldn't get away.'

'Those bloody guys, grabbing at Kris. If I'd caught one I would have belted shit out of him,' said Garrey, handing me a cigarette. 'It's so different when we are on the river. Somehow we've got to keep that energy going while we're in town.'

'Yep,' I said guiltily, having had a wonderful time by the river.

. . .

'Come on Gaz,' I said the next morning, 'you and I are going into town. They'll leave *us* alone.'

'Take my letters,' Kris said, getting ready to wash her hair, 'I'll be fine here.'

We all had letters to send home. The postmaster, relishing a rare opportunity to practise his English, managed to draw out for an hour the simple task of weighing the letters and

applying stamps. And he bungled it anyway. When I arrived in Karachi, my letter home was at the *poste restante*, marked 'insufficient postage.'

The postmaster pleaded, but we rejected his invitation to spend the night at his house. Then we waited two hours in the rain for a bus. It was the first rain since we had left Kalabagh. Kris made up for the frustrations of the day with hot food she had prepared in our absence. During our meal, a man invited himself on board. We couldn't work out who he was until Garrey suddenly recognised him,

'He's the guy who helped us after the sandstorm.'

Through sign language we understood that his boat was further downstream and somehow he had learned we were at the boat-bridge. The fisherman insisted that Garrey and Kris go with him to see his wife. I remained while they endured a three-mile walk to and from the man's boat. They came back with the news that the region between Mithankot and Guddu Barrage was thick with alibabas, and our friend insisted we sail together as he knew the people on the river. We would be safe in his company, so he said.

. . .

A light breeze took us to the rendezvous point, and we sailed together for a few miles. When a headwind prevented any further progress, we entered the shelter of a tributary where many boats similar to our own were already moored. The fishing community greeted our friends, who took obvious pleasure in showing us off.

We shared a meal with the fishermen and, as the wind was still too strong, Garrey asked them to show us how they used their drum-shaped fish traps. Kris stayed behind as we accompanied a group of men and boys inland, following the edge of a lagoon. Having walked a long way past several deep pools that should have contained catfish, we became suspicious.

'What's going on with these guys? There should be fish here,' I said to Garrey.

'Yes, it's weird. I'm worried about Kris.'

The fishermen stopped to talk with a group of men tending a flock of goats.

'Hey, hippie,' a shifty-looking goat herder called out, mocking Garrey for his long hair. Another pointed at the beads around my wrist, and made an effeminate gesture, much to the amusement of the others.

'You are Muslim?'

'No we are not.'

'Why not?' he asked in a distinctly aggressive tone.

'This is a trap, I've got to find Kris,' said Garrey and he quickly headed back to the boats, taking a shortcut over the sand dunes.

Convinced that the fishermen had deliberately separated us from Kris, I waited just long enough to appear casual and then followed. The hot sand scorched my feet, giving me an excuse to run without appearing to be afraid, but we were not pursued. At the boat I hardly had time to cool my feet in the water before Garrey cast off. Kris, too, had become suspicious at the way the women invaded our boat and eyed our possessions.

The fleet followed us and again we made little headway into the wind. When the fishing boats pulled into a safe inlet, we tied up on the main river. Not trusting anybody, we wanted to be free to push off at a moment's notice if necessary. The fishing couple joined us and we cooked the catfish they gave us. I left the group in order to catch up on my sleep, while the fisherman took Garrey for a walk.

'Children?' The fisherman's wife asked Kris as they washed plates in the river.

'No, we have not been blessed by Allah.' It was easier than explaining the Western concept of not having kids until later.

'We too have not been blessed by Allah,' the woman confessed. Then she surprised Kris by suggesting that they swap husbands for the night in the hope of conceiving children. Being childless is a dreadful stigma in a Muslim country. Meanwhile, the fisherman was having a similar conversation with Garrey.

'It was amazing,' Kris told me later. 'To even talk about sex and babies is taboo. And to entertain the thought of doing it with foreigners is really out of character. But they were so desperate.'

'Well, they could have asked *me*,' I said with a smile.

. . .

The lock at Guddu barrage was easily negotiated and we tied up a mile downstream. At the bazaar, Garrey held up our last rupees and asked, 'What's it to be, veggies or charas?'

'Silly question,' I replied. 'But at least buy those eggs.' I pointed to a stall with three small chicken eggs in a nest of straw.

The eggs and the charas sustained our bodies and minds, and the campfire blazed warmly.

'I tell you,' I said, addressing the stars and anybody else who might be listening, 'people who live in artificial environments are deprived. Our minds have evolved over millions of years experiencing Nature; we have a psychological need to live in the open. We *need* to see, hear, smell, taste, and touch the wild. I think experience of Nature is an essential vitamin for the mind.'

'Yep, you're right,' said Kris, Garrey, and the stars. And the shrill cry of a plover sent ripples of healing energy through our minds.

'Did you hear that? It's the call of the wild.'

There was only one flaw in my contentment: loneliness. I needed Judy like my body needed its heart.

. . .

Three days of drifting. We had given up fishing, the fruit and vegetables had finished, and we were living on rice and chapattis.

'Oh God, look at that, it's a map of Australia,' Kris commented as she produced another chapatti.

'I don't care what they look like, they taste just fine.' Garrey dipped the chapatti into a mug of tea and devoured Queensland.

We had lost the main river. The Indus was now so vast that the side-channel we followed was bigger than the entire river had been when we set out. Sand flats had been replaced by high wooded banks and well-cultivated fields. Teams of bare-chested men were felling trees by the water and loading the logs into boats. They stared at us in curiosity and we began to feel uneasy. The Punjabis had warned us about the people of the Sindh, but we knew their opinion might come from ethnic rivalry and paid scant heed to their words. Nevertheless, as an open boat with many people on board pulled out and began to gain on us, Garrey and I took the oars and rowed strongly. We had taken microdots and the associated paranoia transformed them into a boatload of pirates. For a while it seemed they would overtake us but we drew away and they either gave up the chase or reached their destination. Our mood brightened with the appearance of a beautiful girl dressed in rainbow-coloured clothes. She was standing beside a boy eating watermelon while sitting cross-legged upon a buffalo. It was a vision from paradise.

'What's that noise?' Garrey asked in puzzlement.

A sound coming from the fields had grown even louder than the throb of cicadas. Suddenly, we burst out onto the main river and the source of the mystery sound was revealed. A boat, bigger than any we had seen before, was sailing upstream. The noise came from waves hitting the bow and the strong southerly breeze that whistled through the rigging. The sail was like our own but huge, easily driving the boat against the current. The crew of this majestic galleon barely gave us a glance as they passed by. The Indus was now so wide that we could hardly see the far bank.

Vessel on the Indus

Sukkur was close. At first light we joined a fleet of boats loaded with baskets of fruit and vegetables, all headed for market. We approached one that was almost sinking beneath a load of watermelons. The people on board were apprehensive at our strange appearance and we could not understand their questions.

'English,' Garrey called out and, pointing downstream, 'Sukkur.' Having summarised our story in two words, he then pointed to the watermelons and offered them the silver rupee I had hoped to retain as a keepsake.

Reluctantly, they gave us a melon. As we drew away, an old lady beckoned us over and without saying anything handed us another melon. This grandmother, sitting at her special place on the prow, had observed the proceedings without uttering a word. Her authority as head of the family was unmistakable, and her kindness melted our hearts. She had seen that we belonged to the family of the Indus.

Devouring great crescents of sweet, red flesh, we continued to drift southwards. On the horizon, something grey and dome-shaped floated above the mirage.

'It must be a tree,' I suggested."

'Nope, it's a Ferris wheel,' said Garrey. Kris agreed, but they were both stoned. As we pondered this profound question, the crew of another boat waved us over. We rowed towards them and, with friendly smiles, they took our rope and drew us alongside. We exchanged stories as best we could.

'*As'salaam aleikum*.'

'*Wa aleikum salaam*.'

'*Ap kidher ke hai*?' the boatman asked.

'What's he saying?' Garrey asked Kris.

'I think they want to know where we're from,' she replied.

'Kalabagh,' Garrey pointed upstream; 'Sukkur,' pointing downstream. He was a brilliant communicator.

'*Acchaa*.' The boatman looked puzzled. To meet three long-haired foreigners on the river was one thing. To comprehend our voyage all the way from Kalabagh was something else. With true Islamic hospitality he gave us cigarettes, more watermelons, and handfuls of freshly harvested tomatoes and cucumbers. Then the women served us fresh roti with a dish of tomato and aubergine cooked in delicious spices. It was our first proper meal in days. The children quickly overcame their shyness and came aboard *Tao Indus*.

Although the wind wasn't strong, the boatman indicated that we would have to seek shelter. He had seen signs of an impending storm. He was right. As soon as we reached the shore, a vicious wind came howling from the south. The fleet had pulled in all along the bank. The wind blew for an hour and then abated, as if on schedule. I joined the men and boys in the water, towing the boat along the western bank with ropes tied to the top of the mast. Others remained on board and pushed against the sandy bottom with long poles. It was a great game for the kids, and for me too. With my long legs I could easily stand deeper than the others. The boatman sent off one of his sons who returned with a packet of K2 cigarettes and some matches. He handed these to Garrey. How did he know we had run out of cigarettes two days before?

Progress was slow and one of the men began a song, which the others took up. Great vessels under full sail headed upstream. Beneath a purple sky, shafts of saffron light lit up the timeless scene.

'Look at that,' said Kris as the sun set into the water in front.

'Look at *that*,' said Garrey as the full moon rose out of the water behind us.

Date palms tossed their heads in the wind, strings of coloured lights cascaded from minarets and, on an island, was a Hindu temple with white stairs descending to the water and covered in bougainvillea that glowed scarlet in the moonlight.

The Indus had bidden us farewell with a windstorm just as she had greeted us on that first day in Dera Ismail Khan. We were now in the hands of her people; their kindness and respect towards strangers of an alien culture was our final lesson. The Ferris wheel turned out to be a bridge, over which a train passed just as we went underneath. I thought of my train journey that had crossed that same bridge just a few months ago.

The young doctor who had arrived from London would never be the same again.

Myself, Garrey, Kris, and Pakistani friend, Sukkur

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

Our journey came to an end in Sukkur. Even we were beginning to accept the many warnings about bad people further south, and we had achieved our purpose. We had taken on and overcome the unknown, and now it was time to put into practice the many lessons we had learned. I wanted to return to Australia, and Garrey and Kris wanted to see India. It was time to dispose of our possessions, including *Tao Indus* herself.

We tied up among a jumble of boats bobbing on the waves. Curious visitors came on board, some to ask questions, some to offer food, others to stare in wonder. A man named Allahditta living in a mud hut on the bank pointed to our earthenware water container and said, 'Kalabagh.'

'How the hell does he know?' Garrey wondered.

Allahditta had no English, but through expressive use of his hands we learned that he was from Kalabagh and the container had the distinctive markings of the village potter. He took us under his wing and did everything he could to help. He even wanted to take us to a Punjabi movie. We firmly declined that invitation.

Garrey and Kris went to find a hotel and I remained on *Tao Indus*. Word had gone around that there was a doctor on board and a stream of patients came to see me. Most were children with infected cuts and sores, easy to clean and bandage. A young mother unwrapped her newborn baby and, with a pleading look, put it in my arms. It had a cleft palate and harelip. I had assisted in repairing many harelips in New Guinea; a relatively simple operation could rescue the child from a life as a social outcast, but there was nothing I could do. 'Hospital?' I asked quietly. She shook her head and the hope faded from her eyes. It seemed she expected the magic touch of a healer. I wished I could have obliged.

. . .

We loaded our essential belongings onto a bicycle rickshaw and headed for the Fazal hotel. Always mindful of unnecessary expenses, we took our kerosene stove to cook food on the hotel verandah. We gave our remaining utensils to an old man and woman, who promised to look after the boat.

In the heat of the day we sat at our window watching the activity in the town square. Directly below us, a fat man with a white moustache ladled out free drinks from a metal basin filled with water and a block of ice. From first light until eleven o'clock at night he served thirsty passers-by. In the middle of the day, people would be six deep around him.

Allahditta brought potential buyers to the hotel and we spent many hours entertaining and bargaining. The local boats were superior in material and construction, but we finally sold *Tao Indus* to a young man with too much money and not enough sense.

. . .

In all the years we had known each other, there had never been a bad word between Garrey, Kris, and myself. Even at times of stress on the river, nothing had threatened our friendship. But on the river I had made a decision, and now it was time to tell Garrey and Kris.

'I need to talk to you,' I told them.

Catching the tone of my voice, Garrey lit two cigarettes and passed one to me. We sat cross-legged on our charpoys.

'Sure Ade, what's on your mind?'

'It's been an unforgettable journey, so important for us all, but now I have to go on alone. This might sound crazy; I love you both but I need to live my life from my own perspective without being concerned about what either of you might think. We have so much in common, but I feel that we influence each other too much. In trying to make sense of my life and the world in general, I've noticed that I automatically adjust my perceptions to accommodate the way you see things. I need to be alone. And I think you need to be free from me. My presence limits your opportunity to work on your relationship and resolve your differences.'

I paused, they said nothing, but their hearts were with me.

'The energy of the Indus is so strong. From that point of view I have never felt so good. On the other hand, I'm really lonely. I don't know if it will ever work out between me and Jude, but I have to go back and find out. I also have to work in medicine to see if I can maintain the Indus energy in a straight environment.'

'Hey man, that's cool,' said Garrey.

'See you in Australia,' said Kris.

She hugged me, and that was it.

. . .

The train trip to Karachi was quick and uneventful. Now a seasoned traveller, I was filled with a sense of exhilaration. Afghanistan and the journey down the Indus had been charmed with good fortune. We had faced and avoided danger, and many people had gone out of their way to help us. We had seen aspects of Pakistan that few others see.

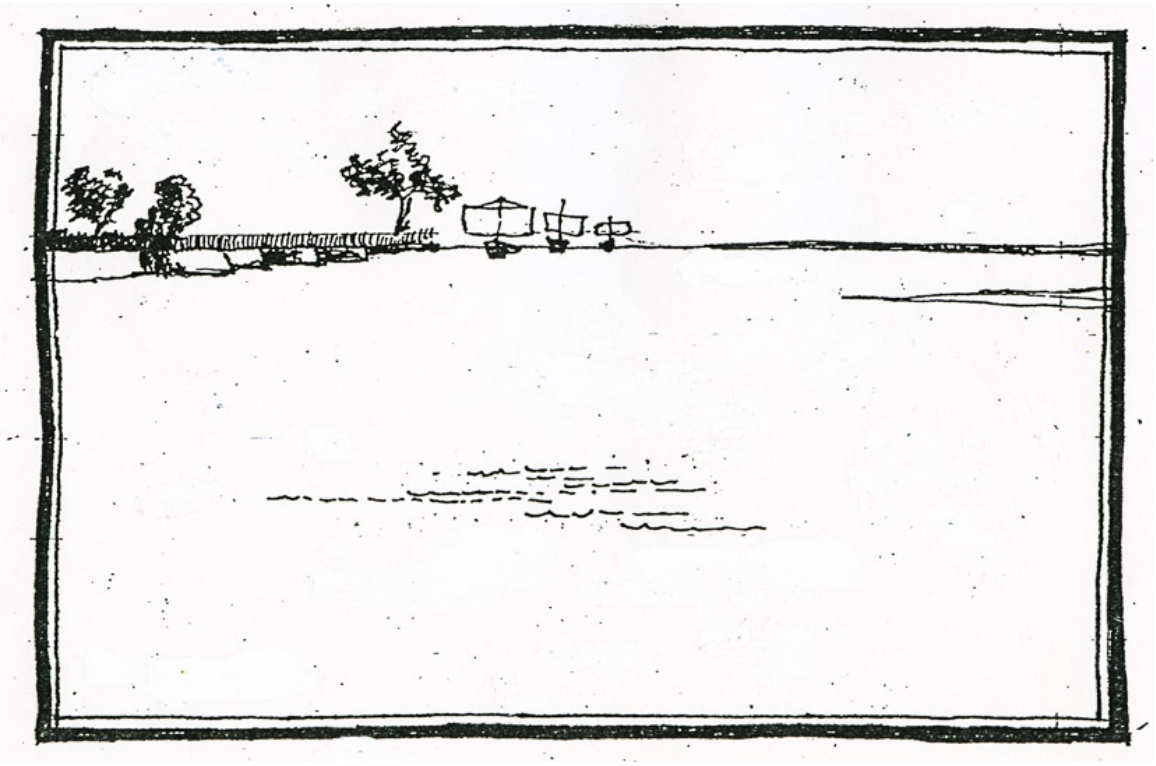
I was in love with the world.

After a shower at the hotel, I put on the shirt and baggy trousers from Kalabagh and went out into the streets of Karachi, which now appeared like home. I was changing money in the lobby of the Chevron Hotel when a busload of European tourists arrived from the airport. Pale, obese, and repulsive in comparison to the slim, tanned Pakistanis, I stared at them in horror, forgetting that, with my straggly beard, long hair, and strange garb, I must have looked pretty weird to them too. I felt like calling out, 'Hey, Mr Catchaloo.' The Pakistanis in the lobby would have appreciated it, but the Anglo-Saxon in me forbade such behaviour.

Outside the lobby, I sat on the lawn, lit a cigarette, and became absorbed in the magnificent beauty of pastel-coloured zinnias in full bloom. The hotel gardener approached and, grinning in delight, said, 'Kalabagh.'

What is it with these people, I thought, *how do they know everything*? He pointed to the stitching on the collar of my shirt. He was from Kalabagh, and it was the village style. I gave him a cigarette and tried to explain how I had come from Kalabagh to Karachi, but I doubted if he understood.

At the GPO I found a letter from my mother, as well as the letter I'd posted to her from Mithankot. Silently cursing the Mithankot postmaster, I sent this off with the correct postage and added another letter describing the remainder of the journey. Then, at the P&O shipping office, I booked a passage on the ship to Bombay, sailing the next day.



ANOTHER REALITY

Twenty Western travellers had saved a few dollars by buying deck passage instead of a cabin. But there was no space for us among the hundreds of pilgrims and workers returning to India from the Gulf. We elected a pretty girl to ask the English officers if we could camp on the vacant poop deck at the rear of the ship. It worked, and we spread out our gear on the beautifully clean wooden deck. At best, our action was elitist, at worst, it was racist, but the Indians were genuinely happy for us.

In the fading light, I stood at the port rail watching Pakistan recede into the mist. Ever since the second-mate of the *Delphic*, the ship on which I had sailed to England, had pointed out the Pole Star, it had been a symbol of constancy for me, remaining unmoved while the entire universe appeared to revolve around it. Now, it was about to disappear below the horizon. I crossed to the starboard rail and saw the Southern Cross for the first time in two years. The stars were beckoning me home. To what? Already the energy of the Indus was fading and I was feeling apprehensive. How could I explain my inner transformation? Lao Tzu had said, 'Those who know do not talk; those who talk do not know.'[6] My problem was that I didn't know what I knew.

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Why is inner experience inexpressible? The uselessness of sophistry and intellectual one-upmanship were plain enough and I'd learned that experiencing something is better than just thinking about it. But Taoism gave nothing objective to work on. And the thought of giving myself up to Tao, God, or a guru repulsed me. I wanted a logical framework to explain my experiences.

Ken Loynes, a fellow traveller on the quest for truth, joined me to look at the stars. I thought my trip down the Indus had been a significant adventure, but, with his wife and daughter, Ken had bicycled from London to Karachi, and now they were going to ride all the way across India.

'Ken,' I asked, 'after my Indus trip, how can I ever go back to a conventional life?'

'You can't,' he replied. 'After my journey I won't be able to either. The change has happened in our minds; externally we still look the same but internally we are on a different planet. The trick is to be able to function in conventional society while retaining our inner difference. Nobody will ever know.'

'But can't we help society by explaining the insights we've experienced?'

Ken looked at me and simply laughed.

I tried another approach, 'When you take LSD, do you think the psychedelic visions and the sense of harmony come from the acid, from the brain, or from within the mind itself?'

'They can't come from the drug, they have to come from the mind.'

'So the acid is like a key that opens a door?'

'Yes.'

'What is that door and where does it lead to?'

'That's what we both have to find out.'

'Then,' I said, remembering my discussion with Hans, 'you believe the mind is different from the brain?'

'Yes,' he thought for a moment. 'I think it is.'

'What *is* it then?' I pleaded.

'It's behind that door,' he replied, defeated.

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The dining room was a barred enclosure seating about thirty people, and meal times were like feeding the lions at the zoo. We ate with the other deck passengers, and now the Westerners couldn't pull any elitist strings – it was every man for himself. Through brute strength we had to fight for a place near the entrance and then rush for a seat when the gate was opened. Rice, dhal, and vegetables were sploshed onto stainless-steel trays and had to be wolfed down as quickly as possible before we were herded out to make space for the next hungry group.

. . .

Our brief crossing of the Arabian Sea ended with the appearance of the Gateway of India, a great arch built during the British Raj to commemorate the landing of King George V and Queen Mary in 1911. I felt eager to get ashore and explore this new country but, having heard tales of a psychic at the Lahore border-crossing who could spot travellers carrying dope, I felt uneasy about the small piece of hashish in my pocket. Just to be safe, and not to be wasteful, I swallowed it. Unluckily, we were delayed for two hours.

'So, you are Australian,' said the Bombay Port customs officer, who must have been wondering why I looked so happy.

'Yes, that's right sir. I'm a doctor on my way home from England.' I always played my doctor card in the presence of officials.

'Then surely you must be knowing about the cricket?'

Oh no, I thought. And the pilgrims pushed closer to hear the score of the current test match between Australia and India.

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Bombay was vibrant with new sights, sounds, smells, and women everywhere dressed in brilliantly coloured saris. So different from the drabness of Pakistan. I could have stayed a long time but, eager to get closer to Australia, I bought a third-class train ticket to Madras. If I had known what was coming I would have gone first-class, but then I would not have learned the art of survival on Indian Rail, a lesson that would stand me in good stead in the future.

On the impossibly crowded platform, a porter offered to find me a seat for five rupees. Mass hysteria greeted the train as it pulled in; I just managed to keep the porter in sight as he skilfully worked his way through the struggling mass. When I caught up with him, he proudly showed me the eighteen inches of wooden bench that was to be mine for the next three days.

The Western Ghats brought relief from the intense humidity of Bombay, and I became acquainted with my fellow travellers. They were more easy-going than in Pakistan, where macho bravado had prevailed. Portly mothers shared with me the food they had brought for their families.

Getting in and out of the door was impossible. At every stop, passengers poured out the windows seeking refreshments and water to quench their thirst. Even before the train had stopped, people climbed out and rushed towards the taps. Politeness was not a survival factor. Amidst a group of men acting as though they had just crawled out of the Sahara Desert, I roared in the voice of a pucka sahib, '*Stand back, it's my turn.*' The men fell away in surprise, and I drank my fill.

People slept on the luggage racks, on the floor, and under the seat, but sleep was impossible for me. In the middle of a very hot night, two beggar girls, about seven and four years old, dressed in rags, sang a sweet melody that brought tears to my eyes. They should have been tucked between clean sheets dreaming of butterflies and flowers, but were destined to live and die on the streets. I gave them five rupees and the older girl flashed me a smile worth a thousand. The other passengers nodded in approval at my charity, but I felt disgust for the caste system that gave the poor no chance.

Belching thick clouds of smoke, the locomotive strained and wheezed across the vast Deccan Plateau of red, sun-baked earth, leading its retinue of rattling carriages filled with tired and sweating people. Bare paddy fields awaited the monsoon that would transform them into a verdant garden once more. How terrible it must be when the rains fail to arrive. The occasional palm tree offered no shade, but a roost for the crows, whose cries seemed to be in mourning for times past when jungle covered the land and protected it from the heat of the sun. A louder clickety-clack announced the crossing of yet another bridge over streams that meandered between sandbanks like miniature versions of the Indus. Casting a professional eye, I assessed the most navigable routes.

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In Madras, my feet were so swollen that I felt like a camel padding along the platform. No crowds, no hustlers, and the faint smell of salt in the air greeted me. I liked the place. A rickshaw boy took me to a hotel frequented by travellers doing it on the cheap, and I slept

until awoken by hunger in the late afternoon. While eating a mutton biryani, I met an English couple who had come from the ashram of an Indian guru named Rajneesh. Westerners were just beginning to take an interest in him, and Michael and Ruth were among his first Western students. They were wearing the regulation white trousers and shirts that preceded the orange and then the maroon garb of Rajneesh's followers. Michael had studied philosophy, he had meditated with Rajneesh, and he knew about LSD. It was another opportunity to further my enquiries.

'Michael, with regard to the psychedelic experience, does acid create the beautiful imagery that appears when you close your eyes or is it created by the brain?'

'The drug affects the brain, but I don't think the visions are created by the drug or the brain.'

'Are they visions of another dimension?'

'No, I wouldn't say that. It is more likely to be another reality.'

'Where is this reality?'

'It's in the mind itself.'

'Where is the mind? In the brain?'

'I don't think the mind can be located within any physical space.'

'Okay, you say this other reality is in the mind. We know it is associated with taking acid. Where does it come from? Is it in my mind now but I can't see it?'

'I don't know. Perhaps it is created by the mind, or perhaps it *is* mind. I'm pretty sure that meditation is the way to resolve your questions.'

I cringed at the thought. The mere word *meditation* conjured up a picture of gurus and devotees, and I wasn't ready for that. I trusted my scientific worldview to be a logical, if incomplete, sphere of knowledge. Whatever remained to be discovered, especially about our minds, should fit into that worldview, even if some restructuring was necessary.

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Sailing was in my blood, so I booked a passage on a ship to Penang in Malaysia. The ship carried cargo as well as scores of Indian deck-passengers. Westerners were not allowed to travel deck-class, and I knew why. Without complaint, I paid the extra cost of a bunk in a shared cabin.

The five-day journey was sheer luxury. The cabins were clean and comfortable, and the dining room served the best food in the world. We had a choice of Indian or Western cuisine, with unlimited servings and wine to wash it down. Like myself, most of my fellow passengers were lean and hungry, having been on the road for many months. There was a swimming pool, and movies on deck at night. The ship went on to Singapore and I almost

regretted disembarking at Penang, but one look at the palm-fringed harbour of Georgetown enticed me ashore.

In a cheap hotel near Chulia Street, I shared a room with an American reptile collector. This was the haunt of the travellers, where dope and opium were smoked openly, unlike Singapore where a man with long hair couldn't even get into the country. Mary and Joe, an American couple, invited us to their room for a smoke. As they listened to my story of the Indus, I took the opportunity to present my ideas.

'Taoism says that people live in disharmony with the world,' I began.

'I'll buy that,' said Mary, blonde and brown-skinned, the epitome of a Californian hippie.

'But it also says there is something called Tao, the path of harmony. If you are aware of it, you can walk along the street without being seen or noticed by anybody.'

'Man, I really dig that,' added Joe, rolling a joint of sweet-smelling grass.

Encouraged by the appreciative audience I continued, 'The problem is, as soon as you think you understand Tao, that very thought loses it. There seems to be something wrong with the action of thinking, and my big question is how can we function or even exist without thought?'

'Try this,' said Joe, and passed the joint.

As we recovered from our laughter. I went on, 'I think there's a connection between the psychedelic experience and the way of Tao. There is something else going on in the world, another reality, another way of seeing things. And it's so much better than what we think is normal. I think acid gives us a glimpse of it.'

Mary began rummaging through her pack, found a well-read book, and presented it to me. 'Have this man, it's just what you're looking for.'

The Teachings of Don Juan, by Carlos Castaneda,[7] contained the alleged field notes of an anthropologist who became an apprentice to a Central American sorcerer who used hallucinogenic plants as a means of entering another reality. His unusual story set off a controversy as to whether it really happened or was simply his own invention. Like Lobsang Rampa, an English plumber who had popularised Tibetan mysticism with fanciful tales that possessed an appealing thread of possibility – I had read his books in high-school – Castaneda's story, continued in subsequent volumes, provided an intriguing presentation of the psychedelic experience as being another reality. Later, I was to discover that the teachings of Don Juan possessed an uncanny resemblance to Buddhist teachings on the bodhisattva's path, the path to enlightenment.

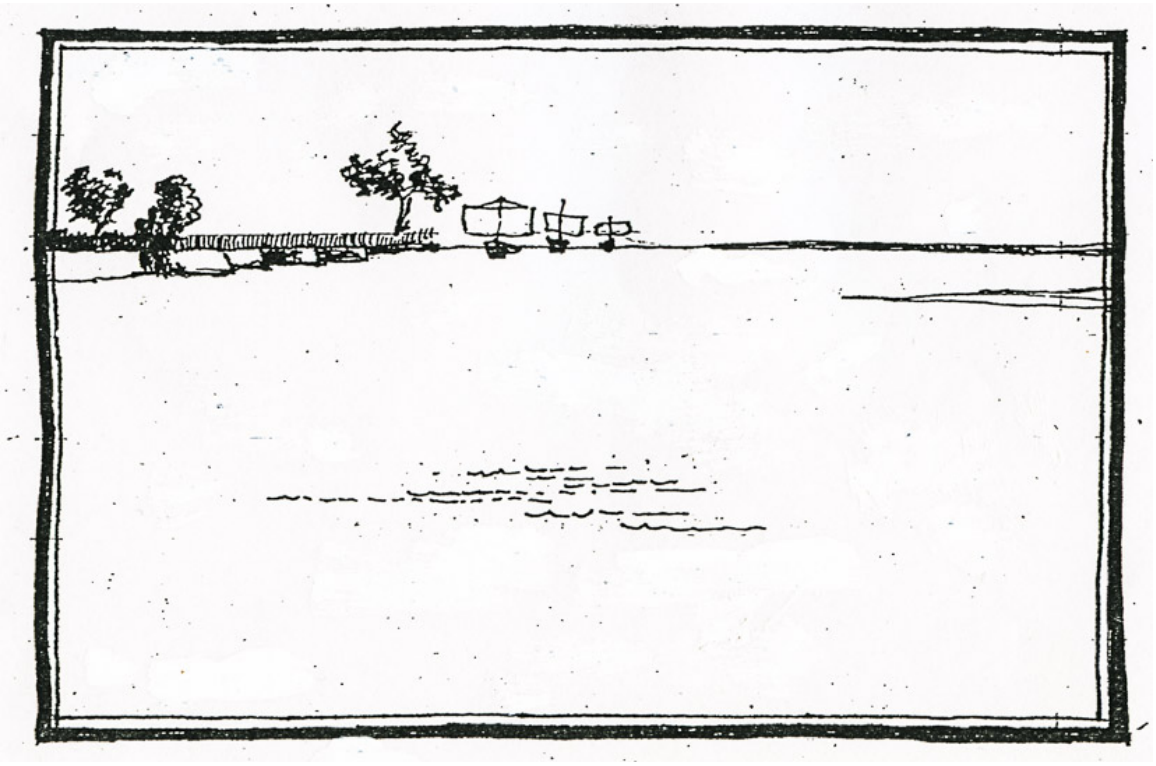
. . .

While walking around Georgetown, I came across a temple with a big statue of the Buddha in reclining pose. People were busily coming and going, bowing and making offerings of flowers and incense. By coincidence, or whatever, it was Buddha's birthday. The faces of the

worshippers radiated peace and, to my surprise, I felt comfortable and at home. Normally I would have been disgusted by expressions of devotion to a statue.

I moved from the hotel in Georgetown to a thatched hut on a beach on the other side of the island. In the shade of coconut palms, I read Castaneda's book. In the *White Goddess*, Robert Graves described gods associated with trees and cereals, and Castaneda too mentioned mysterious beings associated with plants – the peyote cactus, the psilocybe mushroom, and the datura plant. Judy and I had taken *Psilocybe* mushrooms, and Castaneda's description of non-ordinary reality fuelled my determination to unravel the mystery of that ecstatic experience.

PART TWO: CONFRONTING REALITY



THE COMING-HOME SYNDROME

'What's this then?' asked the Australian customs inspector, pouncing upon my salt crystals from Kalabagh.

'Just salt, you can taste it and see.'

He showed a crystal to another man, my appearance had convinced them they were about to bust another hippie returning from the East. They examined the crystal and regarded me with suspicion, but both the crystals and I were allowed into Melbourne.

You should have checked my mind, I thought.

. . .

'You're so brown,' said my mother, hugging me, 'and so skinny!'

'Hi dad, cool sideburns.' My father, sporting fashionable long sideburns, was the next to embrace me.

'You've acquired an English accent,' he replied, grinning widely.

My brother, sister, and brother-in-law, took their turn. They all looked healthy and happy and sported plenty of hair, also in fashion. I untied my own ponytail, no longer necessary after passing through Customs, and they joked at the curls brushing my shoulders.

'Your letters have only just arrived,' my mother remarked. 'If we had known what you were up to we would have been so worried.'

'It was safe, there was no sign of the war. The newspapers sensationalise everything,' I reassured her.

My sense of ease evaporated when we arrived home to a house filled with old friends and a welcome-home party in progress. A water-pipe primed with green marijuana was thrust into my hands and familiar faces swirled around me. A sense of alienation swept over me. Everybody had changed, especially me. Communication across a two-year time gap and an incalculable gap in experience felt ridiculous, and the dope didn't help.

'Ade,' my brother Max whispered into my ear. 'Jude's waiting for you in the back garden.'

I broke free from the crowd and went outside.

'You're so thin,' she said as we embraced.

'That's just because we ran out of food on the river, it's no problem. When can we talk? I've so much to tell you.'

'I just came to say hello, I have to go to work. I'll come back tonight.'

I walked out with Judy to her car and watched her drive away, then reluctantly returned to the party. I tried to communicate with my friends by resurrecting a personality that should have been buried forever. It was a mistake because it made me lose touch with the person who had just emerged from the Indus trip.

. . .

That night, Judy and I lay on the floor in front of an open fire. I tried to explain to her the ideas that had germinated in my mind on the Indus, but I was saying too much and my thoughts came out jumbled.

'Ade, you sound like a Guru,' she said.

That was the last thing I wanted to sound like. As I slowly realised how far apart we had grown, I began to wish I had come straight home from England and not even gone to the East.

Over the next few weeks my self-confidence fell apart and I was sucked into a vortex of depression. There was no way that I could live up to my newly cultivated ideal of carefree spontaneity. Trying to conceal my unhappiness, and an underlying fear that I was going crazy, I became acutely self-conscious in everything I said or did. Later, I learned that the experience of disorientation and depersonalisation leading to depression was common among people returning after an extended stay overseas. I called it the 'coming home syndrome', and even diagnosed it in one of my patients. I was in its clutches and it was going to take a long time to work my way out.

Judy and I spent a weekend at the cottage by the sea where Garrey, Kris, and I had taken LSD and listened to *Sergeant Pepper's* so long ago. We took microdots, but it didn't work out. Trying to revive the past was impossible, there was no niche for me in present-day Melbourne, and my dreams for the future were shattered. I was lost in time. I knew my unhappiness was self-created, but that knowledge didn't help; it only made it worse. With no foundation of logic, the vague ideals I had constructed on the Indus were falling apart. And I understood that the only way forward was to redefine my purpose in life by forgetting the past, finding a job, and giving up drugs.

. . .

Working for a locum agency was the first step. Each night I cruised the suburbs with a driver and a two-way radio, attending emergency calls for general practitioners. This would tide me over until a hospital appointment came up. My plan was to widen my experience in fields useful for work somewhere in the tropics – a small hospital where I would need to be both physician and surgeon.

My mother, Lorna, showed me the morning newspaper. 'Look, here's an advertisement for a doctor experienced in tropical medicine to work in New Caledonia.'

The job suited both my qualifications and my wanderlust, but I felt it would be running away. I knew I wasn't crazy and I was determined to stay in Melbourne to rebuild my self-confidence exactly where it had fallen apart.

'Mum, you've just got me home, why do you want me to go away again?' I asked, though I knew why.

'You're unhappy.'

My return had made her so happy, but she was willing to give that up for me. Lorna and I had always been close friends and we could discuss any subject without reservation.

'I came back happy and clear in my direction, now it's become meaningless. I feel it is important that I get my life back together again here in Melbourne.'

'I saw your peacefulness in the car coming home from the airport. Shouldn't you just leave and find that happiness again somewhere else?'

'It's more than just unhappiness. I can't tell whether it's me going crazy or the whole of Melbourne is insane. People pretend to be happy but there is so much misery. When I'm working, the houses and gardens look pretty from the outside, but once you go in the front door it's another story. Last night I treated a woman with a cut tongue. Her husband, who did all the talking, said she had fallen over. It was bullshit, he had obviously hit her. The house was full of anger. When I said she should go to hospital I thought he would beat me up as well.'

Lorna's face saddened at the thought of domestic violence. Then she brightened up, 'But there's also a lot of happiness in families,' she pointed out.

'I know mum, that's what I want for myself too. But it's not working out with Jude, and I'm just like everybody else, pretending to be happy while I'm unhappy inside. I don't know what the problem is, but leaving Melbourne would be running away. I have to sort it out here.'

So I stayed.

. . .

I entered a general practitioner training scheme, which began with a six-month appointment at Larundel Psychiatric Hospital. On my first day I met the therapeutic unit of psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and nurses in charge of about sixty men and women with sub-acute problems such as schizophrenia, depression, and personality disorders. David, the head psychiatrist, showed me the routine of patient care. He was young, friendly, and open, and I looked forward to working with him.

That afternoon I received a phone call from Kate.

'Mum's sick. The kitten was run over and when Lorna went to it she collapsed with a bad headache. The doctor said it was migraine and has given her something.'

The story didn't sound right, and I drove home with increasing concern. I found Lorna in such distress that I gave her an injection to ease the pain.

'I'm dying,' she said.

'Mum, it's just a migraine, the pain should go away with that injection.' But I wasn't convinced.

'How will Kate and Chris manage without me?' My sister and her husband had recently moved into a new house with their young son, the first grandchild.

'You'll be okay and they can look after themselves, try and sleep.'

Despite my reassurances, I was worried. Her blood pressure was normal and there were no signs of neurological damage, but I feared it might be a cerebral haemorrhage. She drifted into a light sleep and I went outside to bury the kitten. Back inside, Kate was cooking dinner.

'Kate, I think this is serious. We might have to send her to hospital.'

I heard a short cry and ran to Lorna's room. She was unconscious. I called a friend at St Vincent's Hospital and he arranged for an ambulance. As the stretcher was being carried out of the house, Jules arrived home. He had been lecturing in the city and we had been unable to contact him.

'What's happened?' he asked.

'It's Lorna, she's had a stroke and we're taking her to St V's.'

He went pale and dropped his briefcase.

'No, I'm the old one. I should get sick, not her.'

I put my arm around his shoulders, 'Come on, we'll go with her in the ambulance, Max will bring the others in the car. We can handle this.'

On the way to the hospital, the ambulance officer tried to remove Lorna's dentures but her jaws were held tight. I spoke loudly in her ear, 'It's alright, it's Ade,' and she immediately relaxed her mouth, allowing me to remove them.

In the Casualty Department my family gathered in the doctors' tea-room. The angiogram showed a ruptured cerebral aneurysm. There was nothing the neurosurgeon could do. I took Jules to the ward; she was peaceful and breathing normally, but still unconscious. I knew she would never wake up, and began preparing for what was to come.

Lorna died early the next morning; she was only fifty-two. My tears had been shed during the night and, in a state of numbness, I drove Jules to the hospital to say farewell.

Lorna's intelligence, sense of humour, and love had earned her a wide circle of friends and she had no enemies. There had been no generation gap between my parents and their four

children. We shared our hopes, our frustrations, and our friends with them. People commented that they had never seen so many young people at a funeral. At the wake, marijuana-smoking flower children mourned side-by-side with the alcohol-drinking conservative side of the family as we played Lorna's favourite song over and over again – John Lennon's 'Imagine'.

My younger brother Guy phoned from a police station near the airport. He and his girlfriend, Alice, had built a tree-house on a beach near Darwin and a community of hippies soon grew around them. The people of Darwin weren't ready for people living in trees, and when the hippies took Guy to the airport to fly home to his mother's funeral, the police contacted their Melbourne counterparts. Upon arrival, he was arrested for an unpaid parking fine. He had no money and I had to drive across Melbourne to pay the $20 and set him free. As I handed the money to the officer in charge I vented my disapproval of his tactics. He just shrugged his shoulders.

The day after the funeral I returned to work. I could have taken more time off but, with sorrow at the loss of Lorna now added to my general unhappiness, there was no point in delaying the process of putting my life back in shape. I was well acquainted with death, and this helped me to suppress my grief and gradually release it in private.

THE CUCKOO'S NEST

Slowly, my mood lifted; working with people whose lives were in a far worse mess than my own helped me to forget my own problems. I read Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, a funny but sad depiction of life in a psychiatric hospital. And also true. Some of our staff were straight out of the book. With my own inner pain, and a growing cynicism towards the psychiatric establishment, I became sensitive to the hurt and fear that my patients could not express.

I was keen but also naive. One Friday afternoon a schizophrenic young man requested my permission for weekend leave. I asked him what he was planning to do and, in all seriousness, he described how he was going to cut out the heart of the man who was living with his mother. Alarmed, I reported this story to David and told him I could not possibly grant weekend leave. He asked to see the patient and, after a few minutes, he emerged from the interview room saying the man could go home.

'But he's going to kill someone,' I protested.

'No he won't,' replied David with a smile, 'I made him promise not to.'

This was a lesson in psychology. I didn't mind being accused of believing in the delusions of my patients. The criticism was given light-heartedly, and I felt that overkill in sympathy was not a particularly heinous crime, especially for a psychiatrist. But then there was the quiet, well-mannered, depressed man who went home for weekend leave, murdered his wife and her lover, and jumped off the roof of his house.

Although we were surrounded by broken lives and misery, there was often a touch of humour. Once a week, the hospital staff met to discuss particularly interesting cases. One man who defied diagnosis was either crazy or a genius. Everything in his life was planned in meticulous detail; a shopping trip to the city was organised as if he were launching a space shuttle. His head was full of clocks, compasses, and prices. He worked out beforehand exactly how long it would take to walk to the station, reach the city, and do his shopping. He knew all the prices and calculated to the cent how much he would spend. He was small, neat, and spoke rapidly. The interviewing doctor asked him, 'And how do you feel about the people you meet in the street?'

'I see them as dead or alive.'

What do you mean?'

'Just like I said, they are either dead or alive.' He began to scan the room and pointed to a fat psychiatrist I didn't particularly like, 'He's dead.'

Great, I thought. Then he moved on to a pretty young doctor, 'She's alive.' And he continued around the room declaring some dead and others alive. I agreed with his judgments and was delighted at his perspicacity. When he came to me I sent a mental message, C'mon man, alive, okay? But he passed me by and made a pronouncement on the next person.

. . .

Sometimes it was both funny and sad. A woman in her twenties began telling me about her husband's violence.

'He strips me naked, Doctor, then he ties me to the bed, whips me, and rapes me with a beer bottle.'

Shocked by her stories of abuse, I returned to the nurses' station and threw the woman's file onto the table with a loud, 'Phew!'

The nurses were in fits of laughter. 'Did she tell you about her sex life?'

'Yes,' I replied, 'you wouldn't believe it.'

Again they fell about laughing.

'She loves telling those stories to the medical students, she really gets a charge out of it.'

'Shit!'

I laughed at having been manipulated once again by one of my patients. Her stories were true, but the sad side was soon to emerge. A few weeks later I had to break the news to her that her husband had locked himself and two young children in a car with a hose attached to the exhaust pipe. All three died from carbon monoxide poisoning. The wrong person had been hospitalised.

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It was election time. Two manic-depressive patients, who were peaking together, came back exhilarated after handing out how-to-vote cards for the Australian Labor Party. Being a Labor supporter, I forgave them for absconding, but had to reprimand them for fornicating in the broom cupboard. They were unrepentant.

'Doc, it's just so beautiful when we're high, there's nothing like it.'

'What about when you're down?' I asked, half envying the look of bliss in their eyes.

'Yeah, that's not so good.'

At a morning meeting, the hospital superintendent was asked whether the patients were permitted to vote. They were, of course, but there was a right-wing party, the Democratic Labor Party, that nobody liked, and the superintendent replied in deadpan fashion, 'We'll ask them who they're going to vote for. If they say the DLP we'll declare them insane and they can't vote.'

This 1972 historic election brought an end to a generation of conservative government as the 1960s revolution finally reached Australian politics. Capturing the mood of Bob Dylan's immortal line, 'The times they are a-changin,' that had united my generation against the

establishment, Gough Whitlam was swept to power under the slogan, 'It's Time!' Each day, the newspaper headlines increased our euphoria as Whitlam enacted a series of radical changes in Australian domestic and foreign policies. Most importantly, he brought an end to Australia's involvement in the insane Vietnam War. As a friend remarked on election night, 'The stars are definitely shining more brightly tonight.'

. . .

Distinguishing between orderly and disorderly thought was important in psychiatric diagnosis, but I was concerned that a wrong distinction could make a world of difference to the outlook of a patient. Once the label 'schizophrenia' was applied, patients were never again taken seriously. Without choice, they were subjected to neurotoxic tranquilisers and shock therapy, treatments whose long-term effects on the brain were unknown. For example, I once observed a psychiatrist, who liked to throw his not insubstantial weight around, interview a confused, suburban housewife. He badgered her into eventually contradicting herself, and then sent her back to the ward. Turning to the staff, he declared, 'She's nuts.'

'But you put those words into her mouth,' I protested. The woman had been reduced to tears by his bullying method of questioning, which was all a show in front of the staff.

'Don't worry, you'll learn,' he said dismissively, and made arrangements for the woman to have a series of electro-convulsive therapy treatments.

Although shock therapy sometimes produced an amelioration of symptoms, I felt it was unwarranted in this woman's case and she just needed sympathy and understanding, but I had no say in the matter. My dissatisfaction with our understanding of the mind and how it should be looked after was growing all the time. Some psychiatrists saw mental illness as predominantly a physiological disorder and others saw it as predominantly a psychological disorder. The two camps rarely agreed because, in my view, they lacked a common definition of mind and an explanation of how it functions. This was the very question I had contemplated on the Indus.

Schizophrenics, with their bizarre thought patterns and hallucinations, were promising fields of research for my investigation of what mind is. The psychiatrist R.D. Laing made a film, *Family Life*, to show how schizophrenia may arise in young people who received conflicting messages from their parents, themselves, and society. As a medical student I had read Laing's books and had assumed his views represented the cutting-edge of knowledge about schizophrenia. One of the younger medical officers organised a seminar on Laing's work, and we were both surprised that the majority of the staff had never heard of him.

When I met the parents of an acutely psychotic young woman, it was like being on the set of *Family Life*. Her aggressive, conservative father and submissive mother were identical to the characters in the film. In her file, I wrote a long analysis of this woman's family life, but it was a waste of time. She was still subjected to tranquilisers and shock therapy. She came out of her psychosis, numbed but rational, and told me she had visions of demonic spirits trying to enter the top of her head and harm her. The staff had been mystified by her apparently irrational behaviour of always holding a book on top of her head. But once you knew why

she was doing it, her behaviour was perfectly reasonable: she was stopping the spirits from entering her head. She knew it appeared crazy to us, but she had to do it. She also told me that her symptoms began after taking an LSD trip at an outdoor rock concert. So, the question arose, was the cause of her psychosis physiological, psychological, or both? At that time in my life I didn't consider a fourth possibility – malevolent spirits.

. . .

My next story concerns a seventeen-year-old, intellectually dull boy who was tormented by visions of giant birds.

'Doctor, they follow me everywhere, big, ugly birds with metal beaks.'

'What do they do?'

'They say I've done bad things, like sex and stuff. They're trying to peck into my head and eat my brains.'

I was sitting at a desk with the window behind me. A look of intense horror came across his face and he pointed at the window, 'There's one of them out there now.'

With a feeling of apprehension, I turned to look out the window. 'I can't see anything.'

'It's there, Doctor, I tell you, it's there.' He buried his face in his arms and began crying.

A week later, he committed suicide.

. . .

My saddest patient was a gentle Christian minister, known for his work among the aborigines in Northern Australia. He always sat alone in meetings and group therapy, rarely saying a word. All I could get from him was, 'Doctor, I have lost my faith.'

Diagnosed as 'depressive,' countless sessions of shock therapy and cocktails of antidepressant drugs had made no difference. Nobody, including myself, had thought that renewing his faith might be the solution. For over a year he had been sitting quietly on a bench in the ward, his mind in the pits of despair. I made a mental note of the great danger of faith, and included this example in my reply to a series of letters that had begun arriving from my friend Nick in Nepal.

LETTERS FROM KATHMANDU

I had met Nick in medical school through his brother, Dorian, who was in my year. Nick was three years ahead of us and had a reputation for being able to come top of his year while, at the same time, living a wild life. His sense of humour was honed by an addiction to Spike Milligan and the Goons on radio. I introduced him to hashish at Dorian's twenty-first birthday party and he soon became part of the wide circle of friends around Garrey and me.

Nick, and his girlfriend Marie, had met some lamas in Nepal and he was now writing to all his friends, insisting we drop everything and attend a Tibetan Buddhist meditation course in Kathmandu. We loved Nick and Marie, and respected their intelligence but, considering Nick's previous way of life, it was hard to imagine him becoming a Buddhist.

Eastern religion had exploded upon Melbourne, the fervour was on every street corner. Krishnamurti, Zen, the Divine Light movement, the Krishnas, Transcendental Meditation; it was all yoga, incense, and patchouli oil. And now, Tibetan Buddhism? Nick's insistence provoked my anti-religious sentiment. Having recently returned to my safe, scientific world view after the shock of coming home, I was in no mood to explore Buddhism. But, even as I replied to Nick, I knew my own ideas were vague and insubstantial. I still had no idea what life was all about.

At the same time as Nick's letters were arriving, Garrey and Kris came home. I had warned them about the shock of re-entry and, after sailing to Perth, they wisely travelled overland to Melbourne. I was living with Jules, commuting daily to the hospital, and returning in the evenings to a house that had lost its heart. Jules had depended upon Lorna for almost everything and was having great difficulty in adjusting to the emptiness in his life.

Times were sad, but the arrival of Garrey and Kris brought some sunshine. They too had received letters from Nick, but we and a group of friends had different plans. We intended to buy land somewhere along Australia's east coast where we could build houses, make gardens, and live a life-style of our own choosing. We had no specific idea of what to do; we simply wanted to stay together as a group so that we could increase our understanding of the world and ourselves, and have fun at the same time. Nick's typical response to this idea was, 'It's peace of mind you want, not piece of land.'

On the river, we had come to see the Tao as being a mystical law of nature that held things together, both animate and inanimate. For life to proceed smoothly, one had to live in harmony with the Tao; if one moved against it, things would go wrong. To live in harmony with the Tao required letting go of preconceptions and being perfectly adaptable to change by being aware of the Tao in every moment. On the Indus there were times when I thought we had approached such harmony, and I was certain that the accompanying peace and happiness could be maintained in any situation. With a heavy heart, I told Garrey and Kris how my return to Australia had rudely shattered that certainty. I confessed that my inability to put our ideas into practice had thrown me into a downward spiral of doubt to the point where I had to repudiate everything and start again. Their sympathy was not enough to alleviate my disenchantment, and I had the uncomfortable feeling that my situation was not unlike my depressed patient who had lost his faith. I had decided not going to allow myself to believe in anything that was not grounded on solid logic.

. . .

My time at Larundel was finishing. Although the work had been so intense, it was the best situation I could have hoped for to help me understand and work through my own unhappiness. Also, by adding fuel to my belief that Western psychology knew very little about the mind and its problems, the lingering faith I held in my experiences in Pakistan and Afghanistan kept the door open to the possibility that the answer lay in the East.

Most of my patients (and myself) had problems with their self-image, or ego, and conventional wisdom held that a stable mind required a strong ego. At a party for the hospital staff, I had worn a T-shirt on which was printed a spotted mushroom with the slogan Munch that Magic. In 1972, slogans on T-shirts were still a novelty. We had silk-screened the T-shirts ourselves.

With great diagnostic acumen, David, my boss, said to me, 'You wore that to be provocative.'

'You're right.' I laughed, and described my experiences with magic mushrooms.

After listening to my story, David said, 'Many young people have told me about their experience with hallucinogens, but your description is the first time I have been able to understand anything. This is because you have a mature ego.'

It was nice to have my basic sanity confirmed by a psychiatrist, especially as I had been in doubt about it over the past few months, but the concept of a 'mature ego' felt unsatisfactory. Perhaps in psychoanalytic terms, where 'ego' refers to the part of the mind that relates to the external world, it was okay. But, in the more conventional sense, where 'ego' refers to the self-image, I was not so happy. David's stand within psychiatry was more on the side of psychoanalysis, and I too had this inclination. But I was wary about the general assumption that repair and nurture of the self-image was an essential element in recovery from mental illness. It seemed to me there was something wrong with the ego itself.

There was no question that a strong self-image was needed to obtain what we call 'happiness and success' in our society. The flaw, as I saw it, was that strong egos cause as much trouble as weak egos, and enhancement of one person's ego usually occurs at the expense of another's ego. In competition to prove we are prettier, funnier, healthier, wiser, or richer than others, our egos are constantly at war. From sibling rivalry to adult relationships, from the sporting field to politics and religion, everywhere in society, trouble can be boiled down to ego conflict.

Another objection to the concept that a healthy ego is a happy ego came from insight into my own unhappiness. I had returned from the East with wonderful ideas about how people should live and be happy, but I was unable to make even myself happy. My fine ideas had collapsed and I had fallen into the darkness of self-doubt. In wondering what went wrong, I came to the conclusion that the real problem was my pride. Melbourne had not let me down. Judy had not let me down. My inflated self-image had let me down. Therefore, ego was unreliable.

The Tibetan Lamas had the answers to my questions, but my ego was in for more battering before I could open my mind to them.

After Christmas, I left Melbourne and set off for Queensland. My friends, Tom and Kathy, needed somebody to take care of their house in Mooloolah while they went off to Nepal. Garrey, Kris, and the others were going to meet me at Tom and Kathy's place, where our search for land would begin. On my way, I planned to stay with an old friend in Sydney. At school, Simon had been smarter than Garrey and me, but a certain attitude towards authority had landed him in trouble with headmasters and the police. He was now in trouble again, this time with the Sydney drug mafia. Our paths had diverged dramatically since adolescence, but the bond of friendship was still there.

THE GARDEN OF EDEN

Melbourne has the fragrance of fresh lawn clippings and burning autumn leaves. Sydney has its distinctive aromas of domestic gas, cockroaches, and frangipani. The latter smells greeted my nostrils as I knocked at Simon's door. No answer. Persistent knocking induced a growling, 'Go away.'

'Open up you lazy bastard, it's Ade,' I shouted.

'Adie!' The tone changed. Simon stood half-dressed in the doorway while his girlfriend, Sue, a sheet hastily thrown over her body like a Roman toga, peered around his shoulder, curious to see the person whose name had transformed Simon's irritation into happiness.

It was a run-down house in the run-down suburb of Rozelle, but it still possessed that vital, sensual energy which makes Sydney so different from Melbourne. We swapped our stories over a few bottles of beer and Simon welcomed me to stay in his spare room. For the first time since my return to Australia I felt happy and at ease. The clouds had lifted.

. . .

I had escaped Melbourne, but still couldn't escape religion. The next day, with Sue's friend, Lynne, the four of us went to a public talk by the Indian guru of the Krishnas. After ten minutes we'd had enough. The flowers, incense, and chanting were all too much. We nodded to each other, made a noisy exit, and went to a movie. I was happy to comply with Sue's matchmaking efforts and drive Lynne home. We spent the next three weeks together.

One morning, while Simon and I were eating breakfast, Sue casually walked through the kitchen from the shower to the bedroom. I paid scant attention to her nudity. Simon left for work, and Sue, now dressed, joined me for coffee. As she went into a detailed description of how she had lost her virginity, it did not occur to me that she had other motives. Simon, however, knew better. Later that day he phoned and asked me to meet him at a pub in Darlinghurst. Expecting a friendly drink, I was completely taken aback when, at the pub, he accused me of spending the morning in bed with Sue and refused to accept my protestations of innocence.

Simon was in a strange mental state; it was impossible to reason with him and so there was no point in being angry. Back home, he refused to believe that nothing had happened between Sue and I, and he ordered us both to leave his house. I was sorry for her, even though I realised she was not totally innocent. I loaded the car and offered to drive her home to her parents. Before we drove off, Simon came to the car in tears and asked her to stay.

Luckily, I had somewhere else to go.

I drove to the North Ryde Psychiatric Centre where I could stay with another friend. Colin was a psychiatrist I had known in Melbourne, and he had gone through medical school with Nick. He had been through a divorce and was living alone in a big house at the hospital. Most evenings I went out with Lynne, we were growing very fond of each other. While

telling Colin about my journey down the Indus, he encouraged me to write it down. He was going blind, and each day I would read to him what I had written.

At Lynne's family dinner table, I also described my experiences on the Indus and how they had affected my future plans. Leaving aside the drugs aspect, I tried to explain why I and my friends wanted to establish an alternative lifestyle.

'The education system, advertising, religion, and newspapers all dictate, or at least manipulate, what we should think and do. There is no freedom for individual expression; we are not allowed to seek happiness and meaning in our lives by doing something different. We have to wear the right clothes, eat the same food, and behave the same way as everybody else. But look at society. All the authority figures from parents to politicians, even the entertainment and sporting heroes, cannot get their lives together, and yet they condemn young people for wanting change. I think society is a huge lie; we are told we are happy and we believe it. They say we are living in the 'free world', but there's no real freedom in Australia. In Afghanistan and Pakistan the poorest of the poor were calmer and more in harmony with Nature than anybody I know here.'

'Okay,' said Lynne's father, 'but if you want to change society you have to do it from within.' He poured more wine into my glass.

'We're not thinking of changing society, just ourselves,' I replied. 'We don't say we have the answers, but we want the freedom to experiment. If we do find something worthwhile, maybe others will want to follow.'

I sat back, sipping the wine and thinking about Taoism.

'Instead of expecting us to follow old traditions that aren't working,' I continued, 'society should have the strength to allow and encourage people to seek a better, or at least different, reality. Taoism talks about an underlying harmony in the world that individuals can experience but cannot describe. Once this is recognised, people will lose their competitiveness, anger, and greed. Their minds will be at peace. I feel that the purpose of life should be to attain this experience.'

'Man, you don't sound like a doctor,' said Lynne's cousin, 'you sound more like a philosopher.' It was a compliment.

As Lynne took me to the car I apologised for being so outspoken. 'Don't worry,' she replied, 'they agree with you, they just love a good debate.' And she kissed me goodnight. I had passed the test.

. . .

Simon called to tell me that my younger brother, Guy, had arrived at his place. He and Alice were on their way to Bali, and Alice was pregnant. I briefly caught up with them and then I too had to leave.

Lynne was in her first year at university, and possessed youthful enthusiasm balanced by a pragmatism that was beyond her years. I felt very close to her. We spent our last evening together on a North Shore beach, lying on the sand as the sun was setting.

'Lynne, I'll be back in about six weeks, I've applied for a hospital job here in Sydney. I want to keep seeing you.'

'Yes, I'd like that too.' She laid her head on my chest.

A plover called in the distance, and my comment, 'The call of the wild,' earned her approval.

. . .

Over six hundred miles and a new windscreen later, I arrived at Tony and Jill's house in Brisbane. Tony, a doctor, had worked with Nick and Marie. In his birthday suit, Tony opened the front door and gave me a hug. Then he took me to meet his wife Jill. She too was naked, and recovering from hepatitis. Somewhat distracted by her yellow breasts, I shook her hand. Tony made breakfast, and Jill joined us, wearing a shirt that barely reached her hips. Over bacon and eggs on toast, Tony described how to find their property at Maleny, about sixty miles north of Brisbane. It wasn't far from Mooloolah and we arranged to meet there the coming weekend.

Although I had driven all night, I was keen to continue. Revived by the coffee, I pushed on through Brisbane, still waking to a hot summer's day.

I turned off the highway at the signpost to Mooloolah and picked up Tom and Kathy's dog, Fang, from a neighbour. I then forded the river to reach their property. The rich, steamy smell of vegetation and the hum of insects took me back to New Guinea. Their house, a geodesic dome, was the delight of the local hippies and the despair of the local council.

A note was waiting for me on the table, *Hi Ade, welcome. Please eat the food in the fridge and don't forget to harvest the avocado tree. The key to the beach-buggy is in the ignition. Fang's food is in the cupboard by the fridge. Enjoy, enjoy, enjoy.*

While I was sorting out the kitchen, Fang was sorting out the wallabies who, in the last three days, had repossessed their original territory. Fang was not a believer in land rights for any animals other than dogs.

Surrounded by beautiful flowers, magnificently coloured birds, fresh tropical fruit, and clear pools for swimming in the river, I felt like Adam in the Garden of Eden. Though lacking an Eve, God soon put that right by sending a deluge that flooded the river and obliged a visiting friend to spend the night.

. . .

The road to Maleny followed a ridge above Mooloolah, from where I saw the Glasshouse Mountains rising out of the forest like giant fingers pointing to the sky. The heavy rains had turned the track to Tony and Jill's place into a series of rivulets and giant puddles, so I left

my car at the bottom of the hill and Fang and I walked across the fields to the remodelled cowshed, sitting on a rise in the centre of the property. The air was warm, fresh, and heavy with moisture.

Tony, clad only in a leather carpenter's belt, was repairing the verandah. Jill, in a wide straw hat and nothing else, looked like a yellow primrose floating across the grass. She carried a basket of flowers and fresh vegetables. Nudity was clearly the way. Self-consciously, I took off my clothes and we drank herbal tea together.

Tony took me on a tour of the property, which they shared with Nick and Marie. First he showed me the swimming hole, a natural pool at the bottom of a twenty-foot waterfall. The calls of whipbirds split the air with resounding cracks, and magic mushrooms called 'gold-tops' grew everywhere. It was a perfect playground for flower children, and we belonged to that species.

'Tony, what do you think about Nick and Marie getting into Buddhism?' Expecting a deprecatory comment in accord with my own attitude, I was surprised by his positive response.

'I think it's really good. Jill and I met some Buddhist monks in Thailand and they impressed us very much. We would have stayed longer, but that's where she picked up the hepatitis and we had to come home.'

'Do you think they'll ever come back to this place?'

'Not if they get ordained. Maybe you'd like to buy their share?'

I mused at the thought of buying the pleasure that Nick and Marie would abandon. Then the idea of them being ordained struck me, 'Surely they wouldn't do that? They were so good together, so happy.'

'They could,' said Tony, who knew them better than me. 'And there's plenty of space here if you're seriously interested.' He filled his pipe with tobacco laced with green grass.

'Well, it's beautiful, but somehow the bush is too lush, too full of energy. I prefer to be somewhere south of Sydney.'

Still thinking about Nick and Marie, I skipped a flat stone across the water's surface and continued. 'But why give up all this and also their relationship? That's exactly what I'm looking for.'

Assuming the air of a wise man, Tony puffed on the pipe and spoke through his beard,

'Relationships aren't what they're cracked up to be.'

'Sure, but is celibacy the answer?' I was convinced that a committed relationship was an essential ingredient for happiness, and the idea of being totally alone for the rest of my life seemed absurd. The ache of loneliness still resided in my heart.

As we talked, two of Tony's friends came down the creek in search of us, looking like white pixies as they danced from rock to rock. I had the novel experience of standing naked and being introduced to naked strangers. At a distance, I had been admiring the smooth and inviting curves of the girl's body, but when she came close I didn't know where to look except directly into her eyes. Perhaps she had the same problem as she held my gaze. We swam together and then returned to the house where Jill was preparing lunch.

. . .

I was writing to Lynne when the sound of a kombi van sent Fang into a frenzy. He raced down the track, but it wasn't Tom's van, it was Garrey and Kris arriving with two others. The clan was gathering.

The dome became our base as we began the search for suitable real estate. We were in no hurry, and spent most of our time swimming in the creek or at the beach. The concept of our group living together in a rural setting had been growing in our minds for several years and I had been one of its most enthusiastic supporters. But, with what I had learned on the Indus, I was already having second thoughts. To share our lives was going to require serious commitment. The others were established couples, while I was alone. It was difficult enough to find someone compatible with myself, and to find someone who would fit in with the group would be next to impossible. I knew that if Lynne and I decided to be together, we would live differently. Loyalty to my friends and the dream was limiting my freedom in the most important thing in life – choosing a partner.

. . .

The Drug Squad arrived while we were drying bananas. The same men had planted a piece of hashish on Tom and busted him. Long-hairs from down south were not welcome in redneck country. Sweating profusely in collars and ties, their comical appearance ruined any attempt to intimidate us. They rightly accused us of having drugs and began searching but, incredibly, found nothing. Going through my bag, a detective waved my pencil to emphasise his lecture on the evil of drugs.

'Yes, young people today are so foolish.' I agreed, my eyes following every movement of the pencil. Concealed in one end were the last of the LSD microdots.

They accused us of making drugs because they believed that Donovan's song, 'Mellow Yellow', was about the hallucinogenic properties of bananas. Fortunately, bananas were not on the list of proscribed drugs. We humoured the boys from Brisbane and sent them on their way.

To celebrate the event, we took the microdots. My hopes of reviving the Indus experience were dashed. Past insecurities, loneliness, and sadness resurfaced. Once again I realised that drugs were a blind alley, and I was rapidly losing faith in the concept of communal life, or at least in my ability to participate. The man from the Drug Squad would have been pleased.

Not yet ready to express these feelings to my friends, I continued with the search for land, but my heart was no longer in it. We found nothing suitable and the group agreed to look

further south. I took the opportunity to leave first and drive back to Sydney; I had a nagging concern about Lynne. The others were going to look after the dome until Tom and Kathy returned from Nepal.

FALL FROM PARADISE

When I saw Lynne, my anxiety was confirmed. She was pregnant. I was dismayed at having placed her in this situation and by the fact that she had been alone when the doctor confirmed her condition. I assured her that if she wanted to have the baby I would stay in Sydney and look after her and the child.

'I don't know,' she said. 'It's just too soon, we hardly know each other.'

'Let's think about it and meet in a couple of days.'

Colin advised me that in our situation an abortion was the best approach. I agreed, but didn't want to pressure Lynne. If she wanted to have the baby I would fulfil my promise. I went to bed, but questions running through my mind prevented sleep.

Why was I so stupid?

Is an embryo a human being or nothing more than a collection of cells composed of atoms and molecules?

Where does the mind fit in?

Could we have a future together?

She's so young, will she want me?

I decided that an embryo was nothing but a collection of cells. But that didn't make me any happier.

We met at a park and sat in the shade of a big gum tree. Lynne said that having a baby would be too great a hindrance to her studies, and it was better to terminate the pregnancy. I told her I had reached the same conclusion. Her doctor understood the situation and had agreed to carry out the procedure. A few days later I drove Lynne to the hospital where she was to stay overnight.

Filled with remorse, I had no choice but to drive home and leave her to face the experience alone.

That night I had a vivid dream. My arms were stretched out in front of me and in my hands was a tiny baby. Behind the baby was an extremely powerful source of light streaming towards me. The dream required no expert interpretation: the baby's life was in my hands. I awoke and tried to counter this vision with materialistic reasoning, but that was insufficient to satisfy my conscious mind, let alone my dreaming mind.

I picked up Lynne the next afternoon. She was going away for a week and I was heading south. We told each other that we would stay in touch, but we both knew that our paths, which had come together with so much promise, were about to diverge forever.

. . .

The others had arrived in Sydney a few days before, and that evening, Garrey, Kris, and I visited Angie, a friend we had not seen for many years. Her husband was a fervent communist. As the beer flowed, the conversation turned towards the plight of the workers. Dave passionately presented the Marxist explanation of the cause of society's problems, and the need for revolutionary change. My own emotions were running high. Agreeing that society was in a mess, I found myself defending a different view. With equal passion, I upheld the insights we had gained from Gurdjieff, from Taoism, and from our travels in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

I hadn't told anybody about Lynne's pregnancy or the abortion, and I knew that my strong rejection of Dave's dialectical materialism was a reaction to recent events. I was also aware that my argument was reversing my previous abandonment of those insights. I was making a stand for the mystical. As the debate raged, Garrey and Kris were mostly quiet, but I could tell my words spoke for them as well. The expression in their eyes showed that they were fully aware of the change in my attitude. Ade of the Indus was back.

. . .

I left Sydney the next day, arranging to meet the others at Boydtown, an old whaling station on Twofold Bay, south of Eden. The founder of Boydtown wanted it to become the capital of New South Wales but, fortunately, it only became a camping ground for fishermen and vacationers. I had camped there with Garrey and his family throughout my teenage years. And it was the beach where I had fallen in love with Judy.

I bought a two-man tent in Eden for twenty dollars and pitched it beneath the banksias. The summer visitors had long since departed and the beach was mine. Sitting cross-legged in the sand, the familiar smell of seaweed and the slap of waves upon the shore took me back into the past. Alone again, Judy came strongly into my mind. I put the melancholy aside and looked towards the future. Could the clan really create something worthwhile? Our only plan was no-plan. This was excellent from the Taoist point of view, but we were far from the Tao. I decided to wait for the others to arrive and then return to Melbourne and find a job.

. . .

I was reading *A Separate Reality*, the sequel to *The Teachings of Don Juan*.[8] Don Juan's discussion of the way of the warrior, a personal path of impeccable behaviour, rang true. It was becoming sadly obvious that life does not unfold as one wishes. It's a struggle, and the concept of being a solitary warrior appealed to me as being the only way to live. It reminded me of the Taoist principle of seeking and living with the Tao rather than trying to conquer this unpredictable world. There was no doubt that the keys to both happiness and unhappiness lay in the mind. The exact nature of those keys, however, was difficult to determine, but it had something to do with the Tao. This was my challenge. My second thought was, *does a solitary warrior need a female companion or not*?

. . .

The convoy arrived from Sydney, bringing Simon and Sue. They were back together and Simon made no reference to his previous allegations of Sue's infidelity. We were now eleven hippies and a dog. Fang, master chaser of sticks and kombi vans, had captured our hearts, especially with his howling whenever he heard Bob Dylan's harmonica. We camped beneath a cliff on the far side of the lagoon. Our energy was scattered. I was restless. In an attempt to generate some cohesiveness, we took LSD, but for me the magic had gone. LSD had opened up new vistas of experience, and had been instrumental in giving me the impetus to break the chains of social conditioning, but I believed enough in Don Juan to see that, in the search for reality, it was merely an ally. To remain with it was to become its slave. Also I felt that in the long term it could only harm the brain.

When the camp shifted to a more promising location on the coast near Bega, I took the opportunity to drive home to Melbourne. Jules was happy to have a companion in the house. He had continued working and, with his four children gone, it was heart-breaking for him to return from work to a cat, a dog, and his memories. Half afraid of seeming crazy, he told me that occasionally he felt the presence of Lorna in the house and had even seen her. I didn't want to know about spirits, I was having enough trouble with my own memories.

'Jules, it's just in your mind,' may not have sounded entirely convincing or sympathetic, but it was the best I could do.

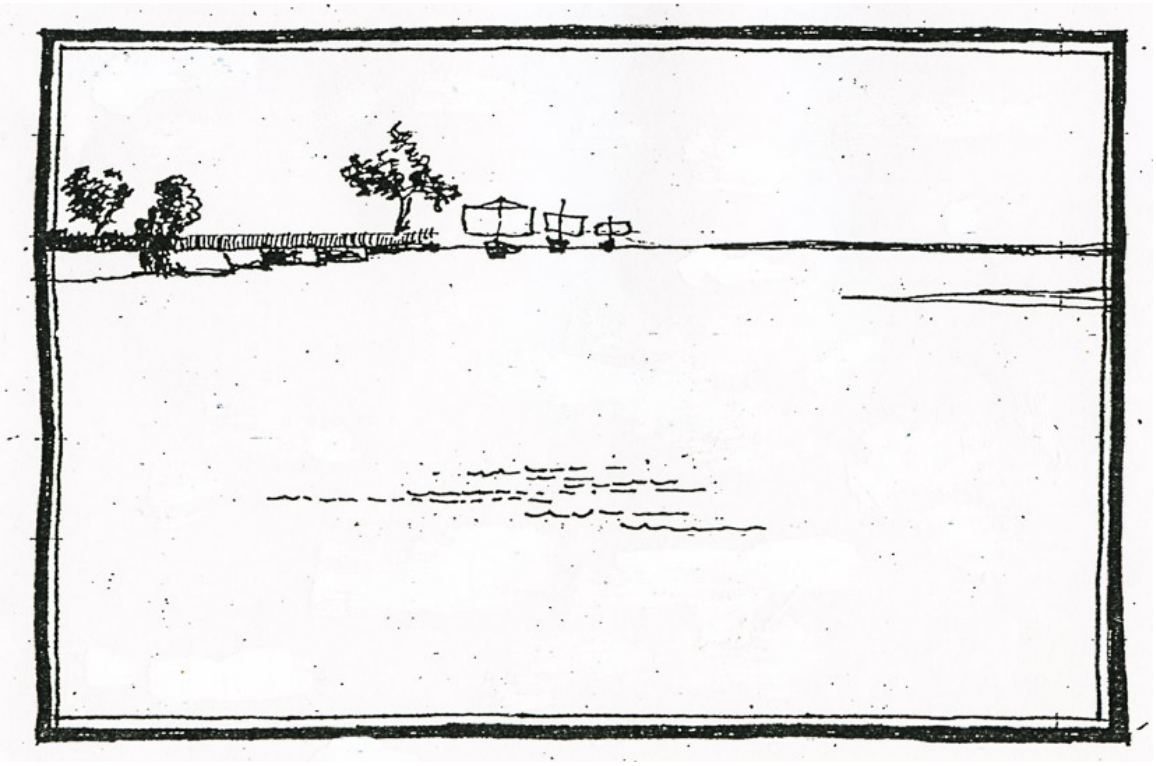
I began working as surgical registrar at the Preston and Northcote Community Hospital (PANCH). The long hours didn't worry me; it was good to get back to medicine. This was my career and I thrived in the challenging atmosphere of the emergency department. Being a doctor was easier and a lot more practical than being a hippie. And they paid me for it.

I still pursued my philosophical quest. Friends returning from Nepal with tales of the meditation course impressed me with their enthusiasm and the logic of what they said about Buddhism. The teachings seemed to be more about psychology rather than a doctrine of belief. But I remained wary of religion; how could one system claim to know the answers to everything?

Then Kerry came into my life. She was a university student and a friend of my sister. Our relationship developed rapidly and we soon began living together. Kerry had been raised as a Roman Catholic and was rebelling against the strict morality imposed by priests and nuns whose own behaviour suggested they were no closer to God than anybody else. We shared a house with another couple in Kew, where it was easy for Kerry to commute to the university and for me to drive to the hospital.

Garrey, Kris, and the others arrived from Bega. They had found some interesting properties, but nothing definite. I finally told them that I was dropping out of the whole scheme. Making my break was difficult, but afterwards I felt elated. A burden had lifted from my mind and I began planning my future. In the new year, when my term at the hospital was completed, I would go to Thailand to find work in tropical medicine. Kerry wanted to attend the next course with Nick's lamas in Nepal, and Kris was going with her. Garrey wasn't interested in going to Nepal. He would return to Bega to look after a friend's house on the coast while Kris was away.

PART THREE: TRANSFORMATION



Kyabje Zopa Rinpoche, Tushita Meditation Centre
(Ueli Minder, photographer)

Like most people, my three objectives in life were to find a compatible partner, to find an enjoyable place to practise my profession, and to find a philosophy to explain it all. On the way, I wanted to experience as much happiness as possible. Sometimes these aims came into conflict. Pursuit of my career had separated me from Judy, and now my career and an element of dissatisfaction were separating me from Kerry. The first two objectives were my priority, and the philosophy was to be the icing on the cake. The philosophy I was to embrace, however, was going to separate me from the first two objectives forever. The story of how such a radical transformation could occur, and the agonies and the ecstasies of doing so, begins with the two men who gave me the inspiration and courage to change my life's direction.

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In 1935, Dondrup Dorje was born in a farmhouse in the hamlet of Shing kar-la, north-west of Lhasa, the capital of Tibet. His family owned a large property where they grazed goats, sheep, yaks, and horses, and grew various crops, in particular, barley, from which they made *tsampa*, ground roasted barley, the staple food of Tibet.

While Dondrup Dorje was still a toddler, a group of nuns from the nearby Rakor Nunnery appeared at the farm. A high Lama had told them that their former abbess had been reincarnated there. The nuns gave Dondrup Dorje presents and continued visiting as he grew older, lavishing him with gifts and love. Later, they would take him to the nunnery and sit him on a large throne to preside over ceremonies. He performed these duties with unwavering attention, but was always glad to return to the farm where he could play with the animals, especially the dogs.

Dondrup Dorje was excited whenever monks came to the farm and, at the age of five, he expressed the wish to become a monk. His family wanted him to grow up and continue the family business, but even at that age the boy saw farm work as meaningless drudgery. He had a feeling that human life could be more meaningful. The family relented and Dondrup Dorje entered Sera Je Monastery near Lhasa at the age of six.

Under the strict guidance of his uncle, Dondrup Dorje soon learned that the life of a young monk was far tougher than working on the farm. But he persevered and, two years later, he received novice vows and the new name of Thubten Yeshe. Around this time he suffered an attack of rheumatic fever that damaged his heart and was to eventually lead to his premature death.

Thubten Yeshe enthusiastically participated in the daily routine of memorising scriptures, receiving instruction, attending chanting and, what he loved most of all, debating in the courtyard. He was an outstanding student and his wild sense of humour and natural showmanship always attracted an audience. The monks would fall over each other in laughter as the young Thubten Yeshe introduced comedy to the ancient Buddhist art of philosophical debate. He also had a reputation for great kindness and warmth in helping younger students. Everybody felt comfortable in his presence and his teachers predicted that Thubten Yeshe would graduate from his studies with the highest distinction as Lharampa Geshe.

Politics, however, were to interrupt Thubten Yeshe's studies. Mao Tse Tung invaded Tibet in 1950 and, under the pretext of peaceful liberation, China slowly took a stranglehold on the country, its people, and their culture. As conditions for the Tibetans progressively deteriorated, and with his own life under serious threat, His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama had no choice but to flee to India in 1959. He escaped secretly, disguised as a man from the province of Kham. When the Chinese realised they had been thwarted, they began shelling the major monasteries, including the residences of His Holiness – Norbulingka and the Potala Monastery.

As the Chinese artillery zeroed in on the monasteries, thousands of monks were thrown into utter confusion. Many were killed. Some immediately escaped to the mountains. Others, including Thubten Yeshe, could not believe what was happening and remained, praying for peace. Sera Je Monastery was falling apart under the terrible bombardment when Thubten Yeshe's closest friend found him and dragged him away to safety. He was in his undergarments, barefoot, and had no food, money, or blankets.

Thubten Yeshe looked down from the mountaintop and saw the holy city of Lhasa under a pall of smoke. He knew it was the end. At his sister's house, his uncle gave him some coins and his sister gave him clothes and the shoes off her own feet. In tears, she pleaded to take him to see their mother, but it was too dangerous. Chinese soldiers were everywhere, searching for and shooting the monks.

Lucky to survive the trek to India, during which many monks died of exposure and starvation, Thubten Yeshe was sent to the refugee camp at Buxa Duar in the Indian state of Assam. Both Mahatma Gandhi and Jawarlahal Nehru had been imprisoned in this old internment camp built by the British.

In the overcrowded conditions and the unaccustomed heat, more monks died. Diarrhoea and more serious illnesses such as tuberculosis spread among them. Despite these difficulties, traditional monastic teaching, study, and debate were re-established. After a few years, Thubten Yeshe began to change. He wanted to put theory into practice, and began meditating more than attending classes. In the evenings when the monks were relaxing and gossiping in the dormitory, Thubten Yeshe would pull his sheet over his head and pretend to sleep. In fact, he was doing his meditation practices. His friends encouraged him to continue the studies but, as Thubten Yeshe later told his Western students, 'I dropped out.'

Lama Yeshe

Lama Thubten Yeshe was to become my main teacher. The story of my second teacher begins with Sherpa Kunsang Yeshe, a married salt-trader, lived in the Solu Khumbu region of Nepal among the foothills of Mt Everest. After his two children had grown up, Kunsang Yeshe devoted the last twenty years of his life to practising as an ascetic yogi, following the teachings of the Nyingma Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. Living in a cave that he had excavated from beneath a shelf of rock, he became a much-loved spiritual mentor of the Sherpa people. They called him Lawudo Lama, after the name of the cave. With tireless energy – he had gone beyond the need for sleep – he alternated his own meditational practices with giving counsel and performing rituals for the people. Before dying, he promised to return to the area in his next life and establish a school for the village children.

After the Lawudo Lama had passed away in 1945, a boy was born in the village of Thami, in the valley below Lawudo. His father died when he was two years old, and his mother had to raise her four children alone. When he first began to talk, this boy told his mother, 'I am the Lawudo Lama,' and, while still a toddler, would try to climb the mountain towards the Lawudo cave. Through the clairvoyant observations of high lamas in Tibet, and after he had selected the possessions of the Lawudo Lama from amongst many similar articles, it was confirmed that the boy was the reincarnate Lawudo Lama.

At four years of age, the boy, now known as Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, was sent to a nearby monastery to learn the alphabet from his uncle, a Nyingma lama. One of the four lineages of Buddhist practice in Tibet, the Nyingma lineage began when the great Indian yogi Padmasambhava was invited to Tibet in the eighth century. The titles Lama (Teacher) and Rinpoche (Precious One) are given to recognised reincarnate lamas. Thubten Yeshe did not

receive these titles because he had been a nun in his former life – sexist discrimination was alive and well even in the hallowed mountains of Tibet.

When he reached ten years of age, Thubten Zopa Rinpoche was taken to Tibet where he began studies at Domo Geshe Rinpoche's monastery near Pagri. This monastery followed the Gelug lineage, a clear exposition of the entire spectrum of Buddhist teachings and practice founded in the fourteenth century by the renowned Tibetan scholar and practitioner, Lama Tsongkhapa. It was there that he received his novice vows as a monk.

After three years in Pagri, Thubten Zopa Rinpoche wanted to move to Sera Monastery in Lhasa but, speaking through an oracle, the Dharma Protector said he should do a meditation retreat at Pema Choling Monastery bear the Bhutanese border. Dharma Protectors are highly realised beings or Buddhas who manifest in peaceful or wrathful manners to protect sincere practitioners from harm and guide them on the path. Sometimes they may be powerful spirits subdued by yogis such as Padmasambhava and commanded to give such protection or, at least, to not cause harm. In 1959, a few months after the exodus of monks and nuns from Lhasa, Chinese soldiers were approaching Pema Choling and Thubten Zopa Rinpoche was taken across the mountain to the safety of Bhutan.

At the Buxa Duar refugee camp, Thubten Zopa Rinpoche began his formal study of Buddhist philosophy with the Sera Je scholar Geshe Rabten Rinpoche. Thubten Yeshe was also a student of Geshe Rabten, and the thirteen-year old Zopa Rinpoche was impressed by the sincere devotion shown by Thubten Yeshe towards their teacher.

In 1961, Zopa Rinpoche contracted tuberculosis and was sent to Darjeeling and then Delhi for treatment. During his convalescence he enrolled at a school for young rinpoches, where he learned English. Many years later, his teacher, Frida Bedi, told me that she once overheard a conversation between three of her young charges, Zopa Rinpoche, Trungpa Rinpoche, and Zazep Rinpoche, discussing how they were going to teach Buddhism in the West. All three were to become instrumental in the establishment of Buddhist study and practice outside Tibet.

After his return to Buxa Duar at the end of 1963, Zopa Rinpoche was told to choose his main teacher from between two of Geshe Rabten's best students. He chose Thubten Yeshe. Sharing the same room with his new teacher, he soon realised the vast extent of Thubten Yeshe's scholarship. Thubten Yeshe read books from all four lineages and rarely slept, spending most of his time in meditation. This suited Zopa Rinpoche who also needed little sleep and the two, master and student, studied and meditated together. Thubten Yeshe had begun teaching himself English and, with the aid of his new student, his English rapidly improved.

In 1967, Zopa Rinpoche's health was still poor. To benefit from a better climate, he and Thubten Yeshe were invited to stay at a monastery near Darjeeling. At the same time, Zina, the vivacious thirty-six year old daughter of a Russian nobleman and a wealthy American heiress arrived in Darjeeling. Zina had turned her back on the excesses of the West and was looking for spiritual guidance. Taken to see Zopa Rinpoche, the only English-speaking lama at the monastery, Zina declared straight out that she was looking for a teacher to show her

the truth. Thubten Yeshe, who was also in the room, asked in Tibetan, 'Who is she? What does she want?'

'She wants enlightenment,' replied Zopa Rinpoche.

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Zina became Thubten Yeshe's first Western student, and she began the tradition of referring to the two lamas as 'Lama Yeshe' and 'Lama Zopa.' She wanted to start a centre in Ceylon, but there were too many obstacles. For some strange reason, the Indian government thought Zina was a Russian spy. Even the Indian newspapers referred to her as 'the Spy Princess'. Secret service agents followed her every move and she could not move freely in and out of India. Apart from politics, the climate in Ceylon was too hot for Lama Zopa's health, and Zina herself had almost run out of money. Instead, they went to Dharamsala, a town in the foothills of the Himalayas north of Delhi where many Tibetan refugees, including His Holiness the Dalai Lama, were living. There, in 1968, she became a nun. The trio had an audience with His Holiness the Dalai Lama and he advised the two lamas to establish a teaching centre in Nepal.

The other monks ridiculed Lama Yeshe for taking an interest in teaching Westerners. 'They are so infatuated with pleasure and so weak-minded, they will never understand the profound teachings of Buddha, not to mention be able to put them into practice.'

But Lama Yeshe disagreed. He saw potential in the very sincerity of Zina and other Westerners. He saw their dissatisfaction with sensual indulgence to be a positive indication that they would have the perseverance to discover the secret of their minds. Lama Yeshe said that even the drug experience had a positive side in that it revealed an aspect of the mind that inspired people to want to learn more.

With Lama Yeshe's personal magnetism and Lama Zopa's magic, Zina's retinue of artists, hippies, actors, and socialites doing the 'Eastern trip' soon formed the nucleus of a circle of students gathered around the two lamas. Americans in turbans, Italians looking like sadhus, academics studying Sanskrit and Eastern philosophy, young backpackers simply 'on the road', a whole spectrum of personality types met the lamas and stayed. At first they lived at a monastery near the great Boudhanath stupa on the outskirts of Kathmandu.

Lama Zopa's family arrived from Solo Khumbu. He had changed so much through illness, they couldn't recognise him. Appalled at how thin he was, they cried and cried. The Sherpas begged him to return to his cave at Lawudo and take up where he had left off from his previous life. He reassured them that when the time was right he would fulfil his promise and return to build a school for the village children.

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In Kathmandu, Zina came across an old friend and rival, Mary Jane, known as 'Max', an African-American woman she had known during their wild days on the Greek island of Mykonos. Max had known Zina as a 'traffic-stoppingly beautiful woman with platinum hair who wore things like a full-length mink coat with nothing underneath'. She was shocked to

see Zina looking so masculine with her shaven head and wearing nun's robes. Max was teaching at the Lincoln School for diplomat's children and had no interest in religion, but Zina enticed her to ask the lamas for advice about her personal life. When she did go to see Lama Yeshe, Max was overcome by floods of tears: she knew she had found her teacher. With her generous American salary she soon became the main benefactor of the lamas' activities.

Zina rented an empty house on a ridge that had belonged to the astrologer who made observations for the King of Nepal. It was about half an hour's walk from the Boudhanath stupa and near a hamlet called Kopan. This became the unofficial name of the monastery the lamas were to build on the ridge. Zina, her daughter, 'her' two lamas, a Tibetan attendant for the lamas, and an assorted collection of artists and poets moved in. Lama Zopa, now twenty-three, spent his time in study and meditation but also translated Lama Yeshe's teachings to Zina, Max, and the others.

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In 1969, the whole group went into the mountains to visit the Lawudo cave. Greatly excited at the return of their precious Lawudo Lama, the Sherpas lined the path, offering tea and the traditional white scarves as the party moved past. Lama Yeshe remained in the background as Lama Zopa became the centre of attention in his home territory. Inside the cave were scriptures, statues, and paintings, nothing had been touched since the previous Lawudo Lama had passed away. Lama Zopa agreed to fulfil the promise to open a school for the children. Max offered to help finance the construction of buildings around the cave site.

Over the next three years the Mt Everest School for Buddhist Studies began to take shape, with young Sherpas and the children of Tibetan refugees spending the monsoons at Lawudo and the winters at Kopan, where Lama Yeshe had bought land with funds donated by the Western students.

Recognising that Westerners needed a longer introduction to Buddhist philosophy, Zina asked Lama Zopa to give a one-month course. He turned her down. Then Zina requested Lama Yeshe to teach a long course, but he refused.She asked Lama Zopa again and again and, impressed by her sincerity, he sought Lama Yeshe's advice. Lama Yeshe said, 'If you think it will be beneficial, then do it.'

So, in the spring of 1971, Lama Zopa Rinpoche taught the first course at Kopan. Twelve people attended the seven-day explanation of how to change self-centredness into the attitude of cherishing others. The course added more members to the ever-increasing Kopan community.

In the meantime, Lama Yeshe was examined at a hospital in Kathmandu. The doctors diagnosed an extremely serious heart condition that would progressively worsen over the next one or two years. The prognosis was that he didn't have long to live. Everybody was distraught, but Lama Yeshe only joked about it.

A year later, Lama Zopa taught a longer course to more people, and the students published a book of notes for others to follow. After the course, Lama Yeshe gave Zina permission to

start a meditation retreat at a monastery in the Himalayas. In the autumn, Lama Zopa taught the third meditation course in a new meditation hall at Kopan, built by Nepalese and funded by the Westerners. Nick and Marie, on a round-the-world tour, had heard about the course and signed up. Nick had become interested in Buddhism in Thailand where he had stolen his first Buddhist book. Before he had time to read it, the car in which they were travelling rolled and the book ended up on his chest with the pages open. He thought this was a sign. After that course, both Nick and Marie became Buddhists. They stayed at Kopan and Nick began writing his famous letters to friends in Australia.

Over a hundred people attended the next course, in March 1973. Nick had worked tirelessly in helping the lamas translate an original Tibetan text and publish it as a proper course book. Marie put her energy into administration as Kopan Monastery kept growing. This was the course attended by so many of Nick's friends from Melbourne and Queensland, including my older brother Max, and his girlfriend, Maggie.

After the course, Lama Yeshe flew into the mountains to visit Zina. He spent a week with her and granted her request to remain in retreat. The lamas, many Westerners, and thirty young students of the Mount Everest Centre, spent the monsoon at Lawudo. During a meditation retreat in a cave on the mountain, Nick decided to become ordained as a monk.

Later that year, news came to Kopan that Zina had died while still in retreat. The exact cause was not known; she had some intestinal trouble but continued her retreat and died sitting in the meditation posture. The abbot of the monastery performed a special practice to ensure her transition into a good rebirth. This abbot said that Lama Yeshe had told him Zina would die. Lama Yeshe said that Zina's sincerity and determination had inspired the very existence of Kopan and his own decision to teach Buddhism to Westerners.

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The next meditation course at Kopan was in November 1973. My younger brother, Guy, was there, and Lama Yeshe performed a marriage ceremony for him and Alice. Their baby boy, Nharyan, had been born in Boudhanath. Two hundred people attended the course, which was now held in a large tent behind the monastery building.Marie and several others asked for ordination. This was the biggest group of Westerners to seek ordination, and Lama Yeshe warned them they should not be running away from ordinary life. He quoted the Buddha, 'One who cannot live in the world with ease, who cannot face worldly activity, is not permitted to become a monk or nun.'

In January 1974, ten Westerners and Lama Zopa Rinpoche's mother took novice ordination from His Holiness the Dalai Lama at Bodhgaya in India. When the group of Westerners, in their red robes and newly-shaven heads, appeared before His Holiness, he exclaimed, 'What is this? Am I dreaming? I hope not, because ordination is a serious commitment. I just hope it lasts.'[9]

BACK TO ASIA

Kerry, Kris, and I arrived in Singapore about midnight. There was no room at the hotel where Garrey and Kris had stayed on their way home from Pakistan, so we caught the train straight to Penang. Premier Lee Kuan Yu's policy of bulldozing old buildings and creating a modern city had, in our eyes, destroyed the appeal of Singapore and we weren't interested in staying to look around.

Our hotel in Georgetown was opposite the Ah Chu medical store, a delightfully appropriate name. With Kris in her own room and Kerry and I in another, we soon learned to locate and cover spy holes bored through the walls from adjoining rooms. Despite their voyeuristic activities being curtailed, the young Chinese who ran our hotel gave me the thumbs up for travelling with two pretty young ladies. It was good to be on the road again, especially with Kerry's companionship. Kris too was relishing the freedom of being able to do whatever she wanted. We travelled to Songkhla in southern Thailand, and then caught the train north to Bangkok. There we parted, Kerry and Kris flew on to Kathmandu and I stayed to make contact with doctors whose names I had been given by friends at PANCH.

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My first appointment was with an administrator at a hospital in Bangkok. Over a traditional Thai meal, he advised me that there were few opportunities for someone in my position who did not speak the language.

I then contacted Douglas Burns, an American psychiatrist living in the city. He met me at my hotel and took me on a tour of Buddhist temples. He had been a monk for three years and had learned to speak fluent Thai. After leaving the monastery, he married a Thai woman. I was interested in the temples, and even more interested in Douglas. He was the first Western Buddhist I had met. His prostrations and incense offerings at the temples raised my scepticism. How could a psychiatrist be so serious about superstitious worship of statues? When I told him that my friend, also a doctor, had become a monk in Nepal, Douglas said that Tibetan Buddhism would never catch on with Westerners. Strangely, I took this remark as a challenge.

That evening, Douglas's wife cooked for us. Their home was full of animals they had rescued from the cruel pet bazaar in Bangkok. The beautiful, cuddly jungle creatures seemed quite happy living in the Burns's bathroom.

Douglas too was doubtful about my prospects of finding work. Nevertheless, he sent me to a friend of his in Chiang Mai. Several years later, I heard that Douglas had mysteriously disappeared while on a journey in the south of Thailand, and was never heard from again.

As my hopes for work faded, my joy in being alone and on the road again increased. In Chiang Mai, Douglas's friend had nothing to offer. Having done my best, I abandoned the idea of working in Thailand. The Mekong River was not far away and I was briefly tempted to revive the spirit of the Indus by sailing *Tao Mekong* downstream all the way to Cambodia

and Vietnam. It was an attractive thought, but Cambodia was caught up in the horrors of the Khmer Rouge, and post-war Vietnam was not Pakistan.

On the bus to a nearby village I sat next to Gail, an Englishwoman. We spent the day together, and then realised we were stranded – the last bus had already left for Chiang Mai. At the only hotel, we were shown a big room with a double bed. I sent a *why not*? glance to Gail. She smiled demurely and told the hotel staff we wanted separate rooms; they looked as disappointed as I felt.

Back in Chiang Mai, I decided it was time to look into Buddhism. I hadn't yet read the booklet Nick had sent to me a year before, but it was still with me. Armed with a bottle of cold beer, I reclined in a cane chair and read it from cover to cover. Then I read it twice more. Something inside me had clicked. It was psychology, stunningly simple and accurate. The causes and the solution of human suffering, and the concepts of karma and reincarnation, fitted a logical pattern. It seemed so familiar; even the Sanskrit words struck a chord deep within me. I instantly resolved to attend the meditation course in Kathmandu. And the bonus would be that I'd catch up with Kerry.

There was enough time to visit Laos before returning to Bangkok from where I would fly to Nepal. The next day I crossed the Mekong and entered Laos. The currency had been devalued so much that things were priced in bundles rather than single notes and, with literally an armful of money, I bought a plane ticket to Vientiane. The road to the airport presented the discomforting sight of several aircraft parked at impossible angles, cannibalised for their parts, and being reclaimed by the jungle. The ancient DC3 was not reassuring, but the hostesses in red uniforms cheered me up. Despite its appearance, the plane managed to take off and get us to Vientiane without mishap.

The unmistakably French influence in the architecture indicated better times, but Vientiane was run-down, almost deserted, and not a happy place. Crossing back into Thailand, I caught a bus to Bangkok, a journey infinitely more hazardous than a flight on a Laotian DC3. To call our driver a lunatic would be letting him off lightly. The drivers of the other vehicles were even worse. Daylight revealed the sides of the highway to be littered with overturned buses and trucks. It was like a scene from a *Mad Max* film.

Against my better judgement, I ate chicken braised on a wooden skewer. And by the time we arrived at the Hotel Malaysia I was feeling the effects of food poisoning. There were no vacant rooms; the hotel manager offered me the billiard table to sleep on for the night but I needed a bed. Feverish and dizzy with nausea I staggered to another hotel nearby and just managed to get to my room before being overcome by vomiting and diarrhoea. I spent most of the night crawling between the bathroom and the bed.

For the next three days I survived on lemonade, lying on the bed, too weak to move. On the fourth day I felt slightly better and made my way to an eating place near the hotel to buy buttered toast and a coffee. As I was gingerly facing up to my first solid food in four days, Gail entered the shop with her girlfriend. She had been in the same hotel all the time.

I moved to a room in the Malaysia and, nursed by Gail and her friend, regained my strength. One night we saw the movie *Siddhartha*, which made me cry. I could not help but identify

with Siddhartha, Herman Hesse's young man in search of truth, who renounces asceticism for a life of business and pleasure. Then, experiencing a lack of fulfilment in the life of luxury, he finds a ferryman, a holy man who has learned the secret of life from the river itself. I realised that what I had perceived as my lonely search for truth was a universal yearning present in the hearts of all humankind. Did the Tibetan lamas possess the key to understanding the secrets revealed to me by the Indus?

Gail left to continue her travels in South-East Asia. We thought we might meet again in London, as I was planning to go there after the meditation course.

I applied for a Nepalese visa and had two days to wait for it. A young woman from Sydney, about five-foot-nothing and with an Afro hairstyle that made her look like a walking lollipop, asked me to accompany her to Pattaya. She was on the road for the first time and had arranged a lift with an ex-marine who had served in Vietnam. This lean American with spaced-out eyes indicating that he had seen too much, taken too much, or both, picked us up at the hotel and we headed off in his car. He had a pile of gear next to him on the front seat and we sat in the back.

Soon I was regretting my decision. The American made Thai drivers look considerate, and that was some feat. He drove so fast that nothing passed us, and we passed everything. With his foot never leaving the accelerator and, I had to admit, the skill of a racing driver, he managed to weave in and out of the traffic, just avoiding head-on collisions that seemed inevitable. At full speed, he rolled a thick joint of hash, which he passed back to us. Although I was on the verge of giving up dope, I thought that if I was going to die I might as well die stoned. When we arrived at Pattaya Beach, our driver informed us that he was also high on acid.

That night there was a party at the house of his friends. The guests were mostly ex-GI's, very strung-out. I watched in amusement, and a touch of sadness, as a giant African-American danced with the lollipop girl. Everybody looked unhappy and lost. I curled up behind a couch and went to sleep. In the morning I returned to Bangkok by bus, picked up my passport from the Nepalese embassy, and flew to Kathmandu.

THE KEY

I could not believe the magic of Kathmandu. It was home, it was my destination – every cliché in the book could not cover my feelings. With my pack safely locked away in a hotel room, I found my way to Freak Street, the Mecca of Hippydom.

'Hey mister, change money?'

'No.'

'Buy hashish?'

'No.'

'Old Buddha statue?'

'No.'

'You like my sister?'

'No.'

I brushed aside the mob of cheerful young hustlers in the street and entered Eat at Joe's restaurant. A scratchy tape of the Doors was playing, and a group of Europeans were sharing a chillum in defiance, or perhaps in celebration, of the sign on the wall above them: *Smoking of the Hasheesh is Not Aloud.*

Ordering a coffee, I sat next to the chillum smokers. 'Excuse me,' I asked, 'do you know how I can find Kopan Monastery? A meditation course is supposed to be starting there soon.'

'Sure man. Catch the bus to Boudhanath, it's only a few miles. Get out when you come close to the stupa. Behind the stupa, a path leads through a lane of shit and onto the track to Kopan. Like a hit?' He offered me the chillum, which I declined.

Well before the bus reached Boudhanath, the white dome of the great stupa came into view, its Buddha eyes peering over the rooftops. The bus stopped at the entrance to the stupa. Overwhelmed by its majesty, I began following the crowd in clockwise circumambulation when a taxi pulled up beside me. Kris jumped out and flung her arms around me. She and Kerry had rented rooms in a house that faced onto the stupa courtyard, and she was returning from shopping. I helped carry her bags of vegetables to their place.

Kerry was surprised at my appearance. I was always coming and going from her life. She looked at me with a smile and asked, 'Where did you come from?'

I explained the impossibility of finding work in Thailand, and my new interest in Buddhism. 'And I was missing you as well.'

'It's too soon,' she replied, 'but now you're here you'd better bring your things from Kathmandu.'

Kris brought us tea; they had easily settled into the Boudhanath scene and were well organised. We discussed the meditation course.

'Everybody's talking about Kopan and the two lamas. More than two hundred have registered. You had better go there now and sign up.'

Kerry and Kris were going into Kathmandu to see a tailor. They explained how to get to Kopan and I set off alone.

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The path crossed terraced paddy fields with islands of giant bamboo swaying in the breeze. Children greeted me with shouts of *namaste*, and scarlet birds flew from tree to tree. A rusty van loaded with lumber stopped and an Englishman offered me a lift. He was working with a building crew at Kopan, frantically trying to provide accommodation for all the course participants. The very planks I was sitting on were destined to become the roof of my room, and were to prove woefully inadequate at keeping the rain out. At the end of a steep climb to the top of a ridge, we finally arrived at Kopan, where an excited gang of boy monks descended upon us to unload the van. I was directed to the registration office, a window in the wall of an old building with bay windows – the astrologer's cottage.

Marie, writing the details of course participants in an old ledger, looked up but at first didn't recognise me. It was hard to recognise her too, with her shaven head and wearing the same robes as the young monks.

'Hi Marie, I've come for the Buddhist brain-washing.'

She looked at me more clOsely, 'Ade! You're finally here.'

Her smile was reassuring, she wasn't crazy. Neither was Nick. I found him in a geodesic dome built by Tom the previous year. He was sitting cross-legged on the floor and working on a pile of papers.

Nick held my hands in warm welcome. 'I thought you would be the first to come, but now you're the last.'

'Well, your letters were about as subtle as a train smash, I had to do a bit of thinking first.'

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There were three days to explore Kathmandu with Kris and Kerry. The cobbled streets, houses leaning at insane angles, and the crowded bazaars reminded me of Afghanistan and Pakistan, but there was an exuberance about the Nepalese that I had never seen in the Muslims. The Buddhist and Hindu temples were far friendlier than the forbidding mosques. Every morning we awoke to the sound of Tibetan monks chanting, accompanied by

trumpets, drums, and bells. Once again the feeling of familiarity swept through me; my heartbeat followed the rhythm of the drums.

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And so began the most intense thirty days of my life.

The lamas, including Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche, lived above the main temple, and the young monks lived in a precarious three-story brick building named Norbulinka. Two hundred and fifty Westerners had signed up for the course and, as well as the hurried construction of new buildings, nearby farmhouses had been turned into segregated dormitories.

I shared a room with four others in a roofless building with the cement still drying on the walls and floor. Two of my room-mates were from Melbourne: Peter, who had gone to art school with Garrey, and Paul, a friend of Nick's and a budding film-maker. And yes, Mary joined us a night or two later when rain flooded her tent. The other two in our room, Scott and Yogi, were destined to become fellow monks with me at Kopan. After the introductory talk on the first evening, we crawled into our sleeping bags on beds of straw, laughing uncontrollably at the apparent insanity of it all.

The daily routine started at 5.30am with roasted soya bean coffee, most welcome in the morning chill, as the sun rose over Kathmandu valley. After coffee, we assembled in a large tent erected on a lawn behind the temple. Our cushions were on a floor of coarse grass mats. A Canadian nun, Ann, led meditation for an hour. She had such a deep voice it was two days before I realised she was a nun and not a monk.

After a breakfast of granola or *chura* – flattened rice flakes – soaked in tea, we again entered the tent for the first discourse by Lama Zopa Rinpoche. A monk, carrying a metal brazier billowing clouds of frankincense and other sweet-smelling plants, preceded Lama Zopa and his retinue of Tibetan monks. They chanted prayers and Lama Zopa performed a ritual with three candles and cone-shaped cakes that were offered to appease the spirits. The ritual immediately ignited my cynicism – *ghosts indeed*! But the chanting, Lama Zopa's delicate hand movements, and the fragrance of the incense combined to create an unforgettable experience. Debate about the teachings raged through the vegetarian lunch and into discussion groups afterwards. In the afternoon, Lama Zopa gave a second discourse and led a meditation. A light supper of soup was followed by another meditation session led by Ann, and we retired, physically exhausted but so fired up that discussions continued in the dormitories until well after midnight.

Lama Zopa began by talking about the mind. This was what I had come for. 'Your mind is your subjective experience of things,' he told us. 'It is your awareness of sense objects and the thoughts you have about them. It includes all your feelings of happiness and unhappiness, and all pleasant and unpleasant emotions. It is both your knowledge and your mistaken ideas, your ignorance.'

He went on to say that a human being has a body and a mind, two mutually dependent but different entities. There is no third component, such as a soul or spirit, and even the person

is simply an abstract phenomenon whose existence is established merely by giving a name to a particular combination of body and mind. Neither the body nor the mind is the person, and there is no person that exists in its own right independently of the body and mind or the naming process.

Wanting to know how the mind could be different from the brain, I took my doubts to Nick.

'Is he saying that the mind has nothing to do with the brain?'

'No, the mind, or consciousness – they're the same thing – depends on the brain and nervous system, but it is not the same. Awareness has no physical characteristics – no colour, no shape, no taste, and so on – because mind is not material.'

'If it can't be physically measured, how can you say it exists?'

'Look at the tree. Does your awareness of the tree exist?'

'Yes.'

'Where does it exist?'

'In my brain.'

'Are you sure?'

'Where else could it exist?'

'In your mind. Your eyes and brain are just conditions that enable your mind to be aware of the tree. Your awareness of the tree is mind.'

'Okay, so my brain is creating my mind. That means that when I die my brain will stop creating, and my mind will cease to exist. So your theory of reincarnation is up the shit.'

'Congratulations! You've understood that it is the mind that goes from life to life and not the body or soul or anything else.'

'How can mind survive death if it is no longer being created?'

'You said mind was created by the brain, I didn't. If you look at it in terms of a sequence of moments, the present moment of your mind follows directly from the previous moment and, in turn, is the cause of the future moment of mind. Mind is a continuum of awareness that flows through time like a river flows across the land. Wherever you look, upstream is always the direct cause of downstream.'

'Are you saying that mind creates itself?'

'In terms of the basic entity of awareness, yes. Awareness also depends upon the nervous system and upon its objects. These act as conditions that determine the *type* of awareness, but they are not direct causes of the *entity* of awareness.'

'Slow down man, I'm having trouble digesting all this.'

'Don't worry, it's only the first day.' Nick laughed. 'It's going to get a lot heavier than this.'

. . .

And it did get heavier as the afternoon discourse began. To the obvious question, 'When did mind begin?' Lama Zopa replied that the mind is beginningless. He said that the cycle of death and rebirth throughout the universe had no beginning: no new minds are ever created, none are ever extinguished, and there was no beginning to the universe.

Nick saw me coming and pretended to hide, but I caught him. I looked into his eyes in mock despair. 'What's all this beginningless stuff?'

'If you traced your mind back, life after life, you would never come to a first life. Your mind has always been cycling within the wheel of life.'

'What about the start of the universe, the Big Bang? How could my mind have existed before then?'

'Even universes have been coming and going since beginningless time. When the previous universe was destroyed, we were gods, still in the wheel of life, who could not be harmed by the cessation of solar systems. Later, our karma caused new worlds to evolve and we were born as animals, humans, and so on.'

'Nick, how can you say all this as though it were fact? How do you *know*?'

'I rely on the Buddha. Our minds have the potential to know everything. Buddha actualised that potential, and this is how he saw things with his omniscient mind.'

'C'mon Nick, where's the proof?'

'Can you prove it's wrong?'

'You're a frustrating bastard. What's this wheel of life then?'

'It's simple. Countless sentient beings – humans, animals, hungry ghosts, hell beings, demigods and divine gods – have been taking birth in different forms since beginningless time."

'*Sentient* beings? What does that mean?'

'Living beings with feelings, or mind. Plants are alive, but they are not sentient beings because they don't have minds.'

'You believe in ghosts? And in hell?' I asked, dumbfounded.

'Yes.' Nick smiled at my astonishment, 'It fits the pattern.'

'You poor bloody thing, what have these lamas done to you?' I half-joked: 'Don't you think magic mushrooms have feelings?'

'Nope.'

'They don't feel afraid when they see long-haired hippies coming to eat them?'

'They can't see long-haired hippies,' he said, taking me seriously. 'Fear and vision are functions of mind.'

'What about the Psilocybe Spirit? I teased.

'So, you believe in ghosts too?'

. . .

The next day was more of the same. In describing the mechanism of reincarnation, Lama Zopa told us that the mind separates from the body at death. Conveyed by a subtle physical energy, it goes through a dream-like intermediate state and finally enters a fertilised egg in the future mother's womb. Thus, the baby's mind does not come from the parents' minds, nor from the developing embryo – it is a third factor required for conception. It carries seeds of both good and bad mental qualities from the previous lives, as well as karmic seeds that have the power to connect the future life with pleasant or unpleasant experiences that correspond to good or bad behaviour in the past.

'How is this different from being punished or rewarded by a compassionate, yet vengeful, God? I challenged Nick. 'It's the same story. We're being coerced through fear of punishment and faith in a reward to live according to the instructions of others, rather than following the true feelings that come from our hearts.'

'Have you been following religion or your heart in life?' he asked.

'Definitely not religion, I've done what I wanted without giving a stuff for what society thinks,' I indignantly replied.

'Has this brought you closer to happiness, or has it taken you further away?'

Nick knew the answer to that. I remained silent.

Wrapping his red robe around his head and shoulders, Nick said softly, 'Take it slowly Ade, there's a lot more to karma than you think.'

. . .

We were told to keep silence in-between discourses and meditations. Stopping talking, however, did not stop me thinking. I was pleased to learn that Buddhism rejected the concept of an all-powerful creator of the universe. My scientific theories may have been under threat, but my atheism was not. The Buddhist alternative to the creation theory was that life, the sun, moon, earth, everything comes from the minds of sentient beings themselves.

Ignoring the rule of silence, once again I sought Nick's opinion. 'You said that the mind cannot be created by the body because mind and matter are different entities, right?'

'Right.'

'So, how can the mind create the physical universe?' I held up a stone as an example of the physical world.

'Again, there's a problem with the word *create*. Matter in general does exist separately from mind, it is not created by mind, and its physical and chemical activity is not karma. But its expression in the form of the different environments experienced by sentient beings is determined by their karma. Without karma, matter would remain in its simplest state. Karma is the force behind the complexity of the universe and the evolution of plants and animals.'

'Is karma mind?'

'Not exactly. First of all, at any one moment, matter has many potential ways of appearing to mind. Whichever of these potentials manifests is determined by the karma of the being experiencing it. Karmic potentials established on the mind-stream by past actions give rise to mental tendencies which connect the person with one of the many potential ways matter can manifest. For example, our human karma ripens the potential of Kathmandu valley to appear as a beautiful place with flowers, water, rice paddies, and so on. But the karma of hungry ghosts makes the valley appear to them as a dry wasteland with no food or drink.'

'So, what's really out there, a lush valley or a wasteland?'

'It depends if you are a human or a hungry ghost. Whatever they experience is real for them.'

'You mean there's no reality independent of mind?'

'That's exactly what I mean.'

'Then,' I tossed the stone into the air and caught it again, 'if I think this stone is gold it becomes gold, right?'

'Who are you, King Midas?'

'Nick, you're not helping me.'

'Sorry. For something to be gold it has to be suitable to be called gold.'

'Thanks, that's a *great* help,' I said sarcastically.

. . .

So, I thought, according to Buddhism, both the environment and the sentient beings inhabiting it are reflections of the activity of countless, beginningless, eternal streams of consciousness that are obliged by their karma to take rebirth in various states of existence where they experience the consequences of their past actions. Maybe the God theory wasn't such a bad idea after all.

I could not accept the theories of karma and reincarnation. On the other hand, the Buddhist explanation of the psychology of our everyday life was reasonable. It explained the problem with the ego, and the solution. Lama Zopa said that the very root of our problems is the mistaken way in which we assume our self to exist, and the solution is seeing the non-existence of this phantom.

'In reality,' he said, 'individual persons are established to exist merely through the action of giving a name to particular combinations of body and mind. Neither the body nor the mind is the person, and there is no person that exists in its own right separate from the body and mind. Existing in mere name alone is sufficient to distinguish ourselves from others, and for us to be responsible for our actions. Since birth, however, we have had the wrong conception that our self is more concrete than that. We mistakenly see our self to exist in its own right as an independent controller of our body and mind. Compounding this original mistake, we cherish our "self" as being more important than others. Obsessed with this false self-image, we self-centredly crave the happiness of sensual pleasure, of being recognised and loved by others, of having possessions, and of being praised. On the other hand, we fear the misery of not having sensory pleasure, of being ignored or disliked by others, of not having possessions, and of being criticised.'

For ten days, Lama Zopa relentlessly detailed how these self-centred thoughts of desire and aversion motivate our behaviour. He said they are the causes of all our suffering and, in effect, they only achieve the opposite of what we want: they attract misery and push happiness away.

. . .

I could see the validity in Lama Zopa's argument, but the implications were vast: I couldn't blame society or anybody else for my problems as the real culprit was my own ego, which I had assumed to be me but it wasn't. And there was no "me" who possessed this ego, in fact, there was no real me anywhere beyond the mere name "Ade." I wanted to run away, it was just too threatening. In the first week, a hundred people did escape, abandoning Kopan for the apparent delights of Kathmandu.

In the meditations I tried to defend my behaviour: *I'm a good guy, I want everyone to be happy, not just me*. But, as I reflected on my life, it became increasingly obvious that selfishness manifesting as pride, anger, desire, jealousy, and biased preconceptions was the underlying factor in all my loneliness and unhappiness. The point Lama Zopa was trying to establish was that "Ade" was neither a good nor a bad guy. "Ade" was just a label, and there was no separate, independent individual indicated by that label. If this body was skinny, "Ade" was

skinny; if this mind was happy, "Ade" was happy; wherever this body and mind were, that's where "Ade" was. "Ade" existed but only in a conventional sense, not in his own right.

. . .

During a meditation on karma and rebirth, I realised that, if it were all true, becoming a monk would be the only sane thing to do with my life. I redoubled my efforts to prove the lamas wrong.

Ann told us the story of Lama Zopa's previous life as the Lawudo Lama. To my sceptical mind, he was an intelligent and kind person who had come to believe the story he had heard as a boy. During a break in the teachings, I approached Lama Zopa and asked outright if the story of his previous life was true. It was the first time I had spoken to him. Lama Zopa paused, looked at me with his half-smiling and deeply penetrating eyes, and said, 'Yes, it is true.'

'How do you *know*?' I demanded, wanting the proof.

'Through mental experience,' he replied.

I understood. Science prides itself on being objective and avoiding the error of subjectivity. But the very nature of mind is subjective experience, there is no other way to investigate, understand, and report the mind. Although subjectivity may colour both external and internal observations, why should we dismiss *all* mental experience as invalid? There is no way to directly prove reincarnation other than by remembering previous lives through the power of meditation. As I could not disprove reincarnation, I had to remain open to its possibility. Apart from that, the manner in which Lama Zopa replied left me in no doubt as to the sincerity of his *mental experience*.

The most undeniable aspect of the teachings was the emphasis on love and compassion for all beings. One evening, the earth began to shake. Somebody called out 'Earthquake!' but nobody moved. A wave of sound flowed up the hill from the valley below – the frenzied barking of dogs and the frightened cries of people. Still leading the meditation, Lama Zopa said urgently, 'Meditate on compassion for the suffering of sentient beings,' and the essence of Buddhism became clear to those of us who, earlier in the day, had been arguing against what we saw as primitive superstition.

. . .

My mind began to drift. I resented keeping silence, regarding it as an imposition on my freedom to ask questions. The tales given as proof of karma, such as elephants making dung of pure gold, or women laying eggs, did not quite fit my scientific perspective. On the one hand, the lamas appeared so wise; on the other, they seemed to be so superstitious.

'Nick, karma and rebirth. It's just too much to believe,' I said in frustration.

'But it's all true,' he said in deep sincerity. He was sounding like Lama Zopa.

'Oh, give me a break. These examples given by Lama Zopa are just fairy tales.'

'I don't think they are to be taken literally,' he replied, 'try to see the meaning they convey.'

'Okay,' I changed the line of questioning. 'You said that karma wasn't mind, so what is it?'

'In general, the word *karma* describes a process of cause and effect. On the causal side, our actions leave imprints on our mental continuum. Deeds motivated to benefit others leave positive imprints that result in pleasant future experiences, and deeds motivated to harm others leave negative imprints that result in unpleasant future experiences.'

'These motivations, I assume you mean selfish or non-selfish thoughts do you? I asked.

'Yes, selfish desire or anger, and non-selfish love or compassion.'

'Those are mind aren't they?'

'That's right. Karma is the *action*, and the intention behind the action is a mental component of karmic cause and effect. The imprints, however, are energy potentials carried *on* the mind, but they are not mind.'

'Then they must be physical?'

'No, they are not matter either. Just as Newton observed an apple falling to the ground and described the principle of gravity, Buddha observed people being attracted to pleasant and unpleasant situations and described the principle of karma. Just as gravity is a property of matter but is not matter, karmic imprints are a property of mind but are neither mind nor matter.'

'Are all pleasant and unpleasant experiences the result of karma?'

"For us, yes. In this or some future life, our karmic imprints will initiate another mental intention, or impulse, that will connect us with a pleasant or unpleasant experience. That's the resultant side of karmic cause and effect.'

'So, my life is predetermined by karma? I have no choice in what I experience?'

'No, karma is not a blue-print for life. It is just one of several conditions required for any experience to happen. Loving, compassionate attitudes are conditions that nurture the ripening of positive imprints. Angry or greedy dispositions nurture the ripening of negative imprints. Although you are not yet free of karma, choice comes through knowing about it. Knowledge of karma is your key to freedom because you will naturally adopt a code of morality that avoids harming others.'

. . .

I was beginning to see the reasoning behind Nick's decision to become a monk. I was amazed, and somewhat wary, that he had achieved such deep conviction in so short a time. What if he had made a mistake?

'Going back to karmic imprints,' I continued, 'to what category of things do they belong?'

'They belong to the group of abstract things that are merely designated upon particular situations. For example, 'time' is merely designated on the observed passage of the past to the present to the future. And numbers are merely designated upon one, two, three things and so on. The "person" is merely designated upon the collection of body and mind. Karmic imprints, time, numbers, persons, all exist but they are neither matter nor mind.'

'How do you know karmic imprints exist?'

'Can I tell you tomorrow?' Nick joked.

'How do you know tomorrow will happen?' I retorted.

'Because 'today' exists.'

'Nick, you have no real proof. All that you have been telling me is just blind faith.'

'It is faith, but it's not blind,' he replied. 'Blind faith is where you believe in something without doubt and without logical reason. Buddha said you must not accept his teachings through faith alone, you must doubt and examine them with a critical mind. If you check up and cannot disprove the teachings, you gain admiration for the Buddha and his teachings. This admiring faith will make your mind clear and you'll investigate further. Then, by seeing how certain aspects of the teachings are in accord with your own experience, and are logical, you will have the faith of conviction. After that, you'll see that compassion and wisdom, the path to nirvana and Buddhahood, are logically attainable, and you'll have the faith that aspires to achieve those qualities. Your doubt must remain until it's removed by the wisdom that sees reality. At that moment, correct faith becomes wisdom.'

. . .

Maybe I had some admiring faith, but I was far from the faith of conviction. The only way I could accommodate the presentation of ghosts, hell beings, and divine beings was to see the description of 'realms of birth' as being a vivid presentation of the range of human psychological states. Some people, such as paranoid schizophrenics or those burned alive, have hell-like experiences; the experience of bliss through drugs, sex, or alcohol is a god-like experience; misers have hungry ghost-like experiences; anger and lust make others behave like animals. And those whose minds are dominated by jealousy and the desire for power are just like the demigods.

To me, this way of seeing the wheel of life seemed even more likely when Lama Zopa described a hell realm where giant birds with iron beaks torment you and peck out your brains. This image was exactly what my schizophrenic patient, the boy who committed suicide, had described. Lama Zopa said that such experiences are indeed projections of the mind, but they are real for those who experience them.

MEETING THE LAMA

During one discourse, Lama Zopa had been teaching for several hours, well past the proper finishing time. Unable to take any more, I left the tent and climbed to the top of the hill. As I was sitting in the sun and looking down into Kathmandu valley, three small girls in charge of some goats came and sat beside me. They offered me a mint sweet as the goats nibbled the grass around us. *This is reality*, I thought to myself. At that moment, a monk appeared on the top floor of the main temple. I hadn't seen him before, but I knew it was Lama Yeshe. There were two other students on the hill, and when the lama disappeared, I anticipated that he was coming to talk to us.

Sure enough, as Lama Yeshe approached I stood up to meet him. He came close, looked right into my eyes and said, 'If you want power, get back in the tent.'

I was taken aback. From reading Carlos Castaneda's books, I had become convinced that the power of the warrior, as taught by Don Juan, was a valid quality to be attained, and that indeed was what I was searching for. How did Lama Yeshe know?

Gathering my defences, I thought, *If you can read my mind, reality is right here with these children and the goats*. And, looking straight back at his eyes in defiance, I replied, 'No.' It was not a very auspicious first meeting with my teacher.

Lama Yeshe turned and spoke to the other two, then he returned to the temple. Having made my point, I went down to the tent where, as if he had been waiting for me, Lama Zopa concluded the discourse as soon as I took my seat. It was time for lunch.

A few years later, I saw a Western monk, half-Native American, trying to give one of Castaneda's books to Lama Yeshe, saying:

'Lama, you must read this book.'

Lama Yeshe took the book in both hands and proceeded to beat the monk on the head with it, once for each word, '*I do not need to read this book*.'

. . .

The course intensified. At dawn each day, Lama Zopa gave us twenty-four-hour vows to avoid killing, stealing, lying, sexual activity, taking intoxicants, singing, dancing, playing music, and eating more than once a day.

'It's okay,' joked Nick, 'you're allowed to laugh.'

But it was too much for me. As soon as it was light, I made the half-hour walk to Boudhanath for a breakfast of porridge and curd followed by fried eggs on toast. Diarrhoea had not helped my emaciated frame to recover from the food poisoning in Bangkok, and I was convinced my body needed more protein.

On the third morning of precepts, I enticed Kerry to accompany me. Like so many others, I was thinking of giving up the course. I intended to ask her to come with me to Goa. There was too much emphasis on suffering, hell realms, ghosts, and religious ritual for my liking. As we were eating breakfast, I noticed that Kerry's eyes had acquired a sublime expression, the smile I had observed in the eyes of acid-trippers and in women who have just given birth. And there was something similar in the eyes of Lama Zopa. She looked so beautiful; I couldn't take her away from Kopan. When we finished eating, I said, 'Kerry, I'm not sure what's happening on that hill, but I think it's good. Let's get back in time for the morning discourse.'

As the course continued I was alternately attracted and put off by the teachings, but a growing conviction in my heart said that this philosophy was valid. The Buddha had indeed been an enlightened person. Still, I held back from prostrating to the lamas and the Buddha image. During one meditation session, however, I finally admitted that the Buddha's wisdom was superior to my scientific education. Self-conscious and proud, I waited for most people to leave the tent, and then I made one prostration to the statue of Buddha. When I joined Kris and Kerry outside, there was such a grin on my face that Kerry tweaked my ear and asked, 'What's got into you?'

Admiring faith had begun to happen.

. . .

Lama Yeshe remained a mystery figure. There were many stories about him, but he had not yet come to teach. One afternoon the word went around, 'Lama Yeshe is coming tonight.' In an atmosphere of increasing excitement, everybody gathered in the tent, all eyes strained towards the entrance. While we were waiting, a monk slipped under the rear flap of the tent and took his place in the line of Western monks sitting near the teaching throne, his red robe covering his face. Suddenly there was a peal of high-pitched laughter from him. It was Lama Yeshe. Still gasping for breath, he took his place on the throne. He had fooled us all. I liked this lama.

Lama Yeshe had picked up most of his English by listening to Westerners and reading Time magazine. Consequently, his talks were peppered with both colloquial and technical terms and phrases that he used with amazing accuracy. Combined with his infectious laugh and the showmanship of a professional comedian, he held our undivided attention over three separate evenings of talks.

Compared to Lama Zopa's unrelenting hellfire and brimstone approach, Lama Yeshe gave a more gentle and yet unwaveringly powerful presentation of the meaning of Buddhism. I was particularly impressed by his answer to my question about schizophrenia. His (edited) reply was:

'What is [the cause of] schizophrenia? There are so many types of schizophrenia that I cannot say exactly one thing. There are many reasons for becoming schizophrenic. For example, how does a student become schizophrenic? In Western schools a student can become schizophrenic when he experiences too much pressure to learn. Besides his own pushing, his parents, relatives, or girlfriend is pushing and pumping him, and also he has

difficulty in learning, so he becomes depressed. He cannot [achieve] and still there is pushing, pushing, and then his superstition arises: "I cannot do, I cannot do, I cannot do, I nothing, I nothing, I'm that, I'm that; people are looking at me, I'm nothing, everybody is saying bad things about me...," and then finally the function of schizophrenia is he becomes crazy. Okay, so that is the main reason, dear sir, it comes from intellecting.'

'Sometimes it is not like that. It can be because he is physically weak, he did not get food and his nervous system is completely breaking and cannot function properly. His nervous system is weak and so his mind is down, it is blocked and so automatically he becomes schizophrenic.'

'Sometimes there can be an idealistic person, absolutely educated, healthy, happy, but suddenly comes one problem in his mind – philosophical argument, or family disagreement – and his ego is hurt. Then he becomes schizophrenic too. Ohhh, there are so many ways to become schizophrenic.'

Lama Yeshe understood the nature of schizophrenia and its association with both environmental and physiological conditions. Also, he indicated that the root cause lay within the mind itself, in particular, confusion relating to the self-image, so well explained in Buddhism to be the underlying cause of all our problems. In his simple words, the description of how intellectual confusion caused by both internal and external pressure to succeed can lead a student to becoming schizophrenic was in accord with R.D. Laing's more elaborate description of how conflicting social pressures can tie up the mind in intellectual confusion that eventually manifests as overt schizophrenia.

Later, I learned that karmic causes leading to insanity are actions such as confusing the minds of others through spells or concoctions, forcing others to take intoxicants against their will, frightening wild animals, setting forests on fire, and any act that harms the well-being of another. External conditions that can precipitate insanity are a very frightening event, harm by a disturbing spirit, physiological imbalance, and grief such as the sorrow of bereavement. I was yet to be convinced about spirits, but the other causes and conditions seemed reasonable.

CHECKING UP

The Buddhist view of the world was enticing, but at the end of the course I was not ready to become a Buddhist. I needed to go away and think about everything. Many times, Lama Yeshe had exhorted us to 'check up' the teachings, and I resolved to do just that. Also holding me back was my understanding that, if karma and rebirth were true, no time should be lost, I should become a monk. And that was the last thing I wanted to do with my life.

Showing the quick wisdom that the lamas told us was a characteristic of the feminine mind, Kerry and Kris attended a ceremony with Lama Yeshe where they became Buddhists. Showing the masculine characteristic of a more ponderous intellectual approach, I refused to attend. Such a commitment could only come when I was completely convinced that the teachings were true.

Like most of the course participants, our first night away from Kopan was a party. With Nick's brother, Dorian, and his girlfriend, Alison, we smoked a little hash and listened to music. Dorian went out and reappeared with an entire lemon meringue pie from the famous Freak Street pie shop. Lama Zopa had spoken endlessly about the faults of desire, and now we were doing some field research.

The next day, I wrote a long letter to Garrey, describing the meditation course. I told him I was not completely sure about Buddhism, but he *must* attend the course to be given by the lamas during their forthcoming visit to Australia. Whatever his reaction in the beginning, he had to remain until the end of the course. I heard later that this letter was passed around and read by many others during the course, which was held in Diamond Valley, near Tom and Kathy's house in Mooloolah. The letter was responsible for quite a few deciding to persevere with the meditation rather than heading off to the beach.

. . .

Heading off to the beach is an inherent urge in the Australian psyche, and the desire to do just that was growing within me as the early summer heat burned the dusty streets of Kathmandu. A special connection had grown between the people from the course; we spent long hours in pie shops discussing every imaginable topic, but mostly travel. Goa on the west coast, and Puri on the east coast of India were popular destinations; so was trekking in the mountains. When we heard about the lake at Pokhara, a half-day bus journey to the west of Kathmandu, Kerry and I decided to go there.

As our bus left Kathmandu Valley, the full extent of the Himalayas was revealed and the cloistered feeling of the valley gave way to a sense of exhilaration as our minds expanded like lotus petals. Over the pass, we entered a deep gorge, carved by a turbulent green river far below us. Landslides had eaten away sections of the road and some of us chose to walk while the driver negotiated the most dangerous parts. People cultivated plots of land on hillsides so steep that they seemed in imminent danger of falling thousands of feet into the ravines below.

At Pokhara, a boy squeezed us onto his bicycle rickshaw and pedalled towards the lake. It was a journey into fairyland. The protesting squeal of straining bicycle metal was the only sound on a road lined with lush grass and thickets of bamboo. Recently ploughed fields exuded the earthy odour of fertility rather than the stench of human waste that pervaded Kathmandu. Amidst healthy stands of maize were thatched cottages with walls of red mud. Behind the houses was a ridge of green mountains, and beyond those, piercing the clouds and impossibly high, was the magnificent peak of Machapuccharee. Two young men led us into a grassy compound bordered by a low stone wall. The thatched cottage had two rooms, each furnished with two beds and a small table. At the end of the building was a toilet and a shower room. It was perfect. We rented one of the rooms for four rupees a night.

Directly opposite our gate, across the road, was a grassy slope that ended abruptly about fifteen feet above the surface of the lake. We could climb down to the water's edge, or simply jump from the cliff-top. Westerners who lived in cottages similar to our own gathered here to smoke dope, swim, and sunbathe, mostly in the nude. We were ignored by the Nepalese going their way along the road. How different it was from Pakistan.

On our side of the road were chai shops that catered for Westerners with porridge, eggs, and toast for breakfast, and various noodle or rice dishes for lunch and dinner. Although the food was ridiculously cheap, Kerry and I prepared our own meals over an open fire, buying fruit and vegetables at the street market. We soon settled into a daily routine of swimming, eating, and taking walks. In the evenings we lay in bed listening to my tapes of the Doors, Pink Floyd, the Rolling Stones, and other rock icons of the era. Each morning I swam across the lake to sit on a forested promontory where birds and butterflies showed no fear. One time, I nearly bumped into a middle-aged Englishman back-stroking down the length of the lake.

'Isn't this absolutely glorious?' he said, as he continued on his way.

Kris arrived with a girl from the course and took the room next to us. We hired a canoe and rowed across the lake to visit a Buddhist temple that we had heard about. With her eyes, a woman clearing vines from the path indicated to me my three companions and made a lewd gesture with her tongue. Her male companions laughed. The Nepalese could hardly be blamed for their opinion of us hippies.

Hey babe, none of that, I'm on a religious pilgrimage, was the mental message I sent her.

There was nobody at the temple, so we went inside and placed flowers on the altar. Sitting cross-legged on the wooden floor, we meditated. At Kopan, we had recited the mantra of Buddha many times and, as I softly chanted this mantra, the others joined in. The energy of the meditation course flooded back. How easily it had slipped away.

Encouraged by our experience at the temple, Kerry and I tried meditating each day but, without a structure to follow, and with the pleasant distractions around us, our efforts went mostly unrewarded. Nevertheless, Lama Zopa's words were in our minds, and we were seeing the world through the eyes of Buddhism. A half-hearted attempt at fishing was abandoned after I thought about the pain and fear a hooked fish must experience. My

compassion backfired when I rescued a fish caught by two boys and it sank its sharp, crocodile-like teeth into my finger, much to the boys' hysterical delight.

The weather had its own daily routine. The morning heat was relieved by afternoon thunderstorms that cleared into stunning sunsets with the mountains shining in mantles of fresh snow. Many travellers came to the lake and left after a few days; it was the beginning and the end of the trek to Jomsom. After Kris had returned to Kathmandu, Kerry and I followed the trekking route to a village beside a roaring torrent that came from the melting snows of Machapuccharee. Another stream, fed by warm rainwater, had a pool beneath a waterfall that tumbled over polished white boulders.

One afternoon I was sitting beneath a rocky overhang thinking that this place was perfection. A man arrived and began fiddling with something that he then threw into the water. There was a violent eruption as the dynamite exploded. In disgust, I watched him collect the dead and stunned fish that floated to the surface. So much for perfection; I remembered the Buddha's words, 'Nothing is perfect in this world conditioned by ignorance and karma.'

Moving on from the village by the stream, Kerry and I stayed with a Nepalese family who charged us just for food: the lodging was free. In a loft above the main bedroom, I listened to the husband and wife arguing. I didn't understand their words, but the tone of their voices reminded me of the interminable domestic arguments I had listened to as a child. The dispute went beyond words and into physical blows, and then heavy sobbing. I lay awake, thinking how even this paradise was not enough to make people happy. Their problems were the same as those of their sophisticated brothers and sisters in the West – dissatisfaction, anger, and the inability to love each other without demanding something in return.

The same confusion existed in my own mind. My relationship with Kerry remained superficial. I just couldn't make a deep commitment. There were too many preconceptions of the 'perfect partner' in my mind, too much selfishness, and an untamed wanderlust. Something else occurred to me as I listened to the couple in the room below. If I did establish a long-term relationship with anyone, and had not overcome my anger, it would only be a matter of time before I was sounding like the man in the room below.

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On our return to Pokhara, I was sitting at our favourite chai shop enjoying a cup of tea after a pre-breakfast swim. Five tall Germans arrived, obviously new to the East. They made fun of the menu and the man who ran the shop, continually changing their orders. Like David taking on five Goliaths, the diminutive shopkeeper stood among them and said calmly, 'Please make up your minds and give me your order. Changing all the time is making me angry. And being angry is not right.'

Silently, I applauded the little man, whose courage and wisdom was a lesson for those five arrogant tourists. And for me.

At the lakeshore, an English doctor from the mission hospital in Pokhara used to arrive on his bicycle and sit among us naked hippies. Living in a world very different from that of the long-haired sun worshippers, he was happy to find that I, knowing both worlds, was able to bridge the gap. He told me he wanted to learn from the young people, though I suspected his motive to be more sensual than intellectual. I questioned his Christian beliefs and how they influenced his medical practice. He described how the missionaries would sit in meetings until someone became possessed by the spirit of God and begin to speak in a strange tongue. Then they would pray for the very sick patients, often all night. I admired his devotion to the sick in going without sleep, but the other activities merely fuelled my anti-religious sentiment. I felt that Christianity, at least his brand of worship, was riddled with superstition. And I still had the same doubt about Buddhism.

Wild marijuana grew in abundance. I had stopped smoking because it was impairing my memory and the clarity of my mind. The goal of my quest was beyond the drug induced state, and my determination to give up dope was strengthened when I inadvertently bought a hash cake. I thought the label special meant more chocolate, but on tasting the distinctive flavour of ganja I thought, *Oh well, I might as well enjoy it.*

Ingested dope takes longer to act than when it is smoked, and its effect is more powerful. Instead of a pleasant evening listening to music, I was overcome by nausea and violent gastric spasms. With nothing left to throw up, I was lying on the floor making horrible, involuntary retching sounds. I thought I was dying, and wondered why the Swedish couple next door didn't come to help me. Kerry was in Kathmandu for a visa extension and, not wanting to disturb my neighbours any more, I crawled outside and lay on the grass until the nausea subsided. The next day I soundly berated the cake shop proprietor, who merely shrugged his shoulders.

Kerry returned with a two-week extension to her visa. We decided to go to Dharamsala in the mountains north of Delhi where the Dalai Lama lived with a community of Tibetan refugees. I had heard about a Tibetan woman, Dr Lobsang Dolma, who practised at the Tibetan Medical Centre, and I wanted to investigate Tibetan medicine. So we took the bus to the Indian border.

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The monsoon had not yet arrived and the heat was oppressive. We crossed the border in the late afternoon and caught a bus to Gorakhpur. Our tiredness was forgotten as we watched the parade of ox carts, women carrying water jugs on their heads, tumble-down shops, and other classic images of Mother India. Everything was silhouetted against a blood-red sky where tendrils of smoke reached up from countless cooking fires to ensnare the sun and drown it in a sea of dirty brown smog.

At a hotel near the railway station we washed away the grime and sweat and lay on our beds, protected from clouds of mosquitoes by mildewed netting. Desperate for a drop of oil, the ceiling fan squeaked away, its blades barely stirring the hot air. We managed to fall asleep and, in the relative cool of dawn, we awoke feeling human again. At breakfast of fried eggs on toast and numerous cups of tea, a fellow guest looked at us in contempt. He was a young Indian businessman, already sweating in his jacket and tie, absurd clothing in that climate.

His outspoken criticism of hippies, a poorly disguised attack upon ourselves, was countered by my trump card that I was a doctor and we were students of Indian philosophy.

The first train took us to Lucknow, where we waited for the train to Pathankot, 600 miles further along the line, from where we would catch a bus to Dharamsala. The railway station was in pandemonium. Every platform was crowded with passengers, porters, dogs, food wallahs, beggars, and the occasional sacred cow, all tripping over mountains of baggage. Kerry and I had first-class tickets but no reservations. Two hopelessly overcrowded trains came and went. Twelve hours later, we teamed up with an American couple and entered the reserved compartment of the next train, refusing the pleas of the conductor to get off the train. At the next station, the poor man whose bed we were now occupying met with a similar obstinacy. The conductor was most polite, but neither he nor the rightful occupant could move us. In the morning we went to another carriage and spent the day sitting on our packs in the corridor. A kind man shared his friend's seat and allowed Kerry to sleep on his bunk while he engaged me in philosophical conversation. That night we had the bunk to ourselves until the early hours of the next morning when we pulled into Pathankot.

Once again in the foothills of the Himalayas, the cool air revived us. Not far out of Pathankot, an ugly town of truck repair shops, our bus lurched to a stop with a flat tyre. I disappeared into the bushes to relieve my bowels. Marijuana grew everywhere and I found myself apologising when, with nothing else at hand, I cleaned myself with handfuls of its fresh green leaves. What blasphemy, I thought, *what would they think back home*? Then I reasoned that, as one of its many colloquial names was 'shit', there was nothing wrong in putting it to this use.

We headed east, past paddy fields emerald green with newly planted rice, so different from the uniform dusty beige of the plains. After passing through several clean and picturesque villages, we climbed the green hills towards a line of snow-mountains that loomed higher and higher above. Three hours later, we arrived in Dharamsala, set on a ridge clad with pines, oaks, and cedars standing tall in the clear mountain air. A sudden thunderstorm had us sheltering at a chai shop, where we had an extremely spicy lunch.

As the rain kept pouring down, we took a room for the night. On the back verandah two Swedish girls were bathing in the torrent of rainwater flowing off the roof. We joined them, and when the rain finally stopped, we took a walk around Kotwali bazaar. Plains people and mountain people mixed in a swirl of different faces, languages, and clothing styles. There were many Tibetan monks, nuns, and lay people, with their ever-present wide grins. I felt a bond with them, especially with the red-robed monks, who brought back fond memories of Kopan.

The next day, a half-hour bus trip further up the mountain brought us to McLeod Ganj, the main refugee encampment, and the home of the Dalai Lama. Kerry and I left our packs at the store of Mr and Mrs Nowrajee, a Bahai couple. They had been there since the time of the British Raj, and probably before. Now, much to their dismay, the Tibetans had taken over their town, building shops and restaurants with a thriving clientele of Tibetans and back-packing Westerners. Most travellers stayed at the Old Palace, the Dalai Lama's first residence. The Nowrajees managed the building, but they could not offer us a room because

this was the responsibility of 'Mr Dieter', who was away in Delhi. Eighteen months later, Dieter and I were to be monks together at Kopan.

We found a room in the Balcony House, a building on the steep road above the Old Palace and near the residence of Ling Rinpoche, the senior tutor of the Dalai Lama. The balcony for which it was named looked over a cedar and oak forest where monkeys played and carelessly tore to shreds the last of the scarlet rhododendron flowers.

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There was a well-established community of Westerners living on the hill above McLeod Ganj. Others lived further down, at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, where they attended the daily classes of Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey, who was appointed by the Dalai Lama to teach Buddhism to Westerners. I began to attend these classes but was overwhelmed by the philosophy and by the seriousness of the Western students. They showed an impressive knowledge of both the teachings and the language, and I felt threatened by the power of it all. The doubts I had wrestled with at Kopan surfaced again and I decided to focus my attention on Tibetan medicine.

The Tibetan Medical Centre near the bus station was a hive of activity. Under the instruction of doctors, some of whom were ordained, young Tibetans were preparing pills made from a wide range of medicinal herbs that they had gathered in the mountains. The doctors knew the medicinal properties of every plant, where and when to gather them, and how to mix them in the right proportions. Some pills contained ten or more herbs. The older doctors had completed ten years of study at the Tibetan Medical College in Lhasa, one of the few traditional institutions to have survived the systematic and sinister cultural annihilation of Tibet. I heard that this was because a Tibetan doctor had cured a Red Army officer of a chronic illness. The ten-year course involved memorisation and study of the Buddhist medical texts translated from Sanskrit to Tibetan, learning how to recognise and harvest medicinal plants and make pills, and the special arts of diagnosis and therapy. The students had to be accomplished meditators, and the best doctors were those who had incorporated the teachings of wisdom and compassion into their whole manner of living.

I introduced myself to Dr Lobsang Dolma and she gave me permission to sit with her and observe her work and learn the fundamentals of Tibetan medicine. A rapid succession of people passed through her tiny office. As each patient entered, they displayed humility and respect in the peculiarly Tibetan way of sticking out their tongues. Their trust in her, and her kindness towards them, was the best thing she had to teach me. If she asked them about their problem at all, it was only a few quick words. The diagnosis was made entirely by feeling the pulse at both wrists, with an occasional glance at their tongues, their eyes, or their urine, which she stirred with a chopstick, smelled it, and observed the telltale bubbles with a knowing eye.

I began by keeping notes, but there was too much to learn. First, I would have to learn the language and, second, I would have to accept Buddhist philosophy, the basis of the medical system. Although the Tibetan people were delightful, and the lifestyle of McLeod Ganj was enormously attractive, I wanted to go back to the West one more time before committing myself to a philosophy, a religion, and a way of life so vastly different to my upbringing.

It was a wonder that Kerry tolerated me. Forever restless, forever seeking perfection, I was again leaving her. She had friends at McLeod and my guilt was partly relieved by the knowledge that she would be safe. After our last night together, she saw me off on the morning bus to Amritsar, and England.

RETURN TO EUROPE

At Amritsar I visisted the Golden Temple, the heart of Sikhism. The peace and beauty of the architecture was betrayed by wall murals showing the militant history of the Sikh masters. To my mind, this was not something to boast about. I reflected on the stupidity of our worship of soldiers and military victories. In glorifying past brutality, we justify future violence as the only means to achieve peace. But nobody thanks you for killing their relatives, or quenching their nationalistic fervour. The embers of hatred always flare up again.

In a park near the Golden Temple, an inscription on a caged well described how the British had ruthlessly machine-gunned thousands of people gathered in peaceful protest against the injustices of the regime. In their panic to escape, hundreds had fallen into the well and drowned. The history of violence was all around me. I thought of Lama Zopa's teachings: 'All the problems of individuals and of society stem from selfishness, hatred, and desire. The solution to our problems is not external. Each one of us must take responsibility to transform our own mind into the aspect of love, compassion, and wisdom.'

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Across the border, my first impression of Lahore was the emptiness of the streets, few people in sight, and a general state of decay. Nothing had changed since Partition. Thankfully, in Pakistan there was little evidence of the cheaply built rows of concrete shops that mar the beauty of India.

The Lahore museum displayed relics from Mohenjo Daro, the site of an ancient civilization of the Indus region. I wondered how those people had viewed the Indus. Was their river the same as mine? In the same room was a famous statue of the fasting Buddha. After renouncing the wealth and pleasures of his kingdom, Prince Siddhartha had studied all that the greatest yogis had to teach. He then entered a six-year fast, during which he and his followers ate only a few grains of rice each day. After demonstrating that extreme asceticism was not the way, he broke his fast and attained enlightenment beneath the bodhi tree at Bodhgaya. The statue of the skeletal Buddha held my attention for a long time. Was it necessary to renounce sex and the pleasures of life in order to follow the Buddhist path? What about the loneliness?

Later, in a walled Mogul garden, I slipped off my shoes and sat in meditation. The busy thoughts died down and a feeling of calm flowed through my mind like a cool breeze chasing away the late morning heat. Whatever the benefits of sightseeing, temples, and museums, nothing could compare to the peace of meditation.

Across the road from my hotel, a shop sold milk rice flavoured with cinnamon and cardamom, and decorated with silver leaf. I became their best customer as Pakistani curries were too hot for my palate. While I was indulging in one of these delicacies, two old men drinking tea at the next table spoke to me.

'Hello sir, may I ask, what is your business here in Pakistan?'

'I have just come from Amritsar and I am on my way to England.'

'Aaaah, you have been to India. Is it not your opinion that India is a better country than Pakistan?'

Realising I was being set up, I replied, 'India is beautiful, but Pakistan also has wonderful people and places to see,' and I wasn't lying.

'But look around you, is this place not falling apart?'

'Do not listen to him,' interjected his friend, 'he is Hindu and I am Muslim. He does not understand this magnificent country.'

Until death intervened, the two old men would meet at the same table to debate the relative merits of the two countries, all the while remaining the closest of friends.

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I crossed the Chenab and the Jhelum rivers, two main tributaries of the Indus, then the Indus itself, about seventy-five miles north of Kalabagh. Looking down at the familiar combination of sand-flats and twisting channels of water, I acknowledged the spirit of the Indus: *I am still searching, but getting closer. Thank you for setting me on the path.*

Peshawar was searing hot and choked in smog. As soon as my Afghan visa came through, I was once again on the bus to Jalalabad. At the top of the Khyber Pass the air became cooler, and we crossed the wide plain where familiar landmarks indicated our approach to Jalalabad. With only half an hour before the bus departed to Kabul, there was no time to visit Zekena's house. I stood outside Mohammed's restaurant. He was not there and the kebab maker didn't recognise me, so I walked on. With the trees resplendent in their summer foliage, the town was completely different from the wintry, wet, and mysterious Jalalabad of my memories, and I was not disappointed to leave for Kabul.

We stopped on a ridge overlooking the Kabul River and the caves where the idea to sail down the Indus was born. My nostalgia was replaced with a sense of elation. Despite the sad events since then, I was much more together than the dreamer who had thrown a stick into the river and conjured up a fantasy. Even the four obnoxious Pakistanis who had been making fun of a gay American on the bus did not disturb my happiness. I watched as they foolishly saturated themselves in an irrigation channel, trying to catch fish that were much too smart for them.

I rested in Kabul, enjoying the coolness and walking around the back-streets of that strange city. One of the travellers in my dormitory discovered that the lump beneath his mattress that had disturbed his sleep was a piece of hashish the size of his fist. The previous occupant must have cursed his loss, probably caused by a last minute indulgence in the same substance.

The bus to Herat, via Kandahar, was a hell of a journey. I was jammed into a seat made for people with thighs half the length of mine, and consequently had to sit folded up like a jack-

knife for twenty-four hours. At every stop, I stumbled out into the desert to relieve myself of the watery diarrhoea I had been fighting to hold back. My discomfort did not prevent my appreciation of the stark beauty of the rugged mountains with all the hues of a Persian carpet.

I said goodbye to Afghanistan at Herat, where an American friend of mind coming the other way two years previously had been asked by the immigration officer, 'Do you have any hashish?'

'Oh no,' said my friend, feigning innocence.

'Well then, have some of mine,' said the officer, as he stoked up a chillum.

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The Iranian side was nothing like that. Cold, arrogant men in uniform thoroughly searched our baggage. Frustrated Westerners reorganised vehicles that had been emptied of their contents, and we were forced to take a capsule of some sort of antibiotic. I thought of making a stand against this absurdity, but it was not worth it. I needed food and sleep and didn't want to miss the bus.

In the old city of Meshed I was lured into buying a Persian carpet that was later dismissed as 'a cheap Pakistani imitation.' My opinion of Iranians was not very high. Young men stopped me in the street and aggressively demanded I talk with them so that they could practise their English. The place had a heavy vibration, which was even worse in Teheran, where I stayed just long enough to obtain a visa for Turkey.

On the bus to the Turkish border, an attractive American woman sat next to me. She was dressed neatly, most unlike the usual Western travellers' uniform of jeans and T-shirt. With my long hair and beard, faded Indian shirt, and red cotton Nepalese trousers, I looked 'like a member of a rock group,' as she later informed me. She had been travelling through Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, testing the virility of the Arabs, and was now heading towards Istanbul and home. I could hardly believe her story, and her openness about her purpose for travelling.

At the hotel in Teheran I had heard that the best way to travel to Istanbul was on a cruise ship that sailed from Trabzon at the eastern end of the Black Sea and stopped at several fishing ports on a four-day cruise to Istanbul. I planned to take this ship, and the American asked if she could come with me.

Mt Ararat appeared, rising out of fields of golden sunflowers, its smooth peak capped with white granite shining like snow against the deep blue sky. We arrived at Erzurum too late to catch the bus to the coast and, obliged to stay the night, my friend took a room at the best hotel. Following the lore of the road, I found a cheap place up a dark alley. I left my things there and rejoined her for supper. Drinking from a bottle of wine she had bought, we walked around town to see the sights. Back at her hotel, I tried to leave, concerned about my possessions, especially the tape recorder in my hotel room. She insisted I wait while she took a shower. I finished the wine and when she returned I stood up to leave.

'At least give me a cuddle,' she said, pulling me into her sweet smelling bosom in a bear hug, during which she huskily whispered in my ear that she was 'a feminist.'

I had no idea what a feminist was. Perhaps it meant being very feminine, like wearing lambs-wool twinsets, but she wasn't behaving like any twinset woman I had known. Even this remarkable confession did not arouse me, and I was released to hurry back to my hotel, where the precious tape recorder was still securely chained to the bed.

The next morning, the feminist and I caught the bus to Trabzon. At the pier, we met an American couple, Dan and Julie, who were also going to Istanbul on the ship. They had student cards and we did not, so Dan booked a cabin with four bunks, all at the student discount rate. The ship wasn't sailing until the next day, so the feminist and I took a room together. That night she succeeded in seducing me, and gave me an unwelcome gift – the clap. Once I had obtained two courses of penicillin at the first port of call, the voyage became more pleasurable. Each afternoon our ship anchored at a fishing village where we swam in the sea and then ate ashore. It was better and cheaper than eating on board. At Istanbul we went our separate ways.

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The lady at the American Express office had two letters for me, but she demanded payment first. This seemed unreasonable, and I angrily gave her the money. Leaving the office through the revolving door, I caught a glimpse of my angry face reflected in the glass. In that split second, I remembered Lama Zopa: *Anger makes you ugly. It destroys your inner peace and causes you to irrationally harm yourself and others. It is your worst enemy.* It was true! In an instant my anger was replaced by laughter, and I sat in the garden to regain my composure as I read my mail.

The first letter was from my father, and the second from my younger brother, Guy. With Alice and their eight-month old baby, he had preceded me along the same route. They had lived in Pokhara, making money by selling cheese sandwiches to travellers, and then had come overland to Greece. Now they were on the island of Crete, so I caught the train to Athens to meet up with them.

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On Crete, I found the village east of Iraklion where Guy and Alice had stayed. There was no sign of them. Their friend told me that Guy was working on the western part of the island, but they would soon come back to pick up their belongings. I built a shelter of reeds and camped on the beach to await their return.

A family from Athens camping in a nearby vineyard befriended me, and often invited me to eat with them. One evening, the son, an architect, offered to take me fishing. We set out from the beach in a dinghy and, as I considered myself to be reasonably proficient at manoeuvring a boat, I offered to row. He would have none of it, insisting that he do everything himself. Having done a lot of night fishing, I was also skilled at lighting kerosene pressure lamps, but that was his domain as well. In the course of half an hour, he managed to lose an oar, and nearly himself, overboard, almost set the boat alight, get his fishing line

caught in the most impossible of tangles, and nearly be shot by an irate fisherman who loomed out of the darkness and accused us of stealing from his nets. Barely able to stifle my amusement, I began to think I was back on the Indus.

An American air base was nearby and sentiment was very anti-American, but when people found out I was Australian they welcomed me with open arms. Australian soldiers had temporarily liberated Crete from German occupation during World War II, only for the island to be overrun again when the enemy regrouped and Churchill sent no support. Apart from their gratitude to Australians for their sacrifice during the war, everyone had a relative living in Melbourne.

While returning from a walk along the shore to inspect the mess left behind by a group of Americans celebrating the fourth of July, I saw Guy and Alice walking towards me, carrying my new nephew. We spent the night on the beach and then moved to where they were living with Leif, a Norwegian shipping line owner. Leif had built a beachside home for his retirement, but his wife died soon after the house was completed, and he had welcomed my brother and his family to share his accommodation, employing Guy as a caretaker in return.

Leif's predicament illustrated yet another point made by Lama Zopa: *Death is the only certainty in life. No matter how much wealth we have, how good we are, or how well we plan, there is no guarantee of attaining the happiness we seek. Other people, our possessions, even our own bodies and minds, are unreliable and can let us down at any time. Real happiness only occurs when we forget ourselves and take delight in the happiness of others.*

At least we were able to give Leif some temporary happiness. After a week on the beach, I was ready for England. During my farewell dinner I wondered whether to specialise in surgery or psychiatry, opposite ends of the medical spectrum. Leif said I should go into surgery because of my big hands. The validity of his reasoning seemed odd, but I said I would keep it in mind. The next day I was on the ferry to Piraeus and then the Orient Express to London.

From left to right: Brother Guy, Alice with Naryan and myself on beach, Crete

MEN ARE SO CRUEL

In London I moved into an apartment in Richmond with friends from Australia. After ensuring that my medical registration was still active, and beginning the process of finding a job, I set out to find Andy and Claire.

Andy had flown to England in the late 1960s to avoid being drafted into the Australian Army fighting in Vietnam. In London, he met Kris's friend Claire. With her two young children, they moved into a large apartment in Queensgate. Andy was teaching mathematics and, at the same time, completing his PhD thesis. I had stayed with them while studying at the School of Tropical Medicine. Rents had skyrocketed in London, and Andy sold the lease of the Queensgate apartment back to the owner for a lot of money. He and Claire then renovated an old postal van and they and the children travelled on the byways of rural England, searching for the lost values of society. Shunned and treated as gypsies by the country people, they had returned to London determined to change society, particularly the way in which the workers and the poor were treated. We had not been in touch for over two years, but I had their address in Bethnal Green.

When I found the house in Sewardstone Road, I thought they must have moved on. The front yard looked like an abandoned archaeological dig, with weeds struggling for survival among piles of broken bricks and street litter. I knocked, and a muffled voice called, 'Come in.' The door wouldn't open, and I learned later that there was no key, you just had to know the right place to kick. Claire opened the door and gave me a long hug. Andy was doing plumbing work in the backyard. He had moved out long before and was living in another squat a few houses up the street. It was just chance that he happened to be there when I arrived.

Claire lived in the house with her children, Little Andy and Samantha, or just Sam. The house was to be demolished by the council, but before the councilmen could make it uninhabitable by putting holes in the roof, as they did with many other houses, Andy and Claire moved in as squatters. Gas and water were still connected and, for electricity, Andy ran a cable from the house next door, paying the neighbours an estimated amount each month for the power they used.

'You have to stay and see Bill and Anneke,' said Claire. Bill was Little Andy's father. I had met him, and his Dutch girlfriend Anneke, when I lived at Queensgate. They were visiting from Australia and staying at Sewardstone Road.

'Great,' I replied, 'but can I stay here tonight? It will be too late to catch the tube back to Richmond.'

'Of course,' she said.

After the others had gone to bed, Claire brought sheets and blankets to the front room. It was cold and miserable.

'You can sleep in my bed,' she offered.

We had been good friends, and now we became lovers. Overnight, literally, I began living a domestic life. Our neighbours were West Indians; we were one of the few white families in the street. I worked part-time at a hospital, sometimes sleeping there, but usually staying with Claire. I looked after the kids, did the shopping, and learned how to bake bread.

One evening, on our way to see a film, Claire and I were acting like teenage lovers, dancing between the parking meters. I thought we were just having fun, but when Bill and Anneke caught up with us, Anneke said reproachfully to me, 'Men are so cruel.'

I looked at her in surprise. Her eyes had that particularly female expression of insight and sadness. I understood what she meant. Claire had been having a hard time. With little money and no partner, she had been struggling to support the children at home and at school. I had burst on the scene in a ray of Cretan sunshine and revived the flower of hope and happiness in her heart. Claire was giving me her body and soul, and Anneke was perceptive enough to see that I wouldn't stay.

'I won't hurt her,' I promised, but felt unconvinced as the awkward spectre of commitment rose up before me. I had been taking from Claire without a thought for the future, revelling in what men see as their innate right – the freedom to come and go as they wish.

. . .

I bought a 3CV Citroen van and, under Bill's supervision, took out the engine and replaced the rings and oil filter, the whole operation taking place in the street. A mechanic was an occupation the neighbourhood kids could relate to more easily than my being a doctor. With everyone piled into the green van, we went on picnics, to the movies, and to the circus. Every Friday night we drove to the South Bank where Little Andy and Sam learned martial arts while Claire and I drank beer with friends at the pub next door.

Claire worked as a dental assistant in the West End, and also attended an adult education course in science at a nearby technical school. She was an active member of the Troops Out movement. Andy belonged to the Workers' Revolutionary Party, which was gearing up for an election. At parties and in pubs, their left-wing friends were always debating politics. Although sympathetic towards socialism, I was politically naive, and these debates did nothing to awaken any desire to become active. Mostly, the communists complained about each other. The Trotskyists, the Leninists, and the Marxists were always at each others' throats. On the rare occasions they turned their attention towards the capitalists, they were filled with hatred. I often found myself arguing the Buddhist point of view that the real problem was in the minds of individuals, not in the political system. I pointed out that the capitalists exploited the workers through selfishness, greed, and hatred and, as the communists also suffered from these shortcomings, their own system would also result in exploitation of the weak by the strong. From my point of view, the only valid political motivation was altruism.

Claire and I joined a picket at a pub that had refused to sell beer to a black man. Our presence infuriated the publican, whose henchmen tore up one of our signs in an action that could have precipitated violence if the police had not been there. The aggression made me wonder about the value even of peaceful protest.

Protest and politics were in the air. At an election meeting organised by Andy for the Workers' Revolutionary Party, both the actress Vanessa Redgrave and a communist veteran of many fruitless campaigns gave rousing speeches, urging us to fight the capitalists. They spoke with such fury that I felt compelled to say something. Standing up, I addressed Vanessa Redgrave: 'What is your position regarding capital punishment?'

Bewildered by my question, she replied, 'The ruling class has been using capital punishment as a weapon against the workers for centuries.'

Then I came to my point, 'Look, these capitalists you hate so much are the people we see every day in the streets of London. There is no way they will ever accept your politics. They will oppose you and, for your revolution to succeed, they will have to be killed. Are you going to kill them, or are you asking the people in this room to do your killing?

'What are you, some sort of Jesus freak?' interjected the old communist. 'Shut up and sit down.'

The audience came to my rescue with cries of, 'No, let him speak.'

Encouraged, I continued. 'I follow no religion. I perceive grave injustices in society and I came here tonight with an open mind seeking a possible solution, but all I hear from you is anger and hatred. It seems to me that your policy of revolution will only cause more harm, it is not a solution.'

. . .

As we lay in bed that night, Claire questioned my pacifist attitude. 'We have to act right now, the system is screwing people every day, it has to be stopped,' she said passionately. 'Somebody has to run the country, we can't send everyone off to meditate in the Himalayas.'

'Okay, but unless the real source of our problems is identified, how can we ever find happiness? The economic system isn't the real problem, it's the people who enforce it,' I insisted.

'Shoot the bastards,' she said with an ironic laugh.

'Claire, I know altruism sounds impossible, but those lamas in Nepal, I think they've achieved the impossible. There's no value in hatred, it only makes things worse. Why can't a political party run on a platform of patience, compassion, and kindness?'

'Get real, Ade, it sounds wonderful, but love and compassion are not politics.'

. . .

A friend gave me her copy of *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism* by Chogyam Trungpa, a Tibetan lama living in the West.[10] This book placed all that I had learned at Kopan into a framework that was both logical and easy to understand. In particular, I saw the need to have a lama, a personal guide. The book impressed me so much that I made a cover of

yellow cloth to protect it, just as the lamas looked after their sacred scriptures. Buddhism seemed to have all the answers, but my desire for a valid philosophy and direction in life was opposed by fear of losing the freedom of self-determination.

There was a similar problem in my relationship with Claire. My desire for a soul mate was opposed by the fear of losing the freedom to come and go as I wished. These fears were all 'me, me, me,' just as the lamas had warned: 'Self-centredness is the root of all problems.'

I accepted their diagnosis, but I wasn't sure of the treatment. Kerry had met another meditation teacher named Goenka, and was enthusiastic for me to return to India and attend one of his courses. Although attracted to the thought of India and learning more about Buddhism, I didn't want to leave England. I loved Claire and the kids, I loved London, and there were many ways to work for people within medicine. I remembered my promise to not hurt Claire, and I also remembered my insight at Kopan that, if Buddhism were true, it was only logical to become a monk. I wasn't ready for that.

. . .

A job as registrar at a psychiatric hospital near Cambridge was advertised. I wasn't qualified for the position, but it was worth a try. With neat hair, trimmed beard, and wearing a suit, I was ready to leave for the interview. A friend asked: 'You're not wearing those are you?' pointing to a string of rainbow-coloured beads around my wrist.

'Yes I am,' I replied. The beads had been given to me before leaving London for Afghanistan, and had been on my wrist during the voyage down the Indus. I wore them to remind me of those times and especially to reassure myself that I could live anywhere in the world.

'I don't think you want this job,' he said. He was probably right.

There were two other applicants, both from the Indian subcontinent. We were interviewed separately by the hospital superintendent and three other psychiatrists. I had good references and the interview went reasonably well until the superintendent looked at my beads and asked, 'You're not one of those people who think shock therapy is an assault upon the person, are you?'

I had not thought of shock therapy like that but, as soon as he said it, I thought, *Yes, that's exactly what it is*. I gave the standard answer that shock therapy had a place in the treatment of acute psychosis and severe depression. Nevertheless, remembering *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, I felt obliged to add, 'The danger, however, is that we don't know how it works. It may cause damage to the brain, and there's always the possibility that it will be used indiscriminately or as punishment.'

None of us was given the appointment. I was told that I would be favourably received if I applied for the position of senior house officer to be advertised in a month's time. My friend had been right; I left with a sense of relief. With plenty of time at my disposal, I drove through Lincolnshire to the east coast, just to give my feet the pleasure of walking along a sandy beach again.

Claire was happy that I hadn't found work outside of London. She knew, however, that I was battling with the decision to stay in England or return to India. Needing space to make that decision, I went to my favourite place in London, the botanical gardens at Kew.

Absorbed in thinking about the future, I was standing in an avenue of trees that disappeared into the mist. A gardener, resting his arms on a pitchfork, made a funny comment about the tartan patches I had sewn onto the knees of my jeans. He was German, about forty-five years old, and his friendliness encouraged me to reveal my thoughts. Should I remain with my lover in England and pursue my career, or go to India and learn more about Buddhism? By coincidence, or some more mystical reason, he had spent three years as a Buddhist monk in Thailand. He now travelled the world, working in all the great gardens. Naturally, his advice was to go to India.

The signs were all pointing East. My relationship with Claire was good, but sometimes I had been irrationally angry towards her. The anger died down as quickly as it had arisen, but it was a warning. Distressed at my father's frequent angry outbursts towards my mother, as a child I had vowed to never be angry towards my future wife. Could I remain with Claire and overcome anger at the same time? I just didn't know enough about Buddhism to be able to deal with this destructive emotion. Then there was dissatisfaction. The lamas had taught that, whatever pleasure we enjoy, our self-centred mind always becomes dissatisfied with it and looks elsewhere. It was true that my desire wandered to other women. How much more would Claire be hurt if I went off with someone else compared to the hurt she would feel by my going to India? Finally, there was the concept of altruism. The central tenet of Tibetan Buddhism is the altruistic intention to devote oneself to others by fulfilling one's inner potential to become a Buddha. Freed from the wheel of life, a Buddha can appear in any way to help others. If I became a Buddhist, like the lamas, or the German gardener, I could always be present at the right time and place to guide others towards happiness and away fron self-inflicted suffering. I was in the right time and place to help Claire and her children, but I didn't have the courage or the conviction to see it through. Anneke had been right: I was going to leave Claire.

Claire argued against my reasons for going to India, and I found them difficult to defend. The knowledge that I had to go was coming from somewhere deep within my mind. It was not another woman or my career interfering in the relationship, it was my search for a philosophy – a philosophy that I didn't yet understand or believe. In her typically strong-willed way, Claire didn't ask me to stay. She stoically accepted my decision, but an air of sadness pervaded us both.

I sold the van to a young man who intended to drive it across the Sahara Desert. I assured him the vehicle would make it. Claire was making me a travelling shirt from a piece of warm yellow cloth I had brought from Nepal.

'There's not enough material for sleeves,' she said.

'Make it without sleeves, I might become a monk one day,' I joked.

'What a waste,' she replied.

Exactly one year later, I wore that shirt on my ordination day.

SLAYING THE EGO

Kerry's teacher, Sri Goenka, was giving a ten-day meditation course at Varanasi (Benares) in India. I arrived a few days early and took a room at the government tourist bungalow. Varanasi is one of the holiest places for Hindus, who arrive in their thousands to bathe in the blessed waters of the River Ganges to purify their karma. When they die, their corpses are cremated by the river for the same purpose.

A line of sun-bleached temples stretched along the riverbank, and pilgrims swarmed at the water's edge, sunning themselves and bathing in the murky yellow water. The river and the boats reminded me of the Indus, even more so when I saw a dolphin momentarily break the surface. I waited for a mystical experience, but the atmosphere was more like a day at the beach. For me, it was an Australian religious experience anyway. Instead of seeing the water as holy nectar, my heathen mind saw a cocktail of eggs, cysts, and spores of every known intestinal parasite. There was no way I would submerge my body in that river, but, just in case there was something in the beliefs of the happy crowd frolicking in the water as though it were champagne, I stood ankle deep for a while. At least my feet will die happy.

. . .

Embarrassingly, I met Kerry with an angry face after an exasperating encounter with an official at the railway station. Wearing Indian-style clothing, she looked different, and her manner had changed too. She had an air of calm that just managed to hold in check the bubbling enthusiasm of one who has found her direction. She knew my sceptical mind well enough to not overwhelm me, and kept her enthusiasm down to a steady encouragement. For my own reasons, I was determined to do the course, even though old doubts were rising by the minute.

With a day to spare, Kerry and I took a rickshaw to Saranath, a village on the outskirts of Varanasi. A park and a stupa marked the place where the Buddha gave his first teaching. We walked among the ruins of ancient monasteries and sat on the clean grass, discussing our lives and directions. Kerry was deeply committed to her teacher, I was still loose, not willing to commit myself to Buddhism, let alone a personal teacher. It was clear that our paths had drawn apart and, although we would remain friends, we would not again be partners.

Goenka was a middle-aged Indian-Burmese businessman. A monk in Burma had taught him a meditation practice to relieve the symptoms of migraine, which had been refractory to all medical treatment. The meditation cured his migraine, and Goenka gave up his business activities to become a meditation teacher in his own right, leading ten-day courses in either Hindi or English at various places around India. His Indian followers were soon outnumbered by young Westerners, eager to experience meditation and attracted by his simple but powerful technique.

The management of the Burmese vihara in Varanasi expected a large attendance for the course. Several new buildings had recently been completed, the cement still damp as at Kopan, and a tent on the front lawn was the dining room. Well over a hundred people

arrived, a similar mix to those who had attended the course in Nepal: young, well-educated Westerners searching for some Indian magic.

The routine was heavy – long meditation sessions of sitting still and watching our breath. There were no discussion groups, and Goenka gave a short talk each evening. We had breakfast, lunch, and a cup of hot milk at night.

From the third day onwards we had to keep total silence. The gates to the compound were locked and nobody was allowed out, but the gap between the doors provided ample space for the peanut and beedie wallahs to make a roaring trade among the less-committed, such as myself.

The days were long and the meditation painful. My ankles, knees, and hips screamed at the injustice of remaining still. My mind screamed loudest of all. Arguments and counter-arguments raged when I was supposed to be focusing my mind on my breath, or slowly scanning through my body in search of the elusive sensation.

In the evenings, I took Kerry onto the flat-topped roof of the main accommodation block where we could watch the setting sun dissolve into the smog of Varanasi, and where I could talk without fear of being busted. There, I expressed my doubts and frustrations, while Kerry, oozing peace and calm, gently encouraged me to be patient. When it was my turn to have an interview with The Great One, whose rigid impassivity was in stark contrast to the mischievous lamas, I received the same advice – just keep watching the breath, continue to scan. I told him I had done a course with the lamas, and took offence at his perfunctory dismissal of Tibetan meditation methods.

Towards the end of the ten days, I broke through the pain barrier, temporarily. Fighting the urge to straighten my legs when the intensity of pain had reached the point where my whole body was shaking, suddenly the pain disappeared, and my body and mind were flooded with a sensation of peace and flexibility. Although brief, this experience gave me an indication not only of the power of the mind, but of the mind's potential to experience bliss through meditation. I was sufficiently inspired to sign on for another ten days. The second course went exactly as the first, but this time I was subdued, keeping silence and not bothering Kerry any more with my doubts.

The second course finished on Christmas Eve. Kerry stayed on to do yet another ten days, and I caught the early morning train to Bodhgaya in Bihar. Bodhgaya is the seat of Buddha's enlightenment. Even though my companions and I were travelling third-class, the compartment was not too crowded and it was we who overwhelmed our fellow passengers. We were celebrating both freedom from twenty days incarceration and Christmas Day. No food wallah could pass by without selling us something – spiced chick peas with a slice of lime, or roasted peanuts served in cones of newspaper – and we drank gallons of chai, smashing the unglazed earthenware cups on the rails, as is the custom.

At Gaya, we piled onto a rickety *tonga*, pulled by an even more rickety horse, and set off for Bodhgaya, a few miles away. The narrow and crowded streets of Gaya soon gave way to open paddy fields, and a straight road running beside a thin stream that snaked across a broad expanse of white sand. After twenty minutes, the Mahabodhi Stupa came into view,

rising above the bamboo thickets and mango groves and radiating a power that irresistibly held our attention. We fell silent as the steady clip-clop of the horse's hooves on the asphalt drew us closer to the structure, a living symbol of enlightenment, no archaeological ruin.

Before reaching the stupa, we stopped at the Burmese Buddhist vihara, where we were to stay. The vihara was managed by a monk called Bhante and his young assistant, Ananda. These extremely kind men have become an institution at Bodhgaya. Forever patient, they have looked after the needs of young and often stupid Westerners year after year with friendliness and compassion, and never a hint of sectarianism towards the various Buddhist traditions. Bhante too, had been busy supervising the construction of new rooms, as Goenka and his entourage were due to arrive a few days after the new year for another ten-day course.

By this time I was well acclimatised to the slow pace of India, and easily adopted the peaceful routine of visiting the stupa each day and eating in the village. Over the centuries, the stupa had been enveloped by sand and only its top was visible. The base had been excavated and the stupa repaired by an English Army officer in the nineteenth century. The stupa had been built on a flat plain, but now it sat at the bottom of a wide, excavated hollow with gardens of lawn, flowering shrubs, and giant shade trees, giving it an extra touch of peace by isolating it from the main road that ran through the nearby village.

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One morning I set out towards a rocky ridge that stood alluringly on the eastern horizon. I crossed the sandy riverbed and came to a fertile strip of land where palm and mango trees grew beside paddy fields, emerald in their winter crop of wheat. A second river was deeper, and I had to wade up to my thighs. On the other side, the land became more arid as it rose towards the rocky escarpment that was my destination.

I climbed the hill and sat on a flat boulder at the pinnacle, with a three hundred and sixty degree vulture's-eye view of the countryside. It reminded me of the time I had sat alone on a granite boulder in a Swedish forest three and a half years before, and wondered what to do with my life. At that time I was twenty-seven and the world was at my feet. I had no desire to accumulate money or gain a distinguished reputation, my only wish was to work somewhere in the tropics. Still, I was torn between my yearning for a companion and the security of a career and my desire to explore the mind and discover reality. Now, sitting on my Indian hill-top, everything I had experienced since then – Afghanistan, the Indus, my unhappy return to Australia, the lamas – fell into place as a logical progression towards Buddhism. The wall of doubt had been reduced to the point where I was convinced the Buddhist path was a valid one. As Nick had once said at Kopan, karma and reincarnation fitted the pattern of both the Buddha's teachings and my own experience. Even if they were not directly provable, karma and reincarnation were not contradictory to my scientific knowledge.

My contemplation was interrupted by a sense of danger. I looked around and saw a falcon circling and then swooping down on me from out of the sun, like a fighter plane. I scolded the cheeky bird and then gave it the victory. There was a building further along the escarpment, and I was intrigued to see what it was. The path wound between dilapidated

mud huts with thatched-palm roofs. Skinny children stared at me, but I was left alone. Even the dogs managed only a few fitful barks before retiring to their patch of shade.

I crossed an open area strewn with rocks, where a strong-looking Tibetan man was lighting a fire. He stopped me. The curved knife in his hand looked threatening, but I was reassured by his friendly manner and the thought that any man who wears his hair in plaits and has turquoise earrings couldn't be all that dangerous. With the knife, he cut a lock of my hair and a piece of nail from my thumb and burned them in the fire while reciting a deep-voiced chant. I didn't understand a word he said, nor what was going on. Later, I found out that it was auspicious to burn one's hair and nails at such a place. It was one of the eight great charnel grounds of ancient India, where yogis and yoginis spent the nights in meditation, doing practices such as Chod, 'Slaying the Ego.' Sitting among corpses torn apart by jackals and vultures, they mentally invoked spirits, zombies, and other fearsome beings to come and make a meal of their own bodies. This was their method of severing ego's attachment to the body as being self.

The building proved to be a temple built in the Tibetan style. A Tibetan monk seemed to have been waiting for me. Without a word, he took my hand and led me further up the hill. He pointed to a low wooden door in the rock face and indicated that I should enter. Then he left me alone. Wondering what these Tibetans were doing to me, I crawled through the entrance and stood up in a room with a high ceiling and a stone altar. I sat on a rough hessian cushion and meditated, experiencing a sensation of immense power. Meditators had used the cave for many centuries, and it was rumoured that the great Indian pandit, Nagarjuna, had meditated there.

That evening I meditated beneath the Bodhi tree, the Ficus religiosa that was reputed to be a descendent of the original tree beneath which the Buddha sat at that very place on the night of his enlightenment. A heart-shaped leaf fell from the tree. Like a leaf in the wind, throughout my life and with no awareness of the forces pushing me, I had encountered pleasant and unpleasant situations without control. Always coming, always going, I had created a trail of bittersweet memories in my search for lasting happiness. Unaware of karma, I had believed I was in control of my life, and when things went wrong I blamed the world. Fear of losing control and plummeting self-esteem then made it impossible to find happiness because self-concern prevented caring for others.

At that moment, I understood that forgetting self and loving others was the real cause of happiness. It was completely clear to me, in order to have happiness and not have unhappiness I had to stop trying to change the world. I had to change my karma instead. My decision became irrevocable: I was going to follow the way of the Buddha. Sri Goenka had given me some insights, but I would follow the Tibetan tradition. In my mind, nobody could measure up to the qualities of Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche.

A young, English-speaking lama named Bero Khentse Rinpoche was giving an empowerment into the meditational practice of *Avalokiteshvara*. He said I could take refuge and formally become a Buddhist by attending. Avalokiteshvara is a meditational deity who embodies the Buddha's quality of universal compassion. A group of Westerners gathered in Rinpoche's room at the Mahabodhi Society rest house. This simple experience was the most important step in my life. It was the beginning of the actual journey into the mind, the

ultimate journey. Although the thought of becoming a monk was present, my preference was to find a partner with whom I could follow the path.

The day after I had taken refuge, Kerry arrived at the Burmese Vihara to do another ten-day meditation with Goenka. I wanted to show her my Bodhgaya, but she was intent on doing the course, due to begin that evening. I thought of attending, but was feeling feverish. Arranging to see Kerry after the course, I moved to the government tourist bungalow on the other side of town.

That night I didn't sleep. The fever and headache became worse and my liver and spleen were swollen and painful. I had malaria, contracted at Varanasi where, night after night, I had been attacked by mosquitoes. A course of Nivaquine eliminated the parasite from my blood, but for five days I was extremely weak and had no appetite. Concerned about my not eating, the manager of the tourist bungalow ordered his cooks to make special food, which he brought to my bed. Through his kindness, and the care of other tourists, I slowly regained my strength.

During this period of enforced rest I planned my future. Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa were arriving in Australia in three months time to give a one-month course at a new meditation centre in Queensland, built on land offered to the lamas by Nick, Marie, Tom, and Kathy. I intended to be in Australia for that course. In the meantime, I could do some travelling and a ten-day 'self-course', meditating on the method taught by Goenka. People told me that the Theosophical Society had a beautiful place near Madras, where one could meditate in peace, and this fitted well with my plan to sail from Madras to Penang and visit Indonesia on my way back to Australia. A few days after the course had finished at the vihara, I said goodbye to Kerry and caught the bus to Gaya, from where I took the train to Calcutta, and then Madras.

SAND, SURF, AND BED BUGS

My first night in Madras was made hell by swarms of bed bugs. I had learned about these nasty creatures while studying tropical medicine, but never thought I would personally feed them. Among all insect pests, surely these are the meanest, even if they do not carry any disease, as I had been taught. Forgetting about universal compassion, I checked out first thing in the morning. At the next hotel I was assured there were no bugs. I dismantled the bed just to make sure.

Every day I sought solitude on the beach, the wild and open coastline providing welcome relief from the overwhelming presence of humanity. Humankind and domestic animals had worn out the land, and all the towns looked the same to me – overcrowded, poverty stricken, and falling apart. With the sun, sand, and surf as my companions, I meditated.

I had left London, and Claire, to see if Buddhism were really true. Now, having accepted it, shouldn't I become a monk? No, I still desired sex and a companion. I had countered Claire's argument that it was perverse to suppress desire, by saying that the lamas were the most uninhibited, the calmest and most relaxed guys I had ever met. I wanted to be like them. To find another woman would betray both Claire and my original intention in returning to India, but my belief in Buddhism was not strong enough to overcome the power of desire. Before I could become a monk I needed to learn how to put the teachings into practice.

My surroundings interrupted this train of thought. On the beach were rafts composed of three logs lashed together. My curiosity as to how these functioned was suddenly rewarded by the appearance of an orange-coloured triangular sail beyond the breakers. Within a few moments, scores of other sails appeared, their various hues lit by the horizontal rays of the setting sun. A fishing fleet had been out there all the time and I hadn't noticed.

Skilfully surfing the waves, the fishermen raced each other to shore, their catch held in nets tied to decks that were mostly awash with water and foam. I was reminded of the fleet of boats on the Indus, where the people had worked so happily against the elements. How many centuries of sunsets had illuminated such a scene? My mind filled with joy, I became determined to do a meditation retreat.

At the Theosophical Society, in the grounds of a magnificent park, I asked about accommodation. I took an instant dislike towards the pompous, middle-aged American woman in charge. The feeling was clearly mutual. She silently looked me over. I was thin from malaria, bearded, wearing faded clothes, and my arms and legs were covered in infected bed bug bites. Summing me up as a lost junkie, she refused me a room, saying, 'We only give accommodation to those who are serious in the spiritual path.'

Fuck you, lady, I have never been more serious in all my life, I thought, and was amazed at my equanimity in not expressing those words aloud. I politely thanked her for her trouble and walked out in relief. The religious atmosphere had been stifling. I went straight into town and booked a passage to Penang. While returning from the shipping office, I stopped to stare at a Pepsi-Cola dispenser on the footpath, my mind absorbed in disgust at the invasion of Mother India by Western culture. A man bought a bottle, handed it to me, and walked on.

He, too, must have thought I was a penniless junkie. I appreciated his kindness, and enjoyed the drink. Although my mind was more at peace than ever before, my body was a mess. I had achieved my goal in coming to India; now it was time to go home.

LICKING HONEY OFF A RAZOR BLADE

It was a week before Easter, 1975. Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche were beginning their tour of Australia. I was standing outside the Union Theatre at the University of Melbourne waiting for Lama Yeshe to arrive for a public talk. Before I could open the car door, Lama Yeshe reached out through the open window, grabbed my beard, and pulled my face down towards his, saying in mock anger, 'I remember you, you're the one who asked all those questions at Kopan.' His high-pitched laugh instantly revived the energy and emotions of the meditation course.

In terms of time, the course had been just over a year before. In terms of personal change, it seemed like lifetimes ago. I mumbled an apology for hassling him during the course and opened the door.

Kerry was there, all my friends were there, and the theatre was full of students curious to see Lama Yeshe, the first Tibetan lama ever to teach in Australia. A throne had been hastily erected and decorated with flowers; Tibetan incense was burning. It was not the Union Theatre I had known in my student days. For me, Lama's words flowed like nectar; knowing the wider picture, each sentence carried great meaning.

Assisted by Nick, Lama Yeshe then led a five-day meditation retreat at a holiday camp by the sea. Again, my group of friends was well represented; even Simon was there, but he only lasted two days. The teachings were too alien for him. I knew exactly how he felt, and tried to help, but I couldn't communicate the insights I had experienced over the last twelve months. On the other hand, I had the opportunity to question Nick once again, this time with less hostility from my side.

'There's so much emphasis on suffering. Isn't there any hope at all for happiness?'

'We meditate on the sufferings of hell beings, hungry ghosts and animals because if we are not frightened of that pain we will do nothing to prevent it. We will continue creating the karma to be born there. On top of that, this meditation is a foundation for universal compassion.'

'Yes, I used to love fishing, but now the thought of a fish struggling against the hook is abhorrent. And, in a way, I've come round to accepting birth in hell or as a hungry ghost. But what about human happiness, isn't that worthwhile? Doesn't love have the wish to give someone pleasure?'

'Which one are you after?' Nick indicated a group of women among the course participants.

'You're supposed to be a monk,' I said in feigned disgust, but he was right.

'As it says in the teachings,' Nick said more seriously, 'samsaric pleasure is like licking honey off a razor blade, it is inevitably associated with pain. Think of the best screw you've ever had; did it leave you satisfied?'

'Sure,' I said, laughing, 'at least for a few seconds.'

'Right. Then you became attached to your lover, depressed when she isn't around, jealous when she's with others, and angry when she doesn't conform to your expectations. Still dissatisfied, you desire somebody else and drop her cold. Or she drops you. And that hurts, doesn't it?'

'Jesus, Nick, how black can you be? Don't you believe in true romantic love?'

'Don't make me laugh.'

Nick was describing samsara, the situation where the mind is under the control of karma and disturbing emotions such as attachment. I knew he was right but I didn't want to accept it. Surely, I thought, I could avoid those traps and have a relationship with more pleasure than pain.

Towards the end of the retreat, Nick arranged for me to see Lama Yeshe. It was my first private talk with him, and I entered his caravan not knowing what to expect.

Lama was sitting cross-legged on a seat that doubled as a bed. He motioned me to sit beside him. I briefly summarised my travels after Kopan and told him that, after much investigation, I had become a Buddhist. I concluded my story by telling him that I wanted to practise the teachings as much as possible in my life, but couldn't decide whether to do so as a monk or – my preference – to share my life with a woman and practise Dharma together.

Lama opened his eyes wide and nodded at the first alternative. Then he rolled over laughing as I mentioned the second.

'Yes, possible, dear, possible. You can live with someone and practise together, but very, very difficult.'

'Why is it difficult?' I asked, defensively.

Again Lama rolled over laughing. Then he sat up instantly composed and said, 'Because, instead of just one crazy mind, you have two crazy minds, and then three, and four.'

'Well, what's the advantage of being a monk?' I asked.

Lama screwed up his eyes and opened them in an expression that I came to know well. 'You can practise Dharma twenty-four hours a day.'

I thanked him and left the caravan. There was more thinking to be done. If I had been serious when saying I wanted to practise Dharma as much as possible, then becoming a monk was the only way. As Lama had indicated, twenty-four hours a day could not be beaten. But I still wanted a woman.

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Lama Yeshe and Nick flew to Queensland to join Lama Zopa Rinpoche, who was about to begin a one-month course at Chenrezig Institute, the new meditation centre. I drove to Bega

and picked up Garrey and Kris. On our way through Sydney we stopped to see Bev and Rich, who had been with us in Jalalabad and were coming to the course as well.

We arrived a few days before the course and helped finish the building. The temple had been constructed in the subtropical style of Queensland by communal effort, only interrupted when the builder and his apprentices downed tools for some surfing.The tail of a cyclone buffeted us and I awoke one night to the sound of hammering. Afraid that the meditation hall would be blown off its base, the builder was securing it with metal ties.

Something upset me on the day before the course and I was driving too fast, my mind spinning with anger. The symbol of peace, a dove, landed on the road in front of a car coming in the opposite direction. In a flash, our two cars passed and, in the rear-vision mirror, I saw a cloud of feathers. Instantly the irritation left my mind and I eased off the accelerator. *Anger is the enemy of peace, in your mind and in the world at large.* How long would it take me to put Lama Zopa's advice into action?

The structure of the course was similar to Kopan. Westerners guided the meditation sessions and Lama Zopa gave two lectures each day. For the last two weeks we took the twenty-four hour vows of not killing and so on. Unlike my first experience of the teachings, when I was full of scepticism and doubt, I listened quietly, absorbing Lama Zopa's every word and striving to achieve success in the meditations.

At the end, I felt a strong wish to do a meditation retreat and piece together all the information. While I was wondering how to do this, all the people who remained were called to the meditation hall, where Lama Yeshe gave a two-hour explanation on how to do a meditation retreat. I wrote down everything he said. That afternoon, I met Lama alone and he gave me more advice, and told me that if any questions arose during the retreat I should write to him.

I drove Garrey and Kris back to Bega and continued on to Melbourne, stopping for a while at Boydtown. Sitting on the beach that had nurtured my ambitions for travel, adventure, and romance, I felt a new sense of freedom. Like a spider confined to its web, I had been trapped in a net of nostalgia and youthful aspiration. When my life did not unfold as planned, I had been unable to adapt to new circumstances. My non-conformity and belief in spontaneity had been superficial. Beneath it all, I had been as conditioned by society as anybody else. But now I was free. The past was unimportant and the future was wide open. There was no longer an inner compulsion to follow a career, to be "normal" and raise a family. No need to make a name for myself, to prove anything to the world, or to change the world. After meditating in the Australian bush for three months, I would follow the Tao.

LAUGHING WATERS

Tom, who had cooked for us at the course, lived at Laughing Waters, near Coff's Harbour on the northern coast of New South Wales. He offered to help me do retreat in the state forest adjoining his property, and so I gathered provisions in Melbourne and headed north once again, this time on the train. The name Laughing Waters was a translation of the Aboriginal name for the creek that ran through Tom's property. The reason was obvious – the whole area had a happy vibration.

Within a week, Tom and I built a one-room shack, using off-cuts from the timber mill and a galvanised iron roof salvaged from the local rubbish dump. I glazed two perfect cedar window frames that we also found at the dump. We built the cabin on a ridge surrounded by massive stumps left by loggers who had plundered the region in the past. I rigged up a bucket to catch rainwater from the roof. If it didn't rain, I could get water from a creek. I had a kerosene stove, a lantern, and a strip of foam rubber to sleep on.

On my final trip for supplies, a shopkeeper gave me $5 too much change. I hesitated, thinking to pocket the money, and encouraged to do so by my companion, who had just been released from prison where he had done time for counterfeiting. Proper ethics, however, are the foundation of Buddhist practice and, if I was serious about the retreat, the money had to be given back. When I told the shopkeeper he had given me too much change, he said, 'If I was that bloody stupid, you can keep it.' I returned to the car with a smile, and a lesson for my friend.

Renunciation wasn't coming easily. While we were listening to music one night, a young woman pressed close beside me, her round hips warm beneath a thin cotton dress. As she began rubbing my leg with the sole of her foot, I held her hands and said, 'Sweetheart, I could eat you, but not at the beginning of this retreat, okay?'

The next morning, I saw her and Tom running naked through the fields and diving into the creek. *Good luck mate*, I thought, smiling.

It was full moon, time to begin the retreat. I asked Tom to shave my head, another experiment in renunciation. He nearly scalped me.

. . .

I moved into the cabin with a three-month supply of roasted muesli, a bunch of green bananas, and some rice, lentils, and potatoes. Tom offered to buy fresh fruit, bread, and vegetables and leave them in a hollow log on top of the ridge every few weeks. Other than that, I would be completely isolated, meditating in eight one-hour sessions each day, and taking the twenty-four hour vows every morning.

I placed an image of Avalokiteshvara on a shelf, put my cushion in front of it, and began the first session. It was going well until the quiet of the evening was shattered by a loud crash on the tin roof. My heart nearly stopped. A possum, lured by the smell of bananas, had dropped from a tree onto the roof. He was to become a regular visitor.

My second fright occurred as I was going to sleep. From the forest came the unearthly sound of someone being slowly strangled to death, shrieking, gasping, and with a final drawn-out gurgle as the victim faded away. My rational mind fought to the surface of a whirlpool of fear, it's an owl. This conclusion was verified by torchlight on subsequent evenings, but I never became fully accustomed to that most horrifying of all bird calls.

There was no time to be lonely. When not preparing food or meditating, I was reading books on Buddhism, the only subject allowed. Another rule of retreat was to not go beyond a mental boundary that enclosed the cabin and the path to the creek. So there were no long walks through the bush. Apart from my wandering mind, the biggest distraction was Tom's *cooee* from the ridge above, signalling the delivery of a box of fresh food. After hearing that call, meditation went out the window as my mind conjured up all sorts of delicacies that might be waiting for me. Tom always added a few treats.

At night I fell asleep instantly, often waking in the same position without having moved during the night. The animals and birds kept me company. Apart from the regular visits of Fat Possum and Bush Rat, there were kangaroos, goannas, and many birds. The most unpleasant visitors were leeches and ticks, the former announcing their presence by rolling off my head engorged with blood, and the latter by a vague sense of weakness that I grew to recognise. Whenever it occurred, I would strip off and find the offending bug embedded in my armpit or the soft skin of my groin.

It rained heavily for the first two weeks and I had to block holes in the roof with a patching compound. This activity became associated with an interesting distraction – music. While trying to concentrate, various songs would come to my mind, which surprised me because I had not been especially attached to music. The first song was written by John Lennon and his friends just for me: *I'm fixing a hole where the rain gets in, to stop my mind from wandering, where it will go-o...* During the sessions, my mind sure did go-o.

When the songs faded, other mental distractions came thick and fast. Sexual fantasies were not a problem, the daily vow of chastity closed that door. But other doors remained open. Like Danny Kaye in *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*, my mind invented stories where I played the suave, witty, intelligent, brave, athletic, and romantic hero. As much as I tried to block these narratives, they returned day after day, each time my role becoming more gallant. In time, these too faded, only to be replaced by memories from further and further back in my life. Emotions associated with these clear recollections took my mood up and down. As the retreat continued, however, my mind became progressively more stable and content. Even during the lows there was always a feeling of joy in my heart, and I came to see these mood swings as a catharsis of suppressed emotion that needed to be expressed.

The intensity of both the happiness and the sadness was surprising. Sometimes tears flowed, sometimes I shook with laughter. The great value in reliving the significant events of my life was seeing them in the light of Buddha's psychology. It was clear to me that the happiest times in my life had been when I loved others and forgot myself, and the unhappiest times were when I was immersed in self-pity. Buddhism explained my life, and my life verified Buddhism. It was an intense psychoanalysis, with Buddha the analyst, his teachings the framework of interpretation, and meditation the therapy.

There was no opportunity to send or receive mail, but when questions arose I began several letters to Lama Yeshe as he had suggested. None of these letters were ever completed. The answer would become obvious soon after I formulated the question and imagined putting it to Lama. Perhaps it was just my mind, but I always felt that Lama was with me in some way.

After one month, the retreat felt like it was just beginning. My concentration was better, and I had become accustomed to the environment and the daily routine. The bush was changing from winter to spring. On the path to the creek I noticed every subtle change, every new flower. My mind was experiencing a clarity of perception I had never known before. The solitude was blissful. The only sounds from the outside world were an occasional aeroplane and, on still mornings, a farmer way down the valley having trouble starting his Holden. I knew the type of car by the sound of its engine.

Going through my books a second and third time, things appeared that I couldn't believe I'd missed on earlier readings. It was like climbing a mountain: at the base you're surrounded by trees and rocks and can't see where you're going; as you get higher, you can look back and see the way very clearly. The path to enlightenment was falling into perspective.

My isolation from worldly distractions and my complete focus on the teachings brought deeper understanding of their meaning: *the root of suffering is misconceiving one's self to exist in its own right as an independent entity*. This means that nothing – from what we believe to be our true self to the selves that we believe others to be – exists in the way we think they exist. One doesn't have to be Buddhist to recognise that self-centredness and self-consciousness disturb the mind and are sources of attachment, anger, pride, miserliness, and jealousy. What is unique about Buddhist psychology is that the very self-image to which we cling as being "truly me" is mistaken. And thus, the understanding that our self only exists conventionally as a mere label placed upon our body and mind, and that we are empty of independent self-existence, will bring self-centredness and self-consciousness to an end. Freed from self-obsession, we will be able to love others without inhibition.

This teaching reminded me of Chuang Tzu's poem *The Empty Boat*,[11] where he says that if an empty boat collides with one's own skiff, even if we are usually bad-tempered we will simply push it away without being upset. But if we see a man in the other boat we will angrily curse him. There are two lessons here. First, if we can empty our own boat in life, nobody will oppose us; nobody will try to harm us. But if we attempt to outshine others, to shame the ignorant, to glorify our reputation, pride and jealousy will lead us into calamity. Secondly, if we see others – people, events, and possessions – as empty boats, our minds will never be disturbed by anger and attachment.

Chuang Tzu continued:

Who can free himself from achievement
And from fame, descend and be lost
Amid the masses of men?
He will flow like Tao, unseen,
He will go about like Life itself
With no name and no home.
Simple is he, without distinction.

To all appearances he is a fool.
His steps leave no trace. He has no power.
He achieves nothing, has no reputation.
Since he judges no one
No one judges him.
Such is the perfect man:
His boat is empty.

Only Buddhist books were allowed on retreat, but I had to have Chuang Tzu. And this passage seemed to be about as Buddhist as you can get. I wanted to empty my boat.

. . .

After the second month, it seemed that now I was *really* just beginning to meditate. The whole day became one of mindfulness in my behaviour and my thoughts. Even at night I would sometimes awaken to find myself reciting the mantra of compassion, *om mani padme hung*. Not wanting to be disturbed by Tom, I left no more requests for supplies and rationed my food so that he need not come again. Each day I ate less, until only one piece of cheese and a bowl of muesli remained. Fasting for the final three days was surprisingly easy. I simply put food out of my mind. When the cheese did creep into my thoughts, I broke it into pieces and fed Bush Rat and the lizards.

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Then it was over. I was interested to see what it would be like to talk again. At the top of the ridge an old logging track disappeared into virgin rain forest. To the left, the track led down to Laughing Waters. I played with the thought of turning right and disappearing forever. Tempting, but I wasn't ready for that, not yet anyway. So I turned left and went down the hill to Tom's place.

The house seemed empty. A noise led me to the kitchen where a girl I hadn't seen before was making tea. She had recently arrived from Sydney and told me that she had thought the others were joking when they said someone was meditating in the bush. I responded hesitantly, words seemed superfluous and talking was a novelty. I was conscious of my tongue and lips working together to form words. We drank tea quietly, she was aware of my inner peace.

The others were in town, shopping for a party to celebrate the full moon. I walked out into the open fields. My senses had become accustomed to the shadows of the forest and now everything appeared big and colourful. A deluge of yellow sunlight bathed the grass, and I climbed an outcrop of lichen-covered rock to take it all in. Lorikeets, rosellas, and other brilliantly-coloured parrots fed noisily in the trees. Spring flowers peppered the meadow with splashes of colour. Laughing Waters was turning it on for me.

Tom returned from Coff's Harbour, and bush hippies from near and far arrived for the party. I stayed for the feast, then left the sound of music behind and returned to my shack and the welcome sound of silence. The company of friends was good, but there was no question of what was more preferable. The retreat had given me a glimpse of the potential of

my mind, of the possibility to experience a peace and happiness beyond my wildest imagination. I knew that, for the sake of myself and others, I had to actualise that potential and not become caught up again in the superficiality of everyday life. The thought of becoming a monk was much stronger, but my options remained open.

While browsing through Tom's library that afternoon, I had discovered Matthew Arnold's *The Light of Asia*, the life story of the Buddha written in verse. The general story is that Buddha was born as a prince in a kingdom on the present day border between Nepal and India. Wanting his son to become a great ruler rather than a religious leader, as had been predicted at his birth, the king brought him up in an atmosphere of pleasure and shielded him from all signs of suffering. While exploring beyond the palace walls, however, the young prince saw a sick person, an aged person, and a dead person. Determined to find the cause of human suffering, he left his princely life and became a wandering ascetic. He learned all there was to be taught by the great yogis but, dissatisfied, he declared that the extreme asceticism of those times was not the answer. Then, seated beneath the Bodhi tree at Bodhgaya, he showed that eliminating the disturbing emotions through the wisdom of selflessness and universal compassion is the way to overcome all suffering.

The magical events described in Buddha's story did not deter me as the question of historical accuracy made no difference to the message. Sentient beings are trapped within wheels of death and rebirth pervaded by misery. Unless they are shown a way out, they will be compelled by ignorance and by karma to suffer sickness, ageing, and death forever more. As every sentient being has been one's mother and father countless times in past lives, it is only natural that each one of us should aspire to lead them out of suffering. By abandoning his queen, who had been his wife during their previous five hundred lives, and becoming an ascetic yogi, Buddha demonstrated that renunciation of worldly pleasures is the first step towards wisdom and compassion. He was showing the way.

Even after five hundred lifetimes with the one partner there was still no satisfaction. After manifesting enlightenment, however, Buddha returned and led his wife to nirvana. Anneke would have approved. If I were to become a monk, I would do it for Claire, even though it would be the last thing she wanted me to do. And I would do it for Lynne and the unborn baby.

ACTORS ON THE STAGE OF LIFE

Returning to the world of people, I went to Coff's Harbour to book a seat on the train to Melbourne. While walking around town I felt acutely sensitive to the signs of joy and misery in the lives of the inhabitants but I was uninvolved, as if I were a visitor from another planet. I wanted to ride that cloud of euphoric detachment forever. Carefree young people radiated the naïve energy of hope and optimism, while the faces of older people betrayed anxiety and a sense of meaninglessness. A broken and discarded doll on someone's front lawn showed the pathos of being loved and abandoned. I felt as if I was on a film set. The man at the train station had to be acting the part of a ticket-seller, he did it so well. And the girl who served me a milkshake and sandwich deserved an Oscar for her portrayal of a girl in a milk bar. Everything was real and yet not real.

Then it hit me. Our personalities are a front. Beneath their facades, everybody was exactly the same as me. Carl Jung's *persona* – the way we present ourselves to society – is a mask for something *that does not exist*. We think there is a true self when, in fact, there is no intrinsic self at all. Just as the doll was once identified by its name, we humans are identified by our name alone. There is no essential self other than our mere name. Our personalities, and even our bodies, are simply temporary acquisitions that our minds will soon cast off. As ugly caterpillars become beautiful butterflies, and handsome bodies become withered old hulks, our bodies are abandoned from life to life but our minds continue on, always seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. Not knowing about karma, and unable to curb our selfishness, in our blind pursuit of pleasure we hurt each other over and over again.

Seeing others in this way I realised how it was possible to have unreserved love and compassion for all living beings. Fundamentally, mothers, fathers, children, boyfriends, girlfriends, cats and dogs are all the same and none of us has any greater right to happiness than anybody else. Not realising this equality, however, we see ourselves as lead characters on the stage of life. By over-identifying with our imagined characters we take ourselves far too seriously and, competing against each other, we make our lives one long tragedy. My sadness at seeing this situation was tempered by knowing there was a solution. People can overcome their karma and self-centred ignorance if they are shown how. Who was going to show them? I now understood my purpose in life.

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In Melbourne it was the same. Jules was living alone and pretending to be happy, but I could see the pain in his face. Caught up in his memories and shattered dreams, he lived a meaningless existence of going to work and returning home to the cat, the dog, and the television.

I fired the first shot as *a fait accompli*: 'Dad, I'm going to become a monk.'

He concealed his shock by scoring a point. 'That's been pretty obvious to all of us.'

'Lama Yeshe said that we should ask our parents for their permission.'

'Huh,' he laughed, 'you don't need my permission, you've always done whatever you want.'

'That's true, but that's the way you brought me up.' A point for me.

'Working as a doctor is an excellent way to help people,' he said hopefully.

'Yes,' I agreed, 'but medicine just relieves the results, it doesn't get to the root cause of our problems. And if I don't rid my own mind of that cause, how can I truly help others?'

He came straight to the point. 'I don't believe in celibacy. If you are wrong you will be terribly disappointed and your life will be wasted.'

'That's a risk I'm willing to take. I've tried to disprove the lamas, but most of what they say I can't refute. I still have some doubts, but not enough to prevent me becoming a monk. In fact, that's the only way I can resolve those doubts. I have to put the theory into practice.'

'What about children, don't you want to have kids?'

I couldn't state the obvious. Jules had raised a family with a wonderful wife but his present loneliness and despair were the result of mistaken ideas about himself and others. Because we see ourselves and others as more than we actually are, clinging attachment cannot be avoided, and when the inevitable separation occurs, either at death or before, grief, pining, and loneliness are its results. As much as my own mind had been conditioned to believe that true happiness lay in a loving partner, a family, and a good career, I had seen beyond that, and I was prepared to challenge it by becoming a monk. Light-heartedly, I replied, 'I can enjoy other people's kids, and not have to change dirty nappies.'

'Look,' he said, not amused, 'I've listened to what this Yeshe has to say and it's just the same as in the Hebrew Scriptures.'

'Okay, I'll become a rabbi,' I replied, raising my hands in the appropriate Jewish gesture of resignation. And that was the end of the conversation.

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I wrote to Lama Yeshe and he replied that several people had asked to be ordained. I could go to Kopan in November and take ordination with them. With a few months to spare, I began working full time again in the Casualty Department at PANCH. It was a good opportunity to save money as there was no material support for Western monks and nuns at Kopan.

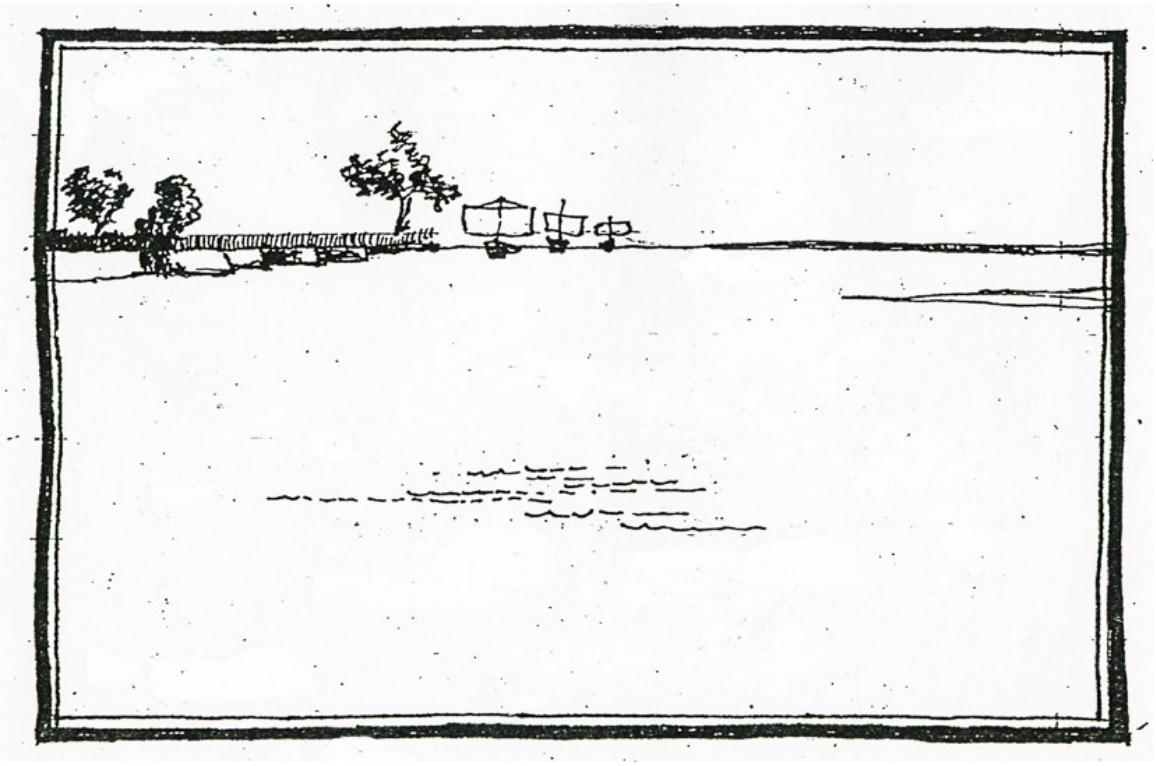
The other doctors and nurses were bemused by my Buddhist inclinations. The idea of taking three months off for a retreat seemed crazy to them. As one young doctor commented, 'Three months! But what about your career?'

I felt sorry for him. He was already so caught up in the system that he would never have a chance to look beyond the blinkered view of the medical world. My view was that the quality of medical practice would be supremely enhanced if a three-month lone retreat in the forest meditating on loving kindness and the reality of existence was a compulsory part of the medical curriculum. But not everyone felt like that young man. One surgeon, who intimidated everybody by his brusque manner, surprised me by saying, 'You know, when I

visited the Buddhist ruins at Borobudur in Indonesia I experienced the most wonderful sense of peace and tranquillity.' He was the only one who was outright in favour of my intention to become a monk.

Although I openly intended to become a monk, a casual relationship arose between myself and Susi, a radiologist at PANCH. She left to go trekking in Nepal and would be at Kopan for the meditation course and my ordination. On my final day at work, as tradition demanded, my colleagues and I gathered at the local pub for a farewell drink. The final image of myself as an ordinary person was my sitting at a table with a jug of beer in front of me, a cigar in my mouth, and my arms around two female doctors, one on each side and asking me, 'But won't you miss the cuddles?'

PART FOUR: ORDINATION



THE EGO

About a thousand years ago, the great Tibetan lama, Marpa the Translator, ordered his new disciple Milarepa to construct a tower from stone, using his own hands and without assistance. When the tower was nearly completed, Marpa came by and demanded, 'Who told you to build this?'

'Why, you did,' replied a shocked Milarepa.

'No I didn't. Pull it down and replace every stone where it came from.'

Without arguing, Milarepa did what he was told. Then Marpa asked him to build another tower. When this was nearly finished, the same thing happened. Again and again Marpa denied he had asked for towers to be built. Milarepa's back became an open wound from carrying stones, and all the while Marpa treated him harshly and refused to give him teachings. Several times, Milarepa was plunged into the depths of despair, but did not abandon faith in his lama. Finally, he could take it no longer and, with the aid of Marpa's wife who took great pity in him, went off to another teacher. If he had retained his faith on the ninth occasion of despair, he would have purified the negative karma of causing the death of many people through black magic, and he would have attained enlightenment. After reconciliation with Marpa and receiving teachings, Milarepa had to live as an ascetic yogi for the remainder of his life to achieve that final goal.

An ego built on the faulty foundation of a misconceived self is the root of all suffering, and the duty of a lama is to help the student dismantle his or her ego. Fear of losing our personality, or of disappearing altogether, is overcome by courage acquired through confidence in the lama and the teachings. Instead of disappearing, one needs to reconstruct the ego on the foundation of wisdom and compassion, and so attain Buddhahood.

A close friend of mine has kindly taken the role of devil's advocate against Buddhism. He once said to Garrey, 'Gaz, Buddhism has done nothing for you. You and Kris argue with each other just as you have always done.'

'You only see the arguments that happen; you don't see the arguments that don't happen because of Buddhism,' was Garrey's astute reply.

On another occasion, he to me, 'Ade, if I were to give up my ego now, I would just die.'

'Yes,' I replied with a smile, 'I think you would.' We both laughed.

Technically, the term *ego* refers to our accumulated knowledge of experience that tries to balance external reality against our innate desire to have pleasure and avoid pain. Ego sees a vulnerable self that needs protection through defence mechanisms to exclude ideas or emotions that are too painful or unacceptable. Narcissistic, immature, and neurotic defences are associated with a disturbed mind, while mature defences, such as altruism, sublimation, and humour lead to mental stability. As it is a person's ego with which we communicate, in everyday language, we use *ego* to refer to the self-image or to the actual person. When

'egolessness' is used as a synonym for the Buddhist 'selflessness,' we are using the everyday connotation of ego to mean self or I.

What we have to understand is that 'selflessness' does not mean there is no self at all. It means that the way the 'I' appears to our ego is mistaken because it appears to exist absolutely, and it is this wrong appearance of self that is negated. Unable to fully satisfy our need for pleasure and to avoid pain, we feel a sense of inadequacy and vulnerability, and the resulting self-consciousness gives rise to ego's defence mechanisms. It also gives rise to attachment, anger, pride, and all the other disturbing emotions. Understanding selflessness is like having a huge load lifted from our shoulders. We feel light and joyful, and our troubles evaporate as we see the world is so much less complicated than we had imagined. This wisdom of emptiness is one of the three principal aspects of the Buddhist path. The other two are the minds of renunciation and of universal responsibility, or altruism.

I chose to become a Buddhist monk because I recognised the need to train my mind in these three aspects of the path, and I had confidence that Lama Yeshe was fully qualified to guide me. It is said that we will never know our face is dirty unless somebody tells us or we look in a mirror. Similarly, we cannot recognise the subtle faults in our way of thinking unless somebody tells us. The lama is like a mirror that can show us the faults in our mind. There is no way to recognise our mistaken view of self other than introspective meditation under the guidance of a qualified lama. I knew I was in for a torrid time with my lama and my habitual self-centredness.

IN LAMA YESHE'S HANDS

My taxi pulled up at Kopan amid a swirl of dust and a flurry of young monks eager to help the new arrival. The course was well under way and the students were just beginning to file out of the tent for lunch. Susi ran to greet me and Nick sauntered over. The smile on his face told it all.

There were now sixteen Western monks and nuns at Kopan, the first community of ordained Westerners in the Tibetan tradition. They were the pioneers, or guinea pigs, however you want to look at it. Including myself, five men and four women had arrived to take novice ordination and join the guinea pigs. During the last days of the course, a tailor measured us for our robes. He had to work overtime when the lamas advanced the date of our ordination by two weeks.

At the end of the course, Susi and I were standing on the hill where the king's astrologer once observed the stars. She suggested we spend a last night together at a hotel on the rim of Kathmandu Valley where the sun can be seen rising over Mt Everest. In declining her invitation, I pointed out the North Star and explained how it seemed to remain in the one spot while the entire universe appears to revolve around it.

'And that,' I told her, 'is the same as my determination to become a monk.'

Wearing as part of my robes the yellow shirt made by Claire, and the maroon chaderi given to me by Garrey and Kris in Jalalabad, I took the preliminary ordination of Barma Rabjung on 18 November 1975. Lama Thubten Yeshe gave me the Tibetan name Thubten Gyatso, and told his new monks and nuns, 'From now on, I am your mummy, your daddy, your boyfriend, your girlfriend. Whatever you need, I will look after you.'

With a big smile, Lama Lhundrup, the manager of Kopan, put a white Tibetan scarf around my neck and said, 'Congratulations Thubten Gyatso. Your new name means "Ocean of Buddha Dharma." This is the same name as the Thirteenth Dalai Lama.'

I smiled gratefully, aware that I had merely a drop of Dharma wisdom, if that. There could be no comparison between myself and the Thirteenth Dalai Lama. The new name symbolised leaving the old life behind and entering the path of morality that leads to meditative stability and the wisdom that brings to an end the miserable state of self-centred confusion.

'I am going to smash your conceptions,' said Lama Yeshe in mock ferocity and, with a shriek of laughter, 'Now you have a party.'

So upon emerging from the ceremony where we had turned our backs on worldly life forever, we were mystified to find ourselves eating cakes, drinking lemonade, and listening to the Rolling Stones, all organised by Lama Yeshe. This was his method of introducing Westerners to Buddhism. He knew our renunciation was what the Tibetan's call 'hairy,' that is, our behaviour tended to be extreme and, by being too strict with ourselves, we would quickly become discouraged. Also, by immediately putting us back on the fence between our old and our new lives, Lama forced us to watch our minds, particularly old habits of

attachment. It takes a long time to overcome attachment, and Lama, our spiritual friend, was showing us that abandoning the props to our ego can only be done slowly.

Taking vows of celibacy and so on provides the best condition for overcoming belief in the mundane world as being a source of true, unceasing happiness. Vows are a powerful aide to cultivating renunciation. By living within the pure morality of non-harmfulness, karmic and psychological obstacles lose their intensity and one accumulates the power to achieve one's goals of wisdom and compassion. These are the actual sources of true, unceasing happiness for both self and others.

Lama Yeshe made it perfectly clear that, although he and Lama Zopa Rinpoche would do their utmost to help, our future was in our own hands. From my side, I saw that the future of Mahayana Buddhism in the West depended upon the successful establishment of monastic communities. If we succeeded in carrying the torch of wisdom handed to us by the lamas, there would be hope in the world. If we failed, the light of hope would fade ever more rapidly.

And so I dedicated the remainder of my life to becoming a good monk and helping the Lamas establish Western monasticism in the Mahayana Tradition. Nearly twenty-nine years later,[12] I am still trying to become a good monk. I am disappointed, but not disillusioned, by the fact that many of my fellow 'guinea pigs' have disrobed. They all contributed, and are still contributing, to the cause of great compassion. To complete my story and to encourage those who are thinking of ordination, or are wavering in their ordination, I will give a brief account of my experience as a monk.

THE MONK

Myself Bodhgaya 1979

Clearing up after the party symbolised finishing our old way of life. We began our new life by joining the other monks and nuns in their evening discussion and meditation. The atmosphere was charged with a feeling of celebration and commitment. Aware that we had entered uncharted territory for Westerners, in our unity we were confident we could find our way, but we knew that the exorcism of old habits from our minds was not going to be easy.

Lama Yeshe began this exorcism the next day. To prevent us from feeling special amongst his students, he broke the tradition of monks and nuns being served first by ordering us to serve the lay students and only eat when they had completely finished. He told us, 'You should think that the purpose of your life is to always be servants to others.'

We were lucky in having Lama Yeshe as one of our teachers. By studying Westerners even more deeply than we studied Buddhism, he became supremely skilled in communicating Dharma through his speech, his body language, and, it was widely believed, his thoughts. Lama Yeshe captured his audiences with a combination of wisdom, compassion, and an outrageous sense of humour. His antics on the teaching throne held us enthralled as he illustrated every point with dramatic, poignant, and hilarious facial expressions and physical gestures.

Despite the initial doubts expressed by Lama Yeshe's peers about Westerners being able to understand and practise the teachings, Lama Yeshe felt that we were genuine in our wish, and capable of doing so. His Holiness the Dalai Lama encouraged Lama to go ahead and teach Westerners, and some students went on to establish centres all around the world for study and practice of the teachings. Six years after my ordination, three hundred Western students, including eighty-six monks and nuns, gathered in India to receive teachings and make pilgrimage. Lama Yeshe told me then that many of his colleagues had come to apologise for their earlier doubts and they rejoiced at what they had seen.

Lama Zopa, whose guidance was equally important to us, had a different approach. His teaching manner was more subdued and we had to work hard to maintain our attention, inspired to do so by his immaculate example. Nevertheless, Lama Zopa could also bring the tent down with his own brand of humour. Our two teachers were a perfect balance, reminding me of a point made to Carlos Castaneda by Don Juan when he said that an apprentice needs two masters, one with whom you can relate as an old friend and one who terrifies you. According to the various dispositions of different students, masters can play either role. Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa had exactly these relationships with their students. Some were in awe of Lama Yeshe and saw Lama Zopa as a brother; others saw them in the opposite way.

Under the guidance of the lamas, the Western monks and nuns based their activities in the astrologer's cottage on Kopan hill. We lived, meditated, and cooked as a group, joining the Tibetan and Nepalese monks in the main meditation hall for major practices and the twice-monthly ceremony to purify our vows, but mostly we were independent. Each day we gathered in the main room at five in the morning for two and a half hours of chanting and meditation. We took turns to prepare breakfast and serve it during that time. The food was eaten in silence. One morning, unknown to us, Lama Yeshe cooked breakfast in our kitchen and served it during the meditation. We used to make simple Nepalese food, but Lama

produced an amazing (for us) breakfast of cereal and fried eggs with cheese on toast. He had asked an English monk what Westerners usually have for breakfast. Lama then spoke to us:

'You people have Western bodies and Western minds, I don't want you to follow a Tibetan trip of butter tea and *tsampa*,[13] you cannot be happy that way. Eat your normal food. Also, I want you to buy proper mattresses and stop sleeping on grass mats on the floor. Your bodies need comfort.'

Early in the New Year, the learned monk Geshe Jampa Gyatso arrived at Kopan. Lama Yeshe had invited him to teach the young monks as well as the rapidly expanding community of Westerners at Kopan. Lama Yeshe knew that Westerners wanted to know exactly how things work, so he asked the new teacher to teach us the *Abhidharmakosa*, a text written by the Indian pundit Vasubandhu explaining the nature of the physical world, the mind, karmic cause and effect, and the path to nirvana. According to tradition, we were told to memorise the root text in Tibetan. After I had laboriously managed to memorise a few pages, I was relieved when Lama Yeshe told us not to continue but to put our time into studying the teachings. The classes continued until the monsoon and were completed the following year. Lama Yeshe advised me to study these teachings well and then write a book to bridge the gap between modern scientific understanding and the ancient wisdom of India. I am still studying.

By now, Kopan monastery had become overcrowded and we needed to purchase more land. There was also a matter of urgency induced by a rumour that a Japanese hotel was going to be built on the side of the hill facing Kathmandu. I suggested returning to Melbourne where I could work as a doctor and raise money. This idea was conveyed to Lama Yeshe, and his reply came back, 'Dr Adrian can work in a hospital and live at Tara House (our new centre in Melbourne) where he can lead meditations. It is his decision.'

My mind leapt at the thought of returning to Melbourne, but I soon realised this was a type of clinging. Even if the motivation was good, old habits would make it hard to stay ordained in that environment. I sent a message to Lama Yeshe, saying it was better for me to stay at Kopan. Two days later, I was walking to Boudhanath when Lama Yeshe went past in a taxi. The taxi stopped and Lama, in the front seat, motioned me to sit in the back. After a few minutes, Lama turned to me and said, 'I hear you make good decision. Melbourne is the heart of your samsara. Better you wait some time until you are strong before you go back.'

Lama encouraged us to make our own decisions. If we made the wrong decision, and if we were strong enough, Lama would let us go ahead and be burned. It was a tough apprenticeship and we had to learn how to pick ourselves up and get on with the job. If we were unable to learn the hard way, Lama would protect us from going too far out on a limb. During a puja in the main temple, Lama Yeshe beat a sleeping Tibetan monk with his wooden *mala* (rosary). After the puja, an Australian monk asked Lama why he didn't treat the *Injies* (Westerners)[14] like that. Lama turned towards him with a wrathful expression that made his knees quake and said, 'Because you can't take it.'

I transformed my cabin into The Peoples' Clinic, a first-aid dispensary for Kopan's fifty young Tibetan and Nepalese monks, for visiting Westerners, and for the surrounding villagers. With the poor water supply, open cesspits, and general ignorance of germs, the

level of hygiene was appalling and people suffered from a wide range of skin infections and intestinal parasites. There was also active tuberculosis.

Myself treating local Nepali villagers outside the People's Clinic, Kopan Monastery, 1979

In the spring we all travelled to Dharamsala and stayed at Tushita Retreat Centre, a rambling old colonial house on the ridge above McLeod Ganj. It was near the Balcony House where I had lived with Kerry. Peter, who had supervised renovations, told me he had been at the point of giving it all up when received a telegram from Lama Yeshe in Nepal, saying: 'You've come a long way baby, but you still have a long way to go.' This encouraged him to complete the job. Lama had seen this statement in a *Time* magazine advertisement

The lamas had an uncanny knack of knowing what we were thinking. One day I was sitting in the sun, thinking of Susi. Lama Yeshe walked by, stopped, and came up to me.

'How is your friend Susi?' he asked.

I couldn't hide anything from him. Sex, or the lack of it, was not a problem, but if I allowed my mind to lose itself in fantasy then it would become a problem. I appreciated Lama's warning.

At Tushita, Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche, the junior tutor of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, gave getsul (novice) ordination to my group. We then spent the monsoon in retreat. On the first morning of my retreat I was looking in dismay at the miserable breakfast of one fried Lady's Finger and a cup of salty Tibetan tea. Suddenly, my window was pushed open and Lama Yeshe's hand appeared with a piece of Tibetan bread covered in Vegemite, a foodstuff reputed to be craved by Australians (other than myself). Then he went away without saying a word. I swore never to have bad thoughts about the food again and, even though there was no improvement in the diet, I was not bothered.

Three weeks of spectacular afternoon thunderstorms heralded the arrival of the monsoon, and the surrounding mountains disappeared behind swirling clouds of mist and rain. When the clouds occasionally broke up, the sun coaxed an abundance of ferns, begonias, and orchids out of hiding. Self-sown cosmos and marigolds appeared everywhere, a sea of pink, purple, and white flowers. I ate my lunches in the garden, sitting on a ledge that looked down upon the next level – beyond my retreat perimeter – where wild marijuana grew as high as the cosmos. At the end of the retreat, while walking past these plants on my first visit to McLeod Ganj, I gave them a friendly pat for old times' sake, and my hand turned to fire. I had touched the lone stinging nettle growing amongst the ganja. The lesson was understood.

When I returned to Tushita later that afternoon, Lama Yeshe introduced me to a man I hadn't met before, one of his first Western students.

'This is Dr Adrian, he has just become a monk. He has achieved the renounced mind of samsara.'

At that stage I had no idea of the full meaning of renunciation but, thinking of the marijuana plants and my recent enjoyment of talking to friends and eating Indian delights in McLeod Ganj, my immediate response was, 'Not yet Lama.'

'Not yet! Good answer!' Suddenly serious, Lama Yeshe held me by the shoulders and looked clOsely into my eyes. 'It will take time, renunciation comes slowly, very slowly.'

Two days after finishing the retreat I was on my way to Ladakh where His Holiness the Dalai Lama was to give a *Kalachakra* initiation. Three busloads of Westerners and Tibetans from Dharamsala travelled first to Kashmir, where we stayed a few days in Srinagar, then over a glacial pass into Ladakh. Compared to the lush forests on the southern slopes, Ladakh was like a moonscape, but the boulder-strewn plains and the backdrop of snow-covered peaks were just like the photographs I had seen of Tibet the land of mystery. As our convoy approached Leh, we came to the Indus, a swift, powerful torrent cutting through deep ravines. It was very different from the majestic river I had known in the Punjab. At a roadside stop, crowds of curious Ladakhis surrounded the Western monks and nuns, inspecting us from an uncomfortably close position. Westerners were a rare enough sight in Ladakh, and Westerners in robes were beyond their imagination. With no concept of our need for personal space, they finished their inspection and, turning to their friends, muttered, 'Hippy Lamas.' Many people were travelling to Leh on foot for the initiation, the women exhibiting their wealth on long hats covered in large pieces of turquoise, coral, and amber. To us they looked a bit crocodilian, but no doubt the ornamentation was beautiful in the eyes of their friends.

The six-day initiation ceremony was given on a sand flat beside the Indus. I sat in the open amongst hundreds of Tibetan monks, who seemed more interested in me than the proceedings. An American nun translated their questions for me. At the end, the people filed past His Holiness for blessing. It took all day, but His Holiness gave extra attention to the few Westerners present, asking us where we came from and what we were doing. When I mentioned Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche, His Holiness held my hands and said, 'Excellent, excellent.' I already had no doubts about my two lamas, and His Holiness's affirmation made me feel especially fortunate to be under their care.

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Dr Tsondrul Gyatso, a refugee from Tibet, was asked by Lama Yeshe to live at Kopan and teach the fundamentals of Tibetan medicine to the monks. Lama suggested that he teach the Westerners as well, and classes were organised with a Kopan monk as translator. After graduating from the Tibetan Medical College in Lhasa, Dr Gyatso had been interned in one of the prisons for 'political enemies,' where he suffered extremely harsh conditions for many years.

Dr Gyatso explained the general presentation of diseases and their causes and then, in detail, he taught the chapter on ethics from the main medical text. I was deeply impressed by the emphasis on compassion as being the main therapeutic power of a doctor; this had not been mentioned at my medical school. A doctor only became fully qualified when he or she was well advanced on the bodhisattva's path of wisdom and compassion based upon perfect concentration and renunciation – subjects also missing from the syllabus at medical school. A Tibetan doctor's day begins while asleep: dreams are observed and certain signs of success or failure of treatments are recognised. Then, before breakfast, meditation on the Medicine Buddha practice is performed, and medicines are blessed through the power of compassion and mantra. Even on the way to work, environmental signs indicate the types of illness to be seen during the day, and success or failure in treatment. Correctly diagnosing illness through feeling the pulse necessarily involves abstinence from alcohol and sexual activity. I doubt if pulse diagnosis will catch on in the West.

Myself treating a young monk at the People's Clinic, Kopan Monastery, 1979

With teachings and retreats following one after the other, my understanding of Buddhism began to grow. I was very happy and never thought about not being a monk. In 1977 I received full ordination from Kyabje Ling Rinpoche, the senior tutor of His Holiness. At that time I accompanied Lama Yeshe to the hospital for a medical check. The extent of his heart disease shocked me and I asked Lama why he didn't have a valve replacement as so many physicians had advised. He replied, 'These doctors know nothing about the power of the mind.'

The power of Lama Yeshe's mind was something I was beginning to wonder at. A letter I had written to Claire had been returned undelivered, and she was on my mind when I entered Lama's room. Lama's attendant was reading letters to him from his students. One was from an American girl asking to become a nun.

'What?' exclaimed Lama, putting on a shocked appearance, 'she wants to be a nun? She is so pretty. What a waste!' Lama gave me a piercing look and all three of us burst into laughter. Could Lama have possibly have known that Claire was on my mind, and that these had been her words to me?

Garrey and Kris came to Kopan to attend the 1977 November meditation course and to learn the art of Tibetan *thanka* painting. They too had adopted Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche as their teachers and I appreciated their unreserved support in my being a monk. After the course they left to see more of India on their way to Dharamsala. A few weeks later I also left for Dharamsala. On my way I visited Bodhgaya and nearby Rajgir where, at Vulture's Peak, the Buddha had given the teachings on the *Perfection of Wisdom*. At the ruins

of Nalanda Monastery, a vast centre of learning for many centuries while Buddhism flourished in India, I felt a strong affinity for the tradition of monastic learning and practice that is the very heart of Buddhism. If the precious teachings and practice were to gain a foothold in the West it would depend upon the successful introduction of Buddhist monasticism, a tall order in this age of sensual indulgence and the sad example being set by Christian monks and nuns unable to restrain their libidos. In the ancient courtyards of the monastery I resolved to spend the remainder of my life in helping to establish Buddhist monasticism in the West.

After arriving in Dharamsala, I took a room at the Tibetan Library. Garrey and Kris were living in a nearby flat and throughout the monsoon we attended the teaching program at the library. In the autumn, I assisted with the birth of Kris and Garrey's first baby, a girl named Tashi.

The biggest test of my ordination, and of my own libido, was about to begin. Anne, a Melbourne graduate in psychology with the looks of a model, arrived at Kopan for the next meditation course. She had been attracted to Buddhism by its clear presentation of the mind and how it functions. In the Peoples' Clinic she told me how she had been seeing ghost-like things ever since she was a child, and how their appearance corresponded with Lama Zopa's description of *pretas*, or hungry ghosts.

My interest in her story gradually became an interest in Anne herself. The teachings explain how ignorance elaborates the attractiveness of nice-looking people to the point where they appear perfect and that's when attachment sets in. This was happening to me. I observed it with a clinical interest and did nothing to compromise my vows, enjoying her company and expecting that when she left Kopan my heart would resume its normal rhythm. Then Lama Yeshe asked me to lead a one-month meditation course at Kopan and gave me permission to prepare for this at Bodhgaya. I found myself travelling to India with Anne and another student.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche had advised Anne to perform three intense purification retreats to cure an illness. She had completed two of these *Nyung Ne* retreats at Kopan, and the three of us did the third at the Burmese Vihara in Bodhgaya. My friendship with Anne, and my attachment, grew even stronger and I was both relieved and saddened when she left for Dharamsala.

To prepare for the course I was to lead at Kopan, I moved to a small Ladakhi temple near the place where the Buddha stayed for six years while fasting. It wasn't long before children from the nearby village began queueing outside my door every morning for treatment of various cuts and sores on their arms and legs. The monk who built the temple asked me to set up a permanent clinic for the Indians, but I had other responsibilities to fulfil.

Some afternoons I bathed in the river that flowed past the ruins of a temple built at the site of Buddha's fast. It wasn't a good idea. I returned to Kopan feeling very ill. A Tibetan doctor at Kopan took my pulse and said it was the change of climate between India and Nepal. I knew he was way off the mark, but was not sure of the problem myself. The next day, the signs of hepatitis were unmistakable. When Lama Yeshe heard that I had been in bed for several days without eating, he came to my room and took me to his kitchen, where he made

sandwiches of goat meat and thick slabs of butter. I was able to eat them and, from then on, I began to recover. Although still weak and jaundiced, with the help of another monk and a nun, the course was a success. After the course, Lama Yeshe asked me to become the resident teacher at Tara House, the centre his students had established in Melbourne.

Returning to Melbourne would be a challenge. Apart from the responsibility of teaching Dharma, Melbourne was 'the heart of my samsara' as Lama Yeshe had said. Also, Anne had passed through Kopan on her way back to Melbourne, and my fondness for her had not diminished. Before leaving for Australia, I went to Lawudo with Lama Zopa Rinpoche and a big group of Westerners. Lama Zopa invited me into his cave, where he introduced me to a visiting lama. 'His *mo* (divination with dice) is always correct,' said Rinpoche and, with a grin, 'Have you any questions to ask?' I couldn't think of anything profound, so I mentioned my forthcoming visit to Australia and asked if it would go well or not. The lama's rather gloomy observation was that my time in Australia would be difficult in the beginning, difficult at the end, but not so bad in the middle.

The forecast turned out to be accurate. Although the teaching program at Tara House went well, I initially found it difficult to be with family and friends. In a lighter version of the coming home syndrome, there was conflict between my persona of old and my persona as a monk. Lama Yeshe had said that instead of 'freaking out' family and friends, we could wear lay clothes when visiting, so I wore jeans for the first time in nearly four years. It felt comfortable to be 'invisible' and not have everybody looking at me and calling me a Hare Krishna. But it confused my self-identity as a monk. These days I wear my robes everywhere and it is so much better.

Both Anne and Judy came to Tara House. I was attached to them both, but the thought of giving up my vows never arose. In fact, their friendship supported my ongoing process of learning how to be a monk and survive in the West. I observed desire without becoming its slave, and found benefit in the company of women, even though it was playing with fire.

Traditionally, monks and nuns avoid the company of the opposite sex and abandon desire through meditation. As that was impossible in my situation, I reasoned that Lama Yeshe had thrown me into the fire of my attachment to either burn or survive.

If I burned, better sooner than later. If I survived, my mind would be well tempered to withstand the sensuality of Western society.

Lama Yeshe often said that we were creating Western Buddhism, not establishing Tibetan Buddhism in the West. As much as the thought attracted me, I wasn't yet free to seek the solitude of a forest retreat. Confidence in Lama Yeshe's wisdom helped me to survive the first difficult part of my time at Tara House, and then the good part began.

THE TEST

In the spring of 1979, Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche came to Australia to lead a retreat in the hills near Melbourne. We had built a meditation hall on the property but accommodation for the seventy participants was limited to tents, caravans, and a temporary shed that also served as the kitchen. We rented a nearby farmhouse for the lamas to stay. At the end of the retreat, Lama Yeshe gave an initiation into the practice of Cittamani Tara, the embodiment of the enlightened quality of quick wisdom, the feminine side of our minds. For two weeks, I led half the students in a meditation retreat on Cittamani Tara while the other half did meditation on the general teachings at a hall in the nearby village.

Ever since the meditation course at Chenrezig Institute in 1975, I had always seen Lama Yeshe as being an emanation of Tara and Lama Zopa Rinpoche as an emanation of Avalokiteshvara. At the end of that retreat, the lamas took the students outside to meditate on the grassy hill behind the meditation hall, with the lamas meditating on the slope above us. During that meditation I had a clear vision of the four-armed aspect of Avalokiteshvara and Green Tara sitting side-by-side. I felt convinced that these were the two lamas.

Carol Davies, the Australian nun who had helped me with the course at Kopan, arrived for the retreat with six of her friends from Western Australia. One of her friends, Ron, had wanted to come but had no money. He was helping renovate a house where the previous owner had lived as a recluse before his death. One evening Ron was in his car preparing to drive home when he heard a voice saying, *Look in the tin on the shelf below the cellar window.* Intrigued, he got out of his car and took the tin down from the shelf. It was full of money, enough for him and his friend, Roger, to travel to Melbourne and attend the retreat with the lamas. Ron and his wife were to become very strong Buddhists and Roger was to become a monk, performing several three-year meditation retreats in the United States.

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Back at Tara House, Carol and I were close friends working together on the teaching program. We were both doers, and our survival motto during interminable committee meetings has stood me in good stead ever since: *Don't be too bloody serious.* At the end of the Cittamani Tara retreat I had asked the students if anybody knew how I could acquire a copying machine. Photocopy technology was just being introduced but I had in mind a Gestetner rotating copier that I had used in Kopan. One of the students had a brand new Gestetner and many reams of paper that he was delighted to give to me. So, as Lama Yeshe had instructed, I began weekly talks on the *Abhidharmakosa* and Carol typed out the extensive notes for reproduction on the Gestetner.

The great exodus of Vietnamese refugees in boats had begun and Australia was offering many a new home and country. There were only two Buddhist centres in Melbourne at the time and, when they discovered Tara House, we were visited more and more frequently by small groups and eventually busloads of Vietnamese. A young woman asked me if I could bring her teacher to Australia from a refugee camp in Hong Kong. I didn't know how to begin such a process, so I sent the name of her teacher to my uncle, the national president of

the Returned Soldiers League, hoping that he may have some contacts in Canberra who could help.

Meanwhile, Lama Yeshe had sent me a letter advising me to do a month's retreat on Cittamani Tara, including making fire-offerings where one visualises all of one's karmic obstacles and emotional afflictions in the aspect of scorpions being absorbed into black sesame seeds which are then offered to the Buddha visualised as a fire deity in the centre of a fire. Garrey's sister, Sue, was living in the countryside near Bega in southern New South Wales and she needed someone to look after her house, her chickens, and her garden while she was away. So I went to Sue's place and set up for the retreat in a cabin some distance from the main house. During my evening meditation sessions I was visited by a marsupial mouse seeking warmth. Climbing all over me, it would sometimes settle on top of my head, in the nape of my neck, or in the palm of my hand in meditation posture on my lap. I couldn't move but it was not too distracting until it started dreaming and kicking in its sleep. There were foxes too. One night I heard foxes crying and the two geese squawking. Imagining carnage but still unable to stop the meditation, I visualised sending indestructible vajras of protection to the geese. To my relief, the next morning they were safe and sound. I slept and cooked in the main house, eating on the terrace overlooking Sue's amazing garden. Yellow robins would join me for lunch, sitting on my shoulder and then hopping on to my plate to eat a lentil or a grain of rice. They would give warning chirps whenever a marsupial mouse appeared, also looking for something to eat.

The one Buddhist book in Sue's library was the life story of Naropa, a famous Indian Mahasiddha. I was deeply impressed by the description of Naropa's dedication to his guru Tilopa and his faith in his tantric mind-seal deities or *yidams*. Nick had told me that the letters Lama Yeshe continually received from his students were mostly about their problems and that we should write to Lama about the good things that were happening. So, with that suggestion and the story of Naropa in mind, I wrote to Lama Yeshe and described how well the retreat had gone, and concluded with the statement, 'I think my main difficulty is that I don't have enough faith in my yidams.' Much later, I heard from Peter Kedge, Lama's secretary at the time, that Lama had received the letter in New York. That evening, during a public talk, Lama said, 'The trouble with you Westerners is that you don't have enough faith in your yidams.' I guess Lama must have appreciated my point.

Re-invigorated by the meditation and the environment, on my return to Melbourne I received a phone call from the Immigration Department saying, 'Your monk has arrived, please come and pick him up.' I had not heard from my uncle and had forgotten about the Vietnamese monk in the refugee camp in Hong Kong. His name was Thich Phuoc Huey and he turned out to be a teacher who was highly revered in all of Vietnam. I offered him my room at Tara House and I moved into the attic. He stayed with us for several months until the Vietnamese organised a place for him to stay. Thich Phuoc Huey was to become instrumental in helping develop Vietnamese Buddhist temples throughout Australia. Whenever I visited his main temple in Sydney I was always treated with great respect and kindness.

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Towards the end of 1980, the prediction by the lama at Lawudo was coming true. My obstinate mind was experiencing difficulties with the Tara House administration and I wasn't feeling happy. Lama Zopa Rinpoche came to lead a two-week retreat at Anglesea, a beach-side holiday town. When the show-down meeting between the adversaries was finally convened, without anything being said, Rinpoche took us all to the beach. He instructed us to take a handful of sand and recite many mantras of wisdom and compassion, *om mani padme hung*, blow onto the sand and throw it into the water to bless the countless creatures that live in the sea. Then we went home. I understood the message, but whether I could put it into practice or not was not revealed because I received a letter from Lama Yeshe advising me to return to Nepal and do some practices. Carol came with me and we attended the November meditation course at Kopan. A senior monk and meditator who had been trained in Tibetan medicine was at Kopan and Lama Yeshe suggested we invite him to teach the Westerners. Carol and I organised classes that were translated by Barry Clarke, an Englishman who had studied Tibetan medicine in Dharamsala. We received detailed instruction on the subtle connection between mind and body and the ways in which mental disturbance leads to physiological imbalance and sickness. Then he taught pulse diagnosis and the modes of treatment. The first line of treatment is change of behaviour and environment according to the type of illness. Then there was appropriate diet for different illnesses. Then the use of medicines derived from numerous Himalayan herbs. And, in extreme cases, the 'coarse' physical treatments of acupuncture, moxabustion, and surgery. This medical system had arisen in India thousands of years ago when people lived in far greater harmony with their environment than we do today. And it seemed to me that today's illnesses, most of which are related to gross lifestyles entirely out of balance with our environment, will not be touched by such gentle therapy. What chance do we have of improving public health today by moderating our lifestyles and curing the environment?

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In March 1981, I was a quarter of the way through performing 100,000 prostrations at the Mahabodhi Stupa in Bodhgaya when Carol arrived from Kopan and handed me a letter from Lama Yeshe. A three-story mansion on 4 hectares of riverside land in the south of France had been offered to Lama, and he wanted me to go there to establish our first Western monastery. Lama wanted me to see him in McLeod Ganj and then go straight to France.

Before leaving, I was called to see an eighteen-year old Austrian boy at the Burmese Vihara. His breathing pattern indicated imminent death. A loosened tourniquet on his upper left arm and a syringe was still hanging from the vein. We did all we could to arouse him but to no avail. There was no doctor to provide the antidote to heroin, so Carol and I took the boy to Gaya, about six miles away. The doctors in the Emergency Department at the hospital there refused to look at him and told us to take him to another hospital. I left Carol, still pleading with the apathetic doctors, and went to check on the boy whose limp body we had put on a bench. He was dead. Sometimes I loved India; sometimes I hated the place.

The next day at the Vihara we went through his things. I found a letter crudely packed with heroin addressed to somebody in Austria. We informed the Austrian Embassy in Delhi of the boy's death, and then, hoping to warn the person in Austria who was to receive the heroin, I wrote a letter to him describing the terrible way his friend had died. Unfortunately,

the Embassy did not contact the family even though we had given his address, and my letter was the only news they received.

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At Tushita, our retreat centre in the forest above McLeod Ganj, Lama Yeshe called me to his room where he and Lama Zopa were sitting on divans. I sat on the floor.

'My monks and nuns have nowhere to live. Elisabeth [a French nun] has found a house that we can turn into a monastery,' said Lama Yeshe. 'I want you to be the director.'

'I will try my best,' I said softly, thinking of the enormity of Lama Yeshe's request and wondering if I had the capacity to do it.

Lama continued, 'I will send the monks and nuns from Manjushri Institute [our centre in England], and from India as well.'

I nodded in reply.

'How are you going to support them?' he asked.

What? It's your idea not mine, I thought, but could not say. My opinion was that monks and nuns should live as beggars according to tradition and not become business people.

Before I could think of a respectable reply, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, more animated than I had ever seen him, interjected, 'It's your responsibility to look after the monks and nuns.'

'If we practise purely we will not go hungry,' I said, quoting a promise made by the Buddha.

'Oh yes, *if* you practise purely,' sneered Lama, and continued, 'The lay people can't support you, what are you going to eat?'

'We can grow vegetables.'

'Bah! You can grow enough vegetables to live on?' asked Lama.

I had no time to answer.

'You cannot study and meditate and grow vegetables all at the same time,' said Rinpoche.

'Maybe you should do some business,' suggested Lama.

My mind was spinning. I had never experienced such an interrogation. Lama was leading me towards accepting that we had to do business, but my mind was not going that way. Lobsang Nyima, the manager of Tushita, served tea, and Lama said something to him. He returned with a small ingot of silver. Lama continued the questioning while tossing the ingot into the air and catching it. Apart from not engaging in business activities, another of our vows is to not touch silver or gold. Lama's message was clear. In cases of necessity, to support the

monks and nuns it is permissible to deal with and not be afraid of the material world. I acquiesced and we discussed ways of making money.

Lama then asked, 'What will we call the monastery?'

I couldn't think of a name. Lama said what he had already decided: 'I think we will call it Nalanda.'

I remembered the prayer I had made at the ruins of the original Nalanda Monastery. *So, this is how karma works*, I thought.

. . .

Chateau de Rouzegas, now called Monastère Nalanda, 45 kilometres east of Toulouse, was to be my home for the next seven years. Cherry trees in blossom rose from a carpet of daisies, buttercups, wild violets, and clover. Groves of lilac perfumed the air, red squirrels played on stone walls, and a family of pheasant darted single file between box hedges. With a kitten for company, I began the long process of renovation of the two hundred year old mansion. It took me two weeks working from dawn to dusk to remove cobwebs from the walls and wash all the floors. Then I began making furniture from scraps of timber, using tools loaned to me by a farmer I had befriended and allowed to graze his sheep on our property.[15]

A monk arrived from England, then another, and Carol flew directly from Sri Lanka with a backpack filled with spices and giant avocados. We filled the cupboards with bottled cherries, tomatoes, chutney, and various jams. For 2,000 francs, I bought an old Peugeot 404 station-wagon and soon came to know every second-hand shop in Toulouse. The sound of cuckoos and the song of the nightingale will forever remind me of those early days at Nalanda.

Eleven kilometres from Nalanda was Vajra Yogini Institute, a large chateau on about 20 hectares of land where the family of Toulouse Lautrec had once lived. It had been bought by one of Lama Yeshe's students from the proceeds of the sale of his flat in Paris. The resident lama at the Institute gave us teachings and acted as our temporary abbot. Later, when Nalanda became overcrowded, the nuns moved to the Institute and established Dorje Pamo Nunnery.

Nick, now the director of Lama Yeshe's centre in Delhi, was supporting his centre by buying second-hand silk saris and making fashionable clothing. He sent us a consignment of these 'sari-shirts' as he called them, and we set up a stall in the street-markets of the French Riviera. Our first business enterprise didn't lose money, but we didn't make much either. At least the girls who spurned our portable changing room and tried the shirts on in the open kept us entertained.

Lama Yeshe visited in the late summer and we had many discussions on how to raise money, particularly the $500 a month rent that we were paying to Vajrayogini Institute which had bought Nalanda's property with some of the insurance received when one wing of the chateau had burned down. One afternoon we were sitting on the lawn thinking about how

to raise money when Lama said emphatically, 'I have the solution.' Then he rolled on the grass laughing and said, 'She (Elizabeth) is not going to like it.'

As we were wondering what the solution could be, Lama sat up straight, clicked his fingers in the air, and said, 'No rent.' And again he burst out laughing.

She didn't like it, but it was indeed the solution. The modest daily amount paid by the monks for their food and lodging was sufficient to cover our basic expenses.

In 1982 our organisation sponsored a tour of Europe by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He was due to teach at Vajrayogini Institute in November and he and his entourage would be staying at Nalanda. While supervising preparations for the visit, my old enemy of impatience began to resurface. Personality clashes with some of the monks dampened my mood, and I began to feel isolated. To complicate matters, among the hundreds of people who were coming to attend the Dalai Lama's teachings was Anne. I enjoyed her company, but had little time to see her. I had to look after our guests at the monastery. Lama Yeshe was there, and Jules, my father, was also visiting.

Waiting for His Holiness to arrive was reminiscent of a film by my favourite comedian, Jacques Tati. On the lookout for Chinese assassins, our security saw a suspicious figure darting from tree to tree. The person was approached with caution but he proved to be a local villager gathering mushrooms. Then, obscured by the mist, a large vehicle entered our driveway at the end of a long avenue of cedars. We unrolled our white greeting scarves with great expectancy. Out of the mist appeared a tractor pulling the council garbage cart. The driver, a cigarette hanging from his mouth, was most impressed by the reception. He handed me a beautifully decorated certificate from the mayor declaring that the house had been inspected and was safe for His Holiness to stay. During the inspection, I had distracted the mayor's attention from my primitive electrical wiring (he was also the local electrician) by talking about his great love – growing chrysanthemums. It could only have happened in France.

The Dalai Lama's presence had a magical effect on everyone. Despite inclement weather, the teaching program ran smoothly and we were all nice to each other. At a private audience, His Holiness gave advice to the monks and nuns on how to live in the West, encouraging us to follow the Christian example of doing social work for the needy.

Lama Yeshe invited several high lamas to dinner, including Dakpo Rinpoche, Gonsar Tulku, and Sogyal Rinpoche. Also at the table was Father Bastiani, a Benedictine monk who lived nearby and was interested in Tibetan Buddhism. During the conversation, Father Bastiani asked Lama Yeshe how Buddhist monks dealt with sexual desire, saying that in his tradition many monks disrobe at the age of forty-eight when they are still young enough to find a wife and raise a family. Lama Yeshe replied that within the tantric system there are methods to sublimate sexual energy. He could not elaborate on these methods, as the subject is necessarily secret. I was sitting next to Lama, and listened to his answer with more than a casual interest. I was only thirty-eight, but something unprecedented in my life as a monk was happening in my friendship with Anne.

A month later, at our centre in Italy, Lama Yeshe's students came from all over Europe to attend his teachings on the *Six Yogas of Naropa*, a profound tantric practice. The energy was even more powerful for me because Anne was there. I saw Lama Yeshe and explained all that was happening in my mind: my desire for Anne's company, my physical attraction towards her, and the fact that I did not want to stop being a monk.

Lama listened closely and said, 'How many women have you had, a hundred, two hundred?' A touch of envy went through my mind as I thought about the stories other monks must have told Lama about their pre-ordination lives.

'No, no Lama, not that many.'

'Do you think one more will make you happy?'

'No.'

'Alright then, you keep talking to her, but *don't touch her*.'

. . .

Anne did not encourage me to break my vows, and I didn't touch her, but my desire for her companionship grew stronger. At the end of the course I saw Lama again, my mind still in conflict between desire and my wish to remain a monk.

Lama Yeshe was in his living room, seated on a couch and leaning over a coffee table upon which was a glockenspiel, a wheel of golden cherubs whose wings deflected the rising air from candles so that the instrument rotated and rang tiny bells. During the day we had heard the news that one of the young *tulkus*, a recognised reincarnate lama from Kopan, had disrobed and gone off with a Western woman. There was an air of sadness about Lama that I had never seen before.

I sat on the chair opposite Lama, who was pushing the cherubs around their circle with his index finger. For five minutes he did not speak, there was no sound other than the tinkling of the bells.

Then he asked, 'What have you got?'

I was holding some letters for him from other students.

'Read to me,' he asked.

The first letter was from an American nun requesting to give back her vows. Showing no reaction, Lama silently pushed the cherubs around and around.

Watching him, I thought of the wheel of life turning in sadness. Since time without beginning, we have been revolving in our personal wheels of misery, always seeking pleasure but never finding satisfaction, never free from the control of karma, disturbing emotions, and death. The power of Lama's silence inspired me to deal with my situation alone. I knew what had to be done.

'Is she still here?' Lama knew what was on my mind.

'Yes Lama, but she is leaving tomorrow.' I let the subject remain at that.

Anne left for Florence the next morning. I took a long walk into the countryside, sat beneath a tree and cried. The yearning for a soul mate rose from deep within my psyche. I was face to face with attachment, the enemy I had declared war upon seven years previously. Until that moment, I had merely played with attachment; now it had to be confronted. I stayed a long time and tried to use Buddhist logic to ease my pain. It didn't work. That method is to be used before the storm, not during it. Then I thought of my lamas and my *yidams*, and the burden began to lift.

I made my way back to the centre with an aching bruise in my heart but walking more lightly. Lama Yeshe was in the corridor.

'Has she gone?' he asked.

Yes Lama.'

'Did you cry?'

'Yes Lama.'

'Good. I want you to write it all down.'

Impossible, I thought. It still hurt too much.

'I want you to do retreat,' said Lama, and my mood lifted. 'Go to Spain and do a three-month retreat on Vajrayogini and the yoga of inner fire.'

Vajrayogini is a female meditational deity, a *yidam*, whose meditational method protects the mind by transforming desire into the blissful wisdom of the path.

Lama then stunned me by asking, 'Do you have a photograph of her?'

Long before, I had given away a photograph of Anne because I knew it would only increase my attachment. 'No Lama,' I replied.

'Then you should get one,' said Lama, stunning me a second time.

. . .

Made of stones and with a boulder as its rear wall, my cabin at our new retreat centre in the Sierra Nevada Mountains in the south of Spain merged into the rocky surroundings. Across a wide valley was another mountain range and, beyond that, the Mediterranean Sea and Africa. His Holiness the Dalai Lama had been there only a few months before and declared it to be a good place to meditate. I was the first to use the cabin after his visit.

The evening my retreat began I found Anne's letter containing her photo on the path – it had slipped out of the lunch basket. It was a lucky find because there was heavy snow overnight. I still wasn't sure why I should have the photo. Perhaps Lama wanted me to realise that just as the photograph was not really Anne, her image in my mind to which I was so attached was also not the real person.

Listen here mind, I told myself, *you know that attachment is like a moth's fatal attraction to a candle flame or an alcoholic's attraction to the bottle. It will only destroy you.*

Yes, but Anne is no candle flame, she's a real person and we can make each other happy.

Well, she's not as real as you think she is, but we'll leave that aside. Are you sure you can make each other happy?

She's just like me in so many ways, I'm sure we'll be happy together.

Are you in love with Anne or with yourself? Even if, despite the odds, you live a long and happy life together, what will happen when one of you dies?

I'll use Dharma wisdom to avoid sadness.

Why aren't you doing that now?

Many such conversations went through my mind during the three months. As the attachment waned, my resolve to follow Lama Yeshe grew stronger, but I was still a long way from renunciation. My determination to remain a monk and achieve realisation on the path was strongest when I thought about Lynne in Sydney, and the baby who never had a chance. I had to do it for them.

IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH

On returning to Nalanda, I met Geshe Jampa Tegchok, our new abbot. He was a renowned scholar and teacher who had studied at Sera Je Monastery in Tibet with Lama Yeshe. For the next six years, the monks and nuns received extensive instruction from him on all aspects of Buddhist psychology, philosophy, and meditation. I am forever indebted to his kindness and brilliant elucidation of the subtle points of the teachings.

During this period I met Hans again. He lived with his French wife, Denise, and their two children on a property called Mas Miquelet in the mountains near Perpignon, not too far from Nalanda. He had met Sogyal Rinpoche and was becoming a Buddhist. The firm bond between us swept away the guilt I felt about the way we had parted on the Indus. Several families lived on the property, including Hans's sister and her three children. I often visited from Nalanda and stayed with the family.

One day I received a phone call from his sister. Hans's car had run off the road and into a valley. The car and his body had been found the next morning. I immediately went to Mas Miquelet, where Hans's body, without a mark on it, had been placed on a bed and surrounded by flowers. I led a meditation during an all-night vigil, and the next day, when his parents arrived from Holland, we buried him in the yard of an ancient church in the nearby village. People from all walks of life, including Gert, paid their respects. In bright sunshine, snowflakes mingled with falling cherry blossom in a display that would have delighted Hans. I hoped our paths would meet again in future lives.

In the autumn of 1983 Lama Yeshe visited Nalanda, looking unwell but still his ebullient self. Geshe Tegchok took him to the village fair, where the two lamas became a greater attraction than the sideshows, playing games with such enthusiasm and laughter that a crowd gathered in a semi-circle to watch them. Lama's performance at the lucky envelope stall was so entertaining that the stall-keeper's daughter, a toddler sitting on the counter, forgot about her ice cream and simply stared at Lama with an open-mouthed smile on her pretty face. I wished I had a camera.

At the end of his visit, I drove Lama to the Toulouse airport. We were extremely late and the traffic was heavy. While stopped behind a long line of cars, I momentarily thought of pulling out onto the wrong side and passing them all. I dismissed the idea as insane, but Lama Yeshe, sitting next to me read my mind and said, 'Go!'

Planting my foot on the accelerator, I passed seven or eight cars, then cut in front just as the lights became green and I made a right turn. This highly illegal manoeuvre got us to the airport with seconds to spare. I didn't know it was the last time I would see Lama Yeshe.

A few months later, the directors of Vajrayogini Institute and Dorje Pamo Nunnery and I drove to England to attend the annual meeting of the directors of Lama Yeshe's centres from all over the world. The meeting lasted several days, during which we stayed in a cottage near Stratford that had been owned by Lady Godiva. The meeting was overshadowed by two deep concerns. The Tibetan teacher who had been invited to teach at Lama Yeshe's biggest centre, Manjushri Institute in England, had inexplicably become hostile and turned the minds of the students against Lama Yeshe. Rejecting an appeal by His Holiness the Dalai

Lama to resolve the situation, this teacher had incited the students to take over the Institute as the foundation of his personal empire.

The second concern was Lama Yeshe's health. Unable to compensate any longer for the severe effects of rheumatic heart disease, Lama's big heart had finally gone into failure during the November meditation course at Kopan. A monk arrived from India with the latest news: Lama Yeshe was in hospital in Delhi, his hair had turned white, and he was gravely ill.

Lama Yeshe was taken to California where his condition gradually deteriorated and he died in March on the first day of the Tibetan New Year. At Nalanda, it took several days for the impact to sink in. Supported by Geshe Tegchok, the monks decided that, rather than go to Lama's cremation, we would continue our studies and meditation. Lama would have wished it.

Even while dying, Lama Yeshe never stopped giving his wisdom energy to others. Nor did he leave us forever. His Holiness the Dalai Lama confirmed Lama Zopa Rinpoche's recognition of a young Spanish boy as his reincarnation. Lama's mind was abiding in a new body that now bears the name Lama Tenzin Ösel Rinpoche. He was the fifth child of Paco and Maria, students of Lama Yeshe, who lived in the village of Bubion where I had done my retreat. Within six weeks of being born, Ösel was present at another meeting of the directors, this time in Germany, but we were unaware. To us, he was just another baby.

When Ösel was six years old, he visited our centre in Taipei, where I was the resident teacher. Despite his recognition by Lama Zopa and confirmation by His Holiness, I wanted to be convinced. It did not take long. Ösel's behaviour and personality were uncannily reminiscent of Lama Yeshe. His sense of humour and certain facial expressions were exactly like Lama Yeshe.

That evening, while I was making dinner, Ösel was acting like a normal mischievous boy. He was hiding the vegetables, so I hid a capsicum and when I produced it he asked in surprise, 'Where did that come from?'

'Magic,' I replied.

He looked at me with great scorn and said, '*You* can't make magic.' I grinned and thought, *Yep, that's my teacher.*

Later that evening, Ösel asked, 'Thubten Gyatso, who gave you that name?'

'You did Lama.'

'Oh, when I was Lama Yeshe?'

'Yes.'

'Alright then, from now on, for ever and ever,' he broke into a singsong voice typical of Lama Yeshe, 'your name is Tenzin Nyima. Nyima means 'sun', but I don't know what Tenzin means.'

Me and Lama Ösel, Taipei

The newspapers and television gave big coverage to the arrival of the child lama, and everybody knew about him. A family brought their dying mother to the centre in the hope that Lama Ösel could help her. Exhausted from a bad cold, Lama Ösel emerged from his room, sat next to the woman, and gently took her hand.

'Do you have any pain,' he asked.

'I am just tired,' she replied.

'What medicine are you taking,' he asked. The family showed him the Western drugs she had been prescribed.

'That's good, but also you should take Tibetan medicine. Basili!' With all the power of Lama Yeshe, he ordered the Spanish monk who was his attendant to give her some pills.

'Take these with hot water,' he told her with the authority of a doctor, 'and you should say *om mani padme hung* many times and don't watch too much television.'

A ripple of laughter went around the room with this last command. The mother and her family were happy. And so were we. His maturity and compassion were a big indication that Lama Yeshe's mind was truly present in the body of this six-year old boy.

The students from the centre took Lama Ösel and myself to a lake in the countryside to liberate hundreds of live fish, birds, frogs, and snakes that had been bought in the food markets of Taipei. While walking along the bank with a group of students, Lama Ösel stopped to watch a fisherman with rod and line.

'Why are you doing this,' he asked through our interpreter.

'Because I enjoy it,' replied the fisherman.

'The fish are happily swimming in the water, and you hook them out and eat them. Do you think they enjoy that?' Lama Ösel asked in a very concerned manner.

The students laughed, and Lama Ösel immediately broke away from them and came to me. Taking my hand, he walked away, asking in a plaintive voice, 'Why did they laugh when I asked about the fish?'

'That's why you are here Lama,' I replied.

. . .

When Lama Ösel was leaving Taiwan, I was sitting with him at a table in the airport. We were sharing a pizza that somebody had produced. Watching me enjoying the food, he said, 'Tenzin Nyima, I have a new name for you.'

I thought, *Okay, if this little boy really does have Lama Yeshe's mind, I know exactly what he is going to say.* And so I said, 'Oh yes? Tenzin Pizza I suppose?'

'How did you know?' he asked in genuine astonishment.

'Magic,' I replied.

. . .

For the Buddhist people of Tibet it is perfectly natural to believe that lamas who teach and practise altruism will take rebirth wherever conditions are suitable to continue their work of helping others. When lamas are truly sincere in their loving-kindness, this thought becomes the primary cause for their next birth. It is not even a matter of choice. Students may turn their backs on their lamas, but the lamas will never abandon any sentient being. I had no doubt that Lama Thubten Yeshe had reappeared in the form of Lama Ösel Rinpoche. For me, whether Lama Ösel remembered his previous life or not was immaterial. I had complete faith that his entire person was an expression of bodhicitta, of universal loving kindness.

This altruistic attitude is difficult for Westerners to comprehend. Our own compassion is limited by our personal comfort zone, beyond which we are reluctant to go. We feel uneasy when we read about people ignoring a sick or dying person in the street. We know that, in our selfish haste, we could do the same. On the other hand, we feel good when we hear of acts of kindness towards others. If we learned to put the happiness of others before our

own, we would be happier than ever. When we want for nothing else, just putting a smile on another's face will make our day.

Is rebirth a fact? Is altruism possible? I honestly don't know. Logically, they are both possible and, as final verification can only come through personal mental experience, I aspire to attain that experience. In the meantime, if my efforts to acquire renunciation, altruism, and wisdom take three years, three lifetimes, or three billion lifetimes, it doesn't matter. My life and lives will be meaningful.

People's Clinic Kopan

EPILOGUE AND DEDICATION FROM THE FIRST EDITION OF THIS BOOK

Lama Ösel Rinpoche enrolled as a novice monk at Sera Je Monastery in South India and began the traditional studies as well as receiving a conventional Western education under the guidance of personal tutors. As this book goes to press (January, 2005), he is studying full time at a Western college with the intention of gaining university entrance.

Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche continues as the head of Lama Yeshe's world-wide organisation, the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition. Apart from being the spiritual friend for thousands of students, he has many personal projects that he intends to see through to completion. Foremost is the construction of a giant bronze statue of the future Buddha, Maitreya, in India inspiration for which came from Lama Yeshe. Lama Zopa Rinpoche is showing us the importance of fulfilling one's teacher's wishes.

My dearest friends, Garrey and Kris, have played major roles in the growth and consolidation of Chenrezig Institute in Queensland. They live on a property near the Institute. Garrey is still involved in building projects, in particular, the construction of many stupas as objects of spiritual inspiration and reliquaries.

Judy married an Englishman and has two children. She teaches introductory classes in Buddhism.

Kerry married an Englishman. She and her husband were founding members of Sri Goenka's meditation centres in Australia and they are both senior meditation instructors.

Anne married an Englishman. They are happy, and I stay with them whenever I can.

I lost contact with Claire many years ago. She probably married a bloody Englishman.[16]

DEDICATION

The spiritual path is a uniquely personal journey that involves entering blind alleys, backtracking, advancing further, falling down, and picking oneself up over and over again. It is impossible to proceed without the guidance of a patient and compassionate spiritual friend, and I was most fortunate to be looked after not only by Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche but also by their own teachers and many of their colleagues from the great Tibetan monastic universities of Sera, Ganden, and Drepung.

I cannot express the depth of gratitude that I, and thousands of others, owe to Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche for the patience, the kindness, the love, and the wisdom he has shown while looking after Lama Yeshe's flower children – as Lama called us – during the difficult years since his passing.

The word 'I' has appeared far too frequently in this book, but the story has not been told to enhance my self-image. It has been written to thank the lamas and the Tibetan people in general. Despite experiencing one of the greatest atrocities in a century of unprecedented atrocities, they have given their heritage and their hearts to us Westerners, who they perceive to be in more trouble than themselves.

If there is any merit from writing this book and, I hope, from inspiring others to investigate Buddhism, I dedicate that merit to the rapid and successful completion of the unfinished work of Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, and now, Lama Tenzin Ösel Rinpoche, in preserving the Mahayana tradition.

POSTSCRIPT

The first edition of *A Leaf in the Wind* concluded above. I have revised the text up to this point, and now, at the request of others, I must bring the description of my journey up to the present date: March 2015. It shall be brief.

After my six years in France helping to establish Nalanda Monastery, in 1986 Lama Zopa Rinpoche asked me to become the resident teacher at a new centre in Sydney, founded a few years earlier by Roger Kunsang. Roger and I had been ordained together in 1975 and he had later set up a cleaning business in Sydney to repay some debts. During that time, he started Vajrayana Institute, sponsored me at Nalanda, and, on his weekly day off, he worked as a volunteer taking residents of an old people's home on day excursions. Roger had rented a house at Neutral Bay on Sydney Harbour which served both as a base for his cleaning business and a Dharma centre.

Over the next three years I taught at our centre in Sydney for eighteen months, then at our centres in Perth, Adelaide, and Melbourne for another eighteen months. Then, after two years as resident teacher in Taiwan, a three-month retreat in New Zealand and a six-month visit to Nalanda, I returned to Australia. Living in France was expensive for Australian and New Zealand monks and nuns, and it was difficult to obtain long-term visas. So I had discussed with Lama Zopa Rinpoche the need for a monastic community in Australia and he gave me the responsibility to build a new monastery on land that had been offered to Lama Yeshe near Bendigo, north-west of Melbourne.

At that time I was the resident teacher at Hayagriva Buddhist Centre in Perth, with no idea how to go about building a monastery. At the conclusion of an introductory course I had given, one of the students approached me and said, 'I am an architect, I have made all the money I need in this life and now I want to do something useful.' And so we began planning together. With my experience from Nalanda, I had a good idea of what would be needed to enable the monastic community to function, and the architect provided the design skills.

I returned to Melbourne with the preliminary plans drawn up. Apart from a small inheritance I had received when my father died while I was in Taiwan, I had no funds to start building. Therefore, while living at Tara Institute, I obtained a medical position working for the Australian government examining migrants and people receiving work-care pensions. It was easy but interesting work. Quite straight-forward, but a challenge to distinguish genuine cases from malingerers, and there were many of the latter.

With enough money to at least begin, in approximately 1992 I moved to Atisha Centre, the retreat centre that had started when the property was offered to Lama Yeshe. Lama had walked over the land and indicated where his vast vision should be actualised: sites for a retreat centre, a monastery, a large stupa, a residential area, a school, a retirement village, and a hospice. The property was not prime real estate. Originally forested, the trees had all been cut down and suckers growing from the stumps had been periodically harvested for eucalyptus oil. When the harvesting had ceased, the strongest suckers started to become tree trunks again, with multiple trunks growing from single stumps and infested with parasitic vines. The topsoil had been washed away, exposing shale and quartz reefs with great piles of dead scrub. It was a wasteland.

Armed with a three-metre stick, some stakes, and a sledge hammer, I surveyed 'monastery hill.' My design included four buildings surrounding a large open quadrangle. I roughly staked out their locations, and moved the stakes from one place to another until I was satisfied. Then I called in the bulldozer. Garrey had helped develop Chenrezig Institute in Queensland and I remembered him telling me they should have flattened the building sites before beginning construction. I wasn't going to repeat that mistake.

Dealing with the council to gain planning and building permits was a new experience for me. I suffer from severe aversion to bureaucracy and had managed to avoid dealings with officials most of my life. Eventually, however, the way forward became clear and I engaged tradesmen to do the essential preliminaries: laying concrete slabs for the first three planned buildings, connecting to the electricity grid, and the underground plumbing.

Several years earlier, I had given a weekend course at Atisha Centre. A nurse at the local hospital had seen the advertisement and contacted me. A patient was dying in her ward and his last wish was to see a Buddhist monk. I visited the hospital and did what I could as he was rapidly slipping away. It turned out that the man had been the grandfather of one of the tradesmen and he had always wanted to meet me to thank me for what I had done. With this good bond, all the tradesmen became friends and not only did they charge me reasonable rates, they also gave me much advice on what to do. We did not employ an actual builder, I supervised both the tradesmen and the volunteers who came to help.

My architect friend from Perth supplied the plans as well as a great deal of financial and moral support. Together with donations from supporters all over Australia, we managed to complete the three buildings within eighteen months for just over $200,000. The monastery was underway, and His Holiness the Dalai Lama named it Thubten Shedrup Ling Monastery. I translated this as Oasis for the Study and Practice of the Buddha's Teachings.

. . .

There was no opportunity for me to relax. In 1999 Lama Zopa Rinpoche asked me to do a teaching tour of our centres in the US. The plane broke down in Hawaii so I spent the night at a hotel in Honolulu and the following day at Waikiki beach. That evening there weren't enough seats on the next plane and the airline offered $500 and another day in Honolulu for anyone willing to take it. I was willing, but I had been booked to give a talk in Boston and had to take the flight.

It was my first visit to the US. The morning after I arrived I was alone in the house where I was staying. The phone rang, it was a reporter from Newsweek magazine. *Of course,* I thought, *I'm in America, this must happen here all the time*. Drive-by shootings were becoming more frequent and the journalist was polling people's political allegiance and their attitude towards gun control. I duly informed her that I was a Democrat and completely against guns.

While exploring the leafy suburban streets of Somerville, I became puzzled by a feeling of apprehension. I realised that all I had ever known about America came from Hollywood and television, and my mind was anticipating a car screaming around a corner at any moment and bursting into flames or emitting volleys of machine-gun fire. I relaxed a bit when I saw a

skunk cross the road. *Yep, this is the USA alright*. But the intense nationalism indicated by numerous Stars and Stripes on display in private homes remained a source of anxiety.

What I found most endearing was the openness of people in the street and their sense of humour that lacked the reservation of Australian and British citizens. In one shop, the lady behind the counter was being visited by the owner of a shop further down the street. The visitor looked me up and down (I was wearing my 'civvies' – jeans and T-shirt), and said to her friend, 'How come you get all the handsome ones? They don't come into my shop.' It wouldn't have been spoken back home.

The people attending my talks were similarly open and friendly. Thoroughly enjoying the communication, I was very much warming towards the US. Then I flew to California. For three months I taught at our centres near Santa Cruz and in San Francisco. It wasn't long before I realised that everyone on the East Coast was in therapy, and everyone on the West Coast was a therapist.

My next stop was our centre in the heartlands of Illinois. After flying everywhere, I wanted to see more of the countryside, so I caught the train from San Francisco. It was a complete education. I shared my dining table with three African-American sisters, the older sister escorting the young ones to visit their family. The conversation was priceless. I spent an afternoon playing poker with some guy, and was amazed at a group of passengers in the scenic carriage with windows all over. They were train hobbyists, recording every station, town, and geographical feature that we passed. And the geography was really something. The Rocky Mountains, ravines, deserts, wild herds of mustangs, scrub fires, casino towns, Salt Lake City, the Mississippi River, and the intensely cultivated plains of Illinois.

Then Washington, Florida, and back to San Francisco, where I received an email from Lama Zopa Rinpoche. He was in Mongolia, where he had been invited to attend the opening of a new monastery built by the Indian Ambassador, Bakula Rinpoche. A group of lay Mongolians had requested Lama Zopa Rinpoche to start a Dharma centre in Ulaan Baatar so that they could learn and practise their Buddhist tradition that had been suppressed during seventy years of communist rule. Rinpoche was very moved by the sincerity of their request and a donor offered to buy two unfinished buildings. The first, in the heart of Ulaan Baatar, would be a residential Dharma centre, and the second was a block of apartments that could be rented out to provide ongoing funding for the centre. The Mongolians who made the request were extremely poor and could never have raised a fraction of these funds. Rinpoche had appointed Harvey, a long-time student of Lama Yeshe, to negotiate the purchase of these buildings and George, an American monk, to begin classes for the people. They were both due to leave Mongolia in November 1999 and Rinpoche asked me to go there to continue the teaching program and Deborah, a Californian woman, to take over the role of director, supervising the two building teams that had been engaged to complete the buildings.

I was staying with a couple in San Jose, California, where I had given some talks, and Deborah came to meet me. Neither of us knew anything about Mongolia and Deborah had never been out of the United States. Mystified about what we were getting into, we at least thought we would be compatible working together in that new frontier. Before returning to Australia, I went to see the Tibetan lama who was resident at our centre in San Francisco. I

made an offering and requested his blessing that my new adventure would be successful. He refused to take the offering, saying, 'It is I who should be making an offering to you. You are going to help the Mongolian people, who for centuries have preserved the practice of the precious teachings on wisdom and compassion and now want to revive the tradition after experiencing such great difficulties. I shall pray that all goes well.'

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Utterly bleak was my first impression of Ulaan Baatar. Fields of wind-swept snow, bare trees, derelict buildings, ugly communist-built heating and power factories, all blanketed in thick smog. It would be two weeks before a rare winter breeze temporarily chased the smog away to reveal the snow-covered mountains that surrounded us.

Harvey and George were staying in the three-bedroom apartment they had rented for Lama Zopa Rinpoche's visit. There were no street addresses and no real taxis. One just stood on the kerb and waved down the first private car. To get to my destination, George taught me my first Mongolian words. With 'right,' 'left,' 'straight ahead,' and 'stop' I could get anywhere, provided I knew the street layout. That was simple. Ulaan Baatar must be the smallest capital city in the world. Mostly I walked, wearing a down parka to keep warm in the minus twenty-five degree temperatures.

George then showed me where to shop. The Mongolian 'supermarket' was a large hall filled with stalls selling everything from meat to groceries, vegetables, and fruit. There was horse, camel, yak, goat, sheep, and cow meat available, as well as a great quantity of dairy products – all those species that provided meat were also milked. The people prided themselves on producing over two hundred varieties of dairy product, from camel cheese to fermented mare's milk. The only vegetables were onions, potatoes, carrots, cabbage, and beetroot, and the only fruit was apples and oranges. Then George took me across town to the Mercury Market where the expats shopped. There you could buy any fruit and vegetable imaginable, for a price that was average in Australia but impossible for the Mongolians. The train line went from Beijing to Moscow, and fresh produce from East Asia and Europe was always available.

George had started classes in a basement hall at Bakula Rinpoche's new monastery. He introduced me to the group of about fifty men and women. Most were middle-aged but there were quite a few young ones as well. Their devotion was palpable as they hungered for the teachings that had been denied them all their lives. And so I began teaching with Gunjiimaa, a young graduate in economics who spoke excellent English and Russian, as my interpreter.

Deborah arrived about ten days later and Harvey took her under his wing to explain the incredibly complex negotiations involved in registering the new centre and then dealing with the two building teams, one Mongolian and one Chinese. She was assisted by Altaan, a geologist whose husband, also a geologist, taught at the main university. Altaan had been of immense help to Harvey in dealing with the bureaucrats, who made their Indian counterparts look like the peak of efficiency. The reliance upon rubber stamps reached a comic sense of absurdity. Every document had to be stamped by every official involved, and we had to have our own rubber stamp as well. There was a special government rubber stamp

office where we had one made and it was handed to us like a graduation certificate. I was sleeping in the room previously used by Lama Zopa Rinpoche and one day I found at the back of a drawer some pages torn out of a notebook. It was Rinpoche's handwriting, and I deciphered the following timely message from the guru to help Deborah and myself overcome our frustration in dealing with bureaucrats:

My greatest problem is that I cannot be a rubber stamp for sentient beings. It has happened sometimes, but not enough, that is why it's taking so long. I have to achieve enlightenment similar to being a rubber stamp. If I could do that I could use myself as a rubber stamp for all the sentient beings. I could be a rubber stamp for their every wish. We ordinary people must become rubber stamps for sentient beings. Yes! Ha Ha, Hi Hi, Ho Ho. Trying very hard for the sentient beings is the greatest pleasure in the life, more than anything else. A million times greater pleasure than being in nirvana, the blissful state of peace.

I myself have been a rubber stamp for my ego, not just for this life, but also working for higher rebirths. From beginningless lives I did not know how to think, how to please others. That which is stopping me from doing all that is not others' ego but My Ego.

Buddha accumulated merits for three countless great aeons to complete realisation of the path and achieve enlightenment in order to teach the path of perfect methods for helping others to not suffer, which means to be a fully qualified rubber stamp. Bodhisattvas always pray to be a rubber stamp by…

Deborah and Altaan took on the intense cold and the two building projects with unwavering energy and determination. Work was slow, cement froze a few minutes after being mixed, and to excavate a ditch for laying pipes, old car tyres were burned on the ground overnight to melt the frozen soil. After digging down about a foot, more tyres were burnt the next evening. With smoke from multiple building projects all over the city mixing with the prevailing smog from coal-fired power and heating stations, the atmosphere was toxic. My eyes burned in the smog and the tears froze on my cheeks.

The leader of the Mongolian construction team completing the apartment block was a lovable rogue. He was probably a descendant of Chinghis Khan. In order to make Mongolia a classless society, the communists had eliminated surnames. During my stay, the new democratic government allowed people to use their family names once again. Not surprisingly, two-thirds of the people chose to be related to Chinghis Khan, their great hero. The leader of the Chinese team completing the second building was also a lovable rogue. Both leaders tried to make short-cuts and charge too much in every way, but Deborah was right onto them. I admired her tenacity in such difficult circumstances.

During the communist era there had been no land ownership and therefore no official boundaries. After democracy, it was a free-for-all with 'squatter's rights' being the main means to claim land. Occasionally we would find fences across one of our building sites, built overnight by people hoping to claim some land for themselves.

The person who sold us the unfinished building that was to be used for the Dharma centre was not a lovable rogue. He was a criminal. The contract specified that the final payment of about $18,000 was not to be made until certain conditions had been met. The conditions were far from being fulfilled, but at a meeting in our advocate's office he threatened to kill Deborah and myself if it wasn't paid immediately. He was definitely a descendant of

Chinghis Khan, but Altaan managed to get us out of the office unscathed. Two years later, a woman came to the three-storey centre building and asked which floor was hers. The man had sold her one floor before it was constructed, and then sold the entire project to us. She understood the situation and took him to court. The building had been designed to be four storeys, but the Chinese builder discovered that the foundations laid by that man would never support a fourth storey. Our builder did his best to reinforce them, but later we found that they didn't even support three storeys.

Close to our apartment was "Police Street," given that name because the main police station and many government agencies were located there. Building materials and tools were also sold on Police Street and so I knew it well. Attached to a brick wall at the corner of Police Street were glaciers of frozen urine where gentlemen were in the habit of relieving themselves. Fortunately we had moved to the new apartment block by the time the spring thaw arrived.

There were many dogs in the streets and one time I threw to one of them a piece of mouldy sausage left in our fridge by Harvey. Thinking it was a rock, the dog ran away. Later, I saw one of the street children eating the sausage. There were hundreds of homeless children on the streets. From babies to teenagers, they lived in the vast network of tunnels that carried the city-wide central heating pipes beneath the streets. Some were orphans, but most were abandoned or had run away from domestic violence fuelled by alcohol and poverty. The heat kept them alive and they survived by begging, stealing, and rummaging through garbage. Man-hole covers on footpaths and roads were always disappearing for their scrap-metal value, and the children were quite territorial, with gangs claiming their own 'tanks.' The circular man-hole openings looked like the tops of army tanks.

Like all the buildings, the entrance to our apartment block had a double door system to keep out the cold. The second door opened onto a filthy concrete stairway that smelled, like everything else in Ulaan Baatar, of boiled mutton and urine. The area beneath the stairs was enclosed and inside lived a woman, her eight-year-old daughter and four-year-old son. Her duty was to keep an eye on the comings and goings of residents and probably to deter thieves, although she would have been powerless to stop a determined robber. The family lived with their meagre belongings in a space about two metres long and one metre wide. There was no toilet, no water, and nowhere to cook. Deborah and I made friends with them and, after the teachings, I gave them the biscuits, oranges, chocolate, and occasional bunch of grapes that the students had offered to me. We took the children into our apartment and Deborah gave them the first baths of their lives. The little girl helped me pronounce some Mongolian words, and then she taught me a simple game of cards. When I finally managed to beat her, I performed the Eagle Dance – prancing around the room waving my arms like the flight of an eagle. This is performed by the victors in wrestling competitions, the favourite sport of Mongolia. She dissolved into fits of giggles. Then we had a pillow fight with her little brother and sent them back to their mother with buckets of yoghurt.

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We could not have succeeded in our many negotiations with the authorities without the aid of Sonam, Bakula Rinpoche's assistant. Bakula Rinpoche had been born as a prince in the royal family of Ladakh. At a young age he had been recognised as a high lama, the emanation

of Bakula Arhat, one of Shakyamuni Buddha's disciples who, along with fifteen others, had promised to always look after future monastic communities where monks and nuns maintain pure vows. Bakula Rinpoche became a monk and was educated to the highest level in Tibet. Later he became a member of the Indian Parliament as the representative for Ladakh. He was appointed as ambassador to Mongolia while the country was still under communist rule. Apart from performing his ambassadorial duties, he toured every region of Mongolia, giving Dharma teachings and blessings. The study and practice of Buddhism was forbidden, but his official status enabled him to teach without hindrance. Most people, even members of the government, were closet Buddhists.

Sonam told me that one evening when he and Bakula Rinpoche were being entertained at the home of a member of the government, he saw a religious painting on the wall. The central figure was the traditional representation of Bakula Arhat holding a mongoose, and the other fifteen arhats were also in the aspect of Bakula Arhat. Sonam asked what the painting represented. The official explained that there was a centuries-old Mongolian text in which the writer foretold a time when Mongolia would be overrun and Buddhism would be almost destroyed, but Bakula Arhat would come to Mongolia and revive the teachings. And this was exactly what was happening.

Bakula Rinpoche told me that he had decided to build his new monastery because many people no longer understood what it meant to be an ordained monk. After the peaceful transition to democracy, he had attended the twice-monthly ceremony at the main monastery where monastic studies were happening once again. Some of those at the ceremony wore robes and then went home to wives and families.

In the 1930's, under the instruction of Stalin's army, thirty thousand Mongolian monks had been rounded up and shot. One suburb in Ulaan Baatar named 'Yellow Cliffs' received its name not from a geographical feature but from the pile of yellow robes the monks had been forced to remove before they were shot in the head and their bodies buried in a vast pit. I have seen the exhumed skeletons from one of these pits, with bullet holes in the back of every skull. I helped to reduce the bones to powder for making thirty thousand small stupas to be placed into one large stupa to remember their sacrifice.

Fit monks were sent to work camps in Siberia, and young ones were forced to disrobe and go to the countryside to care for animals. The survivors became 'married monks' and, even after communist rule had ended, people assumed it was suitable for a person to be both a monk and have a wife. This contradicts the main vows of a Buddhist monk, and Bakula Rinpoche asked those men to not attend the purification ceremony. They persisted in coming, and that was why he decided to build a new monastery where monks could maintain proper vows.

In 2000, Bakula Rinpoche retired from his ambassadorial duties and a farewell dinner was held at the main hotel in Ulaan Baatar. Deborah and I were invited and at the end of the evening we talked to the leader of the opposition, who was to become prime minister when his party won the next election in a landslide victory. That evening he drove us home to our apartment and later he made a good, heartfelt connection with Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

Bakula Rinpoche 2002
(Ueli Minder, donor-photographer)

In the spring we moved to the newly finished apartment block, while work on the Dharma centre continued through the summer. My main class at Bakula Rinpoche's monastery was going well until, as tradition demanded, we had a long summer break. Garrey and Kris came to visit and, along with another couple from Melbourne, we went on a camping holiday with Altaan, her husband Baisa, and their children. In four-wheel drive vehicles we set out across the steppe for Lake Hovsgol in the far north-west. There were no real roads, so we followed simple tracks aided by Baisa's GPS and his knowledge of the land gained during geological expeditions. The fields of green grass and wildflowers, warm rivers, lakes, and great forests

gave me the impression that every winter the Mongolians must decide to leave the frozen barrenness forever, but then summer is so beautiful that they think, one more year. And so they live from one extreme to the other until they die.

Deborah returned to California in December 2000 and her role was taken over by Ueli Minder, a Swiss student of the lamas. Together, we moved into the new centre and over the next three years we set up an extensive teaching programme and published many translations of teachings by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and by our two lamas. Gunjiimaa lived at the centre as my full-time interpreter and translator of the books.

Every Friday evening Ueli and I attended the 'happy hour' at the British Embassy where expats gathered to relax over a few drinks and meet each other. Very often the ambassador herself would be serving behind the bar, and all profits went to a Mongolian charity. One evening, the editor of the English-language newspaper asked me to write a weekly series of articles on Buddhism. Addressing a readership of tourists, embassy staff, missionaries, and English-speaking Mongolians, I tried to present the essence of Buddhism in a way they could comprehend. Gunjiimaa translated the final collection of 42 articles into Mongolian and we printed several thousand copies of the book for free distribution. It was the first general presentation of Buddhism in colloquial Mongolian that had ever been published and it made a huge impression on the people. They had simple faith in the Buddha but no real understanding of his teachings or how to apply them in everyday life. People would stop me in the street and thank me for writing the book. One time, Gunjiimaa and I were at the airport of her home town in the far east of Mongolia and the woman sweeping the floor recognised us from our photos on the cover. With great emotion and dignity, she thanked us and said she read the book every day and it had been an immense aid in her life.

Gunjiimaa and I had a weekly radio talk-back spot during which we would give a half-hour presentation and then answer phone questions. These sessions proved to be very popular, especially among younger people. Perhaps the biggest impact was made by a regular television program made in the US specifically for Mongolia and hosted by Richard Gere. He was a student of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and a big supporter of Lama Zopa Rinpoche. Each episode contained talks by Western monks and nuns and by other teachers including His Holiness. Gunjiimaa's translations were dubbed over the English sound track.

Eight women who had been attending our classes requested ordination as nuns, and Bakula Rinpoche agreed to give them novice (*getsulma*) vows. For some reason, ordination of women had not been common in Mongolia even before the communist era, and Bakula Rinpoche was hesitant because a group of women he had ordained earlier had all disrobed. Nevertheless, he gave the ordination and the new nuns lived at our centre in a large dormitory. Through a donation from a kind benefactor in the US, Ueli and I arranged the purchase of a monastery located in the outskirts of Ulaan Baatar. The monastery had been mostly destroyed by the communists, but a small temple building had been restored and there was a new building with accommodation and a kitchen. The site included a large piece of empty land where the main temple had been. The nuns moved to this monastery and so began the first community of ordained nuns in Mongolia. We also constructed a new building on the site to function as a free soup kitchen and community meeting place for the people who lived nearby in great poverty.

Each year, Lama Zopa Rinpoche visited Mongolia to stay at the centre and give teachings to both lay people and monks at the main monastery in Ulaan Baatar. One group of Mongolian monks historically connected with Sera Je monastery had no permanent place to live and practise, and they requested Lama Zopa's assistance. Again, a kind benefactor offered a large amount of money and Ueli supervised the design and construction of the biggest temple at Ganden, the hub of monasticism in Ulaan Baatar.

Also each year, the government would invite His Holiness the Dalai Lama to visit Mongolia. China always objected and, apart from one special time, the visits were thwarted by China refusing to allow commercial flights with the Dalai Lama on board to fly over its territory, or by pressuring Russia and other nearby countries to not allow him to pass through their airports. On the one occasion when the Chinese permitted His Holiness to visit, they closed their land border with Mongolia so that nobody from China could see him. There were so many people hoping to see the Dalai Lama that his final talk was held in the open at Ganden Monastery. There was no snow, but classically shaped snow crystals about three mm wide gently rained upon us like stars from the sky. And happiness softly rained in our hearts. A giant of a man from Buriat was astounded to see a Westerner in robes and questioned me through his wife, who spoke perfect English. He was a champion wrestler and when his curiosity was satisfied he held me in a bear hug and said, 'May you be blessed with many children.' The concept of married monks had spread far and wide.

Another time, a stallholder at a street market spoke very strongly to Gunjiimaa.

'What was that all about?' I asked.

'She was telling me not to dilute my pure Mongolian genes with those of a foreigner.'

Lama Zopa Rinpoche mentioned his concern about the manner in which Christian missionaries in Mongolia were actively criticising Buddhism and encouraging the people to burn their holy objects. He felt sad that people didn't know enough Dharma to answer the missionaries, and he hoped our centre would be a source of clear instruction for them. Through Rinpoche's inspiration, the centre achieved that goal and continues to do so today. In recognition of Rinpoche's benefit to Mongolia, in 2010 the president bestowed the Order of the Polar Star upon Rinpoche, the highest award to be granted to a foreigner. I heard that, with regard to the revival of Buddhism in Mongolia and the importance of maintaining the tradition of teaching and practice, the Dalai Lama once said privately, 'We've lost Tibet, now Mongolia is our last hope.' This also inspired Lama Zopa Rinpoche to put a great deal of energy into establishing the centre and all the other activities that we carried out.

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During my fourth year in Mongolia I reminded Lama Zopa Rinpoche that five years earlier he had told me, 'In five years you should do a three-year retreat.' Coming out of the blue, that advice had delighted me. I had always wanted to do a long meditation retreat but had never specifically asked about it.

'Did I say that?' Rinpoche replied in mock amazement. Then he checked with his dice and seemed to be surprised, 'It comes out good.'

Even though I remained sceptical about dice divination, this time I was happy to accept the result. Living in Mongolia and getting to know the people had been an inspiring time, but I wanted to face the new challenge of a long retreat.

Gunjiimaa was granted a scholarship by the Indian Government to study for a Masters degree in Bangalore, South India. She was happy to have this opportunity to travel and study at the same time and I was glad for her, but still sad to see her leave. We had been together almost every day, giving talks at television and radio studios, in country towns, at the women's gaol and the teenage boys' gaol, in universities, at hospitals, monasteries, and at the centre. She had taught me a great deal about Mongolian culture, and her humour and common sense kept my mind balanced when the going was hard. She left for India on the same flight as Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

One of the more emotional farewells was saying goodbye to the children at the Lotus orphanage. An Australian woman known as Didi Ananda Kalika, or simply as Didi, had arrived in Ulaan Baatar in the mid-nineties to teach yoga. Two small girls living on the streets used to shelter at night in the stairwell of her apartment block. She took them into her home to look after them, and that was the beginning of the Lotus Children's Centre. A tireless worker motivated by pure love, Didi raised funds to purchase a run-down building a few kilometres from the centre of Ulaan Baatar. When I met her in 2000, she had about seventy children in her care: orphans, abandoned babies, runaways, and children needing protection from terrible domestic situations. Some were brought to her by the police, most were found on the streets. I visited the orphanage most weekends to give healthy food to the children, some medical advice when needed, and to give and receive many cuddles. When my niece visited me, she worked as a volunteer looking after the children.

My dear friend, the Australian nun Jinpa, lived at our centre and spent every day helping Didi. Jinpa was getting to know the system so that she could establish the soup kitchen at our new nunnery and look after the impoverished adults and neglected children in the neighbourhood. She brought one sick boy back to the centre and we had him admitted to the government children's hospital. He had pleurisy and was put in intensive care. Jinpa provided the medicines and food for him, and was distressed to discover that the nurses stole both overnight. Didi had also established a soup kitchen for the adults and children living near the orphanage. One day the cook disappeared, stealing the stove, all the kitchen equipment, and the money for buying food. When I went to the chief of the main police station to report a theft from our apartment, he simply said, 'All the people are thieves, you shouldn't leave money lying around.'

We grew accustomed to the ever-present threat of thieves, as well as the corruption in government departments, and learned to live with these things. The positive qualities of the people and the country far outweighed the negative ones – which I saw as a hangover from the totalitarian regime where, to survive, it was every person for him or herself. The greed, hatred, and pride of those in power had created the opposite of the socialist ideal.

Gunjiimaa

Upon returning to Melbourne in the spring of 2004, I attended the launch of my first book, *The Perfect Mirror*, the collection of articles I had written for the *Mongol Messenger* in Ulaan Baatar. It was well-received, and the publisher, Lothian Books, had also begun preparing the first edition of *A Leaf in the Wind* for publication. I was living at the monastery near Bendigo but there was no time to settle down. Lama Zopa Rinpoche had asked me to lead the one-month meditation course at Kopan Monastery in November.

Compared to the 1970s, Kathmandu Valley was hardly recognisable. The beautifully terraced rice paddies had disappeared beneath a disorganised sprawl of buildings and the air was made toxic by vehicle exhaust emissions. Kopan, too, was hardly recognisable, with a new main temple under construction, several new accommodation buildings, and a massive kitchen and dining complex. The gardens were beautifully landscaped with many trees and flowers.

I led the course exactly as the courses had been run in the 70s, combining meditation sessions with instruction and discussion groups. Over 200 people from all around the world attended, most were new to the Dharma or had only a brief introduction. Aware of my own reaction at the 1974 course, I was able to pre-empt similar questions to my own and clarify the doubts that inevitably arise. This was so successful that some people began to think I could read their minds.

Towards the end of the course, Gunjiimaa arrived from Bangalore. She had a break before her examinations and was able to come for two weeks. She teamed up with Ariun, another friend from Mongolia, and the three of us would eat together. At the dining table I pointed out that she had already picked up the Indian sideways affirmative shake of the head. She denied it but, in laughter, Ariun confirmed my observation. I asked Gunjiimaa to talk to the students about Mongolia, and they were moved to hear her description of the persecution and then revival of Dharma in her country.

Gunjiimaa returned to Bangalore and I flew to Varanasi. Carol Davies, one of my closest friends in the Dharma world, had died of breast cancer while I was in Mongolia, and I wanted to see her daughter, Kalu, who was working at our centre in Bodhgaya. Kalu was doing really well. She took me on a tour of Bodhgaya, and I was surprised to see that Bhante and Ananda, the two monks in charge of the Burmese Vihara, were still there. I had first met them there thirty years previously, even before I became a Buddhist. They must have seen many thousands of Westerners over the years, but they still remembered me.

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Lama Zopa Rinpoche advised me to do the three-year retreat at our retreat centre on Kangaroo Island in South Australia. Several hundred acres of regrowing bushland at the western end of the island had been offered to the lamas. The property was isolated from human activity, the sea was visible a long distance away, and it felt good for my purpose. With the help of friends from the island, from Adelaide, and from Victoria, I built an octagonal rammed-earth cabin with an abundant water supply from a dam and a rainwater tank, a septic system, gas stove and refrigerator, wood stove for heating, and solar panels for light. It wasn't quite the traditional renounced ascetic type of cabin, but I remembered Lama Yeshe saying, 'With your Western bodies and minds, you people have to be comfortable, you can't do a Milarepa trip.' Perhaps I didn't need the stone wall, three fish ponds and a flower garden, but I had to do something to clean up the building site.

After a two-month preliminary retreat, I began the three-year retreat proper in October 2005. Lama Zopa Rinpoche had given me detailed instructions on how to cultivate mental calm abiding focussed upon the *yidam*, or mind-seal Buddha, and I set up a schedule of meditation sessions and breaks, totalling between 10 and 12 hours meditation a day. I

envisioned a mental perimeter around the cabin, beyond which I would not go. It included a short walk to a road along the ridge above my cabin where I built a wooden box with a flag. Nobody other than retreaters lived on the property, but people visited every weekend. Once a month I would put a shopping list in the box and a week later fresh food was delivered, signalled by the raised flag that I could see from my cabin.

Making my own bread and with many dry goods in store, I soon adopted a simple routine for meditating, reading Dharma books, cooking, and cleaning. I did not miss or feel any need for human company or news from the outside world. The fish, the birds, the kangaroos, and the black tiger snakes kept me company. A pair of swallows built their nest beneath an eave and over the years I watched them raise several broods of chicks. I communicated with the cock bird with a simple whistle, which he copied, and would call to me if I was in the garden and hadn't noticed him. One time a black tiger snake tried to reach the swallows' nest by coiling around a length of string tied to the eave. The string was supporting cotton netting draped over a Bodhi tree to stop the possums from eating the leaves. When I tried to move the snake with the handle of a broom, it panicked and became caught in the netting. These snakes are relatives of the cobra and one of the most poisonous snakes in Australia. Very carefully, I held the snake's head in a noose with one hand while I cut it free from the netting with the other hand. The snakes were always around my cabin, and I learned that if I ignored them, they would ignore me.

The centre had set aside two hundred acres of land as a wild-life reserve, but the possum preferred my garden. I called it Osama bin Possum, the Garden Terrorist, and seriously considered planting hot chillies as a form of biological warfare. Kangaroos and wallabies also came to visit every day. I fed them weeds from the garden, and fruit and vegetable peelings from the kitchen. One kangaroo raised two joeys over the three years, and I learned much about their behaviour. The mother displayed gentle intelligence and humour in the games she played with her joeys. And the joeys showed typical juvenile rebelliousness and carefree behaviour, but were always ready to leap to the safety of her pouch at any sign of danger.

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Not only the meditation sessions, but the entire retreat was an inner journey into the past, the imagined future, and the present of my mind. Watching the birds and animals, the changing seasons, and the day and night skies, I fell into harmony with the environment. My own mortality was just another instance of the natural passage of all things from beginning to middle to end. My present being was a combination of experience and the experienced, with the experienced not being independent of the experiencer. The person I regarded as 'me' was neither body nor mind, nor a self-reliant possessor of the body and mind. It only existed through the name given to the body and mind. Contrary to innate beliefs held by this nominal self, there was no real true me to experience things, and no real true things to be experienced.

How long the body was to survive did not matter; by changing the mind I could change its world. If self-centredness could be abandoned, and a caring attitude towards all others cultivated, the future life would be good. If discriminating things as desirable or undesirable according to whether they brought pleasure or not were to continue, the future would be bad. The fundamental reality of karmic cause and effect and the non-inherent existence of all

things was self-evident, at least intellectually. I wished that everybody could have a similar awareness and experience, but I knew that would be difficult. It had taken me thirty years to accumulate suitable conditions for entering into a three-year retreat.

My goal of mental calm abiding eluded me, but I was not disappointed. My confidence in the teachings of Buddha grew stronger and my attachment to the illusion-like pleasures of the senses grew weaker. I saw those three years as a preparation for the next retreat, when conditions would again be favourable for pursuing that most important goal.

There were two interruptions. About eighteen months into retreat, a tooth abscess necessitated extending my boundary to a phone on the property. A few days later, antibiotics and painkillers were delivered to my box, and a week later somebody took me to a dentist to have the offending tooth extracted. I spoke little and asked for no news.

Then, about six months before the end of the retreat, six policemen appeared at the door, saying, 'You've got ten minutes to get out mate.'

A bushfire had been approaching for a week and the sky was almost black, with white ashes raining down like snow. I had built the cabin to survive a bushfire and felt confident I could stay. The police showed me a notice, headed Voluntary Evacuation. When I pointed out the 'voluntary' they said it had been changed to compulsory. I knew it wasn't true, but I felt that if I remained and the fire did come, somebody may get hurt trying to save me. Another retreater was there with a car, so I went with him to the town of Kingscote on the other side of the island. We stayed two nights and I returned to the cabin, again with no news from the outside world. It set me back a month in the meditation, but the bonus was having a freshly baked pizza for lunch.

After the retreat, I had no problem easing back into the world of people. I enjoyed the company of others and even gave a public talk at Kingscote on the first evening. Hair and clothing styles had changed, cars were a different shape, and everybody seemed to be deaf. The mobile audio device revolution had strongly taken hold and there were few people on the street without ear-plugs. And rampant obesity stood out in every age group.

. . .

I returned to Thubten Shedrup Ling Monastery in November 2008 and attended the teachings of Geshe Konchog Tsering who was living at the monastery and teaching at Atisha Centre. The following year, I visited Mongolia for six months. All the projects we had started had matured well, and new centres were being established in towns outside Ulaan Baatar. Gunjiimaa had been busy helping to run the centre and had even been the director for a time. She again became my interpreter for talks at the centre and elsewhere. With help from our organisation and other individuals, she had purchased a one-room apartment that she shared with her mother, father, brother, and two sisters with children. She was the bread-winner for the entire family, a responsibility that she held to be entirely natural for her to fulfil.

From Mongolia I flew to the US to assist at a two-week retreat led by Lama Zopa Rinpoche in North Carolina. At last I was able to explain my retreat experience to Rinpoche, and I

requested him to come to Australia to give a series of tantric initiations. During retreat I had recognised the importance of meditation on the tantric path and Rinpoche had previously mentioned that preserving the study and practice of tantra should be a responsibility of the monks at Thubten Shedrup Ling. Rinpoche said my request was unusual, coming from a Westerner, but he accepted it without giving a date for when it would happen.

I returned to Australia via South Korea, where *A Leaf in the Wind* had been published in Korean, after being translated by a friend I had met on an earlier visit. They called it *Hippy Doctor*, a dumb title that I could only shrug off. The publishing company arranged a three-week tour of monasteries, nunneries, and Dharma centres, where I gave talks and they sold books. I received no royalties, but the abbots were very generous in giving me donations for the Australian monastery.

At the monastery I began completing the buildings we had designed fourteen years earlier. We started with an eight-room accommodation block. Under the leadership of Namgyal, a new monk from Western Australia, the monks did much of the internal work, but we had not quite finished before Lama Zopa Rinpoche arrived the following year to fulfil his promise of giving both general teachings and tantric initiations.

During the third week of the retreat, in April 2011, Rinpoche began the afternoon discourse by asking us whether we noticed anything wrong with his speech. He said that since that morning he had been having trouble pronouncing words. At the best of times it was not easy to understand Rinpoche, and there didn't seem to be any change, but a note of alarm sounded in my mind. Roger, Rinpoche's attendant, was sitting next to me and I wrote him a note, 'Rinpoche is having a stroke, we have to get him to hospital.' Rinpoche had high blood pressure and diabetes, both of which are associated with the risk of stroke. He insisted on finishing the talk, but needed assistance walking back to the monastery. That evening, Rinpoche would not accept our collective request to take him to hospital, but when the right-sided weakness became worse the next morning he agreed to go.

Rinpoche received excellent care from the doctors at the St John of God Hospital in Bendigo, but the weakness was severe and his speech almost unintelligible. His humour, however, remained strong. The uselessness of his right hand reduced him to fits of laughter, which was so infectious that his hospital room radiated happiness. He set up an altar with relics and images of the Buddha in the middle of the room, which the doctors and nurses dutifully circumambulated on every visit.

When packing to come to Australia, Rinpoche had told the nun, Holly, to include his swimming trunks. She looked at him questioningly, because Rinpoche never went swimming. 'I think Australia is a good place to get sick,' he said to her. He wore those trunks in the hospital's therapy pool.

Lama Ösel flew in from Spain to see Rinpoche. He had left the monastery in South India and had studied film-making in Madrid. He explained to me that he wanted to teach Dharma to his generation not in the aspect of a lama sitting on a throne but as someone with whom they could identify, and through a medium with which they could relate: audiovisual. He did not want to be called 'lama,' so from now on I shall refer to him as Ösel, even though in my heart he remains my lama.

In talking about his experiences in South India, Ösel felt that the traditional way of entering a monastery at the age of six or seven was no longer suitable. He thought it would be better for people to become ordained only after they had matured within society and had stable minds knowing what they were renouncing. I fully agreed with him on that point, but there was something else to consider. Since Westerners had begun taking ordination in the Tibetan tradition in the early seventies, the vast majority of monks and nuns had given up their vows. Most of them would have qualified as having stable and mature minds, but still they could not remain ordained.

Perhaps we are mistaken in what we conventionally assume to be a 'stable and mature mind.' If long-term relationships are taken as a measure of stability, we are increasingly out of control. No matter our station within society, from royalty and presidents to everybody else, we cannot contain our sexual desires and relationship breakdown is the result. And if a quiet mind is taken as a measure of maturity, even within established relationships our dissatisfaction, selfishness, irritability, and greed prevent the peace and harmony we seek. In our march towards maturity, we have become bogged down in the mire of hedonistic pursuit of sensory pleasure.

The Buddhist path for both monastics and the laity is a path of increasing mental stability and maturity. So the question is: what level of stability and maturity is required to enter the path, in particular, the path of ordination? I think the only solution to that question is that anybody at any level can enter the path provided he or she has the opportunity to meet and follow the advice of a spiritual teacher who has achieved true stability and maturity of mind. The term, lama, indicates such a properly qualified teacher. Connection with a qualified lama is the most valuable possession in the universe. Unfortunately, there are many people, both Tibetan and non-Tibetan, lay and ordained, who call themselves 'lama' when they are not. Beware the false prophet.

. . .

For the past two years I had been helping Gunjiimaa through email. She had been diagnosed with hypothyroidism and, with the aid of a physician friend, I was able to give her good advice. She told me that she was also suffering from chronic bronchitis that did not respond to repeated courses of antibiotics. Finally, the doctors in Ulaan Baatar discovered that she had pulmonary tuberculosis due to a multi-drug resistant bacterium that she had picked up in India. She was admitted to hospital but no combination of drugs had any effect on the progress of the disease. In early April, 2012, she was feeling a little better and asked Ariun to take her to see her mother. On their way back to the hospital, they stopped at a restaurant, where Gunjiimaa suddenly collapsed and died in Ariun's arms. And a warm light went out in my heart.

. . .

I was in the midst of helping an architect design the final and most important building at the monastery: a two-storey building with a meditation hall and other rooms downstairs and very comfortable accommodation upstairs for visiting teachers, an abbot, and their assistants. When the plans were approved, over the next eighteen months I supervised the tradesmen building the foundation and the walls, and the plumbers and electricians. Again, with the

invaluable help of Namgyal, the monks and volunteers did the remaining indoor work as well as paving and landscaping outside.

In October 2012, at Rinpoche's request I again went to Kopan to lead the one-month November meditation course. 250 people from over 45 nations attended, with Australians and Americans being the most numerous. Halfway through the course, Ösel came to Nepal to help his French girlfriend's parents set up a business in Kathmandu. He stayed at Kopan and I immediately asked him to give a talk to the students. He came to my room where we discussed what I had been teaching and what he could talk about. As he was leaving, I stood up and he gave me a big hug, saying, 'I think this is why I am here.'

I couldn't help remembering a time in Taiwan when the students at an animal liberation ceremony laughed at his reply to a fisherman, and the six-year old Ösel asked me, 'Why did they laugh when I asked about the fish?'

'That's why you are here Lama,' I replied.

Ösel began his talk by saying, 'I am not a Buddhist,' and then he gave a most beautiful Dharma talk in disguise. He mentioned some of the weird ideas floating around the internet, and spoke from his heart about relationships, love, and the need for maturity. He took the mickey out of me just as Lama Yeshe used to humorously mock Lama Zopa Rinpoche during meditation courses. Tears were rolling down my cheeks because his mode of delivery and the content of his talk were pure Lama Yeshe. It went down extremely well with the students and their enthusiasm for the retreat grew stronger until the end, when many people including myself wanted it to continue. Ösel gave two more talks, one of which was an introduction to his first video, Being Your True Nature. It was a documentary on Universal Education, a concept introduced in the 1970s by Lama Yeshe and something very close to his heart. Ösel's enthusiasm for the project was palpable.

. . .

In the new year I returned to the monastery to supervise construction of the new building. Our work had an added urgency because Lama Zopa Rinpoche had agreed to return in September 2014 to continue what he had begun when the stroke occurred. He and his assistants were to stay in the new building, but we had a long way to go. Rinpoche had recovered well from the stroke, but some right-sided weakness remained and his speech was still slightly affected. In part, Rinpoche's recovery was due to the very strict control kept on his blood pressure and blood sugar, and Roger's insistence that Rinpoche perform regular exercise. This last regime was the hardest to implement unless there was a good purpose, such as circumambulating a stupa. Earlier on, a physiotherapist helping Rinpoche had asked him to walk across an open space.

'I can't,' replied Rinpoche.

Fearing some physical problem, the physiotherapist asked why not.

'Ants,' replied Rinpoche, ever conscious of not hurting even the smallest sentient being.

As the building grew closer to completion, everybody remarked on the beauty of the golden-yellow rammed-earth structure that stood majestically amongst the eucalypts. The meditation hall was particularly attractive. At the centre of the altar we placed a gold-leafed Buddha image, to his left, the two-metre thousand-armed wooden image of Avalokiteshvara that I had purchased in Mongolia, and to his right a large Maitreya image seated on a wooden throne, made in Kathmandu. Beside the altar was the complete collection of sutras and Indian commentaries in its own glass-faced cabinet. Around the tops of the side walls we placed relief images of the thirty-five special buddhas of confession that I had acquired in Taiwan and had been painted by the students at the centre. They had been in boxes for twenty years waiting for this time. The upstairs living area was luxuriously fitted out with carpets, furniture, and curtains. I was delighted with the result.

As I left for the airport to meet Rinpoche and his retinue, the plumber was completing a final adjustment, and the occupancy certificate from the building surveyor arrived the next morning. Rinpoche was pleased with the comfort and appearance of the building and he stayed for over two months. To my great relief, everything functioned as planned.

Rinpoche told the people attending the course that there were many hindrances in relation to the whole property, consisting of Atisha Centre, the monastery, and the Great Stupa. He gave us the oral transmission of the Sutra of Golden Light and asked us to recite it to help overcome these obstacles, whatever they were. At the end of the course I had to leave for Nepal to lead the next November course at Kopan. Rinpoche remained another two weeks for a private retreat.

After the Kopan course, I spent Christmas in Melbourne with my family and, at the monastery, we began the long bureaucratic process of arranging for a teacher to come from Sera Je Monastery to stay at Thubten Shedrup Ling and teach at Atisha Centre. Everything was ready for him and his interpreter to move into the new building. On Friday 13th March 2015, however, a family came from Melbourne and lit 108 candles on the altar for their dead father. I was away visiting a sick man and, on my return, I saw the last of six fire trucks leaving the monastery. The new meditation hall had been gutted, the altar, statues, and texts destroyed, and the first-floor support over the altar area severely damaged. Smoke had turned everything else black on both levels. Now, just three weeks after the fire, I shall bring this postscript to an end. But my work is just beginning, again. As I wrote to a friend (Anne from part four), I am not defeated, depressed, or angry. I'm just pissed off.

. . .

I send Big Love to all who have managed to read this far, and I promise that one day I will extract joy from this event, as Rinpoche expressed when he heard news of the fire. Laughing in delight, he exclaimed, 'Wonderful purification.'

NOTES

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9. Personal communication from Thubten Pende, James Dougherty. For most of the material about the lamas in this section, I am indebted to Adele Hulse for allowing access to her soon to be published biography of Lama Thubten Yeshe.

10. Chogyam Trungpa, *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*, Shambala Publications, Boston, 1973.

11. Thomas Merton, *The Way of Chuang Tzu*, New Directions Publishing, New York, 1969, pp. 114 – 15

12. In the year 2004

13. Tsampa is flour made from roasted barley and eaten in many ways. Quite delicious when made properly.

14. "Injie," the Tibetan term for Westerners, is derived from their rendition of "English."

15. The dining-room table and benches that I made 33 years ago are still in use.

16. I located Claire in 2009 and, yes, she did.

About the Author

Born in Melbourne, Australia, in 1943, Dr Adrian Feldmann graduated from the University of Melbourne with a degree in medicine. After practising medicine in Australia and England, he travelled through Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India, eventually finding his way to a Tibetan monastery in Nepal.

After intensive study and meditation, he became ordained as the Buddhist monk, Thubten Gyatso. Since then he has run a free medical clinic in Nepal, taught Buddhism and meditation in many countries, and established monasteries in France and in the country town of Bendigo, outside Melbourne.

In 1999, he was asked by his teacher, Kyabje Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, to go to Mongolia and help establish a new Buddhist centre. Mongolia was emerging from seventy years of communist rule, during which the Stalinist purges of the 1930s virtually extinguished the traditional Mongolian Buddhist culture. He was well received in Mongolia where, apart from the classes he gave at the new centre, his teachings were presented on radio and television and published in the local newspapers.

23,000 copies of the Mongolian translation of the first edition of this book have been distributed, mostly free of charge, and it has become one of the most popular books on Buddhism in Mongolia. After leaving Mongolia in 2003, Thubten Gyatso built a cabin in the Australian bush where he meditated in strict isolation from the world for three years.

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How to Practice Dharma, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche
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Practicing the Unmistaken Path, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche
Creating the Causes of Happiness, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

May whoever sees, touches, reads, remembers, or talks or thinks about these books never be reborn in unfortunate circumstances, receive only rebirths in situations conducive to the perfect practice of Dharma, meet only perfectly qualified spiritual guides, quickly develop bodhicitta and immediately attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

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See the LYWA and FPMT websites for transcripts of teachings by Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche and other practices written or compiled by Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

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LYWA has released DVDs of early teachings of the Lamas, including *The Three Principal Aspects of the Path, Introduction to Tantra, Offering Tsok to Heruka Vajrasattva, Anxiety in the Nuclear Age, Bringing Dharma to the West, Lama Yeshe at Disneyland, Freedom Through Understanding* and *Life, Death and After Death*. See LamaYeshe.com to order any of these DVDs or visit our YouTube channel to view these and many other videos for free: YouTube.com/LamaYeshe.

FPMT has produced a number of DVDs of Lama Zopa Rinpoche's more recent teachings. Visit the FPMT Foundation Store to order. Many more videos are freely available at FPMT.org, and on FPMT's YouTube channel, YouTube.com/FPMTInc.

About the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive

The Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive (LYWA) is the collected works of Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche. Lama Zopa Rinpoche, its spiritual director, founded the Archive in 1996.

Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche began teaching at Kopan Monastery, Nepal, in 1970. Since then, their teachings have been recorded and transcribed. At present we have well over 12,000 hours of digital audio and some 90,000 pages of raw transcript. Many recordings, mostly teachings by Lama Zopa Rinpoche, remain to be transcribed, and as Rinpoche continues to teach, the number of recordings in the Archive increases accordingly. Most of our transcripts have been neither checked nor edited.

Here at the LYWA we are making every effort to organize the transcription of that which has not yet been transcribed, edit that which has not yet been edited, and generally do the many other tasks detailed below.

The work of the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive falls into two categories: archiving and dissemination.

Archiving requires managing the recordings of teachings by Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche that have already been collected, collecting recordings of teachings given but not yet sent to the Archive, and collecting recordings of Lama Zopa's on-going teachings, talks, advice and so forth as he travels the world for the benefit of all. Incoming media are then catalogued and stored safely while being kept accessible for further work.

We organize the transcription of audio, add the transcripts to the already existent database of teachings, manage this database, have transcripts checked, and make transcripts available to editors or others doing research on or practicing these teachings.

Other archiving activities include working with video and photographs of the Lamas and digitizing Archive materials.

Dissemination involves keeping up with evolving technology and making the Lamas' teachings available through various avenues including books for free distribution and sale, ebooks on a wide range of readers, lightly edited transcripts, a monthly e-letter (see below), social media, DVDs and online video, articles in Mandala and other magazines and on our website.

Irrespective of the medium we choose, the teachings require a significant amount of work to prepare them for distribution.

This is just a summary of what we do. The Archive was established with virtually no seed funding and has developed solely through the kindness of many people, most of whom we mention and thank sincerely on our website. We are indebted to you all.

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The Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT) is an international organization of Buddhist meditation study and retreat centers—both urban and rural—monasteries, publishing houses, healing centers and other related activities founded in 1975 by Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche. At present, there are more than 160 FPMT centers, projects and services in over forty countries worldwide.

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In 2009, FPMT Education Services launched the FPMT Online Learning Center to make FPMT education programs and materials more accessible to students worldwide. While continuing to expand, the Online Learning Center currently offers the following courses:

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All of our online programs provide audio and/or video teachings of the subjects, guided meditations, readings, and other support materials. Online forums for each program provide students the opportunity to discuss the subject matter and to ask questions of forum elders. Additionally, many retreats led by Lama Zopa Rinpoche are available in full via audio and/or video format.

Education Services is committed to creating a dynamic virtual learning environment and adding more FPMT programming and materials for you to enjoy via the Online Learning Center.

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The Buddhadharma is the true source of happiness for all sentient beings. Books like this show you how to put the teachings into practice and integrate them into your life, whereby you get the happiness you seek. Therefore, anything containing Dharma teachings, the names of your teachers or holy images is more precious than other material objects and should be treated with respect. To avoid creating the karma of not meeting the Dharma again in future lives, please do not put books (or other holy objects) on the floor or underneath other stuff, step over or sit upon them, or use them for mundane purposes such as propping up wobbly chairs or tables. They should be kept in a clean, high place, separate from worldly writings, and wrapped in cloth when being carried around. These are but a few considerations.

Should you need to get rid of Dharma materials, they should not be thrown in the rubbish but burned in a special way. Briefly: do not incinerate such materials with other trash, but alone, and as they burn, recite the mantra OM AH HUM. As the smoke rises, visualize that it pervades all of space, carrying the essence of the Dharma to all sentient beings in the six samsaric realms, purifying their minds, alleviating their suffering, and bringing them all happiness, up to and including enlightenment. Some people might find this practice a bit unusual, but it is given according to tradition. Thank you very much.

Dedication

Through the merit created by preparing, reading, thinking about and sharing this book with others, may all teachers of the Dharma live long and healthy lives, may the Dharma spread throughout the infinite reaches of space, and may all sentient beings quickly attain enlightenment.

In whichever realm, country, area or place this book may be, may there be no war, drought, famine, disease, injury, disharmony or unhappiness, may there be only great prosperity, may everything needed be easily obtained, and may all be guided by only perfectly qualified Dharma teachers, enjoy the happiness of Dharma, have love and compassion for all sentient beings, and only benefit and never harm each other.

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E-letter No. 138: November 2014

Email PDF Large Print

By Dr. Nicholas Ribush (Last Updated Nov 25, 2014)

Dear LYWA friends and supporters,

Below, we have much to share with you about new teachings made available to you in November from the Archive. Thank you so much for your continued interest and support.

NEW TEACHINGS ON OUR WEBSITE

We have just posted a translation and short commentary by Lama Zopa Rinpoche on the meaning of the eight auspicious signs and how they can be used for success. It was dictated to Ven. Sarah Thresher at Root Institute, Bodhgaya, India, on February 4, 2014.

Read a talk on Transforming the Mind in Everyday Life, given by Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche in Adelaide, Australia, on August 2, 1991. In this teaching Rinpoche talks about the purpose of our life and how to develop a positive attitude, and gives advice on searching for the I. You can read an excerpt from this teaching as our eletter teaching below.

You can also read the prayer for the quick return of Geshe Lhundub Sopa Rinpoche, composed by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama. Geshe Sopa, Abbot of Deer Park Center in Wisconsin, passed away in August.

Read advice from Rinpoche where he discusses the reasons for giving up alcohol, cigarettes and other addictive substances at a Dharma talk in Bendigo, Australia, in August 1991. Read more advice from Rinpoche regarding Addiction in the Online Advice Book.

MORE ADVICE FROM LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

New advices added to the Online Advice Book this month include a letter to a student advising how to benefit her dogs by building stupas and circumambulating them. In this letter Rinpoche says:

> *In reality by just walking around a stupa even one time, so many eons of heavy negative karma collected from beginningless rebirth gets purified and we collect extensive merits every time we go around it. That makes it possible to achieve enlightenment.*

Read also a letter from a student writing to confess that he had negative, harmful thoughts when hearing Rinpoche speak; and advice from Rinpoche that when teaching Dharma, the main emphasis should be on the good heart and benefiting others.

For our friends in the US who are celebrating Thanksgiving this week, it is always good to remember the Rinpoche's advice for this holiday. Read a letter Rinpoche wrote to the Sangha of Sera as dedication for pujas they did for all the turkeys killed for Thanksgiving, and Rinpoche's thoughts about this holiday.

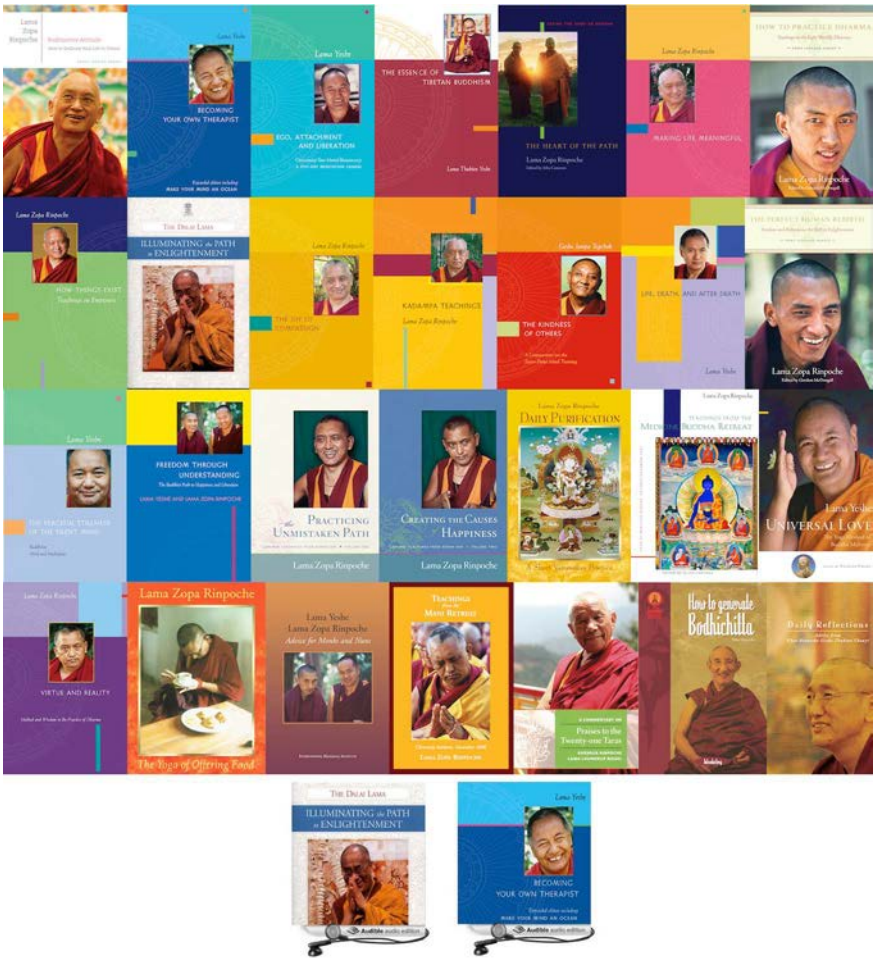
OUR WORK TOGETHER

Last week we sent you an email about our annual year-end appeal. Our sincere thanks to those of you who donated during Lhabab Duchen to give us an excellent start to this year's appeal. To date we have raised over $6,000 towards our $50,000 goal.

We have much to rejoice in after a very successful year of fulfilling our mission to bring you the teachings of Lama Yeshe, Lama Zopa Rinpoche and other great lamas of our time.

This year saw the publication of many new ebooks and the start of our first ebook only series of teachings from Kopan. Our website continues to grow by leaps and bounds and we are hard at work on a new and improved website design. We have begun to post many new videos to our YouTube channel and this year we more than doubled the number of people we share the teachings with daily through social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter.

Browse more LYWA Ebooks and Audio Books



For more please visit LamaYeshe.com

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