

One Woman's Journey

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The following few lines of the great Sufi poet Rumi brought me great comfort when I first read them after giving up my monastic vows, and even as I read them today, I am moved by the compassionate heart of this spiritual master when he invites us to:

Come, come, whoever you are,
Wanderer, worshipper, lover of leaving,
Ours is not a caravan of despair.
Even if you have broken your vows a thousand times
It does not matter-
Come, come, yet again come.

I appreciate the love and insight of this great mystic as there are many of us out here on the road who appreciate the spirit of acceptance even though having broken ones vows a thousand times. I am a person who has left in her wake a trail of broken vows and as a spiritual wanderer, worshipper and lover of leaving, do not feel as though I am part of a caravan of despair. Rather, I feel I have been on a great adventure, an exploration of spiritual life as one woman in a greater multitude of women spiritual seekers and I share my story with the feeling that there may be some kindred spirits gathered here.

Although many changes have taken place over the past ten years since I left the life of a Tibetan Buddhist nun, some of these women have been, and still are, confronted by certain attitudes that do not encourage full expression of their human and spiritual potential which is the birthright of all, regardless of gender. We know that historically monastic communities have been formed by and run with males in mind and the presence of women within the monastic community has at times been problematic. However, with the efforts of people like Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo and others, real progress has been made in equalizing the opportunities for men and women within these communities.

I have been invited to share with you some of my experiences as a woman practicing Buddhism, particularly as a Tibetan Buddhist nun which began with my being ordained by His Holiness the Dalai Lama in India in 1990 and ended with my giving up my robes in 1994. I would like to emphasize before sharing with you some of the highlights and

insights of what was for me just one phase of a longer journey, that my experiences and observations of life within the Buddhist community should in no way be taken as anything but a personal reflection colored by my own conditioning and attitudes.

How did this phase of my journey come about?

Many years ago, as a teenager, I began to study and practice within the neo-Vedanta tradition. I met a spiritual teacher who is now 83 years old, and still working behind the scenes as a guiding light in my life. Eventually, after being married for 18 years and raising my son, I began to live an independent life. Along with this first teacher, I consider the teachings of the late 19th century Vedanta teacher, Vivekananda, to have been a great inspirational force as well. It was he, along with D.T. Suzunki and Dharmaphala, who brought the teachings of Buddhism and Hinduism to the west at the Chicago Parliament of Religions held in 1893. Vivekananda clearly expressed the spirit of the Bodhisattva ideal when he said:

May I be born again and again and suffer a thousand miseries so that I may worship the only God I believe in—the sum total of all souls. And above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species is the special object of my worship.

He also said that,

Although a person has not studied a single system of philosophy, although he does not believe in any God, and never has believed, although he has not prayed even once in his whole life, if the simple power of good actions has brought him to that state where he is ready to give up his life and all else for others, he has arrived at the same point to which the religious person will come through their prayers and the philosopher through their knowledge.

Vedanta Convent and the Dalai Lama

When my son entered college, I entered the Vedanta convent and even though it was a rather cloistered life, I had the opportunity to meet a number of Buddhist teachers as I attended inter-religious council meetings with a more senior nun. I began reading books by and about His Holiness the Dalai Lama and other Dharma teachers and my heart opened. The power of these teachings and the Bodhisattva ideal, the living of one's life for the benefit of others, reeled me in and I began seeing a local lama once a week and eventually he made it possible for me to meet the Dalai Lama. When I requested permission to attend his Kalachakra initiation and five day teaching, my Vedanta teacher surprised me by giving permission to leave the convent each day to do so. Of course most of my sister nuns were appalled by this as we were not allowed to do anything outside that was not related to the work of the convent or monastery and he is still to this day criticized for this decision, while I see it as a measure of his greatness

to allow a person to follow one's own heart, even if it does not follow that prescribed rules of the organization. I had been swept away by the power of the Dalai Lama and the ideal of compassion he manifested and it was this ideal that I saw manifested again and again in the Tibetans who were always helpful and welcoming, putting aside their own desires in their effort to assist another in any way they could. I do not want to idealize those in the Tibetan communities I had contact with in India, as of course, as with all people, there is an entire range of mentalities and behavior, but for the most part these were a people of good heart and I loved being amongst them.

Eventually, having spent three years in that community, I moved out of the Vedanta Convent and into the Dharma Center where I lived with my teacher, the Tibetan Lama I had been seeing for instruction, and several other students as an unaligned nun until he arranged for my ordination by the Dalai Lama. At that time, in 1990, there were still very few western women in the order, and most were either living in a Dharma center, serving the needs of the sangha and community, or, if they wished to live in the company of other women practitioners, lived in the setting of a traditional Tibetan Nunnery in India, something I eventually decided to do.

Ordination

The ordination ceremony which was held in Dharamsala and attended by the requisite number of ordained monks, the Dalai Lama, and about 30 or more males and several western and Tibetan women who were to be ordained by him that day in what seemed to me to be the rather heavenly setting of his temple in the Himalayas. The day before the ceremony, we had our heads shaved ceremoniously and shedding the hair and all the baggage that went along with it was, at least temporarily, wonderful. As we gathered for the ordination ceremony, as previously understood, the western women were told by our translator that we would only be allowed to take a lesser prescribed number of vows. (sramanera—see copy). After repeating these vows and without being asked to leave the gathered assembly, we were told that beyond that point we were not to listen or pay attention in any way to what was being given to the males as part of their full ordination ceremony. This full ordination as a Bhikshuni was, and still is in the Tibetan lineage, unavailable to women, as you have heard. Many women who practice within these communities believe that this is due to the misfortune of birth as a female. As a matter of fact, when I went on to live in the Tibetan Nunnery, Jangchub choeling, in South India, I discovered that as part of their prayers each day, the women expressed their wish to be born in a male body in the next life which they were led to believe was the only way they could fulfill their vows to attain full enlightenment.

Wish for Women's Community

There were two other western nuns who were associated with my Tibetan teacher and Dharma group who, along with myself, had the desire to pool our resources and live together in a house, establishing a routine of practice and living together with a shared common ideal while remaining attached to and continuing to be guided by the teacher

and serve the Dharma center as well. Before being ordained in the Tibetan tradition, I had already spent three years in a monastic community and had experienced the value of women living together and supporting one another in their practice. We not only supported each other, but understood the value of the support and encouragement our life together offered lay women practitioners who visited the community. The nuns in this Dharma group had no community in America at that time and usually had to support themselves partially with a job. We hoped that we could establish something for women in this situation.

Issues for Western Monastics

In the book, *Blossoms of the Dharma: Living as a Buddhist Nun*, many of the difficulties western woman monastics face are discussed in greater detail, including the problem of having to work at a job to earn money and often not having insurance to cover medical expenses. (For example, just a few days after I returned to the states from my last trip to India, I found I had contracted Dengue fever and ended up in the hospital. Needing to go back to work right away, I had to simply walk out of the hospital after two days against my doctors advice as I had no health insurance and returned to work, still quite ill, the next week.) Because of the vows that are taken, an ordained member of the community cannot live as a lay person, yet are not able to live an authentic monastic life either. I had an on-going discussion with my lama for some time about this, but we were denied permission for this womens community as the teacher told us that the lamas needed us to live in the Dharma center and as is expected in monastic life, we complied. Eventually my teacher did agree to send me to what he thought was the ideal environment for my education and practice—a traditional Tibetan nunnery. I began to study Tibetan as there were few who spoke any English at all where I would be living and began to gear up psychologically, not only with the joy of being able to enter that world, but for the hardships as well.

The Tibetan Nunnery

So, I returned to India to live in one of the very few Tibetan nunneries existing at the time—Jangchub Choeling in the Tibetan settlement of Mundgod in the southern savannah plains of India—far away from the influence of the westerners and tourists of the settlement of Dharamsala in the north and close to a monastery where I could study Tibetan language. My desire was to experience the authentic lifestyle of the Tibetan nuns, live in a community of women and learn Tibetan, which I did rather quickly in a simple way out of necessity as quickly as I ultimately forgot it, I may add, due to the fact that there were no other western nuns in the community. The very few out of the 60 or so nuns who had a bit of English due to having been in India for some time and receiving an education in the Indian School system, were usually absent when I needed them. Without a translator, I could only rely on my books to begin communicating in Tibetan.

When I arrived at the Nunnery, I officially entered the community with a great day-long ceremony and the feeding of the community of nuns, a ritual which was happily sponsored by my Lama out of his great kindness with the hope that I would flourish and grow in what he thought to be this ideal environment. More on this later, but first I would just like to share with you some of the daily life experiences of this loving, joyful, and always welcoming group of women:

My wonderful Ladhaki roommate, Lobsang Choenyi was from the remote area of Zanskar and not knowing one word of English, it was up to me to solve the problem of communication. On that very first day, the two of us alone in the room, we simply looked at each other and laughed and smiled and made the sweet gesture of endearment by petting each others hands. Within minutes I began to search for the words I wanted in my dictionary and piece together crude sentences. It was great fun and we laughed so much that the learning became easy and a real joy. Although she was sophisticated in her understanding of the Dharma, it was I who taught her to tell time on a clock I had brought and installed on a shelf in our little room. After she spent many days hiding her ignorance in various ways, she confessed she could not tell time on a clock and was too embarrassed to say so when I would ask her what time it was. As always, with any language, that is one of the first questions one learns how to ask. This is especially true in the western time-driven society but was not nearly as important in this community composed of many Tibetan women who had recently arrived as refugees from Tibet.

Manifestation of Mediation on Compassion

While on a trip to the North for the Tibetan New Year, my roommate and I had the occasion to visit one of the monks from her village who was living the life of a recluse, devoting his time to his prayers and ritual practice. He lived in the mountains about an hours hike from Dharamsala, along stunningly beautiful mountain paths above a deep valley below. When we arrived at the door of his little hut, it was truly like a homecoming, as though we were being welcomed by our Mother who had not seen us for a very long time. His one room consisted of a bed along one wall on a platform, a shelf running along another wall which held his ritual items and few belongings, a small wood burning stove and the long cylinder which is used by all to make the ever-present Tibetan tea. He had just baked some bread in his stove and was eager to share everything he had with us. He sat me down on a stool, patted my cheek and arranged my shawl to keep me warm, while all the time I was captured by a slight smile playing on his lips that made him look like he had a secret in his heart that filled him with a joy so great that it was about to spill over. Truly, the open hearted welcome and tender Motherly love he lavished on a person who was before that day unknown to him, filled me with a deep comfort and joy. As we sit here today, it is warming to consider that perhaps this same monk and surely many other monks and nuns who are living this reclusive meditative life in the mountains and in the monasteries are sending their healing prayers and love to us all at this moment.

Education for the Nuns

I am happy to report that now, through the support of the Dalai Lama and the dedication and untiring efforts of Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo and others, much has changed for the nuns in regards to their opportunities for education. While I was there, they were unable to fully follow the course of study offered to the monks, or engage in other artistic and practical projects that would help support the community and were engaged mostly in the memorization and chanting of Buddhist scriptures. At that time, the monks learned mandala making, ritual dances, making of costumes and other decorative altar items and some also worked in the fields. I believe the creative urge is very strong in women and our individual temperaments are so varied but little consideration was given to this and the opportunity to manifest their creative tendencies was not available and in fact, often regarded as a distraction to their true purpose as nuns—to study the Dharma diligently so they would have a better rebirth as a man in their next life. This I heard on several occasions and since this attitude of women having a lesser birth was supported by scripture, there was very little one could say to convince them otherwise.

In the evenings, the rooms and the hallways were filled the sounds of each nuns chanting practice. In addition, for entertainment, we would occasionally walk over to the debate courtyard of the neighboring Ganden Shartse Monastery and while the painfully shy women hid behind their robes or peeked around buildings, would watch as the monks went through their ritualistic dance-like practice of debating the scriptural texts. Now the nuns are also engaged in the more rigorous and systematic study of scriptures and philosophic debate as well. My roommate for the duration of my stay in the nunnery and with whom I still correspond, sent me photos several years ago of herself and another nun who were chosen to debate in front of the Dalai Lama and of course I was thrilled to see a manifestation of her perseverance and skill in debating the texts.

While I was there, scripture classes were held on a nearly daily basis and at the end of what may be called the class term, exams were held at the nunnery, with the monks from the nearby monastery presiding. This was an extremely stressful time for the more serious students, as they were only able to go on to the next level of study if they passed. (photos)

And the monks, I heard, were quite compassionate in their administration of these written and oral exams. In addition to the daily prayers they chanted in unison in the morning in the gumpa, the nuns were also asked by the villagers to chant special prayers for which they were given a donation to help support the nunnery. In the nunnery in the north, some of the more senior nuns said they were concerned that since there were so many westerners visiting the nunnery, so much time was being spent in the prayers requested in exchange for donations that there was little time left for study

Practice

Having come into Tibetan Buddhism from the Indian Vedanta tradition which places a heavy emphasis on meditation, it was interesting for me to discover that not only was meditation generally not practiced by the nuns, but was actually discouraged. When

my roommate discovered that I practiced meditation she was quite alarmed in that there was the understanding that meditation was not possible until one had memorized and mastered the study of certain texts. I was told that there was one other nun in the community that also meditated, and I felt a certain kinship with this partner in crime. Some of the nuns had received initiation into certain elementary mind-transformation practices that were primarily chanted each day and included some visualization and repetition of mantras for the particular deity invoked, such as Tara, the female deity of compassion, or Chen Rzig, also known as Avalokiteshvara, the male deity of compassion of whom the Dalai Lama is considered to be an emanation. In contrast, practitioners in the west were encouraged to take initiations into a variety of practices from the lamas who came to visit the center. Of course this meant doing the practice commitments that went along with these initiations.

Conditions

I went to the nearby monastery for Tibetan lessons nearly every day and often ate with the monks. It really pained me to see the difference between the diet of the men and that of the women. I often ate a variety of well-prepared vegetable dishes while at the monastery, while the diet of the nuns was very poor. Since there was no refrigeration and little airtight storage available at the nunnery for grains, much of it was left out in the open and many times the rice we were served had a number of rat droppings mixed in. The water for tea, rice and noodles was boiled over wood fires in the kitchen. When the wood was scarce, the drinking water was either not boiled fully or the community drank unboiled water which was usually impure and was most likely the cause of many of the stomach and intestinal ailments in the community. This was particularly a problem in the extreme pre-monsoon heat of summer when one would do most anything to quench thirst.

One banana was given out each week in addition and unless a nun had a special sponsor who would send her extra money with which to supplement her diet, there was very little fruit or fresh vegetable consumed. As difficult as the situation was, they were always grateful that they were being given the opportunity to study the Dharma and live in a safe place.

Since the food was so poor, a western friend arranged with Direct Relief International to have some vitamins sent to the nunnery to supplement their diet. After waiting for months and working through miles of red tape, they finally arrived and were distributed. After a week or so I asked some of the girls if they were taking them and could tell that something was up. Asking my roommate what was happening with the vitamins, she told me that most of the women were not taking them at all because they heard that they made you fat. My use of the Tibetan language was not good enough to get the whole story and even though others who could speak Tibetan well tried to explain it to me and to them, their suspicion remained and I don't know if they were ever taken at all. The same was true with medicines for the ever-resent problem of parasites and TB.

However, they were always grateful for the care and assistance they were given, but often suffered in silence. Although their joyful natures never seemed to be affected by

ill health, eventually it would take its toll on their energy. This problem was widespread within the Tibetan community in general and at that time there was a move to begin educate and train at least one monk and nun from within each monastic community as a health care worker, a program for which the Dalai Lama had much sympathy and to which he gave his support. The inner strength of the nuns and their dignity in the face of real hardship which including separation from their beloved families and familiar environment, was always inspiring and showed me in a very real way how their deep devotion to the Dharma and the Dalai Lama who protected and inspired them, gave great courage and fearlessness.

Gender and shyness

Most of the nuns were terribly shy and unable to speak above a whisper to a stranger, particularly to a man. If able to speak at all, it was from behind their robe which they held up to cover their faces. This was more than ten years ago that I observed this and even now, my former roommate who has become quite an excellent scholar and leader in her community, was too shy to speak openly with a male friend of ours who met with her at the nunnery carrying a message and letter from me. Having grown up in and educated within western society, this display of a deep sense of inferiority in regards to gender was something new for me to observe and the impression I got was that although the hierarchical model and sometimes not so subtle oppression of women that was pervasive within at least the monastic tradition was something archaic, it was somehow understandable that it still persisted and would take time to change. The western awakening to the realization of equality had not made its way into Buddhism in Tibet, or in many other Asian countries. Having grown up in the western model, I feel that on a personal level we cannot deny the positive influence of science, psychology, and the spirit of democracy that we have enjoyed in the west and that form our view of ourselves and the world.

Epiphany

Towards the end of my stay in the nunnery, after going out to the field outside the building at midnight to use the bathroom which was simply the wide open spaces, I had a sort of epiphany. While standing in that field enjoying the silence, while looking into the deep space above I began reflecting on how many times I may have stood doing the same throughout so many lifetimes. Then a sudden feeling as though I was sinking swept through my body as I realized that in this life, I was not Tibetan, this was not my language, and set of symbols—at least not in this life. I was in a remote Indian village, far away from a life that I understood was, and even more important, should be meaningful to me. I had the sneaking sensation that I was hiding from some very important issues that must be unraveled within myself and were not likely to be faced for a long time in that setting. I loved monastic life and the community of women I was a part of, but I was an outsider, a visitor, and as grateful as I was for being offered the opportunity to share in this life for some time, the many issues that I felt I needed

to work through would not be easy to access while in the process of developing new layers of identification based on adopting a new language and culture, should I stay in that environment.

Just after this event I met a very old and nearly blind Tibetan woman while walking on a path. We greeted each other and she took my hands in hers in that lovely way that the Tibetans often greet each other and spoke to me in such a sincere way that I regretted very much not understanding her words. We parted and the very next day someone told me of an old man who was dying in what was called the old peoples building next to ours. I went over with the intention of visiting this man and was led to a small, very poor room with the old man laying on a narrow bed single bed and his wife, who happened to be the very woman I had met on the path the day before. Clearly the man was showing the signs of death so I sat with him quietly for awhile that day as he lay in a bed that was filled with bugs and was told by his wife that he had been in bed for nearly two years. I washed his face and stroked his head, bonding with him in that special way one does when there is nothing left in life that has any significance other than the love shared by two hearts. The only sign he could give me was a slight squeeze of his hand and a brief lifting of his eyes towards me sitting a bit behind him.

The next day while walking the path leading to their building, I suddenly knew he had died and so he had, I soon discovered, just some minutes before I arrived, and the gauzy white khata scarf had been placed over his face. He was still very present in the room and after his wife and I said prayers together I left as the monks came to take care of the body for cremation. The day he was taken to the cremation ground, I followed along behind at some distance and as he was being carried on a stretcher over the field, the khata covering his face blew off and sailed high through the air and eventually landed right at my feet. Of course, Tibetan Buddhism is full of mystery and signs and I surely took this as one which demonstrated a greeting, of sorts, and a farewell from this dear old man I called Pa-la.. After a short time, after having spent five months in the nunnery, I left India.

Leaving

Leaving India and my sisters in the nunnery was not something I took lightly, and I intended to take some time to examine myself and take a deeper look at my commitment. The question then was not whether I was committed to monastic life as I felt quite at peace at that time with that decision, but when back at the center, I found myself being inclined to meet the students and visitors people where they were in terms of their faith and practice as a westerner. This often involved a recognition regarding the validity of their experience and faith as practitioners of other traditions. At times, while listening to my words, I found myself speaking as one who did not support Tibetan Buddhism as the best and highest path, as my teacher indicated we should understand, and began to realize that a deep level of commitment to that particular path as being the highest truth, especially as a monastic, would be necessary should I continue. I began to feel as though I was hiding my true feelings of holding a more pluralistic view and knew my days there were numbered.

Death and Donation

During that time back at the Dharma Center in the U.S. I was asked to assist with the death process of a man who was in the hospital dying of AIDS. He had been loosely connected with the Tibetan center for some time and was sympathetic to the ideals even though not a practitioner himself. After his death a short time after, he donated his library of spiritual books to the Center. While another nun and I went through his books, along with some input from a few others, it was clear that we would continue to have only Buddhist books available on the few shelves for people who came to the center to browse through and read. There was a Bible amongst his books, something that perhaps he had cherished at one time, and regardless of how one feels about this book, the disrespectful attitude and words with which this was cast aside was deeply offensive to me and caused me to reflect on my reaction. This attitude is certainly not a common one amongst Buddhist practitioners, I would hope. However, I was there to witness this one event and for me it was a pivotal moment.

Cultural Issues

According to the psychologist Carl Jung, we are most able to relate to the deeper significance of symbols that have cultural relevance for us. Speaking as a westerner, I believe the study and use of the symbols and rituals that are unique to other cultures can certainly enhance and deepen our understanding and experience of spiritual truths as expressed within the western models of faith and practice. I began to feel that a person such as myself may be more likely to feel, understand, and experience the transformation intended by the ritual if there is cultural connection with the symbols or ceremony. For example, the Christian symbol of the cross as kenosis, an emptying of oneself and surrender of the ego that allows one to fully love and live in the presence of God, or Jesus as a Bodhisattva, may be for the western practitioner as fruitful and meaningful as the Buddhist mindfulness practice as a moment to moment death of the ego, or the Tibetan deity or mind transformation practices.

Although happily engaged in these practices, they were often accompanied by an underlying sense that as helpful as these images and practices were, they were not my own. Some may say that this was perhaps due to a deep clinging to a cultural or personal self-identity, or soul which I did not want to relinquish, but I feel it is more than that. There was a deep longing for authenticity of my own personhood which, though impermanent and this is important— I feel must be acknowledged on the spiritual path, even though in the end (if there is one) it too must go. After some months of reflection on many of the issues that were coming up for me, I decided to return my robes to my lama and continue on my way.

Christian Zen

Some time after making the decision to return to lay life, I began sitting with a Christian Zen group, something of a halfway house for misfits such as myself at that time. The

director of this group was a long time spiritual friend of mine, Fr. Thomas Hand.. He is now an 83 year old Jesuit priest who spent 29 years in Japan, six of those years in spent in Zen training with Yasutani and most particularly, Yamada Roshi. Through his teaching and the strong meditation program he guided, I was able to integrate what I viewed as fundamental principles of Buddhist practice within a western context. Although the retreats and daily sittings were at a Center run by the Catholic Sisters of Mercy, they are for the most part a very liberal and inclusive group, and for the years I have been associated with this Hankokai meditation group, not once has the question of gender equality come up within discussions in the meditation group. I believe this is because it was outside the influence of, and not affected by the doctrine and hierarchical structure of the Church or some of the cultural influences of Japanese Zen.

Women were teaching, practicing and directing programs on an equal basis with men. The teachings of Buddhism, particularly Zen, was taught along with the familiar Christianity which took on a much deeper and expanded dimension when viewed through the more spacious vision and insights of Eastern meditation traditions. This suited the liberal, inclusive, non doctrinaire Christians participating in the group, along with the many who had left Christianity disheartened and discouraged by the Church and faced the East some years ago. Although many did not want to leave the Asian practices and philosophy that had had such a positive influence on their lives, they were ready to make friends with their western roots and welcomed practicing with a group that was free of judgment and doctrine, although rich in study and meditation practice.

In Christian Zen as taught by this particular teacher, the nature of God is described as being Self-giving, loving and a creative energy, not a creator, and it is only the obstacle of our deluded mind that blocks the receiving and expression of this self-giving love. This teacher who had walked the Zen Christian path for many decades advised the students to come to their meditation cushion with a willingness to open up and receive the love which is the self-giving nature of God and always present if we can surrender our resistance and ego defenses. Of course, surrendering the limitations of the ego also means surrendering identity as a male or female. Along with this, the question of having to earn this love and grace through long and arduous repetitions of mantras and prayers, of gradually following the scholastic Lam Rim path of gradual awakening, easily gives way to the understanding that Buddha nature, or Christ nature is accessible to us each moment, no matter what our gender or path as it is always present and it is only we, from the side of our own limited self-identity, who create the obstacles.

In the song of Zazen, the Master Hakuin says:

The merit of one single sitting in Zen
Erases countless sins of the past.
Where then are the evil ways that can mislead us?
The Pure Land cannot be far away.

He goes on to ask the question:

At this moment, what is it that you seek? Nirvana is right here before you.

One would hope that the Nirvana he speaks of here is not meant for men in this moment and for women sometime out there in the future based on a better rebirth.

Another translation of these verses beautifully and hopefully states that

One sitting sweeps away all ancient vices.

I like the immediacy of this sweeping away of all ancient vices in just one sitting. Sounds so easy, but we know how it is for most of us.

A whole new way of perceiving the world that comes about through the dismantling of our ego delusions and defenses is, in western terms, the experience of *metanoia*, a transformation of the mind and a whole new manner of perception. In Christian scripture, it is says, “Behold, I make all things new.” This new vision, or awakening, may be understood if one is a Christian, as Christ consciousness and experienced as the unrestricted flow and expression through oneself of love, or as a Buddhist, as Buddha nature, or becoming a bodhisattva—one who actualizes the flow of compassion without obstructions. Or, as some say, it is simply waking up to who we really are.

Jung and Paul

Drawing from the biblical teachings of St. Paul that love is the most valued virtue, the psychologist Carl Jung, in the book *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* written at the end of his life makes this observation in the closing chapter entitled “Late Thoughts”

I sometimes feel that Pauls words—”Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not love, I have nothing”—might well be the first condition of all cognition and quintessence of divinity itself. Whatever the learned interpretation may be of the sentence “God is Love,” the words affirm the *comlexio oppositorum* of the Godhead. He says that In my medical experience as well as my own life I have been faced again and again with the mystery of love, and have never been able to explain what it is Whatever one can say, no words can express the whole. To speak of partial aspects is always too much or too little, for only the whole is meaningful. . . .Being a part, man cannot grasp the whole. He is at its mercy. He may assent to it, or rebel against it; but he is always caught up by it and enclosed within it. He is dependent upon it and is sustained by it. Love is his light and darkness, whose end he cannot see. “Love ceases not”—whether he speaks with the “tongues of angels,” or with scientific exactitude traces the life of a cell down to its uttermost source. Man can try to name love, showering upon it all the names at his command, and still he will involve himself in endless self-deceptions. . . .

In some closing words written shortly before his death, Jung said,

When Lao-Tzu says: All are clear; I alone am clouded, he is expressing what I now feel in advanced old age. Lao-Tzu is the example of a man with superior insight who has seen and experienced worth and worthlessness, and who, at the end of his life desires to return into his own being, into the eternal unknowable meaning.

So, in this great search for what may ultimately be unknowable meaning, there are many paths we may walk. On the path of Vedanta one may say the paths are varied but the goal is the same; if a pluralist, the paths are many and so are the goals, or one may say there is no goal and that is the awakening. However it is, as seekers we are together in the caravan Rumi speaks of and even if you have broken your vows a thousand times, it does not matter. Just come, come yet again and again.