

PIERRE WITTMANN

A GUIDE TO HAPPINESS

for the Third Millennium



WISDOMLIGHT

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A GUIDE TO
HAPPINESS
for the Third Millennium

WISDOMLIGHT

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*All joy that exists in the world
Comes from the desire to help others and to make them happy.
All suffering that exists in the world
Comes from the desire to search only for one's own happiness.*

Shantideva

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Intention

All beings wish
to find happiness
and to avoid suffering

May this book help them to achieve their desire

Foreword

To write has always been one of my favourite pleasures. It is a taste that I inherited from my father, René, who was a man of letters, whereas my mother, Véréne Mettler, gave me a deep love of painting. In 1984, I began to write a diary and, since then, I have filled, with the passing of the years, hundreds of notebooks in small, practically illegible writing. These notebooks contain also my spiritual experiences, reading notes, thoughts, poems, short stories...I have always enjoyed correspondence, both epistolary and electronic. Having lived for twenty years in faraway countries, correspondence has become my main means of communication with my friends. Although I am a lover of books and an untiring reader, I have never before written a book.

Nevertheless, I thought about writing a book for a long time. But there are so many books on the market already. And when I contemplate the marvellous works that fill the shelves of my library, I wonder if it is indeed wise to add my modest prose to the works of great writers and enlightened masters.

During the summer of 2001, however, two people that I admire and respect told me separately and spontaneously that I should write a book in order to share my experiences: Lama Gangchen Rinpoche, a Tibetan master living in Italy, who teaches, and embodies, the love, compassion and wisdom of the buddhas, and Jean-Marie Bondallaz, my friend and partner at the School of Architecture in Geneva, who became an architect of talent in this city. Very touched by their confidence in my literary talents and the value that my experiences could have for others, I decided to listen to their advice and put pen to paper upon my return to Thailand. The grace of inspiration filled me, so that the chapters of

this book took shape without effort and linked together very naturally.

This work would never have seen the light of day without the precious teachings of all those who have guided me on my spiritual path for the past twenty years. The details of this inner journey and the names of my masters appear on my website, www.wisdomlight.org. I am deeply thankful to these great teachers for the wisdom that they taught me and for the light and the blessings that they continuously bring into my life. I hope that this book can pass on to you all that they have given to me.

My gratitude goes in particular to the late Ayya Khema, a Buddhist nun born in Germany, who was my meditation master from 1990 until her death in 1997. Through her I discovered the essence of the Buddha's teaching and she oriented my practice with patience and kindness. I remember with emotion her letters, carefully decorated with pictures and collages, in which she answered my questions with great precision. In her oral teaching and her numerous books, she knew how to translate, with talent and enthusiasm, the subtleties of Buddhist theory and practice into a language accessible to Westerners. She always encouraged me to pass on, in my turn, this teaching in my own language.

I am not, however, a scholar, nor a specialist in Buddhism, nor an authority in any of the other topics in this book. My knowledge, if it covers many domains, is superficial and limited. As for my practice of these disciplines, it has, during these years of quest, dispersed in many different directions, and reached only rarely the depth necessary for the maturation of accomplishments.

The purpose of this Guide is not to transmit knowledge to you, but to give you the desire and the incentive to study and to practice by yourselves some of the topics that fasci-

nated me, and still fascinate me today. Choose, without taking what I say too seriously, those that speak to you and inspire you! And forget the others. In the same way that a travel guide cannot replace a visit to a country, but invites us to discover it ourselves, I hope that this book will incite you to discover unfamiliar regions and shores as yet unexplored. These discoveries, who knows, may lead you also to embark on the path of wisdom, in order to transform your life and reach happiness. And if you are already a seasoned adept, you may find here the freshness and the innocence of “the beginner’s mind”.

The short chapters of this book will give you the spirit and the essence of things, without entering into technical details and dogmatic theses. They are designed to invite you to think, to feel, to experiment, to search, to understand by yourself. May they awaken you to new realities and unsuspected possibilities, and allow you to reach a dimension of being where peace and happiness replace stress and anxiety.

Chiang Mai
March 2002

In order to be gender sensitive, the gender used has been alternated in the English translation.

Prologue:
Reflection on Happiness

Since I decided to write a guide to happiness, a few days ago, this reflection occupies my mind. I puzzle over how to undertake this task, seemingly so simple, and at the same time infinite and nearly unapproachable... Curiously, the inscription on the cover of the notebook in which I choose to write these pages is “Reflection”, with the subtitle, “The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen nor touched... but are felt in the heart”. This is the case with happiness. Is one able to speak of it, to define it? Or does all attempts to surround it with mental definitions cause it to immediately flee?

The ultimate happiness, and maybe the only true happiness, is precisely the moment, the space, the emptiness between thoughts; when the stress, the agitation, the racing of the mind stops; when the friction, the movement, and the suffering that they generate, give way to the peace, the silence, the timelessness within. One discovers then an infinite space, beyond form, beyond time, an empty space, but, at the same time, rich with the most beautiful and mad potentiality... This space is there, within us. Yet, most of the time – if not all of the time – we bypass it, we ignore it, we don’t even want to see it. It is the most precious thing we have, our true nature, what we truly are; the real life, the one that lasts for eternity; the soft music of silence, the bright light of the Divine, the impenetrable depths of the soul...

We touch this essence when all activity stops, when outside perceptions disappear and when we implode to get back to what we have always been... All the rest is only

illusion, a futile and fleeting dream to which we cling in vain, grasping for an impossible happiness that results from doing and having... We bloom only in non-doing and non-having, in being, in the stillpoint of the instant that is passing away... This point is in the centre of our heart, it is hot, shining, and as vast as space, but empty. Nothing can materialise in this holy place. Only love is there, inexhaustible. It radiates in all directions, erases all ideas, beliefs, memories, fears, hopes, that belong to the past and the future. It purifies the sufferings and the vain illusions of the material world. Let's remain curled up in this protected and magical space, without letting our consciousness drift in the pursuit of the song of the sirens and the bewitching shapes that disguise the dangerous and pitiless traps of existence.

To reside in the space of the heart doesn't stop us from contemplating the movie of the world with its various and colourful pictures. But let's avoid at all costs mistaking them for reality and engaging in playing roles. Otherwise time will take back its power and drive us inexorably to old age and to death through many torments. The only solution is to remain, without being distracted, in this stillpoint around which turn without end the illusions of existence, but which is not affected by them. Let's learn to concentrate on this point, to feel it in the middle of the chest and to place our consciousness in it, totally safe from the waves and the outside storms.

Let's settle on this island, in this shelter that is inside us and, at the same time, beyond us. It contains the whole universe with all its beings and its phenomena; it is the source and the receptacle of all its lights and all its secrets. Let's reach this haven of peace and remain there. Let's welcome then in this holy place all beings who wander amongst the vicissitudes of mundane illusions, let's show

them the place where peace and happiness exist, show them that there is no need to pursue them outside. In this immobile centre of the heart is hidden the biggest of all treasures. It is accessible to all those who take the time to suspend, during one instant, their mad race after the chimeras of the world, in order to enter, to sit down and to enjoy the inexpressible happiness of this precious moment of eternity...

1

Happiness and Suffering

What is happiness? According to the *Robert Dictionary*, the first meaning of happiness – in French ‘bonheur’ is formed from the word ‘heur’ that means ‘good fortune’ – is “luck”. The second definition of happiness is “the state of fully satisfied consciousness”. Among the synonyms for happiness, one finds beatitude, well-being, bliss, pleasure, contentment, enchantment, euphoria, ecstasy, luck, rapture, satisfaction, joy... Among the antonyms, misfortune, bad luck, failure, suffering, worry, pain...

All our perceptions are intimately linked to a sensation that can either be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. Pleasant sensations produce an attraction to the object we perceive, unpleasant sensations, a repulsion, and neutral sensations, indifference. So are born the feelings of desire and attachment, those of hatred, anger and fear, and those of ignorance, indifference and boredom. We often confuse the search for pleasant sensations with the search for happiness. But it is interesting to notice that pleasant sensations are also sources of suffering, as well as unpleasant sensations and neutral sensations because they give birth to what is called the ‘suffering of pleasure’.

The suffering of pleasure is linked to the impermanence of all phenomena. When the experience of happiness ends, its absence produces suffering, then we try to recapture them, but this is not always easy, nor even possible. This difficulty or this impossibility creates new suffering...

Happy experiences that last too long also create suffering, either because they generate boredom or weariness, or

because fatigue, irritation of the body or satiation transform the pleasure into suffering. One gets sunburn, for example, when one remains too long on the beach; one wants to vomit after five pieces of cake; and one gets tired of hearing the same story time after time...

If you are seated in the shade and are feeling cold, you go into the sun and the heat gives you a sensation of happiness. After some time in the sun, you feel too hot and it becomes unpleasant. Then you return to the shade and the coolness is very pleasant. But soon you are cold again... These comings and goings also become suffering.

When one finds happiness, one would like it to last forever, but, after some time, one only waits for one thing: for that which one once called happiness to stop as quickly as possible...

Happiness is not an objective state. What makes me happy can make you unhappy. What makes us happy one day can make us unhappy the following day. The person who pleased us so much can become our worst enemy...

Often, the happiness to which we aspire disappoints us when we have found it. The desire itself gives us more satisfaction than the object of our desire when we get it. It is on this principle that the consumer society operates. All things that we consume never bring us lasting satisfaction. We always rush to buy new products – that are not more satisfactory than the old ones – and this race without end doesn't have anything to do with happiness.

As one of the characteristics of our existence is dissatisfaction, we won't find, in this world, any lasting satisfaction in the objects of the senses.

The quest for happiness passes, however, through the satisfaction of our essential needs – which should not be confused with our desires and our whims. These needs can

express themselves differently, or vary, according to different cultures, times and regions, but they are the same for all human beings. When our essential needs are unfulfilled, we suffer and it is more difficult to find happiness.

There are the needs of the body: air, water, food, sleep. But also clothes, to protect us against the heat and the cold; a roof, to protect us from bad weather, wild beasts and aggressors; and medicine to heal us when we are sick. Food, clothes, shelter and medicine are the four necessities that laymen, in Thailand, offer to the monks who have taken vows of renouncement. We also have needs on emotional, mental and spiritual levels, like beauty, respect, truth, love...

The main causes of sufferings in life, according to Buddhism, are birth, sickness, old age and death; to be separated from what we like, to endure what we don't like and not to get what we want.

In what measure are we responsible for our suffering? Do we create it ourselves? We have the impression that most of our suffering is caused by others or by the outside circumstances of our life. We tend to ignore suffering that we inflict on ourselves, and we refuse the idea that we are responsible for our own suffering.

Actually, what creates suffering is not what happens to us, the injustices of society or the behaviour of others towards us, but the way in which we react to them.

Read that sentence again! It is probably the most important concept to understand – and to accept – in order to find happiness. To really assimilate this truth, I encourage you to read the book by Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*. Viktor Frankl spent several years in Nazi concentration camps during the second world war. Applying this principle, day after day, tirelessly, during the years of his detention,

prevented him from succumbing to suffering and saved his life.

How can one suffer and be happy? Suffering is not necessarily an obstacle to happiness, at least physical suffering. In this dimension of existence, suffering is unavoidable, but, just as with pleasure, it is impermanent. What makes suffering last is to resist it, to become attached to the aversion that one has for it, to become a victim. To accept it, on the other hand, gives it the freedom to cease. This is the first step on the way to happiness.

In rich countries, that are supposed to possess all the material means to produce happiness, there may be less physical suffering, but it seems that most people are nevertheless unhappy. In poor countries, people are less demanding and less stressed; they find happiness in the routine and simplicity of daily life.

Material comfort and the well-being that it produces are not sufficient to bring happiness. Modern society knows a high level of physical well-being, but people are still not happy. They take material comfort for granted, as if it is normal; they are unhappy if they are deprived of it and complain constantly. They presume that happiness is a right, and rebel if the means to get it is not provided.

To better understand the difference between comfort and happiness, take the following test: go to live for a few days without comforts and material well-being to which you are accustomed. Stay in a monastery, a mountain shelter, a hut under coconut trees, or go camping in nature. Don't take along your computer, your mobile phone, or your worries. You may realise that you are happier without all your gadgets and your usual small comforts... It is a revelation on the true nature of happiness. Be careful not to forget this when you return home!

2

What Truth Should We Believe?

One of the features of our time – and of the development of technology – is the enormous quantity of information of all kinds we have at our disposal. I think about all the books that are for sale, the newspapers and magazines, the reports, theses and studies, the internet and its millions of sites, the movies and videos, the radio and television programs, the advertisements and propaganda, the shows and exhibitions, the courses, seminars, conferences, workshops, teachings...

If one could print all this information and pile it up, the stack would be higher than the distance from the earth to the sun. Even if we spent all our life reading, we could assimilate only a minute part of all this knowledge. We can wonder which, out of all this information, is really useful to us, and in what measure it could help us to find more harmony, peace and happiness in our life. Another question that we can ask is which information is true and which should we believe.

Curiously, two thousand five hundred years ago – at a time when only a very few people knew how to read and write, and when audiovisual technology didn't exist – people already asked themselves the same questions. The inhabitants of the city of Kesaputta, in India – the Kalama – saw many spiritual masters pass by, each of whom taught their individual doctrines. Each, moreover, affirmed that their truth was the only truth and that the truth of all those that had passed before or that would pass after were false. As each said the same thing, but as their doctrines were different and often

contradictory, the Kalama were confused as to whom to believe. One day, the Buddha also visited Kesaputta, and the Kalama asked him what they should believe. The teaching that the Buddha gave them that day is called the Kalama Sutta. It is just as suitable for us, today, as it was for the Kalama, two thousand five hundred years ago.

The Buddha advised them to never accept or believe anything immediately or blindly, and to avoid being the intellectual slaves of anyone, including the Buddha himself. He then mentioned ten kinds of information that should neither be accepted nor believed blindly:

1. Beliefs and popular superstitions. The fact that they are passed from generation to generation doesn't mean that they are true.
2. Traditions. They arise from people imitating what others do, and they became custom.
3. News and rumours. These are the stories that people tell, and what is transmitted by the media.
4. Writings. The fact that something is written, printed or published is not proof of its veracity.
5. Logic and reasoning. These can lead to erroneous conclusions if the basis data or the methods of reasoning are false.
6. Philosophical or scientific doctrines. They generally consider only limited and relative points of view.
7. Ideas that agree with our own common sense and our habits of thought. These can be erroneous.
8. The ideas that confirm our own theories and our preconceived personal opinions. These can be false.
9. A speaker's words even though they seem believable. Let's not rely on outside appearances. This is valid for all information that seems true because of the way it

is presented, in particular advertisements and audiovisual information transmitted by television and the internet.

10. The words of one's own master. The Buddha always asked his disciples to contemplate the advice that he gave them attentively, to experiment with it and to examine the results before believing his teachings.

You can add to the list what is written in this book. It is an expression of my truth while I write these pages, a truth that may have already changed since then...

It is curious to note that in the countries ruled by communism and under totalitarian regimes, the population always knows that everything they are told is propaganda, whereas in capitalistic democracies, most people believe that the media tells them the truth.

If we want to remain free, let's avoid becoming slaves to the ideas, the doctrines, the beliefs, the theories of others, and of all the information that assails us daily from all sides. Before believing, and before arriving at any definitive conclusion, let's listen, examine, analyse, contemplate, verify and, especially, let's practice and experiment with these ideas for ourselves. Let's call on the qualities of our heart, intuition, compassion and wisdom for verification.

Most important is to see what impact this information, this idea, this theory, can have on our life, on the people around us, on society, on the earth. Does it bring us more peace, more love, more harmony? Does it alleviate suffering, reduce inequality, solve conflicts, protect the environment, participate in the creation of a better world? Who benefits? A selfish minority that looks for profit and power, or does it bring happiness to all beings?

The good side of the present situation in the world – and of the globalisation of information – is to show us that we

can no longer blindly trust any outside source of information, but only the inner source of wisdom that is in our heart. We suddenly discover that we are in a state of complete uncertainty, in which there is not one truth anymore, but a plurality of truths, where several parallel scripts exist at the same time and where paradox seems to be the rule. In fact, the old paradigm based on the duality of right and wrong, good and evil, white and black... and on our ancestral beliefs, collapses completely. We can no longer find any strong and reliable outside source on which to base our judgements, our opinions and our beliefs.

In the absolute sense, all our views and our opinions are false, because they are all coloured by our desires and our fears, and by the illusion of our own ego. The right view is to have no opinion, and to follow the middle path that avoids the extremes of all dualistic views. The right view transcends good and evil, it is a state of complete uncertainty. It is only in the absence of any concept and any opinion that we can open up to the truth of the present moment, accept things as they are, and act spontaneously by listening to the wisdom of the heart, the great compassion for all living beings.

Let's not forget that wisdom must precede faith, not only in the spiritual domain, but in all circumstances of our life and of the world.

3

Gratitude

Gratitude is a feeling of thankfulness and affection for all that allows us to be what we are, to have what we have, to do what we do or, more simply, for all that enables us to live. Gratitude is not limited to the people who help us, love us or protect us. It encompasses all that constitutes our environment: nature, the earth, the universe – of which we are an inseparable part – and also, what we often forget, ourselves. Gratitude is one of the principal ingredients of happiness. One can never have too much gratitude. In general, we have too little.

We are accustomed to being dissatisfied with our circumstances, to judge and criticise all that does not go well in our lives and in the world. The list of dissatisfactions is infinite. The problem is that this attitude confines us to a negative mood which drains our energy, disturbs our metabolism and brings no relief to our dissatisfaction. On the contrary, it only darkens the picture. Gratitude is the opposite attitude to concentrating on all that enriches our life. This list, too, is infinite. But we take these for granted, regarding them as normal, and don't generally pay attention to them:

The sun which sends us heat and light, the air we breathe, the water we drink and use to wash, and also the water of the rivers, the lakes, the sea and the rain.

Nature which freely gives us its beauty, the countryside, the forests, the mountains, and also the parks, our garden or even a bunch of flowers.

Fruits, vegetables, cereals, the animals which we eat, and also the farmers and all those who allow food to arrive on our table.

Material objects which constitute the environment of our life: our house, the furniture, the clothing, the utensils, the appliances, the books, the paintings, and all that contributes to our comfort.

The people who, at one time or another, shared or touched our life: our family, our friends, our teachers, our neighbours, our colleagues at work, shopkeepers... and all those who contribute to our well-being.

Ourselves, the care we take of our body and our health, the efforts we make to learn, to become informed and to cultivate our mind.

The love, the generosity and the kindness we have for others, and the wisdom and intuition we use to make the important decisions of our life.

Let us think of all the people and all the objects which are, or were, in contact with us, how they take part in our human experience on this planet, rich and unique, and how they helped us to be what we are today.

Gratitude is a means of opening our hearts, of feeling joy and satisfaction for our existence, love and kindness for others and the world in which we live. The vibration of gratitude in our heart pacifies our conflicting emotions, balances our metabolism, strengthens our immune system, reinforces our energy. It brings happiness into our life and our environment. It's a simple practice that can be done each moment and that can change our life!

Working for Peace

During the difficult times we are going through today, if we want things to change, it is necessary that those who want peace do something so that peace can manifest. If we want the forces of light to prevail over those of darkness, we have to create light. Darkness cannot exist in light. If two rooms adjoin, one room completely dark and the other brilliantly illuminated, and one opens the door, light enters into the dark room; but the illuminated room is not darkened by the presence of the dark room. Of course, if the dark room is very big and the door quite small, there will still be some shade, especially in the corners away from the door. It would also be necessary to open shutters or light lamps, so that the dark room could become as clear as the other.

Our world is covered with large areas of darkness. These clouds of darkness are caused by the ignorance and conditioning of a great many people. This darkness is also the shadows of fear and other negative emotions that are fuelled by ignorance and conditioning. Those who want to keep the world in darkness – to be able to continue to exploit it and to control it for their personal profit – use the structures of society to manipulate people: the media to keep them in ignorance of the truth; education, medicine and commerce to condition them to accept their lot in life; and war and terrorism to maintain them in fear.

Every ray of light that we send to the world, however, will dissipate a little of this enormous infrastructure of darkness, until it disappears completely. Light is created by our heart, by the strength of love. Love acts on fear and on all other

negative emotions that ensue from it: resentment, violence, hatred, frustration, despair, sadness... Love dissolves them and makes them disappear.

To create light in our heart, let's sit in a quiet place, close our eyes and breathe three or four times deeply. Let's invoke cosmic energy, divine light, the life force. It is present everywhere, in huge abundance, ready to be drawn on by all those who want to radiate light. Let's visualise this energy like a ray of light coming down from the sky and entering our body at the top of our head. Let's allow this light to fill our whole body. Then let's focus on our heart. Let's concentrate the light in our heart, until we feel a strong heat, like a large incandescent light ball. This is the power of love that is filling our heart.

We are ready now to send light to all the dark areas of the planet. Let's visualise rays of light leaving from our heart and spreading in all directions: To all places that need love and light. To the countries at war. To the people suffering from poverty and famine. To our political leaders, so that they open their heart to love, compassion and respect for all inhabitants of the planet. To all men and women who are conditioned, manipulated, terrorised – and who live in stress, anxiety, despair, suffering – in order to awaken them to their true nature and to remind them of the beauties and joys of life.

Let's try to constantly maintain the light and the heat of love in our heart. This is a good method of preserving our inner peace, of maintaining good health, increasing longevity and even of starting a process of rejuvenation. And every time we are in contact with other people, let's send them big rays of light, peace and love. Let's send light to the people we meet in the street, to those we are talking to on the phone; let's put a ray of light in our letters and in our emails. We will see that the more we send light, the more the source

of love in our heart becomes hot and abundant. It is inexhaustible. Let's teach this simple technique to those around us, because the more people who practice it, the more quickly darkness will disappear from our planet.

Entropy

Entropy, in physics, is “the function that defines the state of disorder of a system, growing when it evolves towards another state of increased disorder”. One of the properties of phenomena is to pass naturally from a state of order into a state of chaos or disorder. For example, when several layers of sand of various colours are placed in a jar, and then the jar is vigorously shaken, the different sands have a natural tendency to mix. This tendency is irreversible, and even though one continues to shake the jar, the sand will not spontaneously separate again into distinct layers. The universe and all material phenomena are governed by the law of entropy.

It seems that the only exception that is counter to this law is life, which takes disparate elements to constitute ordered beings. The purpose of most human activities is to fight against an increase in entropy, except for some, such as war and pollution, which on the contrary accelerate the natural growth of entropy.

If we don't clean our home, it quickly becomes more and more dirty and disorderly. If we don't maintain a house, it ends up falling into ruin. If we don't take care of our body, it falls sick, ages and dies earlier than foreseen.

The work that must be done to fight against the increase in entropy requires effort and energy, but it also produces satisfaction and happiness. It gives us the impression that we have participated in the ordering of the universe, at our modest level.

According to the time taken for the results of our efforts to return to chaos and disappear, different human activities could be classified into “fast entropy actions” and “slow entropy actions”. When one prepares a cake, half an hour later it is eaten and has disappeared. To cook is therefore a very fast entropy activity. When one removes dust or sweeps up dead leaves, the following day, or two days later, there are dust and leaves again. These are also fast entropy activities.

On the other hand, if one constructs a house or writes a book, centuries later the house and the book may still be there. These are slow entropy actions.

In modern society, we tend to give more value to slow entropy work than to fast entropy work. In general, fast entropy work is done more quickly and requires less effort, but it is necessary to repeat it every day. Slow entropy work, on the other hand, requires time and perseverance. It can take months, years, or even a whole lifetime, and it is generally more spectacular.

We could wonder which is the most important, and which brings us the most happiness. It is probably fast entropy work. This comprises of the type of activities we do to attend to our daily needs. Fast entropy work generates less worries, obligations, responsibilities, stress, expectations, and it gives each day a dose of happiness. Although it rarely brings success or wealth, it helps us to live in the present and does not generally inflate our ego. This may be exactly why it brings us more happiness...

6

Laughter

It is said that laughter is a special gift for humankind. Do we laugh enough? How many times a day, or a month, do we use this capacity given to us by nature? Laughter is excellent therapy. For the physical body, laughter makes a whole set of muscles work that stimulate the glands and the organs, and activate the breathing and the blood circulation. For the emotional body, laughter dissipates moroseness, bad moods, stress and anxiety. For the mental body, laughter allows us to perceive things in another perspective, and to accept them with more wisdom.

If the circumstances of your daily life doesn't often give you the opportunity to laugh, practice laughing, as you would practice yoga or meditation. Five or ten minutes of laughter per day have a powerful effect. Mantak Chia, in his Tao Garden, near Chiang Mai, Thailand, often proposes sessions of laughing to his students. Last summer I met a charming young woman in Annecy, France, who had created a laughing club. Its members meet regularly to laugh together. It seems that similar clubs exist in numerous cities around the world. At the Schweibenalp Spiritual Centre, in the Swiss Alps, a young woman regularly organises laughing sessions. She has such a catchy laugh that it is impossible not to collapse into laughter with her.

Among my good laughing recollections, those that have a privileged place in my memory were while watching old comic movies, in particular those of Charlie Chaplin, Jacques Tati and Laurel and Hardy. While reconsidering the scenes in these movies, one notes that it is often the misfortunes of

others that make us laugh the most. One wonders why these misfortunes, if they are so hilarious for the spectators, are not so amusing to the person to whom they happen. I believe that it is a question of state of mind. We can learn to laugh at what happens to us, even at our misfortunes as well as our mistakes. Laughing is the best way not to suffer from them, to forget them quickly, and also not to take ourselves too seriously. We must not forget that all our perceptions of the world are illusory, since they are only mental formations. It is therefore wiser and saner to laugh at them!

In Thailand, people have the habit of laughing when a small accident happens to them, when they are clumsy, or make a mistake. When I first came to Thailand, I was astonished to see a girl who fell off her motorcycle stand up laughing, and a waiter explode into boisterous laughter because he had dropped a pile of plates. In all cases it is better to laugh than to get angry, be it at someone else or at oneself. I have tried, and I have realised that it works very well. It is merely a new habit to learn. And as there are not a lot of opportunities to laugh in the present world, it is a way to create a whole set of new opportunities to laugh in situations where one would usually react negatively.

One of the ways to live in harmony with the world, especially when it seems particularly violent and tormented, is to look at events, even the most tragic, with humour, and to learn to laugh at them. This is a special gift that we have, to be able to do this, so let's not forget it! Those who judge that there are topics at which one doesn't have the right to laugh, are they really fully human? Mistakes are human. Everybody makes some. One of the most important ways to create a better world around us is to know how to forgive the mistakes of others. And as nothing is unforgivable, nothing should stop us from laughing...

Extra-Sensory Art

The Implications of Art, Healing and Spirituality

Art acts directly on our perception and our energy. It generates in us beneficial emotions, producing healing and spiritual opening, which are two aspects of the same purification process.

Art is a human creation, as opposed to nature which is a non-human or divine creation. Contemplation of art and nature can both lead to healing and spirituality.

The reality in which we live contains all the natural as well as the human-created phenomena. Reality is divided into three spheres, or three worlds, that are three different levels of perception.

11. The world of form, or world of desire, is the material world we perceive with our senses.
12. The world of subtle or aesthetic forms is the world of energy and light, which are subtle forms of matter.
13. The world of formlessness, or emptiness, is the purely spiritual world.

These last two worlds are what I call 'extra-sensory worlds', because they are not directly perceived by our five senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching, nor by the sixth sense of our conceptual mind. We nevertheless perceive them intuitively, with the more subtle senses that we all possess, but which are often so little developed that we rarely trust them. We usually don't pay attention to these perceptions and refuse to take them seriously, except when

they are particularly strong. Even if the three aspects of reality are inseparable and exist in all things, the last two are generally much more subtle than the sensory and conceptual perceptions of the world of form, and are masked by them.

Extra-sensory perception manifests most strongly precisely in the contemplation of nature and art. Who has not felt deep emotions in front of a glorious landscape, a rainbow or a work of art? One of the words I like to use to qualify this emotion is wonder, which is a mixture of admiration, surprise and enchantment. Small children are much more familiar with this emotion, but as they grow into adulthood it disappears, as modern society does not encourage this kind of emotion.

It is interesting to note that the three levels of reality awaken in us emotions of very different natures.

The first level generates various kind of emotions that we can classify into the three large categories of greed, aversion and ignorance, depending on the pleasantness, unpleasantness or neutral character of our perception. As long as we stay on this level of perception, we remain under the sway of the power of our mind, and all the emotions we experience, even the pleasant ones, are not particularly beneficial to us, because they are all of a conflicting nature. They don't produce healing nor spiritual opening in us, but just consume our vital energy.

The emotions created by the other two levels of reality are of a completely opposite nature. They are like a magical potion, able to heal all our ills, to open us spiritually and to lead us to the realisation of our true nature.

The world of subtle or aesthetic forms produces emotions of joy, wonder, and enthusiasm, which purify our heart and open it to unconditional love.

The world of formlessness generates emotions of peace, contentment, equanimity, which purify our soul and open it to divine wisdom, giving us clear vision of things as they are.

This is why the practice of extra-sensory perception is so important. It is simple and begins with the contemplation of an object that awakens in us a pleasant feeling, such as a flower or a piece of artwork we particularly like. We practice this contemplation until we succeed in spontaneously rejoicing, wondering, at the display of beauty, grace and harmony. We then let our heart open and submerge ourselves in these emotions, until we feel them strongly within our body in the form of shivers, tears, heat or bliss.

When we have very deeply experienced these feelings of joy and wonder, which belong to the second sphere, we let them dissolve slowly and so we enter into a tranquil feeling of peace, calmness and coolness. We are now in the third sphere of reality, and we can let our soul open to the essence and oneness of all things.

This practice can be done at all time, and, with training, not only in presence of beautiful objects and artworks, but of any phenomena, including those that our senses and our mind consider ugly or unpleasant. It is what we call “seeing the beauty in all things”. And every time we succeed in being in the two superior spheres of reality, in pure extra-sensory perception, we are directly connected to cosmic energy and to the Divine; we are in harmony with the oneness of all creation, and we discover our real nature. It is the secret of true healing and spiritual realisation.

Even if we don't believe we are artists, we can make our life into art, and transform all aspects of our existence into beautiful artwork with many facets. Each facet will awaken in us the pure perception that generates joy, wonder, love, peace and contentment. It is what I call 'Artotal'. Thus we can

become the creators of our life and our happiness, and have the power to transform our environment and the whole world into the beauty of our subtle perception...

The Nature of Mind

We all have a certain idea of the nature of reality. We are taught that the universe, and its creation – some billions of years ago – began as a big explosion, the big bang. Then we are told of its evolution, from an atom of hydrogen – formed of a proton of positive charge and an electron of negative charge, the origin of duality – up to the complexity of the human brain, the seat of intelligence that human beings are so proud of that they imagine it is the climax of all creation. This, however, comes under serious doubt when one sees the use that they make of their intelligence.

This belief and this model of the universe are based on science, which is one insidious way of keeping people in ignorance of their true nature in order to easily manipulate them. Reality, as perceived by the sages, shows us that the truth is precisely the opposite of scientific theories. The supreme intelligence, or primordial wisdom, is at the origin – it even precedes all idea of origin – and is empty of all dualistic or conceptual reference. It **is**. It is that which generates duality and the ten thousand material things, which are only its grossest manifestations.

Human intelligence has presently stagnated at the level of these dense manifestations, which seems like a mindless state of ignorance. Rare are those who have awakened from this torpor to discern the true nature of reality: clear, pure and benevolent. Yet, this luminous nature exists in each of us, and in all things. It has always existed and will always exist, because it is beyond the illusion of linear time. It is the true nature of mind.

The nature of mind is our spiritual essence, linked to the primordial and unlimited wisdom of emptiness. In opposition, our ordinary mind is linked to the limited intelligence of our material brain. The clarity of the nature of mind is veiled, however, by the dualistic and conceptual perception of the ordinary mind. Ignorance, or illusion, is to take this perception, that consists of all objects and phenomena that our senses perceive – the world in which we live – for absolute reality.

The world is only a relative reality, a playful and illusory manifestation produced by absolute reality, emptiness, that is the womb of potentiality of all manifestations. This world that we perceive as if it were real and solid is only a dream projected like a holographic picture by our mind. We identify with these pictures and we suffer from the desires and fears that they awaken in us. We don't realise their ephemeral and changing nature. They are elusive, and yet we constantly try to grasp them. Thus we create for ourselves a world of stress and frustration, instead of remaining in the peace, the silence and the light of the uncreated...

Journey in Time

Imagine that you have just made love, your companion has fallen asleep by your side and the dawn is soon to come. As you also drift into sleep, curious physical sensations seize your body, luminous geometric shapes appear in your visual field and you are suddenly transported into the body of another person, five thousand years into the future, in a strange place that somehow seems familiar to you, but that you don't quite recognise.

This is what happened to Hank Wesselman, an American anthropologist whom I met at the Prophets Conference in Victoria, Canada, in August 2001. The place where Hank found himself – in the body of a man called of Nāïnoa – was in California, a little south of San Francisco. This region, Hank saw, was then covered with lush tropical forest and populated with wild animals; and all traces of the brilliant civilisation that had developed there five thousand years previously had completely disappeared under a thick layer of earth and vegetation.

Nāïnoa lived in a community that had returned to the stone age, and the civilisation that had previously existed in this region was no more than a faraway legend five thousand years after its fall. The whole North American continent in Nāïnoa's time was populated by only a very few tribes. Those on the Californian coast had come by boat from Hawaii; and those within the continent were former Eskimo tribes who had emigrated southwards. Only these people, who had kept in close contact with nature even during the great civilisation, had succeeded in surviving at the time of the fall.

What is interesting about Hank Wesselman's narration – Hank wrote a book, *Spiritwalker: Messages from the Future* that tells of his adventures in the world of the spirits – is that Nāïnoa also sometimes incarnated in the body of Hank, five thousand years earlier, and discovered with surprise the marvels of the great civilisation. For the two men, separated by five millennia of illusory time, this meeting was a deep spiritual experience. Spirituality lasts, whereas all human discoveries and material fabrications are ephemeral, wild imaginings... And nature, even though it tolerates exploitation, ridicule and destruction for a period of time, takes back its rights one day and implacably destroys its predators...

The Four Divine Emotions

The Buddha's teaching speaks of Four Divine Emotions. They are also called the Four Immeasurable or the Abodes of the Gods. This is because, when one feels these emotions, one lives in bliss, like the gods. These four emotions are love, compassion, joy and equanimity. They are four friends we should invite to share our lives. At the same time, let us dismiss the enemies, the negative emotions. The Four Divine Emotions applied to all social situations eliminate tension and create peace. They are medicine for the mind and the body, the secret to sleeping well and a means to good conduct, for oneself, for others, for society, and for the environment. Linked with wisdom, these emotions produce energy and clarity, peace and harmony, liberation from fear and suffering; they are the source and the essence of enlightenment.

Love

Love, or loving-kindness, is the opposite of hatred and selfishness. It is the antidote to ill-will. It leads us to helping others to find happiness and joy. Loving-kindness should not be confused with attachment, affection or sensuality. It doesn't depend on whether a person is worthy of love or loves us, but of the capacity of our own heart to give love. As everybody seeks to be loved, it can be practiced always and everywhere! Loving-kindness is different from the passionate love of the novels, the instinctive love of parents for their children, the friendship of those close to us, and the goodwill for our neighbours. It is an unconditional, disinter-

ested love, that doesn't expect anything in return; a love without attachment, without desire to possess, without preferences. It is for all beings, universal, unlimited.

The practice of loving-kindness consists of respecting all beings as they are, their right to exist; of taking the time to understand them, of listening to them; and of dissolving the barriers between oneself and others. This means coexisting peacefully with ourselves, with others, with the environment; and dealing with situations, without creating problems. Loving-kindness meditation consists of sending love, not only to our family, our dear ones and friends, but also to the people with whom we have some difficulties and even to our enemies. One can also send love to groups, to countries and to the whole planet. Especially one should never forget to send love daily to oneself.

Compassion

Compassion is the opposite of cruelty and violence. It is the antidote to malevolence and spitefulness. It leads us to helping others to overcome suffering. Compassion is active; it should not be confused with pity, which is merely to be sorry for others while hoping that we won't undergo their fate. Compassion demands that we forget our personal preoccupations and respond to situations with openness, receptivity, availability, generosity and kindness, and without being afraid, because we don't have anything to win or lose. The foundations of compassion are the understanding of the universal law of suffering – the Four Noble Truths – and the experience of our own suffering.

The practice of compassion includes everything that we can do to alleviate the suffering of others, action as well as prayer and meditation. One of the highest forms of compassion is the *tonglen* meditation practiced by the Tibetan Buddhists. *Tonglen* consists of exchanging one's own happiness

for the suffering of others. This technique allows us to realise that our happiness, even if we give it to others, doesn't exhaust itself; and that the sufferings of others, if we take them into our heart, are immediately consumed by the fire of our compassion.

Joy

Joy, or sympathetic joy, is the opposite of envy and jealousy, and also of affectation and hypocrisy. It is the antidote to sadness, discontent and depression. This kind of joy leads us to being delighted with the happiness of others, their success, their material achievements, their fine qualities, their talents, their good actions, their faith, their spiritual realisation...

When we experience sadness or despair and don't find anything for which to rejoice in our own life, the best way to change our state of mind – and to recover our good mood – is to sincerely share the joy and the happiness of others. Even when one is alone, one can practice the meditation of joy, while visualising the success, the good qualities and the happiness of others in order to bring joy back into our heart.

Equanimity

Equanimity is the opposite of anxiety and agitation. It is the antidote to emotional reactions, desires and fears, and should not be confused with indifference. Equanimity is a state of perfect consciousness and mindfulness. It perceives all and doesn't ignore anything, but it is not affected by what it sees. It is not distracted by emotions; and it preserves all its energy and its wisdom to act in an appropriate manner. With equanimity, the mind is in balance, imperturbable; it is detached, and it rises above distinctions and judgements. The

foundation of equanimity is the understanding of impermanence, of non-self and of the law of karma.

Equanimity consists of maintaining our emotional balance in both pleasant and unpleasant situations; in overcoming extremes of attachment, ill-will and indifference to beings and sense objects; and in accepting things as they are. It teaches us to control our emotions, with discipline and mindfulness, and to practice meditation in action, which means preserving our calmness and our inner peace in all the circumstances of life.

The Four Divine Emotions constitute the essential practice of the bodhisattva, the sage who was committed to helping all beings and to guiding them on the path to enlightenment.

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Reiki

From Healing to Spiritual Awakening

Reiki is one of the names describing an age-old technique of laying-on of hands for healing. In reality it means much more than that... Reiki is a Japanese word. *Ki* means energy or life force, and *rei* means cosmic, universal, divine, spiritual.

This energy, Reiki, is present in all things; it infuses life, governs the physics of elementary particles and co-ordinates the movements of stars and galaxies. It is an energy that responds to the laws of harmony, wisdom and love. It is always available, everywhere; its abundance is infinite and inexhaustible. As it is always present and never ceases, in order to have access to it, we just need to invoke it. But in our modern society we have forgotten that we have this innate power and, in our ignorance, we neglect this source of abundance, healing, wisdom and love.

In every culture we find healers who use this magic energy. We still find some such healers within rural communities around the world. Great sages have used it, and continue to do so. Every one of us uses this energy instinctively, without knowing it, when we place our hands on a painful area in our body or on the injury of a crying child. Reiki is as simple as that, anyone can learn it in an instant, without effort, because each one of us has this power in our genes.

There are no theories, dogmas, laws or rules that govern Reiki. It is our intuition that guides us. All we need to do is to invoke and channel this energy, and it will respond to our

prayers, bringing healing, protection, consolation and happiness into our life, and into the lives of our family and friends.

Reiki works on three levels. First, we can heal and take care of ourselves, which is something we too often neglect. Thus we take responsibility for our own health, and stop depending on others to find harmony in our lives. It is also a skilful means to develop self-confidence and faith in the benefits that the universe is able to grant us.

Secondly, Reiki allows us to help others, to soothe and heal the illnesses and the sicknesses of those who suffer, who are desperate, of all those who do not yet have a personal relationship with cosmic energy, or who do not dare to believe in it. If they receive a treatment that helps them, they might open to the energy of Reiki and to the idea of becoming autonomous healers themselves.

Lastly, Reiki enables us to heal the earth, because each time we invoke it, or use it to treat ourselves or others, we bring a small beam of cosmic energy, of divine light, onto this planet. When millions of people do this every day, a huge influx of love and purification constantly nourishes this world which is so much in need of it. Practising Reiki is a gift we can give every day to ourselves, to others and to the world in which we live, without effort, and at no cost. And while offering Reiki to others, we also receive it ourselves. Isn't it marvellous?

Reiki is not simply a technique to heal our physical diseases, it also treats emotional and mental troubles. It can be used to heal situations, problems, conflicts, and relationships, to purify our environment, food and thoughts, and also to protect people and things. Reiki is not limited by space and time, it travels instantaneously everywhere and can act in the past and in the future. Truthfully, the powers of Reiki are

infinite. They are limited only by our lack of imagination and creativity. When we open completely to Reiki, we become the creators of our own life and of the world in which we live.

Embracing the Reiki energy has another advantage. It is a way to nurture our spiritual being. As we let the energy penetrate us, nourishing and purifying all the cells of our body and enveloping us with its protective radiance, our subtle channels and our energy centres, or chakras, are harmonised, and we connect to the divine wisdom, to the dimensions of consciousness that transcend the limitations of the material world. Once we have deeply integrated this process, we can realise that we are all beings of light living temporarily in our physical body in order to accomplish our mission in this world and to experience the mysteries and the joys of life on earth...

To study Reiki is to learn to develop confidence in the benefits of this energy. At the beginning, a few simple instructions will guide our hands until we're able to hear the voice of our own intuition, our inner guide. Learning Reiki is also a commitment to take care of ourselves, of our family and friends and of the earth, while becoming a channel for cosmic energy, a messenger of divine light. This is the main goal of the Reiki attunement, a short ceremony during which a Reiki master transmits the Reiki energy to us, laying his or her hands on the top of our head (the antenna connecting us to the source of cosmic forces), on our heart (the centre of love and compassion) and on the palms of our hands (our emitting antennae in the material world).

The Price of Happiness

For it to function, the consumer society has made people believe that happiness can be bought with money, forgetting the old proverb that says “money can’t buy happiness”. Many people work like slaves to earn money to buy all kinds of material goods, services and entertainment that should, supposedly, make them happy.

Unfortunately, this doesn’t work. And one notes that the richer the country, the more unhappy the people. A consumer society produces a whole set of phenomena that go in the opposite direction to the search for happiness.

The possession of material goods creates our attachment to these goods, the insatiable desire to always possess more, and the fear of losing them or having them stolen.

The payment of credit, expenses, taxes, and for the maintenance of our houses and goods drags us into an irreversible downward spiral. We need more and more money and we can’t allow ourselves to stop working. If we find ourselves unemployed, it is high drama.

Our work conditions and the difficulties that we encounter to meet our financial obligations and to satisfy our desires put us in a state of permanent anxiety and stress that is harmful to our health, our longevity and our psychological balance.

The increasingly coercive laws that governments apply, supposedly to assure our security and to improve our comfort, multiply our frustrations and our fears, and undermine our individual liberty.

A climate of anguish is generated by the bombardment of negative information from the media.

The precarious state of health of most people and their emotional and psychic imbalances are even more aggravated by the pollution that results from new technology, from the manufacture of consumer goods and the production of the necessary energy to use our happiness tools.

Our system of education conditions children, from an early age, to conform without resistance to the imperatives of the consumer society, and to satisfy its requirements in order to have access to the material happiness that it promises.

And yet, if we think clearly, we realise that one cannot reach true happiness while following the way of material progress. Because happiness is not obtained by the accumulation of **having** and **doing**, but by the blossoming of **being**. It is detachment, non-having and non-doing – *wu wei* – that lead to happiness, exactly the opposite of the conditioning of the consumer society. Here too they have it all wrong!

Happiness cannot be converted into a cash commodity; it is not produced by worldly wealth. It is the fruit of our inner wealth, wisdom, love and contentment. It happens spontaneously, and that is why it is priceless. It is free, and that is why it is so precious!

War and Peace

Peace is one of the most important ingredients of happiness; to be at peace with oneself, with others, with the world. And the surest way to be at peace with the world is to be at peace inside. When our inner peace is steady and unshakable, we are at peace, whatever the outside conditions. But it is not easy, and most people are not yet there.

Inner peace needs to be cultivated gradually, a little each day, until it becomes invincible. In the beginning, in order to be at peace inside, it is necessary to be at peace outside. It is important to avoid all conflicts – those with other people – and all situations that create dissension in our mind. All displays of violence, of war, of quarrels are harmful to our fledgling inner peace. If we live in a country at war, let's avoid the zones of confrontation; in a country at peace, let's avoid demonstrations and places where violence rages. Let's abstain from watching television or movies, or reading books or newspapers, when the topics are war and violence. The more we nourish our mind with serene images, the more it gets used to peace.

Let's avoid frequenting and mixing with people who constantly sow discord, who criticise others and speak of vengeance, who get angry or fight. When disputes explode with others, let's always try to settle them as soon as we can, if possible amicably. It is better to accept that we are wrong, within limits, so that conflict can stop. Let's apologise if we are at fault and let's forgive others their mistakes. Let's express clearly what we feel, our needs and our desires, and

also our limits, so that things are clear. What is unsaid provokes misunderstandings, cold wars and grudges.

Let's avoid speaking of all topics that create dispute, such as politics, social problems, legal issues, competitive sports, racism, philosophical or religious ideologies, because most people are firmly attached to their beliefs and their opinions. And let's not interfere in the business of others. Let's accept things as they are; and not make a drama of them when they don't correspond to our desires or to our expectations. Let's not create conflict where there was none before. Those who do things that displease us are not perfect either, they have their weaknesses and their limits. They generally do their best and, when they make mistakes, it is often without bad intention. Let's not hold grudges against them.

As it is not possible to control the reactions of others, let's learn to control our own behaviour. Always choose love rather than anger. Let's not express our negative emotions, but learn to observe them and to transform them. Every time that we succeed in remaining quiet and peaceful, our inner peace has the chance to fortify itself. And let's not forget that one moment of uncontrolled anger destroys days of effort and practice.

When doubt, hesitation, fear, or desire creates tension inside us, let's not allow our mind to turn into a battlefield. Let's find a space of calmness and solitude, sit in silence, breathe deeply three or four times, then we can consider our problem or our inner conflict with clarity. Let's compare potential solutions with the aspirations and goals of our life, and let's allow our intuition to give us answers. And let's never forget that a bad choice is always preferable to a prolonged state of doubt and inner struggle.

Let's learn to accept responsibility for everything that happens to us in life. It is we who chose to incarnate on this

planet in order to undergo a certain number of experiences. These permit us to evolve and to progress on a path that transcends the material aspect of terrestrial existence and the limited time of this life. Everything that happens to us, even if it is unpleasant, is never the fault of others, of our parents, of our children, of our partner, of our boss, of the government, of society, of God... Appearances are often misleading. When we accept responsibility for what happens to us, we avoid being angry at others, avoid living in hatred and with grudges, avoid creating discord. Remaining in prolonged states of negativity will eventually provoke illnesses in our physical body.

Let's not hold grudges against ourselves either. This is even worse than being angry at others. Let's accept ourselves as we are, with our weaknesses and our limitations. Let's love ourselves and try to improve ourselves, while uncovering the reasons for our failures and our suffering. And let's endeavour to abandon our old ways of thinking and behaving so that the same painful events stop re-occurring in the future. Let's treat ourselves with gentleness, tenderness, love, and respect, because as long as we don't have this understanding attitude towards ourselves, others will not have it for us, nor can we have it for them. Work always starts with oneself; let's not forget that we are the only person on whom we can really rely in all circumstances. Also, let's not spoil our relationship with ourselves by inner quarrels, but let's protect it like the most precious of jewels. Let's create a haven of love and peace in our heart, that nobody and no circumstance can tarnish or disturb, and where we can always take refuge when the outside weather is stormy...

To avoid outside confrontations is not escape, indifference or weakness, but the understanding that if we add our own aggressiveness to the existing outside conflicts, we will only aggravate them. It is only from a space of inner peace

that we can hope to help others to solve their difficulties, and hope to have a peaceful influence on society.

Contemplating the Sky

Contemplating the sky is an important source of inspiration and wisdom. I am lucky to live, in Chiang Mai, in an apartment that has a big terrace on the fifth floor. I have a view that spreads from the south to the east, while passing through the north. Only the south-easterly quadrant is missing from my view.

Thailand's climate allows me to spend a lot of time outside, even at night. The weather changes quickly and rare are the days, even during the monsoon season, when the sky remains overcast for the whole day.

The contemplation of the sky offers us a different spectacle day and night. At night, one sees the moon's phases and eclipses, the planets and the stars, the comets and the meteoroids, the fireflies, the lightning, the fireworks, the satellites and the lights of planes, and other flying objects, identified or not.

During the day, one sees the sun, sometimes the moon, the clouds, the rainbows, the tracks left by planes, the blue of the sky, the colours of the sunrise and sunset, the weather, the light of the different seasons, the birds, the butterflies, and many kinds of other flying beings and objects.

Observing the phenomena and objects that move in the sky is enthralling, but what fascinates me the most is observing the sky itself. The space, this infinite and empty immensity, the calmness and the silence that inhabit it, this opening into other dimensions, into the unknown, into the beyond... I never get weary of letting my gaze get lost in the

blue of the sky or in the impenetrable obscurity of the night. It is there that I perceive the abode of the gods, the absolute truth, the source of all manifestations; there that I imagine the existence of invisible worlds and celestial regions where my soul longs to return one day.

The observation of the phenomena that inhabit the sky also bring me back to the down-to-earth realities of the world and of relative truth. The phases of the moon and the trajectories of the stars situate me in a material universe regulated by physical laws and by the repetition of temporal cycles. The clouds make me think about the cycle of water, the origin of life on earth. Their unceasing movement and the constant and subtle transformation of their shapes remind me of the changing and ephemeral character of all phenomena and of my own existence. The fleeting beauty of rainbows and sunsets give me joy, wonder and faith in the fundamental harmony of all creation. To follow the flight of birds and the trajectory of planes awakens atavistic memories of other existences when I also knew how to fly.

To meditate while fixing our gaze on the sky teaches us that the true nature of our mind is like the sky, vast, luminous and empty. All perceptions and thoughts that abide in it or cross it are like the clouds, the stars, the birds or the rainbows, transient phenomena, that arise, pass, then disappear, without a trace. Our thoughts, our sensory perceptions, and the worldly phenomena that result from them, seduce us and seem real to us; we become attached to their beauty and do not accept that they change and disappear. Let's realise that they are only the illusory game of manifestation, and let's admire the unceasing parade of their various shapes and their iridescent colours. Let's stop identifying with and reacting to their misleading appearances, but let's remain like the sky, pure, luminous and imperturbable.

Kindness

Relationships that we have with others have a strong influence on our happiness. When the people that we are with are agreeable and welcoming, we have a more pleasant experience than when they are aggressive and have scowling faces.

In Thailand, we are lucky to be around smiling, agreeable and helpful people, even though they may have other shortcomings. The waiters in restaurants, the vendors in markets and shops, the receptionists in offices and companies always smile and express themselves in soft voices, with supple and gracious gestures. They are also diligent and considerate. Sometimes, Thai people don't understand what one asks of them and they may not be as efficient as their western counterparts, but their gentleness, their smiles and their courtesy are very pleasant. One feels respected and honoured.

It is important to be conscious of the kindness of others towards us and of the happiness that a peaceful and warm atmosphere procures. Let us learn how to appreciate kindness and respond to it with gratitude. When one is impatient, and gets excited or answers Thai people in an unpleasant way, they maintain their calmness and don't react. It is considered ill-mannered, in this country, to get angry. Suitable conduct is to always keep one's heart 'cool', *jai yen* in Thai.

To be happy because others are kind to us is a good thing, but we should in turn be thoughtful towards others. We must understand that all beings are like us: they look for happiness and like to be treated with respect and kindness. Let's learn

to act in a calm and gracious way, to smile, to speak with a soft and warm voice, to be helpful, attentive and available. Treating others with this type of behaviour is a good way to make them happy; thus, in response, they will be more calm and more thoughtful. It is an exchange of good behaviour, of civilities.

In schools of wisdom of the Fourth Way, they call this attitude ‘outside consideration’. This is one of the main areas of work on the spiritual path. It should not be confused with ‘inner consideration’, which is the bad habit of ruminating internally on our misfortunes and the lack of respect others show towards us.

When we know, in all circumstances, how to behave with grace and kindness, to be polite and smiling, then we will finally live in a civilised world, where everyone receives their share of happiness and is able to make others happy.

Wu Wei

Wu wei is a Chinese term that means ‘non-action’, ‘non-doing’. *Wei* means ‘to do’ and *wu* is an adverb of negation. *Wu wei* is a Taoist practice that has fascinated me for a long time. Many years ago, in December 1984, I bought a book by Alan Watts, *Tao: The Watercourse Way*, in Wellington, New Zealand. It was his last book by Alan Watts, and the uncompleted version was published after his death in 1973. It contains a whole chapter on *wu wei*. I like this book immensely because it contains calligraphy of all the key Chinese words and of a large number of quotes from Taoist masters. At that time, I was studying both Chinese and calligraphy.

The idea of *wu wei* is subtle. It doesn’t merely mean doing nothing, but rather defines an appropriate way of doing. It explains what is judicious to do and not to do. The key sentence of *wu wei* is in the *Dao De Jing* by Lao Tzu: “The Tao doesn’t do anything, and yet nothing is left uncompleted”. This realisation comes from the simple observation of nature: rivers flow down to the sea, seeds sprout, children grow, the sun rises, the rain falls... The whole universe functions perfectly, in its complexity and in its smallest detail, without anyone doing anything. Only humans devote themselves to numerous activities on their own initiative, and have thus created for themselves, for others and for the environment, a whole range of problems, worries and conflicts that has brought our world to the sad and dramatic present situation.

Two thousand five hundred years ago, Lao Tzu advised his fellow men to practice *wu wei*, but, as with many spiritual teachings, only a very few have heard him. It is clear that the obsession to do has today reached alarming proportions; and rare are those who manage to escape this trap. From their youngest age, we push children to study excessively and to participate in all kinds of extracurricular activities. Hardly have they finished their studies, than they hurry to find a job to which they devote the majority of their time and their energy; and all their brief moments of freedom are dedicated to other occupations. Unemployment is a curse and idleness is very poorly thought of. Even after retirement, older people find all kind of activities to be busy with until their death, or until they are immobilised on a hospital bed.

The consumer society has created a plethora of illusionary needs and superfluous desires that people can only satisfy by working to earn the necessary money, supporting at the same time the whole cast of bureaucrats and politicians in charge of controlling the life of people and of establishing laws to regulate their work. We live thus amid a profusion of papers and consumer goods of all kinds – from souvenirs of bad taste to nuclear missiles – that pollute our environment and strip the earth of its natural resources.

The idea of *wu wei* is far from the feverish and stressful activity of modern society. It is close, on the other hand, to the life style of primitive tribes, who are today on the way to extinction. Once they led an existence in harmony with the environment, and their activities were limited to those necessary for survival: gathering or picking fruits and vegetables, hunting, construction of huts, manufacture of tools and instruments for daily life, education of children, religious ceremonies to attract the favours of the spirits of the land... These different tasks were distributed fairly among all members of the community, according to the capacities of

each one. The rest of the time was dedicated to rest, to the contemplation of nature, and to the simple fact of living in inner peace and universal harmony. These primitive people practiced *wu wei* perfectly. They were free and independent, following the laws of nature and of the Tao, not those imposed by others.

A good example of *wu wei* is that of the cat that spends long hours sleeping or dozing and only rises when it needs exercise, or when hunger pushes it to go hunting a mouse. Like the sage who practices *wu wei*, the cat acts on its needs, its instincts and its intuition, and never on the orders and directives of others.

Water gives us one of the most beautiful examples of *wu wei*. Water never makes any effort, it uses merely the forces of nature. Gravity allows it to flow – forming wide rivers – to infiltrate everywhere, to surmount the largest obstacles and to erode the hardest rocks. Thanks to the strength of winds and tides that give birth to roaring waves, water shapes the coasts of our continents. With cold weather, water turns into glaciers that break mountains, and with heat, it evaporates and changes into clouds of various shapes that let themselves be pushed by the wind, before falling again as rain...

What has to be understood in the idea of *wu wei*, is that the sage acts only in a natural and spontaneous way to answer an immediate need. *Wu wei* is not laziness, indifference, carelessness or flight. The sage is always present, attentive to his environment and to what is happening around him; but he has neither intention nor premeditation. He does not act according to past experiences nor to future aspirations, and always follows only his own personal initiative. A sage lives completely in the present. And this is what makes him fundamentally different from ordinary people.

We are conditioned by our past experiences, by those of others, and by a whole set of laws and beliefs. We act with premeditation to get something in the future, generally power, money or success... what we think of as happiness. Our actions respond to the principles of duty, obligation, responsibility, greed, conscience, fear of punishment and hope of reward. Our acts are conceived by the mind and by logic, instead of coming from the heart and from intuition. So doing becomes a continual forward flight, without one moment of respite: a flight from the emptiness which non-action seems to be; from the fear of recognising our true nature and the deeper reasons for our incarnation on this planet; from the difficulty of giving a meaning to our existence and to all the actions that seem to justify it.

But the universe has never asked us for this frantic activity. We are here merely to live, to **be**, and not to **do**. Those who ask us to do are the people in power who use our energy for their profit. And the gods that they invented to justify their requirements and their power. Do we really want to continue to be the slaves of this power? Is there any place for inner peace and joy in the stress of labour imposed by others? Can we find happiness in a life where our essential freedom is scorned.

If we just step back for one moment, we can observe the world and realise its madness and its absurdity. But to really understand why it is like it is, we need to look inside ourselves. The world is only a reflection of its inhabitants. Let's observe the agitation and the unceasing chatter of our own mind, its conditioning to activity and to continual movement. All our actions of body and speech are produced by mental actions. They are generated by our inner agitation.

To be able to practice *wu wei* in the outside world, it is necessary to start with practicing it in ourselves: To calm our vagabond mind that our elders compared to a restless mon-

key. To find inner peace and silence. To abandon our desires and our fears. To stop concocting all kinds of futile plans and projects, and to stop wasting our energy to achieve them... Then, in the emptiness of non-action, we will begin to glimpse happiness!

Electric Wires

A few months ago, I decided to give away my old computer, a big, heavy and loud machine that radiated a lot of heat and electromagnetic pollution. I didn't use it any more since I now have a laptop. According to Feng Shui, my old computer was situated in the "couple-friends-associates" area of my apartment, so that for the last few years the computer had become my companion, my friend and my most intimate partner. It was standing, with its various accessories, on three small pieces of furniture placed at some distance from the wall in order to leave room for a jumble of wires and cables, and a whole set of transformers. This area had become a nest of dust that gave off unhealthy energy and sheltered a prospering colony of bugs and vermin.

While undoing the knots in these tangled cables and cleaning this corner, I contemplated the greedy stupidity and the paradoxes of our technological society; and I realised where our passion for technological toys wounds: at the level of our energy supply. On the one hand, we possess minuscule, very effective and sophisticated devices. On the other, to feed these devices with energy, which only request a weak source of current, we must use thick cables and transformers, often more cumbersome and more heavy than the devices themselves, and which give off abundant heat. There is far more wasted energy than that used by the device itself.

The electric network of our dwellings and our workplaces is composed of wires, tubes, plugs, fuses, boards, meters. It is supplied by an urban network composed of thick cables, thick tubes, aerial cables, large transformers, control and

distribution stations. These are linked to high-tension cables that cross the landscapes to get their supply from powerhouses. Most of these powerhouses function with coal or oil, which pollute the atmosphere; with nuclear energy, and the dangers that that entails; or with hydraulic energy, produced by artificial lakes that disrupt the ecology of whole regions.

Yet a small non-polluting device exists, capable of freely providing the necessary electric energy for most of our domestic devices. It was discovered more than a century ago, at the very beginning of the use of electric energy. As the inventor of this device was ready to commercialise it, the financial and industrial powers that controlled the copper market – and foresaw the millions of kilometres of copper wires that were going to be necessary to distribute electricity from the power stations to every house – opposed its manufacture. The inventor disappeared mysteriously, along with his patent. All those who, since then, have been tempted to look into this invention have failed in the process, or were victims of unfortunate accidents.

Of course, other commercial powers, such as the oil barons, rallied quickly to the side of the producers of copper. The manufacturers of the cables and transformers which form the nests of dust behind the computers also became their allies, as did those who manufacture the missiles for bombarding countries involved in the oil trade. All is linked. And it is interesting to observe how our small domestic problems give birth to huge world conflicts.

The Five Wounds

According to Lise Bourbeau, who founded the “Écoute ton corps” (Listen to your Body) school, there are five fundamental wounds from which we are susceptible to suffer during our early childhood. These conditioned our behaviour then and still affect our adult life. These five wounds are rejection, abandonment, humiliation, betrayal and injustice. They were generally inflicted on us by our parents or by figures of authority who took care of us. One of the wounds is generally predominant, but it is not uncommon to have several of them or even to have all five, in various degrees.

Each of the wounds corresponds to a mask, or defensive behaviour, that we adopted to face similar situations to the one that created the first wound, and to protect us from further hurt. These five masks are respectively those of the “withdrawer” for rejection, of the “dependent” for abandonment, of the “masochist” for humiliation, of the “controller” for betrayal and of the “rigid” for injustice.

Each of these masks becomes such an important part of our personality that it manifests in a characteristic way in our morphology. The withdrawer is skinny, weak, bent, nearly non-existent. The dependent has shoulders and other parts of the body which sag; the body is limp and lacks tone. The masochist is fat or obese, with a strong back. The controller has a strong and muscular body; the man is broad-shouldered and the woman has large hips. The rigid is energetic, straight, stiff, dry and tense. It is fascinating to note that a person’s morphology can change when a particular occur-

rence has revived one of their wounds or, on the contrary, when they have succeeded in healing the wound by a process of personal development, therapy or forgiveness.

To discover our wounds allows us to know ourselves better, and to understand our reactions to specific situations and the usual and preferred workings of our personality. We should know that the five wounds develop at different ages and for different motives. Rejection, from conception up to ten months, is linked to the questioning of our right to exist. Abandonment, from birth up to a year and a half, is linked to the deprivation of food or affection. Humiliation, from one to three years, is linked to the questioning of our independence. Betrayal, from two to four years, is linked to seduction and the awakening of sexuality. Injustice, from three to five years, is linked to the development of our individuality as a human being. Lise Bourbeau notes that rejection and betrayal are generally associated with our relation with the parent of the opposite sex, abandonment and injustice with the parent of the same sex.

It is interesting to observe that as long as we are conditioned by our wounds and use the corresponding masks, we attract into our life people who have the same wounds as us. These relationships continuously reopen our wounds and cause us to hold on even more strongly to our defence masks. The fear of being wounded again by the behaviour of others pushes us instinctively to react in the same way. The vicious circle continues until we decide to work on ourselves. The discovery of our wounds allows us to realise that we are adults and that we no longer need to react like small children.

The most powerful way to heal our wounds is to understand and to accept the behaviour of our parents, in order to be able to forgive them. Then we will stop being involved in relationships based on the same action/reaction patterns of our wounds/masks. We will finally be able to

have relationships based on love rather than fear; and we will stop wounding others in order to avoid being wounded. We will also abstain from wounding our children in the same way as we have been wounded by our parents, thus breaking the fateful hereditary cycle of injury and abuse.

The Prophets

Prophets are people who predict the future. There have been prophets at all times and in all cultures: the prophets of the Bible, the Oracles of Delphi, the shamans and the sages of ancient aboriginal tribes, Nostradamus and Edgar Cayce. Nowadays there are also many prophets. Most receive their prophecies by channelling and some write books to reveal their predictions. There are, however, many false prophets. Prophecies are generally taken seriously only after they have happened. It is then that we understand them, because their formulation is often cryptic or they lend themselves to various interpretations. What is most difficult to determine is the precise date at which a prophecy is going to take place.

It often happens that prophets coming from different cultures and periods make the same revelations, without any contact between them. Many prophets are predicting dramatic events for the present period: natural disasters, epidemics, a new world war, the tragic disappearance of a large part of the world population and even the end of the world. Curiously, there are many prophecies, often coming from the same sources, that predict exactly the opposite, that is to say the beginning of a long period of peace and harmony, a new golden age on planet Earth.

Gregg Braden, in his book *The Isaiah Effect*, explains that prophecies may not be definitive and irreversible predictions for the future, but different possibilities of what could happen at a certain moment. The system of prophecies could be a kind of quantum process, where future events cannot be foretold in a definitive way, but only in the form

of probabilities. And human beings can choose which of these possibilities they want to see happen. Prophecies could, in fact, be warnings of what could happen if humanity doesn't make appropriate choices at the required time.

The insane and irresponsible growth of modern society threatens the very existence of the human race, of life on earth, and of the whole planet. The politico-economic system, the wild and reckless development of technology, the pollution, the destruction of nature, the raping of non-renewable mineral and energy resources, genetic manipulation, the creation and the accumulation of more and more weapons of destruction, the loss of moral values... The main cause of these curses is the insatiable greed of human beings.

The present period is crucial for the future of humanity and life on the planet. The arrival of this pivotal moment has been foreseen by prophets of all cultures for millennia. Are we going to have the wisdom to choose the prophecies that announce a new world of peace, love, joy and harmony? Are we able to abandon our greed for power and material possessions? Are we ready to give up war, competition, profit, growth, manipulation, exploitation, in order to create a society based on sharing, sound ecology and co-operation?

The first stage is to become aware of the present situation and of the consequences of its blind pursuit. Then it is necessary to investigate the other possibilities that are offered to us. It seems there exist privileged moments when it is possible to pass from one potential reality to another. This is what is offered to us at this moment in time. These openings to another reality exist for a limited time, then the portals close again. The point is to catch the opportunity before it is too late.

For the passage from one dimension to another to take place, from one universe to another parallel universe, it is necessary that a critical mass of the population clearly expresses the intention for it by their aspirations and their prayers; that a part of the population has a strong longing to see the cessation of the present excesses and suffering and chooses to consciously open the way to a new reality. Then the change in consciousness of this group of pioneers will provoke a change of consciousness at a wider level, and the transformation will be possible, because it will then be wanted by all. The prophecies help us to become aware of what threatens us before it is too late. And they show us the solutions. Are we wise enough, today, to listen to them?

The Visible and the Invisible

One of the main causes of the difficulties that we encounter in our existence on this planet is the limited capacity of our sense organs and thus the narrow perception of reality that ensues. We only see what is visible to our eyes, which means material objects when they are lit by a luminous source whose frequency is within our visible spectrum. Thus, we have developed an understanding of the world based only on the things that we see: a materialistic perception of the world.

Among the invisible things, those that we can't perceive with our physical eyes or that we cannot see because they are hidden from us, one finds:

Material objects shrouded in darkness. Many animals, like cats, however, see in the dark.

Objects or their details, when they are very small, such as insects, cellular and molecular structures, atoms... Some of these, of course, are visible through a magnifying glass or a microscope.

Objects that are too distant to see distinctly. One can see some of these with binoculars or a telescope.

Objects concealed by fog. These are visible with radar or infrared lamps.

Objects hidden by opaque materials, like clothes, walls, packages, the tissues of the body. One can discern these with X-rays.

Auras and subtle energies that surround living beings. The Kirlian system allows us to photograph these.

The air that we breathe.

Electromagnetic waves.

Events that happen in other places, or at other moments in time – in the past or the future. These can be perceived by clairvoyants. They can also appear to us in our dreams, as well as in states of trance, hypnosis or meditation. Some are transmitted to us by technological means such as television.

Energy, in its different forms: in particular cosmic and telluric energy, as well as the vital energy that circulates within our body. One can feel it and various means exist to measure it.

The beings or entities from other dimensions, such as fairies, imps, elves, angels and demons, divinities, the nature spirits, and those of the dead. Some people can see them.

We have the possibility to perceive a lot more than our physical eyes see. But we have generally lost this capacity, because we don't use it, or because it is dismissed and often denigrated by modern society. Small children often perceive entities from the invisible world. But, when they speak of their experiences, they are scolded, made fun of and not taken seriously. They do not dare to speak of these experiences for fear of ridicule, and begin to repress them, believing they are bad. Gradually, these experiences disappear and they forget them.

The blind sense subtleties that most sighted people don't perceive. Mediums, clairvoyants, diviners, dowsers, healers, yogis... all are capable of sensing many things that we don't perceive. To be able to see the invisible doesn't depend on occult or miraculous powers. It is accessible to all those who are ready to listen to their heart and their intuition; and who don't only trust their physical senses and their intellect.

However, if we haven't used our subtle senses for decades, a little exercise is necessary to reactivate them.

We can develop these capacities, because they are latent in us. Society, however, has created a plethora of devices and equipment that seem to replace these subtle senses so that we do not develop them. As we have become dependent on these devices and on those who manufacture them, we no longer trust our own perceptions. To look through a device is like walking with crutches. What we see doesn't appear to us in the same way as what we perceive directly with our own senses. It is not really part of our reality. What is dangerous in this, then, is that our vision and our understanding of reality becomes distorted. And we remain in ignorance of the true nature of things as they are.

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Death

Every day, about three hundred thousand people die on earth. This is the average; some days five to ten thousand more or less die, a variation of two to three percent. Death is a normal and natural phenomenon of our type of existence. Every living being, in this system – plant, animal or human – is born, lives for a longer or shorter period according to its species, and dies.

The cause of death, in the case of human beings, varies: illness, accident, murder, attack by an animal, old age, execution, natural disaster, terrorism, medical mistake, war, poisoning by pollution or unhealthy substances, suicide, torture... We all know that we are going to die one day, even though, in our western society, we don't like this idea. We prefer to ignore it and simply to not think about our own death. We also avoid coming close to death, to dying people and corpses. One leaves that to specialised institutions – hospitals and funeral parlours.

However, inside, at the deepest level of our being, the fear of death lies dormant, even though our life is not really under threat. When one of our dear ones dies, we generally experience an emotional break down, immense pain and grief. We don't accept this death, because it reflects the reality of our own death. What disturbs us and causes us great anguish is that death entails three big unknowns, and we are dreadfully afraid of the unknown. When are we going to die? How are we going to die? What will happen after death?

The circumstances of death are quite unforeseeable. Sometimes people seem doomed to die, and yet escape death by a miracle, whereas a silly accident can carry away someone who had the promise of a long life. The moment of death is completely uncertain. Youngsters often die before their elders, and when we fall asleep in the evening, we don't know if we will wake up in our bed or in the beyond.

As for what happens after death, we do not lack for theories and information: the experiences of mystics; those of people who have visited other kingdoms in their meditation or during regressions under hypnosis; near-death experiences; and visions born from the imagination of writers and artists throughout time... Most of those who have experienced life after death affirm that it is a lot more pleasant than terrestrial existence, which is not very difficult to imagine... Let us not fear therefore to leave this tormented world, and while waiting to go, let's enjoy our happiness down here without being affected by the fear of imaginary torments in the beyond.

The Platonic Solids

The five Platonic solids are the tetrahedron, the cube, the octahedron, the dodecahedron and the icosahedron. The most well known is the cube, a volume formed of six square faces. The faces of the tetrahedron, the octahedron and the icosahedron are respectively four, eight and twenty equilateral triangles. The twelve faces of the dodecahedron are equilateral pentagons. The geometers and the thinkers, even before Plato, have always been in awe of these five perfectly symmetrical solids. One can add to these solids a sixth one, in which all others are inscribed, the sphere. It is formed of only one face, which, however, is not plane.

The vision of symmetry awakens in us a sense of order, beauty and harmony, because symmetry is in our genes and we live in a symmetrical body. Nature functions and evolves according to symmetrical patterns and processes. And human beings reflect the creative systems of nature in their own creations, in particular in the plastic arts, music, architecture and handicrafts.

There are different kinds of symmetry. The bilateral symmetry of our body is a one-dimensional symmetry, like that of the isosceles triangle, the rectangle or the lozenge. The axial symmetry of the stem and the radial symmetry of the flower are two-dimensional symmetries, like those of the cylinder, the square and all other equilateral surfaces.

The symmetry of Platonic solids, on the other hand, is a spherical symmetry, a three-dimensional symmetry. Our senses, in the three-dimensional material world in which we live, don't allow us to perceive geometric forms that possess

a symmetry of an order superior to three. Other solids present a spherical symmetry, in particular the stars formed on the different Platonic solids. These stars, however, do not have all the harmonious features of Platonic solids, in which all faces, all edges and all angles are equal. Platonic solids, in addition, have particular symmetrical relationships that link them, since they all inscribe, not only in a sphere, but also inside each other.

The contemplation and the study of Platonic solids are part of Sacred Geometry, an art that teaches us that these perfect forms are an integral part of the structure of the universe, of the macrocosm and the microcosm. One finds them also in the movement of the galaxies and atoms, and in the energy patterns that govern life, from the level of the planet to the level of DNA. To visualise Platonic solids in rotation inside or around our body is a powerful practice that balances our energies, reinforces our immune system, and enables us to travel to other dimensions and to other levels of consciousness.

The simple presence of these solids in our environment has a beneficial influence on our well-being and our spiritual development. An English sculptor, Tim Ward, built me a model uniting the five Platonic solids, all fitting into each other. It is a sacred and magical object that I never get tired of contemplating. It is, in fact, imperceptible in its totality by our ordinary mind. This is what makes it so fascinating!

Impermanence

According to the Buddha's teaching, impermanence, or *anicca* in Pali, is one of the three characteristics of all conditioned phenomena.

Curiously, the title of this chapter is a word that doesn't exist in the French language, neither does the adjective 'impermanent'. They are underlined automatically by a red zigzag on the screen of my computer. Although the root of these words is French, perhaps we should consider them as anglicisms, since they exist in English. This deficiency is a puzzle to all those concerned with translating Buddhist texts into French. Many French authors nevertheless use these words. And one finds them in the *Dictionnaire de la sagesse orientale* (Dictionary of Oriental Wisdom) published by Robert Laffont. Purists of the French language choose from such synonyms for 'impermanent' as passenger, of short length, unsteady, fleeting, fugitive, fickle, ephemeral, momentary, precarious, provisional, temporary, transient. However, they have more difficulty finding words to replace 'impermanence', apart from precariousness, inconstancy and instability.

The two other characteristics of existence, *dukkha* and *anatta*, are not easy to translate either. *Dukkha* is often translated as 'suffering', which has given rise to the false idea of many Westerners that the Buddha advocated suffering. 'Dissatisfaction' or 'imperfection' would be more appropriate translations. The third characteristic, *anatta*, is generally translated as 'non-self' or 'impersonality', neither of which express the connotations of *anatta* appropriately.

The impermanence of phenomena is their most important characteristic, since it is from this that the other two characteristics arise. Because the phenomena are impermanent, they are unsatisfactory, or painful, and they don't possess a self, or an inherent essence. The difficulty of finding appropriate words in our vocabulary to express these notions shows us how foreign they are to the idea of reality that is dominant in western culture. Yet, recent discoveries in quantum physics have demonstrated the essential discontinuity of all physical phenomena, which oriental wisdom has known for millennia.

The notion of impermanence teaches us that all conditioned phenomena, whether material or mental, gross or subtle, inside or outside of us, are in constant transformation and in perpetual movement. They are born, pass and die, but they never stop, nor do they persist. All material objects are composed of innumerable particles in movement. The earth rotates on its axis, while turning around the sun which, in turn, moves at a breathtaking speed within the galaxy. Innumerable physiological, metabolic and chemical processes take place at all levels of our organism, twenty-four hours a day, during all of our life. As for mental processes, those who have tried to meditate no longer question their impermanence.

Everything that began will end, everything that united will separate, and everything that was born will die. Impermanence is linked to time and manifests at various rhythms. It is often imperceptible, at first sight, by our senses. Because of their imprecision, our senses give us the illusion of permanence. Without impermanence, no existence, no life, would be possible, since all would be frozen in an immutable and eternal form. It is also impermanence that allows us to change, to evolve and to free ourselves from our difficulties and our suffering. But our possessions, our power, our

success, our relationships, our joy, our lives... are also impermanent.

Modern materialistic society ignores and refuses to acknowledge impermanence. Consequently it continues to encourage the unrestrained acquisition of material goods as a steady source of happiness and security; the obsessive attachment to the physical body; and the fear of death. The contemplation of impermanence teaches us to practice equanimity, the supreme virtue of the sages who, knowing that everything is impermanent, do not fear bad fortune and do not rejoice in good fortune, but accept things as they are with contentment and gratitude.

What Can We Do?

Responding to my message *To relieve misery is less expensive than war*, with statistics to back it up, a friend answered: “For decades we have known this, but what are we doing?” What are we doing in order for things to change, to create a better world? What can we do? This is indeed a good question, because it is easy to judge and to criticise the present situation, the things that we don’t like in the world, but it is less easy to propose solutions and follow through with actions to implement them.

The first thing to do is to accept our part of the responsibility for what takes place, for what happens to us, on all levels. By this I mean everything that happens to us personally, and also that occurs in our family, our community, our country, as well as in the world and in the universe. Everything is linked. We are part of the whole and each of our actions – our actions of mind, speech and body – have a significant effect on the whole. If the bad news is that our past actions are responsible for the present atrocities – but also for the beautiful things – that we see in the world today, the good news is that our present actions can change the future into the direction that we want and that we now choose.

Therefore, instead of moaning about war, terrorism, inequality... the first step is to contemplate the situation in order to understand what is really happening, to discern the truth behind the often untrue information that we receive. What is really happening in the world? Why do these ugly events occur? How did we come to this? Who controls this

situation? Who benefits from it? In what way am I also an accomplice of those who lead us? And in what measure does this situation benefit me also? The first step is to discover the truth with objectivity and to examine where I am located in this truth; then to accept this observation.

The second stage is to make a list of the things that I would like to preserve and those that I want to see changed in my personal life and in the world.

The third stage is to compare the two lists, the one with the desires for my personal life and the one with my desires for the world. Are these two lists compatible, or are they contradictory? If they are contradictory, what takes priority: my personal desires or those for a better world? If my personal and selfish desires take priority then the world won't change, it will remain controlled by greed, fear and aggression. On the other hand, if my desires for a better world take precedence, the world will change for the better. If I choose the second option, then correspondingly my personal aspirations will also be fulfilled, though perhaps in a form a little different from the one that I now express.

When we have accepted that the priority is for the advent of a better world, rather than our personal desires, then let's choose the ten most important things that we would like to see changed in the world and let's write them out clearly.

The next stage is that of the action needed to create these changes, in order for them to manifest in the material world. But first we need to understand how material manifestation, the process of creation, operates in our world: from the creation of the universe to the baking of a cake. Simply put, any creative act starts with an idea, a mental action. We have already taken this action when we wrote down our list of the things to change. These now exist as thought-forms, that is to say like seeds that have the potential to manifest what we

want. For these seeds to germinate, we should water them. We should not forget them, but keep them present in our mind. Let's read our list again and again morning and evening, until it is rooted well within us, until it becomes second nature, a deep motivation.

The second level of manifestation is the level of speech, communication and energy. This allows the plants to grow. It fortifies the thought-forms in three ways. Firstly inside us, by visualising our desires and nourishing them with the energy of our heart, with our love and our compassion for others and for the planet. Secondly, by sending this energy and this visualisation around us and into the whole universe through meditation and prayer. Finally, by communicating our ideas, our desires, and our vision for the world to those around us and to our acquaintances through speech, writing, email, so that the energy of their thought-forms joins ours to form powerful collective thought-forms. When the number of people who cultivate and maintain these thought-forms reach what is called a critical mass – this is the term used in nuclear physics to indicate the mass of radioactive substance that must disintegrate in order to bring about a chain reaction – the thought-forms will manifest spontaneously in the collective consciousness of humanity and a change of consciousness will take place.

It is this change of consciousness that will allow us to act efficiently at the third level, the physical and material level of society. At the moment, it is quite difficult for individuals who are not in positions of power to have any real impact on changing things at the world level. If they did have impact, they would be treated as terrorists or subversives by the powers now in place, and would be used as scapegoats to even more firmly repress any tentative transformations.

We can, however, begin to take action within the framework of our personal life. At first, they won't seem linked to

our desires for changes in the world, but they will help us to develop the strength and the energy we need to act efficiently at the mental level and at the level of communication and energy. Therefore let's take again our list of desires and let's see what personal acts we can begin to implement, when appropriate, for each of the points on the list, even if these acts, at this stage, don't seem to have a direct influence on potential changes at the world level.

Even if this work at the subtle and personal level doesn't appear to be either spectacular or efficient, it does have a lot more power than we imagine. If only some tens or hundreds of thousands of people around the world could do these actions in their daily life, radical as well as unexpected changes would manifest more quickly than foreseen. If we could do only one thing, which is to replace in our heart the energy of fear, of powerlessness and of despair with the energy of love, with the power to create and of hope, the effects on our personal life, and on the world, would be immense.

Beauty

Beauty is one of the needs of our emotional body. It is a very important ingredient of our life that is often disregarded in modern society. Beauty is the search for quality and purity in our perception. It is felt by the heart and is produced by love and creativity. The search for quantity, profit, easiness, speed or efficiency rarely produces beauty. Beauty is an ornament of the ordinary that requires attention, inspiration and generosity. Nature produces beauty spontaneously, but human beings must cultivate it in order for it to manifest in their activities and become a quality of their lives.

Beauty transcends matter, it adds a spiritual dimension to our three dimensional material world. We cannot explain beauty, but we can feel it. We don't create it with the rational mind, but with intuition: not with the head, but with the heart. Beauty is the harmony of forms, colours, sounds, as well as of proportions, rhythms, relations. It has a direct effect on our being as a whole. The contemplation of beauty brings us peace and harmony, and elevates our soul. It offers us joy, contentment and wonder.

The greatest source of beauty is nature. That is why it is so important to regularly spend time in nature. It is a way to revitalise ourselves, to fill us with energy and to purify ourselves. Contact with nature reminds us that we are part of it, that it is nature that feeds us. It is this link that keep us in good health, on physical, emotional, mental and spiritual levels.

As we can't always live in nature, it is very important to introduce beauty into our environment and our daily life, in particular into our home and our workplace. We should design our living and work spaces with care and with taste. Beauty doesn't mean an accumulation of furniture, artworks or expensive objects. It is often simplicity that best expresses beauty. The space is just as important as the objects that occupy it. The beauty of emptiness! A good example is a Zen room, without furniture. Its beauty resides in the proportions, the materials. The only decorative elements are a flower in a vase and a painting or a calligraphy. Order, cleanliness and light are also part of beauty.

Our inner beauty manifests in our outer beauty. The way in which we take care of our body, our appearance and our clothing are also part of beauty, as well as our deportment, our movements, our way of walking, sitting, or lying down. It is important for ourselves, for our inner beauty to blossom, but also for the beauty of the image that we offer to others.

Let's introduce beauty in our different daily activities. First of all in our meals. To eat in a pleasant location, without being hurried, has a beneficial effect on the digestion and the assimilation of food. An attractive presentation of a dish awakens the appetite and puts us in a serene and harmonious mood. Beauty is a subtle nourishment that adds a vital energising ingredient to our food.

To create beauty and harmony is a great source of contentment, satisfaction and happiness. It is in art, of course, that one finds the most elaborate forms of beauty created by human beings – even though it seems that modern art often despises and repudiates the ideal of beauty. All personal artistic activity is a way to plunge oneself into a universe of beauty every time one feels the need for it. Visits to museums and historic monuments, watching audio-visual

spectacles and reading are also ways to regularly satisfy our need for beauty.

All our actions are opportunities to manifest beauty and creativity in our life and our environment. In the beginning, this requires mindfulness. It is about observing how we do things and adding a touch of beauty to our movements, our words, to our way of arranging the numerous objects that we manipulate during the day. With practice, we learn to spontaneously create beauty around us and to offer it generously to others. This is a new artform, the art of living.

As beauty is unfortunately not always one of the features of our modern world, another practice is to transform our perception in order to see beauty in all things. In fact beauty is always present, even in the ugliest elements of our environment. It is often hidden in details or aspects that escape us at first sight. Let's stop looking at things in our old habitual way and with our preconceived ideas, and see them with the fresh and innocent vision of a small child who discovers the world for the first time. All objects and the ten thousand things will then shine with a marvellous and mysterious glow. It is this glow that expresses the intrinsic beauty of the phenomenal world.

Evolution

Any evolution requires transformation. And anything that doesn't evolve, degenerates and dies. One can wonder, therefore, while observing nature, society, the human species, if we are currently in a process of evolution or degeneration. The same question can be asked while observing oneself. My idea is that the whole evolves, but that some parts of this whole, those parts that don't, or can no longer serve evolution, degenerate and disappear. In any process of evolution one observes that the individual elements, by their degeneration and their death, allow the evolution of the whole, and the birth of new elements that are more evolved and more effective than the old. What looks like degeneration or a backwards turn, appears on another level like a growth crisis.

Any change is the result of two antagonistic forces, one that goes in the way of progress and evolution – which would go too fast if it was left to act alone – and one that goes in the way of conservation and resistance – which would self-destruct if it was left to act alone. A subtle balance of these two forces produces a gradual evolution that allows the progressive integration of changes. This balance is, however, fragile and periods of fast evolution follow periods of stagnation and fundamentalism. So, if one looks closely at evolution and its short-term development, it seems unsteady, chaotic and precarious. On the other hand, if one stands back, one will see that in the long-term it is regular, coherent and harmonious. Furthermore, fast progress in one domain often coincide with blockages in others. Strong turbulences result from this.

I believe that this is what is happening at the moment in the evolution of modern society on planet Earth, as well as in the personal evolution of many human beings. Technological progress and material growth are now rapid, fuelled by the belief that they offer the solution to all problems. This belief is contrary to all ancestral wisdom and experience gives vivid proof that it is erroneous. Money doesn't make happiness, and neither does material progress. On the contrary, it blocks the spiritual growth of a society and the development of domains such as education, politics, the protection of the environment, health, the development of alternative energies, the resolution of conflicts, the equitable distribution of vital resources, objective information, and the improvement of the quality of life.

The richest countries materially are those that show the highest rates of physical and mental illnesses, of criminality, of pollution, of all kinds of conflicts. They are also the countries where the largest quantity of toxic foods and substances are consumed; where negative emotions like fear, stress and anxiety are the most widespread; where one counts the largest number of jails, hospitals, asylums, lawyers, divorces, suicides... They are the countries in which it is most difficult to find true happiness.

The mistake is not in the technology and the material goods themselves, but in the use that is made of them, as well as in the goals and the motivations that underlie this frantic growth. A minority tries to acquire maximum profit in order to establish control and power over the whole of society. This same technological progress and the same material wealth could very well be used to develop the sectors quoted above, that are currently locked in old patterns, and to offer quality of life to all instead of reserving quantity to an elite. Because the ideas, the technology and the vision that would permit the

transformation and harmonious evolution of society already exist, they are ready to be brought into play. They only lack the necessary funds and the green light of governments.

To get to that point, it is necessary that these projects are supported by public opinion as a whole; and that each of us awakens and stops allowing ourselves to be manipulated by the forces in power. This change can only come from every individual's awakening, from our own transformation. Each person must ask themselves if they are completely satisfied with their life, their health, their work, their environment, their relationships with their loved ones and with society. If the answer is yes, let them share their way of life with those that are not so happy as they are. If not, let them find what they can change in their life to make it more harmonious, more peaceful, more fulfilling. In our time, numerous resources exist to help us in our personal transformation. Each of us can begin to change today, in order to create the society of tomorrow.

Suffering

Suffering is, according to the Buddha, the second of the three characteristics of existence, of our life on this planet. The two others are impermanence and non-self. The term ‘suffering’ used here is a translation of the Pali word *dukkha*. It is certainly one of the meanings of *dukkha*, but, in the framework of Buddhist teachings, *dukkha* doesn’t necessarily indicate a painful experience. Dissatisfaction, imperfection, insecurity or stress more clearly express its particular connotation.

The translation of *dukkha* as ‘suffering’ often leads to the false idea that Buddhism is a religion that advocates suffering, whereas its practice leads, on the contrary, to the cessation of suffering, or of *dukkha*. The Buddha considered, however, that *dukkha* was a particularly important aspect of our existence, since he dedicated his first teaching to it after having attained enlightenment in Bodh-Gaya, at the age of thirty-five. This teaching is called “The Four Noble Truths”. He gave it, in the deer park of Sarnath close to Varanasi, to the five ascetics with whom he had been meditating in the forest before his enlightenment.

The First Noble Truth is the existence of *dukkha*; the Second is the cause of *dukkha*; the Third, the cessation of *dukkha*; and the Fourth, the path that leads to the cessation of *dukkha*. Although this teaching may appear simple and concise, it is actually very deep. It constitutes the foundation of all Buddhist teachings and practices, and it is recognised as such by all schools of Buddhism.

The First Noble Truth makes us attentive to the fact that all aspects of our existence are *dukkha*. Birth, sickness, old age and death are *dukkha*. Not getting what one wants, being separated from what one likes, and enduring what one doesn't like are *dukkha*. Pain, dissatisfaction, frustration, sadness, grief, anguish, fear, despair... all are *dukkha*. These unpleasant circumstances are part of the first kind of suffering, known also as the suffering of suffering. This is the easiest to understand.

The second kind of suffering is the suffering of pleasure. This shows us that all pleasant experiences – the pleasures of existence – also contain this characteristic of dissatisfaction. It doesn't mean that pleasure doesn't exist, but that what we call pleasure is a subtle form of suffering. The pleasures are *dukkha* because they don't last, they are impermanent. Any pleasure turns, sooner or later, into repletion or boredom, and then becomes greed, the desire to have more of it or to regain the pleasant sensation. Greed gives birth, inevitably, to discontent, to agitation and to frustration.

The third kind of suffering is called the fundamental suffering of existence. It is produced by the realisation that the five constituents of our being, the five aggregates – the body, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness – also possess the characteristics of *dukkha*. They are also impermanent and constitute a continual process of movement and transformation. All movement gives birth to tension, friction, agitation and stress, which are subtle forms of *dukkha*. By its nature, its metabolism and its physiological, organic and cellular structure, our body is in constant transformation; it produces various and changing sensations, pleasant or unpleasant, that constantly oblige us to move to find comfort. Those who have tried to remain seated in meditation without moving for half an hour, or who have

remained lying for weeks on a hospital bed, know what I am talking about.

The mental aggregates are no more peaceful than the physical. The sensations, emotions, sensory perceptions, reactions, judgements, thoughts and ideas follow each other without ceasing, day and night, in our waking consciousness and in our dream consciousness. They don't give us one minute of respite, peace or silence. And this constant agitation of the mind is *dukkha*, also known by those who practice meditation.

The Buddha, when he tells us that suffering exists, asks us to contemplate this truth, to penetrate it and to understand it completely. It is the first step towards self-knowledge, wisdom and liberation. It is the opening of the path that leads to the abandonment of the causes of suffering and to the realisation of its cessation, *nirvana*. The experience of our own suffering leads us to the realisation of the universality of suffering. It is this realisation that is the source of compassion, the vocation of the bodhisattva, the sage who has decided to dedicate his life to free all beings from suffering.

The Enneagram

The Enneagram is a teaching that has fascinated me since I came upon it – at the same time as Reiki – during a stay in San Francisco in 1996. It is a system that classifies personalities into nine types. The first time that I heard of the Enneagram was while reading a book by Gurdjieff. He said something that astonished me. He claimed that it was very easy to know people and to foresee their reactions, because only nine types of personalities existed. Gurdjieff had learned the Enneagram from the Sufis of Afghanistan, and it seems that he taught it to some of his disciples when he was living in Paris, at the beginning of the twentieth century. Gurdjieff gave no explanation of the system itself, but ten years later I discovered the Enneagram through reading books by Don Richard Riso. I then studied it further by attending the workshops of NB Keops in Annecy, and later those of Helen Palmer in California.

The Enneagram remained a secret teaching until the end of the sixties, when a Chilean, Oscar Ichazo, began to teach it in the West. Since then, psychologists, then the Jesuits, began to be interested in it and numerous studies have been undertaken to develop this system, to teach it and to apply it. A profusion of books and workshops enable people today to study the Enneagram.

The word ‘enneagram’ is the name of a geometric figure with nine sides, formed by an equilateral triangle and an irregular concave hexagon. The nine types are placed at the nine summits of the enneagram, and the sides of the figure

indicate specific relationships that exist between the different types.

The system of the Enneagram certainly allows us to know others and their personalities better, and it is used, in companies, for the recruitment of staff and the management of the capacities of each person. I find, however, that the best quality of the Enneagram is to learn how to know oneself. The first stage is to discover one's type. Every person belongs to one of the nine types, and to one only, and this type doesn't change throughout life. It seems that we are not born with a type, but that the personality is formed in early childhood, according to the way the child responds to the first confrontations with its environment and especially with its parents. At that time, the child chooses a strategy of defence and survival that will model its personality, and that will continue to be applied in an habitual and preferred way during all of its life to respond to the challenges of existence.

We are generally unconscious of our typical personality, which is why it is often difficult to recognise one's own type. This discovery can provoke a shock, because it puts us in the presence of aspects of ourselves that it would be more comfortable to ignore. Even though there are nowadays many systems of tests and interviews to help us to find our type, it is only by the sincerest will to objectively look inside ourselves that we can determine our real type, and not the one that we would like to be. No type is better or worse than another; they all have their good qualities and their shortcomings. If our type is often the one that we like the least, it is because it shows us our own shortcomings without compromise, those that we did not ever want to see until now.

To know our type enables us to develop and use our qualities to the best of our ability, and helps us to work on our shortcomings and to correct them. But we should not

forget that our type is not our true nature, it is a false personality that we constructed in our childhood and that became habitual. Helen Palmer, in her oral teaching, shows us, through meditation, how to find our true nature – that which transcends the behaviour patterns of the different types – and to cultivate mindfulness, in order to avoid falling into the habitual reactions of our type.

Although several authors give names to qualify the nine types, they are traditionally designated by the numbers from one to nine. It is not easy to describe the nine personalities in a few words, and I advise all those who want to study this system and to find their type to attend a workshop or to read a book. Here is, however, a brief description of each type that will give you some idea of them.

1. The perfectionist: critical, responsible, hard-working; tries to reach perfection in all things.
2. The helper: optimistic, generous, sociable, outgoing; always endeavours to help others.
3. The performer: competitive, hard-working, efficient; searches for success and material gain.
4. The artist, the romantic: passionate, refined, emotional; idealistic and always searching for a meaning for his or her existence.
5. The observer: intellectual, lonely, inventive, introvert; tries to accumulate knowledge and information.
6. The sceptic, the faithful: pessimistic, anxious, aggressive, has difficulties with authority; searches for security and trust.
7. The epicurean: optimistic, charming, full of energy and talent; searches for pleasure and new and varied experiences.

8. The boss: independent, affirmative, combative, often excessive; searches for power and justice.
9. The mediator, the peacemaker: quiet, understanding, diplomatic; searches for peace, comfort and harmony.

The Perfections

The teaching of Buddhism recommends us to practice a certain number of qualities, or virtues, called *parami* in Pali and *paramita* in Sanskrit (from *parama* meaning supreme). These virtues were developed to perfection by the Buddha during his numerous previous lives, described in the Jataka tales. The bodhisattvas cultivate these qualities with the purpose of helping all beings without discrimination, to bring them happiness and to free them from suffering.

Theravada Buddhism teaches ten perfections: generosity, virtue, renouncement, wisdom, energy, patience, veracity, determination, love and equanimity. Mahayana Buddhism teaches six: generosity, virtue, patience, energy, concentration and wisdom. It should be noted that some of the perfections are also found in the teachings of the Four Divine Emotions and of the Noble Eightfold Path.

The perfections are essential ingredients of any spiritual life and those who worry about the harmony of the world in which they live must cultivate them. A person who possesses these qualities, even though not to the point of perfection of the Buddha, is a blessing to her surroundings, to society and to the environment.

Generosity

This is the first perfection, and it opens the way. In Thailand and in the other Buddhist countries, monasteries, monks and nuns are entirely dependent on the generosity of their community. Generosity is a disposition to giving more than one is expected to. One can offer material goods,

money, one's time, one's attention, caring, one's capacities, one's work, love, a shelter, teachings, advice... Prayers, offerings and meditation for the peace, health and happiness of beings are also ways to practice generosity. Even if one doesn't possess anything, one can practice generosity. The teaching mentions three levels of generosity: a beggar's generosity, who gives what he doesn't need anymore; the one of a friend, who shares what she has; and the one of a king, who gives more than he keeps for himself. In generosity, what is important is the purity of our motivation. We must give for the good of others, from compassion for those who suffer or who are in need, without expecting to receive something in return, such as merit, advantages or gratitude. Generosity frees those who practice it from desire, attachment and selfishness, and it brings them satisfaction, peace and happiness.

Virtue

Virtue, also called moral or ethical conduct, is the disposition to accomplish good actions and to avoid hurting others. It ensures peace and harmony in our relationship with others and in society. Ethics includes three levels: to avoid bad actions, to cultivate good qualities, and to work for the good of all beings. It is not a practice reserved for monks and nuns. For Buddhists, virtue starts with respecting and applying the five precepts. These precepts are not commandments, but actions that one should endeavour to avoid because they harm, not only others, but oneself. They are: not to kill living beings, not to take what is not offered to us, not to have harmful sexual activities, not to lie, and not to consume intoxicants. Good moral conduct decreases our desires and our fears, purifies our mental perturbations and extinguishes the fire of our passions. It generates joy, con-

tentment and self-confidence, and facilitates the practice of meditation and concentration.

Renouncement

Renouncement is to give up something by an effort of will for an ideal that is considered superior. Let's give up everything that creates suffering: our fears, our desires, our negative emotions, our conflicts. Let's give up the aspirations of the ego, its distractions, its need for support, its identifications, its justifications, its requirements, its indulgences, its ideas and its opinions. Let's give up attachment – which doesn't mean to throw away one's goods and to leave one's family. At the time of dying, we will have to give up everything: our possessions, our family, our friends, and even our body. Let's practice renouncement before, to prepare us for that moment.

Wisdom

There are three kinds of wisdom: the wisdom born from study, the wisdom born from contemplation, and the wisdom born from meditation. In daily life, wisdom helps us to recognise what is beneficial from what is harmful, for ourselves and for others, so that we can avoid difficulties and live in harmony. Wisdom is the knowledge of the Four Noble Truths and of the true nature of phenomena. *Vipassana* meditation, founded on virtue and concentration, is a means to develop wisdom, in order to attain liberation from suffering.

Energy

Energy is necessary for everything that we want to accomplish, in daily life as well as on a spiritual path. Only people who have a lot of energy accomplish great things.

Energy allows us to make an effort with joy and enthusiasm. In spiritual practice, it enables us to achieve fast progress, without getting discouraged by illness, difficulties and interference from others. Energy must have a direction, otherwise it turns into restlessness. It is necessary to cultivate virtue and to overcome our instincts, our reactions and our conflicting emotions. Energy is the antidote to the three kinds of laziness: complaisance, weariness, and the laziness stemming from attachment to activities that oppose our spiritual development. In the beginning, meditation requires a lot of energy. Later it regenerates our energy.

Patience

Impatience is a reaction of the ego that wants to get instant gratification, that wants everything to be compliant to its desires, without worrying about others. The results of this attitude are anxiety, frustration and often anger. Patience is a form of wisdom, that accepts things as they are, that knows their true nature, which is impermanence, and that waits until they change by themselves. There are three kinds of patience. The first consists of not letting ourselves get affected by the harm that others do to us, knowing that if we react, we will create even more problems, but that if we remain quiet, others may also calm down. The second encourages us to gladly endure suffering and unfavourable conditions, without blaming others, while accepting with joy this maturation of our karma. The third is the patience that enables us to contemplate the deep and subtle points of spiritual teachings without being distracted. It is the result of training the mind with meditation. It is necessary to have patience with oneself, with one's own weaknesses, in order to be able to accept the shortcomings of others. Patience is the tolerance and acceptance of others as they are; it is the antidote to hatred; it is the most beautiful ornament and it is

also armour. But patience is never complacent. It is linked to wisdom, as well as to the necessary determination and energy to put things back in the right direction.

Veracity

This is to tell the truth, to be honest and trustworthy, to keep one's promises and one's commitments. It is to be honest to oneself, to observe and to analyse with objectivity one's own weaknesses, thanks to the mirror of mindfulness, and to constantly question oneself in order to unmask the ego. It is also to know the truth that is absolute and universal. To search for the truth requires a lot of energy and wisdom. Unfortunately, the young lack wisdom, and the old lack energy!

Determination

Without determination, one cannot accomplish anything, not even getting up in the morning. Determination is indispensable in daily life; one cannot wait for things to happen by themselves. It is also essential when following a spiritual path, and in particular when practicing meditation. A strong determination to make spiritual progress develops when one realises that it is the most important thing to do in life, the only thing that can bring us true happiness. For this, it is not necessary to become a monk or a nun, all circumstances of life can help us to progress. This determination brings us joy, and so regenerates by itself.

Love

This is unconditional love without attachment, that cares above all for the happiness of others. Love is one of the Four Divine Emotions.

Equanimity

Equanimity is the balance of the mind, when it is freed of desire and aversion, when it doesn't become disturbed by good or bad circumstances, but accepts things as they are. Equanimity is founded on wisdom and on the abandonment of the ego illusion. It is also one of the Four Divine Emotions.

Concentration

Concentration is the control of the mind: the capacity to focus on an object without being distracted, agitated or sleepy. Concentration doesn't develop spontaneously, but requires a lot of effort. The mind has the habit of being distracted and constantly escaping, but thanks to meditation, one can succeed in taming it, as one succeeds in taming a wild animal.

The Emotions

The word ‘emotion’ comes from motion, movement. An emotion is an affective reaction that provokes a movement of energy in our body. This affective reaction, more or less violent, is caused by the sensation that automatically comes with all sensory perception, be it perceptions of our physical senses, sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell, or those of our mental sense, our thoughts. These sensations, according to the Buddha’s teaching, are of three types: pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. This means that, simultaneous to every perception, there is a sensation telling us whether what we see, hear, touch, etc., pleases us, displeases us or doesn’t matter to us. If the sensation is pleasant, we are attracted to the object of our perception; if it is unpleasant, we reject this object; if it is neutral, we ignore it. The emotional reaction that manifests then allows us to act very quickly to assure our survival.

When we perceive danger, for example, we feel an emotion of fear or anger that provokes a secretion of adrenaline in the body, giving us the necessary energy to flee or to defend ourselves. In the same way, the smell of an appetising meal produces an emotion of greediness that whets our appetite; and the sight of a pretty woman – or a good looking man – awakens our sexual desire, inciting us to seduce in order to procreate. Our emotions serve, fundamentally, to arouse instinctive reactions for our survival and the survival of the human species. It should be noted that the emotional reaction short-circuits the mental process and enables us

thus to react more quickly and efficiently than if we had to base our reaction on logical reasoning.

However, in our modern society, we rarely need the help of our emotions to survive. The human population is not on the way to extinction, there are no longer many wild beasts in our environment and we are not at risk of coming back empty handed from an expedition to the supermarket. And yet, we certainly have a lot more emotions in a day than a native living in a primitive way in the jungle.

Many people think that emotions add spice to life and they would not give them up, not for anything on earth. Yet everybody knows that to eat too much spicy food gives ulcers and haemorrhoids. Ancestral wisdom as well as the latest scientific research shows us that two kinds of emotions exist: those that are harmful to our health and our well-being, and those that are, on the contrary, beneficial.

The sages and the scientists also tell us that we can learn to control and to manage our emotions, in order to only experience those that are beneficial to us. Small children generally have strong emotions that they don't know to manage or to control. And, unfortunately, in modern society, most adults have remained like small children on the emotional level. The more evolved have hardly entered into adolescence. If we observe the modern world in which we live, we note that it functions on the basis of primary and puerile emotional reactions. This explains how society, and the majority of individuals, are not in very good health, on the physical as well as on the psychic and spiritual planes.

The effects of harmful emotions are: imbalance and incoherence of the physiological rhythms, in particular the cardiac rhythm that is the most powerful in our body and that affects all other aspects of our metabolism; weakening of the immune system and a correspondingly low resistance to

illnesses; premature ageing; loss of our vital energy and a constant sensation of fatigue or weariness; difficulty perceiving reality clearly and thus making suitable decisions, because harmful emotions separate us from the intelligence of the heart; a growing upsurge of uncontrollable harmful emotions; difficulties in relationships and communication with others; a difficult life, unsettled and full of problems and suffering. The main harmful emotions are fear, hatred, anger, resentment, jealousy, anxiety, stress, greed, sadness, depression, frustration, guilt, attachment, pride, and violence.

The effects of beneficial emotions are: balance and coherence of the physiological rhythms, in particular of the cardiac rhythm; stimulation of the immune system and a strong resistance to illness; greater longevity and the preservation of a young and vigorous body; increase in vital energy and a greater resistance to fatigue; an opening of the intelligence of the heart and the capacity to perceive reality clearly so as to make appropriate decisions; development of the capacity to control and to manage one's emotions; a greater ability to attain harmonious relations with others; an easy life, peaceful and full of joy and satisfaction. The main beneficial emotions are joy, peace, appreciation, gratitude, contentment, kindness, compassion, love, generosity, equanimity, and respect.

When in doubt, when you don't know how to classify one of your emotions, see how you feel after having experienced it.

Note that the harmful or beneficial nature of the emotions is not linked to the pleasant or unpleasant nature of our perceptions, but to the way in which we react to these perceptions. The fact that a harmful emotion appears justified to us doesn't remove any of its harmfulness. Frequent expression or manifestation of harmful emotions is injurious, and is the cause of most cardiac illnesses. But the

repression of harmful emotions for long periods of time is also injurious, and is the cause of most cancers. Whether you express them or not, harmful emotions will end up killing you! What, then, should we do?

The secret is to practice the Four Supreme Efforts. This is a teaching of the Buddha. Supreme, here, means superior, that is to say that can bring us the greatest benefits. The Four Supreme Efforts are: not to let arise a harmful emotion that has not yet appeared; if a harmful emotion appears, not to let it continue; to let arise a beneficial emotion that has not yet appeared; when a beneficial emotion appears, to let it continue. This practice, as the name indicates, requires effort, but an effort that will be generously rewarded.

At the beginning, it takes mindfulness and observation, to really understand the harm that negative emotions are doing to us and the good that beneficial emotions are doing. Numerous techniques exist to help us to manage and to control our emotions, on the level of therapy and help, and on the level of personal development and spiritual practices. The final goal is to become the master of one's emotions, instead of being their slave. It is a choice that all those who want to enjoy a more harmonious existence and to live in a better world must make sooner or later...

Health and Illness

Our modern society has great difficulty understanding the notion of health and illness. We generally consider illness as a series of painful symptoms that manifest in the physical body, and health as the absence of these symptoms. This is such a limited view that it hardly has any connection at all to the topic. This view comes from ignorance of who we are, of our true nature. We have the impression that we are beings, separate from each other, independent of our environment, with a physical body capable of living on average between fifty to eighty years, and with the capacity to think logically and to have emotions.

Actually, we are multi-dimensional beings. Our physical form that lives on planet Earth at the beginning of the twenty-first century is only one of our numerous dimensions. We are not separate, but are intimately connected elements of a series of sets of higher dimensions, such as society, the earth, the universe. As the physical body is composed of organs, tissues, cells, atoms... every individual is one of the elements that constitutes entities of higher dimensions. this is the law of the macrocosm and the microcosm. Every set is a microcosm for another that is bigger than itself and a macrocosm for one that is smaller than itself. But all these sets situated at different levels are part of the same whole. They are organised in an identical way and are mirrors of each other.

Health and illness are not limited to the presence or to the absence of symptoms, but represent a state of harmony or disharmony, function or dysfunction, of the set or of one of

its parts. This lack of harmony manifests as symptoms. A symptom is an alarm signal informing us of the existence of disharmony or dysfunction, but it is not the cause of this imbalance. The cause is generally located at another level, in another dimension than the one where the symptom manifests. This is why, if one believes that the dimension of the physical body is the only one that exists, and that it is an independent entity, it is impossible to perceive the causes that are located in other dimensions. In the same way, if one doesn't perceive the interrelations that exist between apparently separate entities, one cannot understand how the imbalance of one can affect the balance of another.

Let's take some examples to grasp how this system functions at different levels. If one knows that a human being is not composed solely of a physical body perceptible by the senses, but also of a complex energetic structure and a series of subtle bodies that surround the physical body, one will understand that an imbalance at the level of the energetic structure or of one of the subtle bodies can manifest in the physical body as symptoms. The Chinese have understood this for a long time, and they use acupuncture to restore the normal flow of vital energy that circulates in the meridians. Meridians are non material channels, situated inside the body, through which vital energy circulates.

One of our subtle bodies is the emotional body. It contains all the memories of our emotional life. If this body receives a wound such as rejection or betrayal, and if this emotional wound is not treated by suitable means – that is through a process of forgiveness or therapeutic help – it will manifest one day in the form of symptoms in the physical body.

Another of our subtle bodies is the astral body. This body contains all the karmic memories of our previous lives on earth and in other dimensions of existence. If we have been

wounded in a past life by, for example, a knife in the back, the wound remains in the astral body and it is possible that it will manifest in this life as physical symptoms or pain in that place. In this case, undergoing a regression will allow the event to be experienced again in order to be healed on a subtle level.

In these examples, if one ignores the causes because they are not on the material or visible plane, there will be no chance of healing the sickness, and all treatment to make the symptoms disappear will have no effect on the real cause. This is why modern medicine, although often succeeding in making symptoms temporarily disappear, is incapable of truly healing the cause of most illnesses. It should be understood that it is the being in its totality that is sick. When an organ is in disharmony, the whole being loses its equilibrium. One cannot isolate this organ to treat it, because all the different parts of our being, whether they are physical or subtle, are interconnected. It is the being in its totality that should be treated.

The principle is the same when one considers a human being as part of a group, a society or the ecosystem of the planet. In the family framework, for example, if one member of the family is in disharmony – this doesn't only mean physically sick, but includes troubles at the emotional and mental levels, as well as the person's behaviour and functioning in the family, at work, and in society in general – this imbalance is going to affect all the other members of the family.

It should be noted that any disharmony first manifests on subtle levels and if it is not healed on that level, it appears on the physical level as a last resort and often after a long period of crisis. The absence of serious physical symptoms is not a sign of good health. Many benign troubles on the physical level, to which one doesn't pay a lot of attention, are actually

signs of more serious problems on subtle levels. It is necessary to understand that this process functions in both directions. An illness in one family member is going to affect the family's health as a whole, and a family crisis or conflict is going to affect the individual health of each member of the family.

The same pattern is found at the level of society. A society is the reflection of its members and vice versa. Every individual's health affects the global health; conversely the troubles and the imbalances of society affect the health of families and individuals. Thus, while taking care of the problems and sicknesses of society, one takes care of all individuals in that society at the same time. And every individual who decides to take care of themselves, not only at the level of their physical sickness but especially on the emotional, mental and spiritual levels, will be a source of health for the whole society.

To carry this still further, let's consider human beings as a part of the ecosystem of the planet. And here, again, one finds the phenomenon of the mirror, or perhaps of the hologram. The whole is in the image of each of its elements and, at the same time, is reflected in each of its elements. When we pollute the planet, the air, the water, the soil, we pollute ourselves, because we are nourished by the air, water and products that grow in the soil. While exploiting and wasting the mineral and energetic resources of the earth, we waste and lose our own mineral and energetic resources. By destroying life on the planet by deforestation, pollution, wars... we destroy our own vital force and our immune system. By ignoring the true nature of the planet – as a wise and conscious living being – we ignore our real nature, our essential wisdom and the infinite potentialities of our multi-dimensional being. The health of the planet is the key to our

own health, and our own health the solution to the health of the planet.

And this solution is not insignificant or utopian, it is real and accessible to each of us now. Although we seem helpless before the powers that manipulate society and do not care about the world's health, we do have the choice and the power to take care of our own health, our own well-being, for the well-being of others and the planet.

Golf

The game of golf was born in Scotland, more than one thousand years ago. On long pastures of thick grass that spread along the coasts, between sand dunes and banks of heather, shepherds had fun and passed the time by using long sticks to hit round stones with into rabbit burrows. The winner was the player who put his stone into the hole with the minimum of strokes.

Even though I like this legend, it is unlikely that it is true, because the first historical document that mentions golf dates from the third century before Christ. Golf originated in China. This old game, the *qiwan*, was commonly practiced at the imperial court during the Tang and Sung Dynasties, as paintings from that time show. The players used canes of bamboo with heads made of hard wood, and wooden balls. Like a lot of other inventions that Westerners wrongly attribute to themselves, golf probably arrived in Europe thanks to the travelling merchants of the Middle Ages.

If the form and principles of golf haven't changed since its origins, modern technology has completely transformed the material used by a golfer, especially in the last few decades. The stones and wooden balls have been replaced by balls formed of a synthetic shell, hard but elastic, pressed around a core of titanium. The sticks or canes have become clubs, with metallic heads mounted on metal, graphite or light alloy shafts. These are very sophisticated instruments that enable one to hit balls very far, with great precision. Nowadays, good players can hit balls for more than three hundred yards.

A modern golf course is comprised of nine or eighteen holes of various lengths. The shortest hole can measure less than a hundred yards, whereas the longest hole can be more than six hundred yards long. Scottish-style courses, which are more traditional, endeavour to preserve the natural lie of the land. American-style courses, on the contrary, are often constructed completely artificially with the help of bulldozers. Thus golf courses are created in the middle of forests or in desert regions. Around the city of Phoenix, in Arizona, there are more than a hundred golf courses constructed in the middle of the desert and artificially watered.

On each of the holes of a course, a strip of well cut lawn – called a ‘fairway’ – spreads from a hillock – called a ‘tee’ – to an area of very finely mown lawn – called a ‘green’. On the green one makes the ball roll towards a hole in the ground in which there is a flag. Because of its Anglo-Saxon origins, even in France the terminology of golf remains in the English language. In Quebec, however, all English terms have been translated literally into French. Thus, on the Quebec courses, the green is called *le vert*. On most holes, between the tee and the green, as well as on every side of the fairway, obstacles threaten the player whose shots are not precise enough. These can be lakes, rivers or arms of the sea, bunkers – pits full of sand – trees, woods, groves, or ‘rough’ – rough land or wilderness covered with tall herbs, bramble, heather, or thick vegetation... where it is difficult to find one’s ball – and land considered out of bounds, where one doesn’t have the right to play.

The game of golf is governed by a whole set of rules, established and published by The Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews in Scotland, considered as the Mecca of golf. These rules govern behaviour, or etiquette, on a golf course the system of scoring, and the different penalties that

a player incurs in different circumstances. The rules also indicate what should be done in a whole set of particular circumstances, for example, if the ball is perched on the top of a tree or if it is taken away by a wild animal.

One of the peculiarities of golf is that every shot – every time the player hits the ball – counts for a point, whether it is a long shot of three hundred yards or a small shot of five centimetres, just enough to make the ball fall into the hole. The ideal score, named ‘par’, is of three strokes on short holes, four strokes on middle length holes or five strokes on long holes. Although every player’s goal is to play to par, the score, on each hole, may often be greater than par by one or several strokes. But it is also sometimes lower than par. Scores of one, two or three strokes under par are called birdy, eagle and albatross, respectively. Every player receives a handicap, or index, that indicates the number of strokes above or below par that constitutes their average score. The handicap is adjusted according to the results of every competition. This system allows players of different abilities to play in competition together. The least good player receives a number of supplementary strokes equal to the difference in handicaps.

Another peculiarity of golf is that, even when one plays a round or in competition with other players, one plays, in fact, against oneself, against one’s own score. The player is alone in front of his ball, and completely in control, it seems, of the place where it should go. The other players don’t directly or physically influence his game or his score, as for example in tennis where a player is penalised by his adversary’s good shots. A player who misses a shot in golf is the only person responsible, and he can blame only himself. The game is a sad opportunity to realise that one is not really master of one’s own body and movements.

When they play badly, some players get so angry at themselves that they insult themselves, break their clubs, or become very unpleasant to their partners. These reactions, of course, will only further deteriorate the quality of their game, decrease their concentration and increase their bad mood. Another danger is for players to become seduced by their beautiful shots and to believe that they have finally become the champion of their dreams. This kind of pride also disrupts concentration and the bad shots that generally follow set the record straight again.

A most important virtue for a golfer is equanimity, knowing how to remain calm, concentrated and imperturbable, whether the shot is good or bad. In daily life, equanimity is a beneficial virtue, but very difficult to practice. It is the same on the golf course. One finds in golf most of the situations and difficulties that one meets in every day life, in relationships with the other players, with the environment and especially with oneself. Golf is thus often compared to spiritual practice. Some sages, by the way, such as Krishnamurti and Stephen Jourdain, were fine golfers. It is also said that one who practices golf lives through the whole range of human emotions, from ecstasy after a perfect shot, to bitter frustration when several balls in a row are lost in a lake or in the woods.

It seems that most people who play golf at least once are hooked on the game for life. And it is then difficult to stop playing. As golf is a very difficult sport, the hope of improvement is always present and perfection is never acquired. Perhaps this is why golf is the most practiced sport in the world. Even though one can play golf until an advanced age, it is not particularly a sport for the old. The young can learn it much more easily. Golf is also a good way to remain in good health and to improve one's physical condition. To play golf is to walk in nature for four hours

while covering about six kilometres on foot. Those who today play with electric carts lose one of the great benefits of golf, the pleasure of the walk.

Golf is a difficult sport because the movement of golf, the swing, is especially complex. It is difficult for us to register it in our muscular memory and to reproduce it regularly, unless one has learned it while very young. In fact, it is not a natural movement. On the contrary, the natural inclination would be to hit the ball as hard as possible, with what is called the warrior or hunter instinct. As this instinct is a defence and survival instinct, it is not possible to get rid of it completely. This is the movement that takes over when the player is distracted, upset or irritated, or trying to hit very hard to succeed in a particularly long shot. And it is this instinctive movement that causes missed shots and the accompanying misery. This happens even to the biggest champions, but of course less often than to the Sunday player.

Without going into detail, a good swing consists, for the right-handed, of a pull with the left side rather than a push with the right, a little like a backhand shot in tennis. With the warrior's instinct, it is the right side, the stronger, that dominates. The speed of the head of the club at the time of impact with the ball – which can reach more than a hundred kilometres per hour – produces the length of the shot. The trajectory of the club head and the orientation of the club face at impact give it its precision. These are the three ingredients of a good golf shot.

According to my friend Peter Andraes, author of the book *The Secret of the Inner Swing*, the secret of golf is, as the title suggests, the inner swing, a spiral of energy that takes birth in the abdomen. This spiral of energy generates a centrifugal force that gives power and speed to the outer swing. The subtle energy rotation inside the body is a form of Qi

Gong that has been practiced for millennia by Taoist adepts. It enables not only the mastery of the golf swing, but also the rotation of the universe.

It should also be noted that small shots from the green or its immediate surroundings require a particular technique, performed with precision and sensitivity. As these short shots constitute about half of the strokes, even though they are less spectacular, they are just as important as the long shots for a good score.

Golf is a sport that is never boring or monotonous, because every course is different, every hole is different and every shot is different. The conditions of the ground: dry, muddy, wet, frozen; those of the weather: hot, cold, windy, or rainy, as well as the differences in the environment and the seasons, create ever changing conditions.

As with all beings who spend their life looking for happiness and avoiding suffering, the golfer endeavours to find once more the bliss of a sublime shot and to avoid the frustration of a bad shot. It is a quest without end... This is why so many golfers reincarnate, life after life, for centuries, to devote themselves with passion to their favourite sport.

The New Paradigm

When one thinks about the advent of a new society, of a better world, it is easy to make a list of the things that presently function badly or create problems and suffering; all the things that one would like to change. It is a little more difficult to come up with better solutions. But the most difficult aspect seems to me to envision how the transition can take place from the present world to a better world. One of the options, of course, is the massive destruction of our infrastructures and the death of a large part of the population, caused by huge natural disasters or disasters provoked by human beings. Or a third world war that would create a space for the reconstruction of a new type of civilisation. These solutions are of course not desirable. A progressive and smooth transformation would be preferable.

If fundamental change seems unlikely in the near future – in the present state of the world – this is especially so because the forces that presently have power in the world don't want change. They want to retain their power and their wealth. They even would prefer to increase these and to spread their control over the whole world. The new paradigm is contradictory to their interests and they will do everything to prevent its development, intensifying the manipulation and control of individuals by education, the media, soporific chemical substances added to food, medicines and, especially, by fear. Thus, there is very little chance of change on that front.

The only solution that seems possible is a massive change, a quantum leap on the level of consciousness of the popula-

tion, a general awakening. This event could appear very quickly, over the course of a few weeks or months. It seems, however, that in order to bring it about it is necessary for the state of chaos of the world to reach a critical threshold, a level of disorder that is no longer acceptable to the fundamental intelligence of the universe, hence effecting the spontaneous passage to a new order. Is the present situation catastrophic enough? Or do we need an intensification of terrorism, whether unauthorised and unacceptable, or official and justified, to reach this threshold?

If the level of consciousness of humanity changes, our vision of the world and ourselves will clearly show us that we are not only part of the whole, we are indeed this whole; that the infinite abundance of the universe is at our disposal; that we have the power to co-create a new society based on peace, love and harmony; and that our existence is not limited to the material world that we perceive with our senses, nor to the illusory temporal length of our incarnation. We will then realise our true nature, and be liberated from the greed and the violence that seem necessary for us to survive in the world as we perceive it now, based on suffering, lack, fear and competition.

If all beings are transformed by this change of consciousness, our leaders will be also. They will then give way to those who are wiser than them and instead of pursuing their personal selfish interests, they will make appropriate decisions for the good of all. All resources and the technology to create a better world, where none will go hungry, where wealth will be distributed fairly, where violence and fear will be replaced by joy and love, already exist. Only the decision to put them into play are missing. This vision may seem utopian today, but it could be realised much earlier than one would dare to imagine. This is what we should focus on if

we want it to manifest. We have the power to do it, let's use that power now!

Homeopathy

I used homeopathy for a long time, without knowing, however, how it functioned! I have discovered lately that there exists abundant literature on this topic in France. I read two small books for background information, and then I found a particularly clear explanation in the book by Thorwald Dethlefsen, *The Challenge of Fate*.

I learned that homeopathy had been invented in the beginning of the nineteenth century by Samuel Hahnemann (1755-1843), according to the principle of likeness, “*similia similibus curantur*” (the similar is healed by the similar), which had already been expressed in antiquity by Hippocrates. Allopathic medicine, on the other hand, is based on the principle of opposites.

Hahnemann discovered by experiment that if a substance produces a certain symptom in the body, one can use this same substance to treat an illness that provokes the same symptom. A substance that is a poison becomes a remedy against this same poison when it is taken in a very small quantity. This is what one means when one speaks of homeopathic doses.

Homeopathic remedies are manufactured from basic substances, called ‘mother tinctures’, which consist of extracts from minerals, plants or animals, of which there exists a very large variety. The secret of homeopathy is that the basic substance is diluted. The most commonly used process of dilution, called the Hahnemannian dilution, consists of taking one part of the mother tincture and diluting it in one hundred parts of water or alcohol, while shaking the mixture

vigorously in a small bottle. This is the first dilution, named 1CH. Next, one takes a part of this new solution and dilutes it again in one hundred parts of water or alcohol. One pours the mixture into a new bottle that one shakes vigorously in turn, to get the second dilution, 2CH. This process is continued to get dilutions of 20CH or 30CH.

What is astonishing is that from the tenth dilution onward there isn't a single molecule of the mother tincture left in the bottle. Thus the mother tincture, which is often a poison if it is taken in a strong dose – as in the case of arsenic or mercury – cannot have any harmful chemical effect on the body. However, the molecular information of the mother tincture has been transmitted to the molecules of the solvent. It is this information that the molecules of our body are going to use to bring about their own recovery. It seems also that the greater the dilution, the more powerful the effect of the remedy and the more it acts at a deep and at the same time subtle level. Thus, low dilutions act especially on the physical level, whereas high dilutions act on the spiritual level.

It is interesting to note that France is currently the country where homeopathy is most popular, used by some ten thousand physicians and more than forty percent of the population. It is also well known in the rest of Europe, but still not widespread in other parts of the world.

Homeopathy is much less harmful to the organism than the chemical drugs of allopathic medicine. Although homeopathic treatment can appear, in some cases, slower than allopathic treatments, this is because it doesn't act on the symptoms, but directly on the information that constitutes the deep cause of the illness. It is a healthy, efficient and inexpensive way of treating oneself.

The Sound of Silence

Silence has always been one of my deepest spiritual experiences, in particular during meditation retreats: to remain for ten, fifteen days or more, without speaking, and also without writing and without reading. To speak provokes strong mental and emotional turbulence. In silence, this turbulence subsides, as the waves on the surface of a lake; and the mind calms itself, becomes still. To find inner silence is one of the great benefits of meditation.

In worldly life, the mind is always active, thoughts and emotions constantly follow each other twenty-four hours out of twenty-four. The consciousness of dreams follows the consciousness of wakefulness. The silence from thoughts is peace, void, rest. To speak requires a lot of energy. In silence, we can use this energy for concentration and contemplation; then we only need a few hours of sleep. The artist uses the energy of silence to create. This energy fortifies and regenerates our body and our mind. It not only rests our mind, but all of our cells.

When one comes out of ten days of silence, one realises the stressful influence of noise, as when one comes back to the city after a stay in the mountains, in the countryside or at the sea. To live in a calm and silent place, especially at night, is a great privilege, and has a very beneficial effect on our physical and mental health. But the greatest benefit is inner silence. It is independent of outer silence. It is a state that one cultivates, in particular through meditation. It enables one, even in the middle of the biggest tumult, to return to a haven of silence and peace inside one's heart.

The biggest tumult is often not the outer noise, but our own thoughts. It is their unceasing chatter that it is necessary to learn to quiet. In the void that then occurs, one hears the sound of silence, the music of the angels, an ethereal vibration that comes from another dimension. It is the sound of our essence, of our soul, of our multi-dimensional being. Silence is the link that allows us to remember – to find again – who we are, and to rejoin our true abode...

Science and Spirituality

My beliefs are founded more on spiritual revelations and experiences than on science. I don't completely trust scientific "facts", because they change every time a new fact is discovered. Science is based, above all, on material reality and logical thought. As it only concerns a very small part of reality, the material world, science only knows a very small part of the truth. Every time that science reaches a new level of reality, one gets the impression that it comes closer to spirituality, that it proves what was already known by ancient wisdom. In our materialistic society, belief in the spiritual, the invisible, is poorly thought of without scientific proof.

Scientific proof is demonstrated by the repeated observation of an experience, and explained by reason, logic and mathematics. But sages, who know by their own experience, don't need any proof. When they discover that fire burns if they touch it, they don't need to repeat the experience ten times, nor plunge themselves into logical reasoning for proof.

It should be noted, however, that spirituality doesn't try to make new discoveries to come closer to science. If science succeeds in unveiling all levels of reality, what will be revealed is that which the sages have known for millennia. Scientists won't have anything to prove anymore and science will merge with spirituality. It will have become obsolete.

Science, with of its deformed view of reality, was and still is one of the main causes for the erroneous views and beliefs of modern society, as well as of the destruction, pollution and sickness of our planet. It has transformed the majority

of human beings into manipulated robots, whose main aspiration is to work to earn money: money that enriches the manipulators. Science is attractive to the mind; this is why it functions so well. Like technology and the consumer society, it satisfies human greed.

Science is in the pay of economic and political power; it must respond to its appetites and its ambitions. The scientists of the Middle Ages who didn't comply with the views and the interests of the Church were burnt at the stake or excommunicated. Scientists of today whose research opposes the interests of the forces in power are deprived of funds, and if they persist, they end up in jail or are victims of regrettable accidents. To be politically correct, science must confirm the mechanistic view of the world and of a human being, in order to justify a society that defends technological and industrial progress, economic growth and allopathic medicine.

Even though we may be fascinated by the scientific discoveries of today, and the technology that comes from them, we do need to realise that, although they have given us greater physical comfort and an abundance of material goods, they haven't brought peace, happiness or love into the world. People are, on the contrary, increasingly more sick, stressed and desperate. They can't find any meaning or any goal for their painful existence on earth in the views proposed by science.

The spiritual vision of a living and unified universe, in which every individual part has a role and the power to participate in the co-creation of the whole, has quite another dimension to that of the materialistic and mechanistic view that maintains the individual in a state of torpor and ignorance, preventing the discovery of one's true nature and the true nature of the universe. The change of consciousness that is needed for the passage from the materialistic para-

digm to the spiritual paradigm requires a complete transformation of all the structures of our society and first of all of the education system.

This transformation seems unlikely, because the present powers making the decisions are still firmly anchored in their old beliefs, and even if they were capable of making the appropriate decisions, it would still be another twenty years before we would see a new generation raised according to new principles. And the present world, if it doesn't accept the necessity of change, is at risk of disappearing within the next twenty years.

It is, therefore, time to consider another process, a mutation of the consciousness of humanity, generated by the revolutionary thought-forms of a minority that will have reached a critical mass. Then, smoothly and spontaneously, the structures of society will change, because the old structures will no longer be appropriate to the new paradigm.

Simplicity

Why are our lives so complicated? Why are the structures of our societies so complicated? Yet life is so simple. Nature functions by itself, without effort, and without our intervention. The stars follow their orbits, the sun rises and sets every day on earth, the rain falls, the wind blows, the rivers flow towards the sea, the plants grow, the animals are born, live and die... Why are humans the only ones who make life so complicated for themselves?

Because they don't accept things as they are. Nature offers human beings marvellous living conditions, but they are not satisfied with them. They want to control nature and to make it function according to their ideas. And it is here that things become complicated. Human beings create desires, needs, expectations for themselves that go in opposition to the laws of nature. They don't understand that they are part of nature, of a harmonious whole, and that this whole functions perfectly without their intervention. It gives them, without reservation, everything they need to live in peace, joy and harmony, without stress, without effort and without conflict.

From the moment when human beings want to oppose nature, and at the same time their own nature, things become very complicated and very difficult. Considerable effort is needed, and brings with it continuous struggle and bitter suffering. It is like making the water of a river go upstream, instead of letting the current flow freely. In the end, all these efforts only lead to failure and frustration, because nature doesn't have any intention of changing its course to satisfy

human whims. It will always have the last word, will set the record straight again at the required time, and will call to order or annihilate its dissident elements.

We have arrived at a stage where the complications of the world are so coercive – and the suffering that results from them for the majority of the inhabitants of this planet so intense – that there is an imminent necessity for an important change. People realise that the institutions that control society, even though they have become very sophisticated and pretend to offer them everything they need to be happy, only actually increase their stress, their problems, their worries and their suffering. No longer do these institutions respond to their essential needs.

People are exhausted by all the laws, rules and obligations that they must follow. They feel that they are completely alienated from freedom, and are merely slaves of a system in which they have no jurisdiction. Increasing numbers of people are looking for a simpler life, away from obligations, frantic work, administrative harassments and the constant aggressiveness of the media, advertisements and forced consumption. They want to leave the agitation and the pollution of the cities and live in the countryside, a simple life in tune with the rhythm of nature.

Simplicity can also be found in meditation or any form of spiritual practice. Let's understand that our true nature is simplicity, and that all the complications that overwhelm us are only of our own making, are illusions with which we identify. Because we ignore our true nature, we think that we are isolated entities, that we must work to earn our part of the universal abundance and struggle to survive and to protect our possessions.

We are constantly seeking and elaborating upon complex methods to satisfy our greed, such as the manufacture of a

proliferation of expensive and useless material goods. We create destructive armaments to fight the enemies created by our attachment to these material goods and our fear of losing them. These attitudes make our existence extremely complicated. Life becomes a constant source of frustration, anxiety and suffering.

Let's stop coveting the panoply of useless toys that we accumulate. Let's give up controlling things and beings, thinking that power will solve our problems. Let's stop worrying about the future and amassing arms to defend ourselves. Then we will find simplicity, peace and harmony. Let's accept things as they are, let's be content with what we have and let's express our gratitude for everything that nature offers us.

We are part of a harmonious whole that functions thanks to the energy of love and generosity. We don't need to make any effort or devise complicated stratagems to receive universal abundance. It is due to us if we learn to create, spontaneously and without premeditation, our own reality for the well-being and prosperity of all. This is true simplicity, the simplicity of non-action, or *wu wei*. The Tao doesn't do anything, and yet nothing is left incomplete...

Good and Evil

Our society believes that to create good, it is necessary to fight evil; to solve problems, it is necessary to look for those who are guilty and annihilate them. Unfortunately this belief, which has been applied since ancient times, doesn't work. On the contrary, problems increase and good seems more and more difficult to find. Our society uses violence as a means to an end; but violence only creates more problems and evil. Thus we witness an escalation of violence, which does not solve anything, but actually increases the difficulties and the suffering.

This belief is based on erroneous ideas. First, the idea that the causes of problems – and of evil – are outside us, and that if we destroy an outside cause, we will not be harmed in the process. But the idea of outside and inside is an illusion. There is only one whole. And it includes all phenomena – including ourselves – as well as the causes of all phenomena. When one destroys the causes, one destroys a part of the whole, and a part of ourselves.

The other erroneous idea is that the causes are material and that one can fight them with material means. The belief that everything is material is also an illusion. The material world is only a small part of all phenomena. It seems important to us, because it is the only one that we perceive with our own senses. The material symptoms that we know are not the true causes. These causes are not material. Thus to fight the symptoms with material means has no effect on their causes, which are located on another level. The belief that evil is created by outside enemies that one can fight with

material means is found on the individual level as well as on the social or political level.

For our physical body, the problems are illnesses, and the enemies are viruses, infections, tumours. One fights these enemies with chemical drugs and operations. These violent means don't treat the true causes of the illnesses, which are metaphysical, but in fact create new ones and further weaken the body and its immune system. Consequently, in modern society, people are increasingly sick.

The material solution to fighting social problems is to establish laws that regulate and control the behaviour of individuals, and to prosecute and to condemn the enemies of society, those who don't respect the law. The causes of social disorders are not however those people who break the law. They are located on another level. Society has created an enormous police and judicial infrastructure to enforce the law; the number of lawsuits and jails constantly increases. The number of laws are also continually increasing, so that individuals are more and more stressed by the threat of legal action and punishment. And the true causes of social disorders and sicknesses similarly are on the increase.

Our solution to political conflicts and problems is to make war, whether it is military, religious, psychological or economic, and to manipulate groups and individuals so that they participate in these wars and support them. But as the causes of political problems are not the countries, the minorities or the individuals who create the conflicts, wars only make the problems worse and increase their number, at the same time multiplying social and health problems.

The true causes of conflicts, individual and collective, are the negative emotions that dwell in the human heart and manifest at the collective level. The most important of these are greed and fear, which generate a whole range of harmful

emotions such as hatred, anger, jealousy, envy, injustice, pride, despair... These are the underlying causes of violence, of conflicts, of delinquency, of lies, of dishonesty, as well as of all health problems. The most destitute have greed for freedom and essential needs, and fear of poverty, tyranny and death. The most privileged have greed and attachment for wealth and power, and fear of their loss.

One cannot treat these causes with chemical drugs, nor with laws, nor with wars. But one can replace them with positive emotions, such as love, peace, contentment, truth, generosity, joy, hope, faith, justice... When these positive feelings replace the negative emotions in the human heart, they manifest at the collective level and heal health problems, social unrest and political conflicts. Then individual, social and political health will reign on a world level. In order for good to replace evil in the world, it is necessary to start with replacing them in every individual's heart. For this to succeed it is not a matter of fighting evil and negative emotions, but merely of cultivating good and positive emotions. When these become settled in the heart, there is no longer room for negative emotions, which dissolve and disappear. As the darkness disappears when one puts on the light.

A way to create light is to establish a better balance of resources, rights and freedom between all people and all nations of the earth. The suffering, the hunger and the oppression that exist in the poor countries of the Third World are not favourable conditions for the development of positive virtues. But in rich countries, the stress, the anxiety and the attachment to material goods created by capitalistic societies are no better. Even though the symptoms and apparent causes are different, the roots are the same. The only remedy is love, not violence. The only enemy is oneself, not one's neighbour.

The Pages

An exercise proposed by Julia Cameron in her book *The Artist's Way* is to write three pages every morning. She calls them 'the morning pages'. The goal of this exercise is to express all things that are within us and that we tend to repress. The pages are not an exercise in style or literary creation, nor the writing of a diary, although they can on occasion be, or become, one or the other. But this is not their goal. The pages should not be written for a future or potential reader. No one will read them, not even you. Don't reread as you write. Julia recommends not rereading them for at least five weeks. This exercise is not made to satisfy our ego, but, on the contrary, to purge it and to purify it of its unconscious pollutions.

Write without preconceived ideas and without premeditation. Put pen to paper and begin to write whatever, what thoughts pass through your mind, even though they don't make any sense, are stupid, nasty, incoherent, clumsy... And continue to write, if possible without stopping until the end of the three pages. You will see that you have rhythms that correspond to the different levels of your subconscious. Because these pages act on the subconscious in order to bring up to the conscious the repressed impressions buried there. What will come out in the first page are surface impressions. Suddenly there is a kind of block. Then it is necessary to reach a deeper level to be able to continue and, by the third page, really important things begin to come out. This is why the exercise loses much of its value if you write only one or two pages.

The pages are also a wonderful exercise for developing your creativity, for waking up the hidden artist that dozes in the depths of each of us. And this is not only for writers or poets. Because artistic inspiration also comes from our unconscious, and to create it is necessary to open the door that gives access to this gigantic reservoir of information and ideas. It doesn't only contain the experiences of this life, but also the memories of our previous lives, the collective unconscious of the whole of humanity, and the history, not only of our planet, but of the whole universe. The pages will enable you to get into direct contact with the divine source of wisdom and omniscience, and to receive all the information and ideas which you need at a required moment.

It is the process of writing the pages that counts, not the result, nor the beauty of your sentences. At a time when the telephone has often replaced written communication, these pages are an opportunity to once more discover the pleasure of writing, the contact of pen with paper. Therefore it is recommended to write the pages by hand, rather than type them on a keyboard. I use school notebooks. To write them in the morning is a good way to get rid of the residue of the past and to wake up the motivations of the future before beginning the day. Try the pages for a week. Who knows, you may get a taste for them. Or you may take up the lost vocation of poet or artist once more...

Taking up Arms

During our weekly meditation gatherings in Chiang Mai, our group leader Katharina, following her usual custom, asks us an existential question and invites us to draw a card from *The Secret Dakini Oracle* to guide us in our answer. Last night, it was 22 October 2001, the question was: “In the present situation, what can I do to preserve my inner peace and to help to establish peace in the world?” The card that I drew was “Taking up Arms”, card number 60, showing Vishnu, standing on the back of a turtle, wearing armour and holding various objects in his four hands. My first reaction was shock at the paradox. Is it necessary to take up arms, to fight, in order to establish peace? Is this not exactly what we try to avoid, “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth”, the escalation of violence, war that increases suffering instead of alleviating it?

I then realised that I had felt a warlike energy for the past couple of weeks. I had the impression that I could not remain passive any more, indifferent, apart from what happens in the world, but that, one way or the other, I had to act, to react, against the lies, the manipulation, the control... for freedom, truth, justice, peace... That I had to fight to defend what I am, to defend my own truth and my own inner peace. Even the buddhas, when in situations where they cannot exercise their compassion by peaceful means, manifest under wrathful forms to accomplish their task.

The important thing, when we choose wrath, to fight, war, when we decide to take up arms, is to truly perceive our motivation. If it is to defend personal interests, or those of a

small number of people at the expense of others, if it is out of greed and out of desire for power and control, or out of fear of losing our power, our possessions and our privileges, our motivation is not a good one. The fight will only produce suffering and chaos, and the peace that it will establish will be an artificial peace imposed by the control of a despotic power. But if our motivation is to make the truth appear, to create transparency, to bring more equality to the world, a more just sharing of our resources, to fight against control, tyranny, manipulation, then peace and harmony will establish themselves naturally, and joy and love will replace fear and sadness.

Curiously, two months later, on 21 December, I drew the same card again. This time the question was: “What do I have to let go to find inner peace and to help to establish peace in the world?” I understood that to take up arms – preferably in the figurative – can be, in some cases, an appropriate measure, but always for a particular purpose and for a limited period of time.

Light Structures

Extra-sensory art is a form of art in which artworks are not perceptible by our ordinary senses of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting. They are nevertheless perceptible by the senses we call intuition, the sixth sense or the third eye, as far as these senses are developed. Extra-sensory artworks are either composed of subtle forms made of energy, waves or vibrations situated outside of the visible or audible spectrums, like auras or celestial music, or are beyond all form, like space and silence.

We will talk here about a particular type of extra-sensory art: light structures. These structures are composed of pillars, or vertical beams, of light or energy linking heaven to earth. These pillars are deeply rooted in the heart of earth and rise high into the sky in order to connect to the source of cosmic energy. Each pillar has its own dimension, a specific colour, and a particular sound vibration. The set of pillars that forms a light structure follows a design that represents preferably a spiritual symbol or archetype, like a mandala, a cross, a star or another sacred symbol.

The light of these pillars is composed of a particular form of energy, which has healing and spiritual properties. Appropriate devices can measure its intensity. It is similar to the healing energy used in energetic healing techniques such as Reiki, and also to energy emanating from sacred objects and holy places. These light structures are thus, at the same time, artworks, therapeutic tools and sacred symbols. And the installation of these structures is a creative act, a healing session and a sacred ceremony.

These light structures can be installed in any location, in a house, office, commercial space or public place, inside or outside a building. The design of the structure will depend on the configuration and the situation of the location, the needs and spiritual aspirations of the owners or users, the inspiration and vision of the artist, as well as on channelled information received during the installation or its preparation.

The benefits that we can expect from the installation of a light structure are many. During the installation, the space will be purified by an abundant supply of cosmic energy. The installation process will also bless the place and transform it into a sacred space, creating in it an atmosphere of beauty and harmony, implanting a source of healing energy beneficial to all inhabitants and visitors, and establishing the power of love, peace and wisdom. The light structure will also offer protection against human and non-human dangers and allow angels, guides and other benevolent entities to use the pillars to access the place and ghosts and malevolent spirits to escape from it.

These effects are perceptible during and after the installation by receptive persons.

Manipulation through Suffering

According to the *Robert Dictionary*, the definition of suffering is “the fact of enduring something painful or unpleasant, physical or moral pains”. Suffering is part of the human condition. But to know if it is good, as some religions ask us to believe, or if it is necessary or really unavoidable, are questions that we all ask ourselves at some time or another.

The Buddha, in his first teaching of the Four Noble Truths, said that suffering exists, that it has causes – which are the three poisons: greed, hatred and ignorance – and that it has an end, which can be reached by the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path. The end of suffering is awakening, or enlightenment. An awakened being, a buddha, doesn’t suffer anymore, not at all and never again. This doesn’t mean that the enlightened being doesn’t have physical pain, for according to the Four Noble Truths, the meaning of suffering, or *dukkha*, is dissatisfaction with existence and experiences. This is moral suffering, created by the mind. Physical pain is therefore not suffering when we don’t react to it adversely, and when we understand its meaning and its utility.

Physical pains are alarm signals that warn us of an imbalance, danger or faulty functioning of a part of our body, in order that we can take necessary measures to avoid or treat it. It is like the luminous signal that comes up on the control panel of a car to warn us that our oil is low, that a door is not properly closed or that the brakes are not functioning

properly. If we accept this signal, we will not suffer at the psychological level.

Suffering, in human society, is not limited to our own illnesses and sicknesses. It is frequently provoked by outside causes. This is the case for physical suffering such as hunger, lack of sleep, torture, sexual abuse, violence... and for moral suffering such as betrayal, rejection, abandonment, injustice, fear, poverty, humiliation, lack of love... When suffering is unacceptable to the emotional, mental or spiritual state of development of a person, they create psychic traumas, physiological imbalances and personality disorders. People who suffer from these traumas become easily susceptible to suggestion and manipulation.

The effect of traumatic suffering is much more powerful on the psyche of children, who are often conditioned for life by their childhood wounds unless they follow appropriate therapeutic treatment to heal themselves and to recover their freedom.

When harmful treatment or wounds are severe, a person blocks them out, which means that they have erased them from conscious memory. They remain engraved, however, in the unconscious and can be awakened by similar triggers. The people who suffer from this syndrome, called 'personality dissociation', can be directed by mental control to perform acts that they subsequently forget. They are used nowadays in armies, in special commando units, in terrorist networks, as well as in sexual slavery.

On a less serious level, it can be seen that a large part of the population allows itself to be easily manipulated by the forces in power. Most people have been conditioned by the suffering they endured in their daily life from childhood on, like stress, anxiety, dissatisfaction, violence, poverty and war. Fear, insecurity, hatred and greed that are fostered daily by

the media and guilt that is taught in religions are maintaining the population in a state of latent suffering.

The manipulation of the masses by suffering is nothing new, it has been used by those in power since ancient times. It is especially strong in our time without, however, most people realising this. In order to free ourselves from this manipulation, the first step is to recognise that we suffer and that we are manipulated. Then the process of liberation can begin. To change the world, we must first free ourselves from its grip, and consequently start waking up to what is really happening. Innumerable thundering alarm clocks are ringing everywhere at this moment throughout the world, and yet most people don't hear them. Will an atomic bomb be necessary to wake them up?

Nature

Let us never forget that we are part of nature. We are part of a whole that contains the whole universe, with its galaxies, its stars, its suns, its planets. We are also part of the earth, with its minerals, its plants and its animals. Even though for centuries human beings have endeavoured to control, to exploit, to destroy, and to pollute nature at a steadily increasing rate, nature is always there, impassive, and doesn't stop accomplishing its tasks, assuring the balance of the universe and the preservation of life.

Human beings have succeeded in annihilating thousands of living species, in ruining the harmony and the beauty of a large part of the planet, and in sending quantities of destructive objects and harmful waves into space. They may succeed in destroying their own species, but they won't manage to destroy the universe, because a human being is only a small microbe, though certainly malevolent, on a small planet lost in the middle of a small galaxy... If human beings don't understand that they are part of nature and that while destroying nature they destroy themselves, if they don't change their attitude in order to regain harmony with nature, one day nature will take back its rights. Nature will have the last word; it is more powerful than their greedy and aggressive egos.

To regain harmony with nature and live in synergy rather than in opposition to it, it is good to plunge oneself into nature as often as possible. Best, of course, is to go for a walk in the mountains, in the forest, on a beach. But, for those who live in a city, a park or a garden is better than

nothing. When we are in nature, let's not just walk, run or pedal while continuing to live in the thoughts of our daily worries, but let's observe, let's perceive nature with all our senses, let's see its beauty, its infinite variety, let's listen to its noises and its songs, let's inhale its odours, let's taste its flavours, and let's feel the breezes, the waves, the sand and the grass, the weather and the temperature, with our body. Let's open ourselves to nature and let's feel that we are part of it, that we are inseparable, even though the conditioning of our society tries to part us from it. Let's discover its strength and its infinite power – which we also possess, even though technology tries to make us forget this – and its beauty – even though we try to replace it with virtual images.

Every time that we are in communion with nature, we regain our true power and the contact with our essence. Let's give nature our support again so that it takes back its rights. Together we can create the harmony, the beauty and the happiness we all need to live in peace. And we can participate in the recovery of our planet that is presently quite sick.

Proof

What is proof? According to the *Robert Dictionary*, it is “what serves to establish that something is true”. Why, in our dimension, in our state of consciousness, do we need proof? Because we don’t know what is true. We don’t know the truth; it is hidden from us. We are in ignorance of the true nature of reality.

Every day, hundreds of pieces of information reach us through our senses. For most of us, they are the only contact that we have with the outside world, and even with our inner world. Up to what point can we trust, can we believe the messages of our senses, sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell? Everything, it seems, conspires to make us believe that the information that our senses give us corresponds to what we know, to what we think we know, to our beliefs and our habits.

But what happens when they give us a new, unusual message, that shatters our knowledge and our beliefs? For example, if a spaceship lands in my garden and small green beings descend from it – something that is impossible in the normal conditions of my existence – what do I do? I need proof that confirms what my eyes see, that proves to me it is not a mirage or an illusion. I run into the house to get a camera, but when I come back to the garden, the ship and its passengers have disappeared. The grass is indeed a little crushed in several places, but is this proof? If I tell this story to my friends, are they going to believe me? The grass may have been crushed by the dog, or by the gardener’s tools...

If it is sometimes difficult to believe our own senses when they directly perceive an event, what about an event that is told to us by someone else, a second hand event, or an umpteenth hand event? Or news that one reads in the newspaper or sees on the television? Some people think that everything that is printed is true and that all images on a TV screen are true. Yet, these same people read novels and watch adventure movies, and don't think that they are true, unless "true story" is written in the script!

The news, advertisements, politician's speeches, are these truth? We are given proof, material proof, testimonies, therefore it is true! How many innocent people have been condemned by material proof and testimonies! "Proof only convinces the mind", said Pascal. It is the mind that believes the perceptions of the senses and the proof of their veracity. It is the mind that creates the illusory world in which we live, and for that it functions in perfect intelligence with our sense organs. It is the mind that constructs proof, and it is again the mind that holds us prisoners of the illusory world based on the proof that it has itself constructed. It is a vicious circle, as long as we remain at the level of the mind and its logic.

The material world in which we live functions on the basis of this logical mind. It is our logical mind that manipulates us and limits us to this material dimension, the Cartesian view of the world. This view permeates our institutions and the structures of our society: science, where repeatable experience is proof of a theoretical statement; allopathic medicine, where the analysis and the observation of a symptom is proof of the diagnosis of an illness; our system of education, where grades are proof of pupils' knowledge and intelligence; the economic system, where computerised statements are proof of our possessions and our debts; our social system, where all kind of papers and administrative

documents, legal deeds and laws, act as proof of our existence, of our position in society, of our relationships with others, of our rights and of our obligations...

But we are forced to recognise that the world governed by the logical mind with its dogmas, its laws and its demand for proof, is only one aspect, one part of reality. We also have a heart, feelings, sensations and emotions, intuitions and inspirations, and a spiritual essence that have nothing to do with dogmas, laws, beliefs, habits and their logic, or with material proof and legal deeds.

It is this part of ourselves – this divine part – that we must listen to, that we must trust, that we must believe, because it is only this that perceives the truth, the reality that is beyond the illusions. It is this only that can lift up the veil and take us to other dimensions, to other levels of consciousness. Our logical mind, as well as our material body and its limited sense organs, are only conceived to enable us to survive as best we can in the third dimension, in this world of suffering and frustration, made fleetingly pleasant by a limited range of pleasures and entertainments that allow us to temporarily escape our misery. We know this world well, but who would want to live in it until the end of eternity?

Meditation

Meditation is probably the best thing that we can do, not only in order to find peace, harmony and happiness in our life, but also to offer these qualities to others and to the world. Meditation is practiced, under one form or under another, in all religious and spiritual traditions. To my knowledge, however, it is the Buddha's teaching that reserves the largest place to meditation, and that gives the most precise and most complete instructions on its practice. This is why nowadays one frequently meets adepts of all religions and all spiritual paths in Buddhist monasteries and centres who come to learn and to practice meditation.

There are numerous techniques for meditation, and they differ according to different traditions. Their goals are, however, always the same: to find peace and harmony, and from there, truth and wisdom. Curiously, when one reads about the meditative experiences of the mystics, one sees that they all agree perfectly, whatever their tradition is, even though the terminology that they use to express themselves is often very different. The writings of Theresa of Avila or Master Eckhart, for example, describe exactly the same meditative absorption stages as the Buddha's sutras. This is because the human mind is always the same, whatever our beliefs, and always reacts in the same way as a result of the practice of meditation.

In Buddhism there are two main kinds of meditation, the meditation of calm, *samatha* in Pali, and the meditation of wisdom, *vipassana*. The meditation of calm has the goal of pacifying our restless mind; and the meditation of wisdom is

to realise the true nature of reality, which is at the same time our true nature. It is this realisation that allows us to throw off the veils of ignorance and attain awakening or enlightenment. But in order for the mind to gain access to this wisdom, it is first necessary to calm it, which means to stop the continual chatter and compulsive preoccupation with the small material problems of daily life.

Before beginning meditation, it is good to understand how it functions and acts on our being. Let's first of all remember that we consist of two parts, the body, our material part, and the mind, our immaterial part. These parts constitute what the Buddhists call the five aggregates. The material aggregate of the body; and the four immaterial aggregates of the mind: sensation, perception, mental formations and consciousness.

Ordinary people who don't meditate and don't follow a spiritual path are especially concerned with their bodies. For them, it is all that exists in this material world; therefore all their time and all their energy are dedicated to caring for their bodies, often excessively. They work all of their lives to have the means to take care of their bodies the best they can. It's comfort, it's appearance, it's security and it's well-being are a constant worry. They feed it with the best foods, dress it in elegant ways, accommodate it in a welcoming house where it is well sheltered and can rest; they wash it regularly, take care of it when it's sick, offer it the best beauty cares so that it remains young and always looks good, make it practice sport and exercise, offer it entertainments and vacations, and transport it in a car or in other comfortable means of transportation...

And the mind? People generally consider that the mind copes very well by itself and there is no need to worry about it or to take care of it. And yet it works twenty-four hours a day for the whole of our lives – it thinks during the day and

dreams during the night – without one moment of rest, without one day of vacation. One never thinks to wash it, to take care of it, or even to thank it or to grant it the least attention. One crams it with all kinds of unhealthy and indigestible foods that it is incapable of assimilating and that make it sick.

The mind feeds on impressions, that means on everything that we perceive with our senses. This is nourishment as indispensable for our survival as air, water and food. The mind only digests the impressions that it perceives in a conscious manner, but unconscious impressions stagnate in the unconscious in the form of psychic waste that disturbs us and prevents us from functioning normally. This waste is the cause of our negative emotions, our psychological troubles and our neuroses. Remember, it is the mind that directs our life, that reacts to outside circumstances with love and kindness, or with fear and aggression. It is the mind that inspires all our words and our actions; it is the mind that gives birth to our suffering and our frustrations, but also to our joys and our moments of happiness.

Only the mind can liberate us from our suffering and can bring us happiness. But, in order for this to take place, it is necessary to take care of the mind, it is necessary to respect it. Our mind is a marvellous tool that gives us access to knowledge, inspiration, creativity, wisdom, joy, love. The best way to take care of this precious jewel is meditation. It is the only means of giving the mind rest, of allowing it to stop thinking for some moments, and of getting rid of psychic waste.

Meditation enables us to reach a state of beatitude and peace that acts like a purifying balm for our wounds, and relieves stress, anxiety and restlessness. It also helps us to take back control of our mind. In our ordinary state, we usually function in automatic mode, which means that we

have very little control over the functioning of our mind, our thoughts, our reactions and our emotions. Most people are not even aware of this, and think they are masters of their mind. Until the day when they try to meditate... To control one's mind means to be capable of choosing one's thoughts, one's emotions and one's reactions.

If you want to try meditation and to understand its benefits, you will find quantities of books on meditation. In 1984, while I was living in Arizona, I bought a small book called *How to Meditate* by Lawrence Le Shan. It was my first spiritual book, and it changed my life. But to read a book on meditation is not sufficient, it is necessary to practice it if one wants to get benefits from it. Today there are meditation groups everywhere. There is even one in Musièges, the small village where I live in France. Buddhist centres and monasteries organise retreats regularly – of a weekend, ten days, or more – which is the best way to learn how to meditate.

Meditation is a very simple practice – which doesn't mean that it is easy! The point is to start. You can start immediately. Then the most important thing will be to continue, that means to practice every day, even if it is only for ten minutes... However, twenty minutes or half an hour a day will give you better results.

Choose a calm place and a moment of the day when you won't be disturbed. Switch off telephones. You can sit down on the floor, on a cushion – with crossed legs or in the lotus position – or on a chair. The important thing is to have the back straight. It is not recommended to sprawl in an arm-chair or to lie down. Once you have balanced your body, close your eyes – this is easier at the beginning, even though some meditations are practiced with the eyes open. Breathe three or four times deeply and try to loosen all the muscles of your body. Voilà, you are meditating!

Now choose an object of meditation on which you are going to focus your attention. One of the most commonly used is the breath. Simply observe the in-breath and out-breath, the air that comes in and goes out through the nose. You can also use your posture as the focus of your meditation, the weight of your body on the cushion or the chair, the sensation of heat in your heart, or a mantra. Very quickly – and in spite of yourself – some thoughts are going to arise in your mind and distract you from your object of meditation. This is normal! As soon as you realise that you are distracted, gently return to your object of meditation, to your breathing or your mantra, without being angry with yourself, frustrated or discouraged. There is no good or bad meditation, some days one is more able to concentrate than others, even when one has meditated for years. The simple fact of sitting down and dedicating time to taking care of your mind is the greatest benefit of meditation.

Every second of concentration, of absence of thoughts, is one second of purification and of inner peace. Each of these seconds has an immense impact, not only on our life and our own well-being, but it is a spark of light that generates peace, love and harmony in our surroundings, in the world and in the whole universe.

Crises and Transformation

If we observe the history of the universe and the functioning of nature, we notice that every important transformation in the process of evolution is preceded by a crisis, by a period of chaos. This crisis announces the impossibility of continuing within the existing conditions, and the necessity for change, for transformation, for a leap forward in the process of evolution. This could be what is currently happening on earth, while we wait for the radical transformation that ancient prophecies have announced for the year 2012.

What exactly will be the nature of this transformation? It is difficult to say, because what we call transformation is the passage of a known condition, that which we are living, to a completely new condition, which we don't yet know and that is not even really possible for us to imagine in our present mental structure, before the transformation. Some speak about the ascension of the planet and its inhabitants, others about the passage from the third dimension to the fourth or fifth dimension, still others about the return of the golden age or paradise on earth... It is quite difficult to visualise these events, especially when one considers the state of seemingly inextricable decadence of our present civilisation and the limited vision of most of our leaders.

Barbara Marx Hubbard, in her book *The Evolutionary Journey, a Personal Guide to a Positive Future*, gives a very good comparison of our inability to see a positive, or even a possible outcome while in the present situation.

Let's suppose that humanity is in the foetal state, at the end of the seventh month of gestation. What would scien-

tists predict in this situation? They would foresee that in one month, considering the rhythm of growth of the humanity-foetus, serious signs of famine and overpopulation would begin to manifest. In two months, there would not be sufficient resources and whole populations would die of hunger. In three months, the pollution, overpopulation and social revolutions would reach alarming proportions... On the basis of these forecasts, they would counsel us to stop our growth before it is too late, to redistribute the existing resources, to store, preserve, plan and accept our limitations.

As with most experts, our scientists in the foetal state would not be able to predict the new state – since it has never occurred before – just as a cell in the embryo is not able to foresee that in the ninth month birth is going to take place. Birth is near for us also, and the last years that we have to live before experiencing this liberation are going to be difficult.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is one of the most efficient practices for the creation of peace and happiness, on an individual level as well as on the level of society. The meaning of ‘to forgive’ according to the *Robert Dictionary* is: “to hold an offence as non-existent, to give up seeking revenge for; to forget the mistakes, the wrongs (of someone)”. Not to forgive is, therefore, to hold a grudge, resentment, hatred towards someone, to concoct plans for revenge, and especially not to forget the wrongs or the offences that one underwent.

Resentment and refusal to forgive are not limited to the wrongs that we have ourselves undergone in the past or in our childhood, but often concern offences undergone by our family, our clan, our race, our country... generations or centuries before our birth. A grudge is “the tenacious memory that one keeps of an offence, of a prejudice, accompanied by hostility and a desire for vengeance”. It is a particularly virulent form of hatred; and hatred is the most harmful negative emotion. It is especially harmful for the person that holds it, a lot more so than for the person against whom it is directed. It is as if a person has picked up a burning coal with a naked hand and wants to throw it at the person that caused the wrong. The hand holding the coal is burnt first, and the coal may not even hit the adversary when it is thrown.

In the same way, grudges consume the heart of those who harbour them. They harden their character, darken their mood, create aggressiveness in their relationships, and cause, in time, numerous physical illnesses – in particular cancer.

Grudges manifest in people who refuse to take responsibility for what happens to them in life and who always seek to project faults on others. These people take on the role of the victim, which allows them to control and to manipulate others by making them feel guilty. They become attached to this attitude and the power that it gives, and refuse all idea of forgiveness that would make an end to the pretexts that justify their abuses of power. These people live in constant suffering that slowly gnaws at them. They are generally so accustomed to behaving in this manner that they are not even conscious of it.

People often have resentments against themselves, against their own weaknesses and their own mistakes, and they are at the same time the victims of their mistakes and the target of their resentments. A particularly dramatic and uncomfortable situation, but very widespread in our modern society!

The process of forgiveness, in order for it to be efficient and definitive, is not simple nor easy. It may take some time, but it will bring a freedom that will radically change the lives of those who find the courage to do it. In order for forgiveness to be efficient, it must be complete and unconditional. One cannot forgive half-heartedly. One hears people say: "I forgave him, but I haven't forgotten!" These are the people who didn't forgive, because to really forgive is to forget!

The first stage of forgiveness, according to Lise Bourbeau, is to identify the emotions – there may be several of them – and to become conscious of the accusation that is held against us or against another person, and to understand how it affects us

It is then necessary to accept responsibility for our emotions and how we react to them. Actually, in every circumstance of life, we always have the choice of reacting with love, or with fear and aversion. It is useful to realise that the

attitude of others towards us is in general a mirror of our own attitude; and that one of our fears, often unconscious, is that someone will accuse us of the same thing of which we accuse others. And as long as we don't learn this lesson, we will continue to attract the same kind of people and situations into our lives.

When we have accepted our responsibility, we must accept the other person and abandon our grudge against her. In order to do this, it is very useful to try to put ourselves into her skin to understand and feel her intentions. The odds are strong that the other person is accusing us of the same thing and has the same fears as us.

The next stage is the most important. It consists of forgiving ourselves for having held a grudge against the other person. This stage needs to be firmly understood, because it is the one that enables us to throw a completely different light on the event and to be able to forgive. It is about taking responsibility for ourselves for our bad reaction towards what we considered, at the time, to be offensive. Thus we become the culprit, and it is ourselves that we must forgive! Let's remember that no event that happens to us is either good or bad in itself, it is only an experience. It is our reaction that judges it good or bad. It is necessary to realise, at that moment, that we all have fears, beliefs, weaknesses, limits... that make us suffer and react. Let's learn to accept ourselves as we are, and let's also accept others as they are.

The next step is to find the sincere desire to express forgiveness to the person concerned. Here it is necessary to prepare oneself mentally and to get used to the idea of asking for forgiveness for having judged, criticised or condemned her. This stage is finished when the idea of going to share our experience with the person involved gives us a feeling of joy and liberation.

The final stage is to go the person and explain to her how we have felt about the situation, and ask her for forgiveness for having been angry, for having condemned, criticised, judged her. And at this point, be careful! We should not say that we forgive her unless she asks us.

Only real forgiveness creates a sincere and lasting peace, erases all resentments and grudges, and brings complete freedom to all parties involved. Then there are no more enemies!

And the next time that you react badly to a problem, a disagreement or a painful event, ask for forgiveness before it turns into conflict, cold war or an atavistic hatred.

The Material and the Spiritual

“The third millennium will be spiritual or it won’t be!” said André Malraux. Are the events that we are experiencing at the dawn of the third millennium the last jolts of materialism that are announcing the advent of a new spiritual world? Let’s hope that this is so, otherwise the third millennium will abort before it has really begun...

This prophecy can be understood in another way, on an individual level. Those who are on the spiritual path will reach the new spiritual world; those who remain in the material will perish with the material world. Human beings have the privilege to access the spiritual world while living in the material world, because their true nature, even though embodied in matter, is spiritual. The material world is extremely limited, because it only represents the densest, coarsest form of creation. Matter is one of the forms of energy that constitutes the universe. It is the only one that our physical senses perceive.

However, to believe that matter is the only reality that exists is proof of ignorance and immaturity. If we observe the world, we notice that it is on the basis of this belief that it has functioned for centuries. And few are the beings who are spiritually awakened enough to react without fear before a threatening material event. Yet our mind cannot be affected by the material. An atomic bomb cannot destroy it; it is invulnerable and immortal. Furthermore, it has the power, when correctly trained, to act on matter.

At the moment, spectacular alterations of matter can only be made by a minority of people who possess psychic

powers. However, we all act on matter in subtle ways without knowing it. In particular, the power of our emotions has remarkable effects on living matter, on plants, animals, people, as well as on our own metabolism. Numerous recent scientific studies have demonstrated these phenomena, in particular those of the HeartMath Institute, in California.

Ignorance and the refusal to recognise the spiritual aspect of reality in our civilisation leads to the absurdities and adversities of our present world. If we think that the world and its inhabitants are only material, we arrive at the stupid belief that all the problems that we meet have material solutions. But if we observe the origins of these problems attentively, we can see that they are not of material nature. They can be divided into two main categories: greed for the things that we like and fear or aversion for the things that we don't like. In our society, material answers to these two types of problems are money to grant us the first category and bombs to get rid of the second. These are simplistic solutions and they do not work. Yet these material solutions are constantly applied and every day are creating more suffering, poverty and despair in the world.

This materialistic conditioning has come as a result of global manipulation in the domains of education, media, food, medicine and all aspects of our daily life. It began several centuries ago, but has grown in intensity during the past few decades. It is so powerful that even the people who dedicate an important part of their life to spiritual studies and practices have great difficulty getting rid of its hold, unless they live completely outside of society.

Our body and our mind are receivers that record outside influences and are conditioned by them. Our body is conditioned and weakened by the chemical poisons that it absorbs with food, medicines, and pollution in the air and the water. Our mind is conditioned by education and by all the infor-

mation that it receives from the media and from different forms of entertainment. On the unconscious level, we are strongly influenced by the beliefs, emotions and thought-forms of the collective unconscious. To protect ourselves from these harmful influences, our spiritual nature has often closed and has become inaccessible to us. It seems that even for those who practice spirituality, it opens for some moments, during meditation for example, and closes again afterwards.

Our spiritual nature is located in the heart. It is the opening of the heart that gives us access to it. Because of its link with the spiritual, the heart is the most powerful organ of our body. It is the heart that must direct the mind, and not the reverse. But our education has conditioned us since childhood to believe that the mind should direct the heart, and it is not easy to reverse this ingrained belief. Our strongest conditioning is fear. It is a fictitious fear, created by the conditioned mind, and is different from the fear of danger that arises when we need to protect ourselves. It is mainly linked to two material fears, the fear of lack and the fear of death, which produce reactions of greed and violence. The heart doesn't have these fears, because it lives in love. It knows that it is inseparable from the inexhaustible abundance of the universe, and that death doesn't exist, it is only a transformation.

As long as we remain prisoners of the level of consciousness of the present world, we will be victims of fear, conflict and death. But if we transcend this reality, we will discover the abundance, peace and immortality of the spiritual world. Where do we want to live in the third millennium? We have a choice!

Electromagnetic Pollution

Electromagnetic pollution is probably one of the most insidious kinds of pollution, because we can't see it. It is very strong inside our modern houses, in all urban and highly inhabited zones, and at a lower level it is present on the whole surface of the planet.

Electromagnetic fields are an inherent part of any manifestation in our universe. The electromagnetic force is one of the four forces that ensure the existence and functioning of the universe, according to present scientific knowledge. Elementary particles are guided in their trajectories by electromagnetic forces, and they themselves emit electromagnetic waves. At the atomic level, electromagnetic fields are created by the negative energy of electrons and the positive energy of the nucleus.

Electromagnetic waves circulate in our meridians and our *chakras*, or energy centres, and form around our body our aura and our subtle bodies. They are important vectors of our metabolism and of the metabolism of all living beings. The earth also has its own electromagnetic fields: the polar magnetic waves, different networks of telluric waves, as well as the electromagnetic fields that surround it. Interstellar space is also inhabited by all kinds of cosmic radiation that are emitted by the stars and the galaxies and influence their reciprocal behaviour.

It was in the heart of this complex and subtle network that life appeared on earth, taking advantage of the beneficial waves and protecting itself from those that are harmful. All these fields and electromagnetic waves are natural. What we

call 'pollution' in this case are the waves and electromagnetic fields created by modern technology, and also the disturbances caused by human beings in the natural electromagnetic fields and waves. This pollution not only disturbs the health and the energetic balance of all living beings – causing illnesses and all kinds of psychological and behaviour troubles like anxiety, stress and depression – but also the health and balance of the planet, particularly of climatic and tectonic phenomena.

In houses, electromagnetic pollution is initially produced by building materials. All the metallic structures such as pillars, beams and framework, reinforced concrete, pipes, ventilation shafts, radiators, metallic doors and windows are potential pollutants; as well as the electrical installation and all the machines and electrical devices. Evidently, the bigger and more spacious the buildings, and the more they are surrounded by other buildings, the stronger the pollution. Most houses and workplaces of so-called civilised regions are, therefore, particularly harmful to our health, our well-being and our psychological balance. Just going camping out in the wilderness shows us the difference! It is preferable to live in a house made of wood, stone or brick than in a building made of metal or concrete; and it is better to live in the countryside than in the city.

In houses, spending a lot of time close to machines should be avoided, particularly to electrical and electromagnetic devices. One should not have any such device in the bedroom, not even an electric alarm clock. The most dangerous device in a house is the television set; yet in this case, the electromagnetic pollution is quite small compared to the emotional and mental pollution produced by most broadcasts. But that is another topic. A television set is like an electromagnetic pollution gun that bombards everything that is in its field without stopping, even when it is turned

off. The cathodic monitors of computers have the same effect. The liquid crystal screens of laptop computers are, it seems, less harmful.

One of the main sources of electromagnetic pollution is caused by the network of cables distributing electricity. In the cities, all electric lines, whether they are underground or aerial, cause an omnipresent pollution. In the countryside, this pollution decreases when one moves away from villages, roads and high-tension lines. Inside buildings, it is useful to know that harmful waves are emitted even when devices and electric lamps don't function. To prevent this pollution, a device now exists that can be placed on the general electric board of the house in order to automatically cut out all circuits that are not in use. These are automatically connected back when one turns on a switch. A permanent circuit is maintained, however, for the refrigerator and water heater. Another solution is to close off the electrical supply to your house during the times when you don't use it, and to use a torch if you get up during the night.

Telecommunications networks, those of mobile telephones, radio and television relay stations and all satellite links cause, of course, pollution, which is difficult to avoid anywhere on the surface of the planet. The ozone layer that surrounds the earth once protected us from harmful cosmic rays. The perforation of this protective layer provoked by chemical pollution of the atmosphere exposes us to a new form of electromagnetic pollution. It is useful to know that natural electromagnetic phenomena, such as the waves emitted by underground water, by the nodes of telluric networks and by some geological formations, can also have harmful effects on our health. The ancients knew how to protect themselves from these, because they took them into account when they constructed their cities and their houses.

Since we can no longer avoid electromagnetic pollution, we have to find remedies that alleviate or prevent its harmful effects. Any form of energetic practice or healing enables us to re-balance our magnetic fields that have been disrupted by the pollution. I am thinking particularly about yoga, Tai Ji Quan (or Tai Chi), Qi Gong, Reiki, acupuncture and about some forms of meditation using the *chakras*, cosmic energy, the *merkaba*, Sacred Geometry... All these practices reinforce our own energetic structure and protect it from outside pollution. But of course they function more efficiently for those who don't live in a too polluted environment! An analysis of your dwelling and your workplace by a geobiology or Feng Shui specialist is also a good means of improving your energetic environment and neutralising the sources of pollution that disrupt it.

Chinese Writing

I have always been fascinated by Chinese writing. About fifteen years ago, I found a small book that taught, in the form of comic strips, how to write in Chinese. And I tackled the task. I loved it, and at the time I was doing it for one hour every morning and often more. After having finished the first volume, I got the next two in order to continue my study, and then I went on to more sophisticated Chinese books. After this I stayed in Seoul, Korea, for several months, to attend a school of calligraphy. The Koreans, although they now possess their own alphabet, have for millennia used Chinese writing; they still use it on some occasions, as do the Japanese. Later, I studied calligraphy in Taiwan. Then I took courses in the Chinese language, but I never succeeded in speaking it fluently.

What fascinates me in Chinese writing is that it is composed of ideograms, and not of phonetic letters as in most languages. Every sign is a small picture that originally represented graphically the object designated by the ideogram. With time, these drawings became stylised and have become the ideograms that we know today. The first traces of Chinese writing date back more than five thousand years; and the characters used today stabilised about three thousand years ago. It should be noted that a system of simplified ideograms appeared after the Chinese revolution at the beginning of the twentieth century. This is the one used nowadays in mainland China, whereas the traditional ideograms are still used in Taiwan and by Chinese living overseas.

The characteristic of an ideogram is that it is a semantic sign without a proper phonetic value, as are our numbers. When one writes the number 6, it means “6” for a French person as well as for an Australian or a Mexican, yet each language assigns it a specific phonetic value and pronounces it differently. This is what happens with Chinese ideograms, and allowed all the various peoples of the immense Chinese empire – and some neighbouring countries such as Korea, Japan and Vietnam – to use the same language and the same writing, each using its own particular pronunciation.

What I like in Chinese writing, is that every ideogram is like a small painting. By the way, Chinese is traditionally written with a brush and ink, even though today felt pens and ball-point pens have replaced the brushes. Chinese calligraphy, using traditional techniques, is practiced by many adepts in China, in Japan and in Korea. It is an art form, that possesses periods, styles, masters and master-pieces.

The drawing of each ideogram responds to very precise rules, concerning in particular the order and the direction in which the different strokes are drawn and their harmonious and balanced composition in a fictive square. Traditionally, Chinese is written from top to bottom and from right to left. The text is formed therefore of columns of ideograms and not of lines, and a Chinese book starts with what we consider as the last page.

Every ideogram is complete in itself and has its own meaning. It corresponds to a word. It is, on the other hand, often composed of several parts, that are themselves simpler ideograms. These are called keys or radicals. There are about two hundred keys that make up the basic ideas of language, like man, woman, water, wood, sun, moon, etc. All other ideograms are composed from the key ideograms. The ideogram that means ‘bright’, for example, contains the key ‘sun’

coupled to the key 'moon'. Some ideograms include three, four or even more keys.

Classic Chinese language has more than fifty thousand different ideograms. But everyday language uses only about three thousand; and one thousand ideograms are sufficient to read a newspaper. A specific phonetic pronunciation corresponds to each of these fifty thousand ideograms, that is always monosyllabic in Chinese (which is not always the case in Japanese). As we simply cannot make fifty thousand different monosyllabic sounds, there are many homonyms. But as Chinese is a tonal language, every sound can be pronounced in four different tones.

In the modern Chinese language, most ideas, or words, are composed of two ideograms – sometimes three or four – the second ideogram refining the meaning of the first. The ideogram 'to go down', for example, when it is followed by the ideogram 'rain', means 'to rain'.

One of the difficulties of non-alphabetic languages is to classify and to find words in lists, like dictionaries and directories. The system used in Chinese dictionaries is to classify the words according to their main key. All words that contain this key are placed together; they are then classified according to the number of strokes that they comprise. If, for example, thirty ideograms contain the key 'sun', each formed of ten strokes, it will be necessary to read the whole list to find the sought-after word. This method is quite disconcerting for the beginner.

The study of the Chinese language is a good way to find out about Chinese history, culture and thought, as we discover antiquity through the study of Latin and Greek. China is the most populated country in the world, with more than one billion two hundred million inhabitants. It is a country in full expansion. Important Chinese communities

exist in all regions of the world. The Chinese are very prosperous and control the economy and trade of most countries in the Far East. Chinese living outside mainland China collectively may be the most important financial power in the world.

For an artist, the appeal of Chinese calligraphy is that it unites in an inseparable way beauty of form with semantic richness.

After Death

Why are we so afraid to die? The testimonies of those who have visited the beyond are jubilant and rejoicing. Millions of people have had near-death experiences and have communicated what they experienced. Others have relived, under hypnosis, periods of time spent in the beyond between their incarnations. Of course, there are also descriptions of hell in many religions, that artists have profusely depicted for centuries. These are not surprisingly less jubilant! In most cases, these descriptions do not come from personal experience, but rather from sermons warning us against evil doing. However, such preaching doesn't seem to be much of a deterrent, when one sees what happens in the world...

The experiences of those who have visited the beyond don't speak of devils, infernos and torture, but of light, peace, joy and love, of a non-material world where physical suffering doesn't exist as we don't have bodies. Souls, they observe, move in space, crossing magnificent landscapes of light. They rejoin loved ones who left the earth before them. They also encounter soul-mates from their own spiritual family whom they meet again and again between each incarnation, to program the scripts for their next lives in matter.

Death is not an end or a rupture. Life goes on, under another form, in another dimension. It seems, according to many testimonies, that existence is a kind of school where we learn to evolve. In the beyond, we study theoretical courses, and on earth we come to do the practical work. This is the most difficult part, but we choose these experiences of our own free will before coming. Even though we don't

always succeed in the tests, we generally take them very seriously. When we review our life upon our return to the beyond, in company with the other protagonists in our script, we have the opportunity to laugh at ourselves, and to hug in our arms of light those who played the roles of our enemies or our torturers on earth. And we promise ourselves to play this scene better next time.

What should we believe? The dogmatic threats of the priests or the idyllic narrations of those who tell us of their experiences? When in doubt, I think that it is always better to believe what does us the most good, what makes us happiest, what creates the most peace and hope in our heart. Our beliefs condition the quality of our life and we are free to choose our beliefs. All beliefs that generate fear are harmful to our health, our emotional balance, our well-being, as well as to our relationships with others and with our environment. Let's choose the beliefs that produce peace and love.

Let's not forget that we create what we believe, so let's believe what we want to see manifest, not what we want to avoid at all costs. And let's not forget either that malevolent actions generate negative thoughts and emotions, and when they become habitual, give birth to unhealthy beliefs... A good state of mind incites us to act with spontaneous kindness, whereas a bad state of mind leads us to commit malevolent actions.

All is linked, our actions, our beliefs, the quality of our life and that of our death. The priests may not be completely wrong either, but let's not take their words too seriously. We don't know if hell really exists in the afterlife, but it seems that there are countless people who already live in hell here below, in particular when they identify with their beliefs! There is nothing that obliges us to be like them...

Society or Community

During the past twenty years or so, an increasing number of people have found that they cannot blossom and find happiness in modern society, and have decided to live in communities. Today there are thousands of new communities throughout the world.

A society and a community both describe sets of people, social groups. The meaning of these two words is quite close; they even become synonymous in some situations. A society is “a set of individuals between whom exist lasting and organised relations, most often ruled by institutions and controlled by sanctions”. A community is “a social group whose members live together, and have common goods or interests”.

A society comprises, for example, all the inhabitants of a country. Most inhabitants are part of a society, not through choice, but because they happened to be born or live in a particular country. If certain members of a society deliberately decide to settle in a country other than the one they were born in, they didn't generally choose its institutions.

A community, on the other hand, is a much smaller group, in which the members have chosen to live. All the members of a society can't possibly know each other personally, even though they live in the same geographical region. They don't feel as if they live together. The members of a community, on the other hand, live together – like a big family – and everyone knows each other. In general, they share common interests or goods and participate in the organisation of the community.

In this sense, a village could seem like a community by its size and the fact that the people know each other. However, even though they sometimes have common interests, villagers don't generally have common goods; and they don't participate in the organisation of most of the institutions on which they depend, which are part of the larger society.

The majority of people who choose to live in a community no longer agree with most of the institutions that govern society. They feel that even though their society is founded on a system of democracy, they don't actually have any means of expressing their ideas and influencing the choices that are made by the authorities. They feel that they are conditioned and manipulated by the political, economic or religious forces in power. They don't accept the ethics governing the operations of institutions, in particular with regard to the protection of the environment, human rights and the management of these institutions. And they don't agree with most of the principles, beliefs and values on which their society is based.

A community is a very old social system. The tribes who lived according to this principle – some still exist – lived for tens of thousands of years in peace and prosperity, until their communities were destroyed by colonial invasion. Large societies or civilisations, on the other hand, followed one after the other, during the four or five thousand years of history that we know, in an uninterrupted succession of wars, crises and conflicts. Periods of decadence and obscurity alternated with periods of glory, prosperity and cultural brilliance. None of these large civilisations lasted more than a few centuries.

Even though the vestiges of the splendour of these societies still fill us with wonder, we note that the bigger and more powerful these civilisations were, the more miserable and marked by suffering, frustration and servitude the life of

their populations was. It is still like this nowadays, even though most people are so conditioned that they don't realise it or don't want to recognise it.

A return to life in a community doesn't mean a return to a prehistoric way of life, but to a simpler, more healthy and more harmonious life style than the stressful, sick and conflicting life of modern society. People forming communities prefer a peaceful life, close to nature, rather than a frantic race after material progress and utopian wealth in an artificial world; a life of love, sharing and joy, rather than a life of selfishness, competition and violence.

One of the first objectives of the new communities is autonomy. They endeavour to take responsibility for most of the essential needs of their members. Among the vital needs of human beings, the most important are water, food, energy, housing, a certain number of useful objects, education, health, spirituality. The idea is that each of the members participates in the life of the community according to their capacity, and performs certain tasks. These tasks are more rewarding and fulfilling than the professions of most people in modern society. Above all, it is the motivation that is different. It is more satisfactory to work to help the people who are dear to us than to earn money and to enrich anonymous companies and corporations.

There are many types of communities. Some primarily search for autonomy, whereas others are searching for community life or the sharing of common interests. Some are founded on spiritual development or a religious practice, whereas others are completely laic. Some are based on specific activities and their products are sold outside the community, whereas in others, the members work in the outside world. Some are open to all new members, others impose a certain number of more or less strict conditions for membership, while others still are closed or have waiting lists.

One of the important points is that a community, to be viable, must not exceed a certain size, which is of a few hundred people. Otherwise it becomes necessary to create institutions to manage it, and one falls again into the shortcomings of the societies that one tried to leave. Most communities are located in rustic regions and wilderness, outside urban areas. Some restore abandoned villages, castles or monasteries.

This increasing interest in community life shows the dissatisfaction of a part of the population for the conditions of life and values of modern society, and announces the emergence of a new type of society, more human, more balanced and more ecologically sound. Many people realise that material progress, technology, money, entertainment and the overabundance of information and scientific knowledge don't bring them happiness, love, health, or inner peace. These people often live with a feeling of isolation and loneliness and don't succeed in finding either a deep meaning to their existence, or their place in a cruel, unjust and too regulated society.

Community life proposes a simple and healthy life in a beautiful environment, in the middle of a natural and welcoming setting, and within a group that shares the same aspirations and the same values. While giving a new meaning and another dimension to our existence, it enables us to satisfy our too long forgotten essential needs, and to realise that they are the true ingredients of happiness.

Stillness

As I mainly studied spirituality in English, some concepts are linked for me to English words, and I have difficulty finding a French equivalent that expresses the same connotation. For example, the word 'stillness'. When I tried to translate it into French, the dictionary gave me four words: immobility, calmness, tranquillity, silence. These four words, which are not synonyms – except perhaps calmness and tranquillity, whose meanings are very close – describe different aspects that I perceive in the meaning of stillness. The notion of stillness refers, in particular, to the meditative experience and applies to the different levels of body, speech and mind. The stillness of the body is immobility; that of speech, silence; and that of the mind, calmness or tranquillity.

I love consulting my numerous dictionaries, in particular the *Robert Dictionary*, to find the precise meaning of words, their synonyms and their antonyms, their etymological roots, as well as examples of their use and the quotes that accompany them. For calmness, I find: "1. State of immobility of the atmosphere, of the sea. 2. State of what doesn't change suddenly or radically; impression of rest that results from it". For tranquillity: "1. State that is steady, constant, or modified regularly and slowly. 2. Moral stability, tranquil state (tranquil meaning here: 'experiencing a feeling of security, of peace'); order, peace in human relations, in a society".

It seems therefore that calmness indicates an impression of rest, and tranquillity a feeling of peace. Among the synonyms for calmness and tranquillity, those that are part of the

meaning that I give to ‘stillness’ are: peace, serenity, rest, quietude, impassiveness, equanimity, stability, balance.

Ayya Khema, who was my meditation master until her death in 1997, spoke of the search for the “stillpoint”, for the point of immobility, of calmness, of tranquillity, of silence, inside oneself, in the deepest part of the heart. This point is not only the centre of our being, but the centre of the world, of the universe that surrounds us – this illusory projection of our conceptual and dualistic mind. The stillpoint, like the hub of a wheel, is immobile, and the ten thousand things of *samsara*, of conditioned existence, turn tirelessly around it.

To find this tranquil point is to escape from the infernal round of birth, suffering, death and rebirth. It is also the point of equanimity, where all that happens in the world – happiness and misfortune, pleasure and pain, hope and fear, gain and loss, success and failure – no longer disrupts our inner calm. Here worldly phenomena are perceived for what they really are: illusions, mirages, dreams... a movie without end, full of sparkling colours, varied landscapes, passions, intrigues and romances, projected onto the screen of our conceptual mind. The stillpoint, on the other hand, is when the movie has disappeared, leaving the empty and luminous screen of our awakened mind.

On the path of meditation, one meets the tranquillity of equanimity in the fourth absorption, when the subtle and decreasing agitation of the characteristics of the first three absorptions – beatitude, joy and contentment – have been completely quieted, and the mind has found again a state of stillness, like water in a deep well.

Exaggeration

Exaggeration is a form of lying. For Buddhists, lying is one of the five actions that one should try to avoid when progressing along the spiritual path. The four others are: killing living beings, taking what is not offered to us, having harmful sexual activities and consuming intoxicants. It should be noted that for Buddhists, failure to respect these precepts is not a sin, but an obstacle on the path that leads to awakening and to the liberation from suffering. Observing these precepts, on the other hand, protects our happiness and our inner peace.

Exaggeration is a habit so prevalent in our culture that one doesn't notice it any more. When one expresses oneself without exaggerating, words seem flavourless and without interest, and no one pays any attention to them. There are two ways of exaggerating: to maximise or to minimise, to overestimate or to underestimate. Neither is the truth. To overestimate is a way of giving more importance to what one says. When one speaks of oneself – and to speak of oneself is most people's favourite topic – exaggerating is a way of giving oneself importance. In the same way, to underestimate what one says about others is a way of giving them less importance. One can even ignore them completely and not speak of them at all. If they do something wrong however, exaggeration is again foremost.

To exaggerate while speaking of our qualities, our possessions, our knowledge or our admirable actions is pride. It is a way of expressing our power and showing ourselves as superior to others. To exaggerate while speaking of our

shortcomings, our misfortunes, our sufferings and our mistakes is also pride. This is what is called the victim's attitude. It can lead to an abuse of power, by making others pity us or by making them feel guilty in order to get their help or their support.

Exaggeration is used extensively to manipulate people, in particular in politics, advertising and the information media. And here, exaggeration is often blatant lies. The importance that we assign to our perceptions, to things, to people and to events, is directly in proportion to the emotional reactions that they awaken in us: the greed for the car praised in advertisements, the hatred for the terrorists whose wrongdoings are blown up out of all proportion, the fear generated by the disaster whose pictures are broadcast again and again by television. Exaggeration used by the political and economic forces in power always awakens negative emotions. It is how control and manipulation are exercised in order to maintain people in stress, anxiety and insecurity. It is also how those in power become richer at the expense of the people, and support their greed for objects that promise them an illusory happiness.

In order not to yield to the chimeras of exaggeration, one can step back a little in relation to the perceptions and the news that we receive, and put them in perspective. What is the truth? Do I want to believe what someone wants to make me believe? Am I being manipulated, either by outside information or by my own perceptions?

A good way to get to the truth is to observe how one feels when confronted with a piece of information. On the physiological level, what do I feel in my body? And on the emotional level, what do I feel in my heart? If I feel bad, if my energy level decreases, then my perception is harmful to my balance, because it is my perception that is the problem, the way in which I react. Information, whether it is true or

not, exaggerated or a lie, is what it is: a piece of information. It is neutral, it is neither good nor bad. We are not obliged to believe it!

When one watches a movie, one often identifies with the action, and one feels emotions, but once the movie is over, one remembers that it is fiction, then emotions dissolve and one regains one's balance quickly. No one obliges us to watch horror or war movies that may detrimentally affect our emotional balance. The same goes for broadcast news. It is our health, physical and mental, that is of concern here.

Let's stop selling our body and our soul to those who use them to build fortunes and grab more power. Do we want to continue to be victims? Or do we want to recover our freedom, our power and control of our life? The way to do this is to fortify our heart and to learn to master our emotions. Then equanimity will give us the necessary insight not to react in a harmful way to our own perceptions, whatever they are!

Astrology

Since prehistoric times, human beings have been fascinated by the stars and by their movements in the sky. Observation and study of these phenomena gave birth to astronomy, traces of which exist in all cultures. The Ancients understood the interrelation of all phenomena, and they wondered if the position of the stars affected their fate. This is how astrology was born. One also finds astrology, in different forms, in all civilisations. If astronomy allowed human beings to measure time in a quantitative manner, astrology allowed them to measure the quality of time, and to foresee auspicious or unfavourable moments in which to undertake the different challenges in their life. It is interesting to observe, however, that in the past astronomy and astrology were not two separate sciences as they are today. They were practiced by the same people, and were considered a highly-respected art.

The astrological system most currently used in the West is tropical astrology. In this system, one considers the Earth as the centre around which the planets turn. The planets taken into account here are the Sun, the Moon, the five traditional planets, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn, the three new planets discovered in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto, and finally Chiron, which was discovered in 1977.

The fact that one observes the rotation of the planets around the Earth – and not around the Sun – explains why these planets are sometimes retrograde, which means that they give the impression that they are going backwards. The

planets have a particular influence on the quality of time during these periods. The eleven planets turn around the Earth, considered as stationary, following various orbits. The Moon does one rotation in twenty-eight days, whereas Pluto's orbit lasts two hundred and forty-eight years.

While rotating in the sky, the planets successively cross twelve constellations of stars that are known as the twelve signs of the zodiac. They recall the shape of the symbolic figures of Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius and Pisces.

To establish an astrological chart, an astrologer draws a map of the sky, formed of a circle and divided into twelve sections representing the twelve signs of the zodiac. He then projects on this map the precise position of the planets at a particular time and place. Traditionally, these positions were given by lists called 'ephemeris'. Today, they are calculated automatically by computer programs.

The map of the sky turns around a system of axes that represents the position of the Earth in its rotation on its axis in twenty-four hours, according to the hour and place of observation. The vertical axis – or axis of life – gives the position of the zenith or Midheaven (M.C.) above, and of the nadir or Imum Coeli (I.C.) below. The horizontal axis – or axis of the personality – indicates the horizon, with the rising sun on the left, known as the Ascendant (A.C.), and the setting sun on the right, called the Descendant (D.C.). The four points determined by these axes have a particular significance and importance in the interpretation of a chart. The Ascendant represents the karmic tasks that the person comes to finish in this life; the Imum Coeli her roots and her origins; the Descendant her relations with her partners and with others; and the Midheaven her career and her role in society.

Every planet, and every sign, has its own specific energy. It also corresponds to one of the four elements, earth, water, fire or air. Every planet, representing the active principle, possesses the same energy as one of the signs, which is, in a way, its preferred abode. Each planet is, however, more or less in harmony with the energy of the other signs. Thus the position of each planet in a particular sign gives us an initial set of data for interpreting the quality of time at the particular moment under consideration.

The map of the sky is further divided into another set of twelve sectors named houses. Each house corresponds to one of the domains of our life, and also to a particular type of energy. So the position of each planet in a particular house gives us a second batch of data to interpret the quality of time at a particular moment.

The astrologer also studies another set of factors, the aspects, determined by the positions of the planets in relation to each other. The aspects are calculated by the angle formed by the reciprocal positions of the planets on the map. Thus the data is very broad. The astrologer's art consists of interpreting this data and of making clear and applicable deductions, to understand the variations in the quality of time during various periods in our existence, so that we can make appropriate choices at the required moment.

There is an interrelationship between the astrological signs, the planets, the houses and the domains of our life. The quality of their energy can briefly be described in the following manner:

The sign of Aries, the planet Mars and the 1st house – domain of our actions – correspond to vital energy in its raw state.

The sign of Taurus, the planet Venus and the 2nd house – domain of our material possessions – correspond to the energy of beauty and abundance.

The sign of Gemini, the planet Mercury and the 3rd house – domain of communication – correspond to the energy of the intellect.

The sign of Cancer, the Moon and the 4th house – domain of our family – correspond to the energy of emotions.

The sign of Leo, the Sun and the 5th house – domain of our personal expression – correspond to the energy of power and creativity.

The sign of Virgo, the planet Chiron and the 6th house – domain of our profession and our health – correspond to the energy of healing and of the fruits of work.

The sign of Libra, the planet Venus (while waiting for the discovery of a twelfth planet, the planet Venus is the planet of Taurus and Libra) and the 7th house – domain of our intimate relationships – correspond to the energy of love and harmony.

The sign of Scorpio, the planet Pluto and the 8th house – domain of our hidden instincts – correspond to the energy of transformation.

The sign of Sagittarius, the planet Jupiter and the 9th house – domain of philosophy and religion – correspond to the energy of evolution and discovery.

The sign of Capricorn, the planet Saturn and the 10th house – domain of our structures and our goals – correspond to the energy of completion and death.

The sign of Aquarius, the planet Uranus and the 11th house – domain of our superior Self – correspond to the energy of inspiration and revolution.

The sign of Pisces, the planet Neptune and the 12th house – domain of the invisible and of voluntary service – correspond to the energy of imagination and intuition.

The first stage of an astrological study consists of establishing a birth chart, which gives the position of the planets at the time of birth, calculated according to the exact time and place of birth. This chart, according to astrology, gives a general vision of the capacities, the potential and the obstacles that will characterise the whole of the person's life. It is not an immutable verdict of fate, but a specific and individual pattern upon which the person can build according to her own choices. The astral positions will, however, make these choices more or less easy, according to the quality of time at the moment when they will be made.

To know the quality of time at a given moment of our life, the astrologer will compare the position of the planets at that particular moment with their positions on the birth chart. He will observe what are, at that moment, the positions of the different planets in the signs and the houses, as well as the aspects formed by their respective positions in the two charts.

Another study that the astrologer can make is called 'synasty' which is the comparison of the charts of two persons, in order to understand how the energies of the two are going to interface and the conditions and potential of their relationship.

Astrology is a vast and complex science that uses a number of other techniques of analysis that I will not go into here. It should be noted that besides Western astrology, several other astrological systems exist, of which the most well-known are Chinese astrology and Vedic astrology. By very different methods, they often arrive at similar conclusions. However, most people don't know that other systems

of astrology different to tropical astrology exist within Western astrology.

In ancient times, astrology used the same data as astronomy, and it was the exact position of the stars that determined the quality of time. The zodiacal constellations, however, move in the sky according to the precession of equinoxes, and they are no longer in the same places that were fixed several centuries ago by the promoters of tropical astrology. This change of position is significant, since today there is a gap of 28° between the real positions of the stars in the sky and their arbitrary positions used by tropical astrology. To simplify the calculations before the era of computers, the astrologers had divided the zodiacal circle into twelve equal sectors of 30° each. While observing the sky, one notices however that the dimensions of the signs are not equal, but vary between 21° and 43° .

Astrology based on these discoveries is called, in German, 'sternbilder Astrologie', literally 'the astrology of the stars' images', or 'skyview astrology' in English. This branch of astrology was developed by the Austrian astrologer Editha Torsson and should not be confused with sidereal astrology.

Interpreting a horoscope, based on the real images of the stars in the sky, puts into question most of the beliefs that we have about our personality – which would correspond to a certain star sign and a certain Ascendant. According to this system, one discovers that the Sun and the Ascendant, in ninety percent of cases, are in other signs than those given by traditional tropical astrology. This discovery deeply transforms the vision that we have of ourselves, and our understanding of the events of our life. It reveals to us our true nature...

Western astrology may have been deliberately distorted by those in power about two thousand years ago, to prevent

people having access to the correct information and to be able to control them more easily. According to Katharina Bless, with whom I studied astrology, the time may now be here to recover the true knowledge of astrology. This may help us to better understand what is currently happening in the world so we are able to make, in full knowledge of the facts, appropriate decisions to build a better future.

Beliefs

Our beliefs condition our life and the world in which we live. We create our life and the world in the image of our beliefs. What is a belief? It is a mental formation, a thought-form, that we consider to be true. Beliefs are based on past information memorised by our mind, that we consider as true, valid and beneficial. They can come from our personal experiences, from the experiences of others, from our education, or from things that we have heard, read, learned, or observed.

Beliefs are generally based on the assumption that a behaviour that provoked a certain result in the past is going to necessarily produce the same result in the future. If this result is unpleasant, the belief is linked to the fear that it reproduces; if it is pleasant, it is linked to the desire that it reproduces. Thus, through the fears and desires that they create, beliefs direct our life and dictate our behaviour, our reactions and our actions. They block all attempts to change, to progress, to transform ourselves. The same patterns recur continually in our daily life, in our work, in our relationships and become deeply ingrained habits that are only uprooted with great difficulty.

At the level of society, collective beliefs, fostered by millions of people, condition the functioning of society and of its institutions. These are the dogmas, the doctrines, the systems of thought, whether they be political, economic, religious, philosophical, social...

Beliefs begin as thought-forms on the mental level, but the fact of fostering them and of considering them as reality

solidifies them, and they end up manifesting in the material world. This is the power that we have to create our own reality. What we don't understand, however, is that all creation motivated by fear or greed inevitably produces suffering, conflict and frustration. Only love has the power to create harmony, peace and happiness.

Most of our beliefs are so deep-rooted in us that they become unconscious. We are completely identified with them, as if they were our true nature. Then it becomes very difficult to recognise them and to understand what belief it is that pushes us to act in a certain way. We have many beliefs, thousands of them, that apply to all circumstances of our life. As we have given all our power to our beliefs, we function most of the time in automatic mode, without making conscious choices and without using our intuition or our spontaneity to respond to the particular requirements of each situation. The choices and the patterns of the past dictate the present, even when they are completely outmoded or obsolete.

The same phenomenon occurs in society; we just need to make the effort to be attentive and to open our eyes to notice it. But to make this effort it is necessary to come out of the torpor of automatic mode. What is required is a powerful alarm-clock, a shock, a disaster, an accident, or a serious or unforeseen event, that pulls us out of our usual routine of the annoyances and illusions of everyday life. Then we suddenly discover that we have a heart, instead of following blindly the beliefs of the mind, a heart that perceives and understands the present, that draws its energy from love, wisdom, intuition, and spontaneously knows the appropriate response to any situation.

To remove the power from the collective beliefs that control society, the only option is to dissociate oneself from them. When no-one believes them anymore, they will

dissolve by themselves. As always, the work starts with oneself. Let's observe our beliefs, let's discover them, let's decode them, and let's observe the results of each belief, and ask ourselves if it is useful or beneficial. In most cases, it was useful and helped us at one time in the past. But the events of the past are not those of the present, neither are we the same person. If this belief is no longer beneficial or useful and continues to produce unpleasant results, let's not hesitate to abandon it. Every abandoned belief is a step toward happiness, freedom, and the power to create the life and the world we long for.

Non-Self

Non-self – *anatta* in Pali – is one of the three characteristics of existence, according to the Buddha’s teaching, together with impermanence, *anicca*, and suffering (or dissatisfaction), *dukkha*. However, contrary to the impermanence and suffering that are characteristic of all conditioned phenomena, non-self is a characteristic of all phenomena, whether conditioned or not. That means that *nirvana* also has this characteristic. The doctrine of non-self probably best characterises Buddhist thought. It is not found, by the way, in any other religion or philosophy. It is also the doctrine that is the most difficult not only to understand, but especially to realise.

The idea of non-self means that there does not exist an inherent, immortal and independent entity that one can call the “self”. Therefore, the person to which one refers when one says “I”, “me”, “my”, “mine”, doesn’t exist, is an illusion. This doesn’t mean that we don’t exist at all, but that the “I” is only a conventional designation used for the practical needs of daily life.

According to Buddhism, a human being is composed of five aggregates, a material aggregate that constitutes the physical body, and four mental aggregates: sensation – that feels phenomena as pleasant, unpleasant or neutral; perception – that qualifies phenomena by means of names and concepts; mental formations – that include all thoughts and emotions aroused by sensation and perception; and consciousness – that observes and memorises these experiences. These five aggregates constitute physiological processes for

the body, and mental processes for the four others. They are perpetually changing and do not possess any steady, permanent element that one could qualify as a “self”. Yet it is these aggregates that we habitually consider as “me”. But when we conduct an attentive and thorough investigation, we notice that we can’t find this “me”, neither inside one of the aggregates, nor outside of them.

Buddhist literature abounds in treaties of logic that irremediably refute the existence of the “self”. It is probably a good thing to understand intellectually that the “I” doesn’t exist, a first stage, but this doesn’t prevent us from continuing to react as if our “I” existed. If someone steps on my foot, it is “my” foot that hurts; if I am insulted or praised, it is “me” that feels either wounded or flattered; and if I have a traffic accident, it is “my” car that is damaged. And in all these cases the “I” is affected emotionally, and has a tendency to react with a mental, verbal or physical action.

Who is this “I” that claims the ownership of a foot or a car, that identifies with emotions, that reacts and premeditates actions? And where is it located? This “I”, or ego, that we can’t find but that nevertheless plays such an important role in our existence, is also the one that is the cause of all our problems and all our suffering. Indeed, we take our “I” very seriously, and dedicate the greatest part of our time and our energy to looking after its comfort and its well-being, to arranging things so that it will be loved, respected, listened to, obeyed. It is with this that we identify who we are, our profession, our role in the family and in society, our qualities and our shortcomings, our belonging to a group, race, sex, country. It is this that possesses the material goods, the titles, the privileges that we claim; and it is this that accomplishes all our actions, good or bad, those of which we are proud and those that we regret.

Nothing of what we are, of what we have or do, is permanent. Our being in its whole, and all phenomena to which it is associated, are part of a process in constant transformation over which we have very limited control. Any identification with this process is a cause of frustration, stress, anguish, and all kinds of endless annoyances. To protect this illusory “me” that we identify with, and to satisfy its insatiable desires and demands, we are forced to react to the vicissitudes of existence with greed, aggressiveness or indifference. Thus we create immeasurable suffering for ourselves and for others. And as the vast majority of human beings act in this manner, we live in a society where each group, each minority, each country lives in greed, violence, and indifference to the misfortunes of others, in order to defend and to protect its collective ego.

This ego that doesn’t exist, whether it is individual or collective, is the cause of all misfortunes and all suffering. Shantideva, one of the great sages of Mahayana Buddhism, said that to want the happiness of others is the source of all joy in the world, whereas to want one’s own happiness is the source of all suffering.

We can indeed realise from our own experience that every time we identify with this illusory “me”, we create a separation between ourselves and others, between ourselves and our environment, and we come up against the impossible task of manifesting in a permanent way a world that responds to the utopian whims of our illusory “me”. This attempt, that we have endeavoured for decades to realise by our selfish actions, has always brought us only frustration and disillusionment. On the other hand, each time we allow our identification with the “me” to dissolve, we realise the unity of all things and all beings, and we let ourselves be carried by the inexhaustible flow of creation. While accepting things as they are, without interfering with the

luminous and wise design of nature, we spontaneously accomplish our selfless and voluntary role in the whole, and thus we create peace, joy and happiness in the world, for ourselves and for others.

Angelic Spiritual Healing

Treatment of subtle bodies and the energetic structure

This healing technique, also called ‘energetic harmonisation’, was already known on planet Earth at the end of the Atlantis civilisation and in Pharaonic Egypt. It was reintroduced to America in 1989, and to Europe in 1993, by the Quebec medium Marie Lise Labonté. The Xedah angels, initiators and guardians of this teaching, transmitted detailed instructions to her while she was in a state of profound trance.

Angelic Spiritual Healing treats the flow of energy that nourishes the first seven subtle bodies which surround our physical body. Our physical body constitutes only a small part of our being, the more dense part and the more perceptible by our senses, but we are not limited to this material body. We are beings of energy, and matter is only the roughest form of energy. The subtle bodies wrap around our physical body like cocoons or Russian dolls. The thickness of each body can vary between 40 cm and several meters, depending on the spiritual development of the person. It is said that the subtle bodies of Christ and Buddha were perceptible at a distance of several kilometres.

On the level of energy, there is no separation between us and other people, or between us and animals, plants, minerals and objects, which have also, like us, an energetic envelope or aura. The presence of these interpenetrating energy bodies allows us to understand the notion of interrelation –

everything is related! We are part of a vast energy network that generates all the phenomena of the universe, from the rotation of galaxies to the movement of elementary particles, including all the current events and all our physical and mental actions.

Another way to comprehend these different bodies is to see them as more and more subtle levels of consciousness. The first three subtle bodies are directly linked to our present incarnation on earth, but they can also contain memories of past lives. The first subtle body is the etheric body, the closest to the physical body, which constitutes an energetic replica of all our tissues and organs. The second body is the emotional body. It contains all the emotions that we have crystallised since birth, and sometimes emotions from intra-uterine life or past lives. The third body is the mental body. It contains all the thoughts, beliefs and conditioning, ours and those we have inherited, received or borrowed, during our life.

The fourth body, the astral body, contains karmic imprints from our past lives. This body is linked to our present incarnation and also to our other lives on earth or in other worlds. The fifth body is the supra-astral body. This body makes the link, and at the same time creates a protection, between our earthly bodies and our celestial bodies. The sixth body is the celestial body. This is the body, or level of consciousness, where our guides reside, as well as angels, archangels and spiritual masters. The seventh body is the light body. It links us directly to the Source or the Divine. It is the vehicle that the soul uses to rise toward the Source after death.

Each body is nourished by a river of *prana*, or vital energy, called the median line, which flows from head to foot. When this energy flow is obstructed, the body is badly nourished, loses its vitality and atrophies, and this deficient state can

affect the other bodies. If these energetic blockages persist, they can manifest in the physical body in the form of symptoms. The purpose of Angelic Spiritual Healing is to clear these obstructions so that the being in its wholeness can recover its vitality, harmony and health.

The energetic harmonisation of the seven bodies requires two treatment sessions. The first treats the first four bodies, and consists of liberating them from their obstructions. The therapist starts by scanning the median line of the different bodies with her hands to localise the configurations that obstruct the free circulation of energy.

We have ourselves placed these blockages in our energetic structure following painful circumstances in our existence. Although these defences were useful to us at one time in our life, they have generally lost their usefulness years or decades later, but continue to obstruct the flow of our energy. The different types of configurations exist can be visualised as physical obstacles, in order to better understand them.

By channelling the angelic healing energy, the energy of light and love, the therapist heals the different configurations that obstruct the normal flow of energy. After the treatment the patient will feel lighter, liberated from obstacles and the wounds that have caused them. It is then up to the patient to renounce them definitely and not to let them recrystallise.

The second session treats the three superior bodies. Unlike the first four bodies these are not subject to obstructions. However, their energy level can vary according to the quality of their link with the source of cosmic energy, the psychical balance of the person and her spiritual development. In addition, as each body has the role of nourishing the bodies it contains, it is the energy of the superior bodies that nourishes the earthly bodies. The second part of the treatment consists simply of energising these bodies using

angelic energy channelled by the therapist. Then the patient will have an additional supply of energy to nourish and heal his different bodies, because, ultimately, he alone is responsible for his healing.

The treatment acts on the three levels of being: the body, the mind and the soul. It allows the patient to recover his inner peace and his joy of living and creates a state of well-being and openness that stimulates the immune system and reinforces the natural healing power of the being in its wholeness.

The healing teachings of the Xedah angels contain other more specific interventions for the treatment of the *chakras*, the heart, the consciousness and the *sushumna* channel.

The Ills of Society

When one contemplates the problems, the suffering and the vicissitudes of the world, one wonders what led us to this situation. According to Buddhism, the illnesses of the world, of society and human beings, are caused by the three poisons: ignorance, greed and aversion.

Ignorance does not mean not having studied or gone to school – the school system itself is conceived to promote ignorance – it is the ignorance of our real nature and the real nature of reality. It is the belief that we are separate entities and that our existence is limited to this visible material world and the duration of our life on this earth.

Greed, that comes from ignorance, is the immoderate desire for material goods, sex and power. Among material goods, the one for which we are the greediest is money. Yet, with the present banking system, money is generally numbers on paper, and we rarely see the colour of it. Material greed comes from the belief that we live in a world characterised by lack and not by abundance, a world where there are not enough resources and food for everybody. Therefore, we think it is necessary to accumulate as much as possible, to avoid ending up with nothing. Greed for sexual relations is the desire to regain the impression of unity, interrelation and bliss of which our beliefs make us think we are deprived. Power is a way of ensuring the acquisition of material goods and sexual partners, and to preserve those that one already possesses. It is also a way to control and to rule others and the world. Greed for power is also based on the belief of lack and of separation.

Aversion is the violence and aggressiveness necessary to acquire the objects of our greed and then to protect them. It is also the fear of not succeeding in acquiring them and protecting them.

It is important to note that the three poisons, ignorance, greed and aversion, are not our true nature, but conditioning that we mistake for our true nature. This is why our situation is not desperate. We can wake up and realise our true nature, which is wisdom, generosity and love. Both tendencies – positive and negative – exist in us, and manifest in turns. It seems, however, that we have difficulty controlling them and that, in moments of stress, our negative side usually takes over.

This negative aspect is what one calls the ego. It is preoccupied first of all with itself and with its own interests, even when at the expense of others. In really serious situations, on the other hand, it seems that the ego passes into the background and wisdom, love and generosity take over. Generally, though, the conditions of our daily life are not dramatic enough for this phenomenon to occur.

We, however, have the ability to observe the three poisons in ourselves, as well as their opposites, and understand the devastations or benefits that they produce in our life. We can also work on ourselves and transform ourselves to improve our life and our relations with others. This is a difficult and long-term task, as all those who have undertaken it have noticed.

When one extrapolates this observation to society, one can easily understand the difficult conditions that currently affect life on planet Earth. The inertia of a society is a lot heavier than the inertia of an individual, and thus its transformation is slower and more difficult. It even seems insurmountable, but this is not so. Let's remember that society is a

reflection of the individuals within it. Therefore, if all individuals transform themselves and awaken to a new reality, their reflection – society – will be transformed automatically, without effort and without difficulty. Awakened individuals will not want to live in a society that doesn't correspond to their new wisdom and their new aspirations. And their decisions to change society will no longer be opposed.

The present difficulty is that if a part of society awakens and understands the dramatic and urgent nature of the situation, and glimpses the possibilities for transformation, the other part will still be immersed in ignorance and firmly attached to greed and aversion. This second group is composed of people who possess the majority of the material goods and power. They want to keep them and even increase what they already have, while endeavouring to control the whole world and all its wealth. They are not very far, unfortunately, from achieving this.

To reach their goal, their method consists of manipulating people to maintain them in ignorance and to continue to make them believe that greed and aversion are the only solutions to their happiness, to their security and even to their survival. Of course, it is the opposite that is true! For millennia, society has functioned within this power game, and thus it continues to function today. As long as the population is in ignorance of the real manner of the functioning of the world and remains a victim of the manipulation and hypocrisy of the forces in power, there is little chance for change.

The majority of people ignore their power to transform and their capacity to provoke changes in society, because they have been given a whole set of fictitious liberties and rights that make them believe that they are free and that they have power. One of the biggest tricks of modern times is democracy. What power have individuals in our democratic

countries? What influence do they have on political decisions, manipulation of information, the power of the economy? What rights do they have to propose and realise transformations in society?

Of course, to survive in the world as it is presently organised, most people have to submit to the system. It controls all aspects of society, education, health, work, technology, the consumption of material goods, and in particular, the food chain. One way to escape from this system is to create autonomous communities that function on another system of values. These communities enable us to see that alternative solutions exist and are viable. Another way is to live in the system without being part of it, which means to use the system and its energy to transform it. This is subtler, but may be a more efficient way to act on the existing structures.

Recognising the ills of society doesn't mean that everything in our modern societies is bad or harmful, and that everything must disappear before a better world can appear. Far from it. Many healthy and positive elements exist in our societies, thank God! But it is important to understand what creates the problems and suffering, and destroys and alienates the life of beings, nature, the environment, the planet, especially the causes of these ills.

We should not repeat the mistakes of the system, as in modern medicine, which tries to eliminate the symptoms instead of healing the causes. And if the symptoms are complex, the causes are simple: they are our values and our beliefs. Instead of being based on wisdom, generosity and love, they are based on ignorance, greed and aversion. The recognition of the causes is the most important part of the process of healing and transformation... It is here that each of us must begin, by observing their presence inside ourselves!

Time

The concept of time conditions all aspects of our life. It is also one of the things that we have great difficulty in grasping. If our material world is a three dimensional world, it seems there exists a fourth dimension, time, that allows the three others to change. When we observe any phenomenon in space, in the three dimensional world, we observe it at a given moment in time, and if we observe it at another moment, it is different. This is the law of impermanence, that says that everything is in a state of constant change.

This law is based on the hypothesis of the existence of linear time, that inexorably moves forwards from the past towards the future, passing through the present moment, which is an infinitesimal and elusive point on the line of time. According to this theory, time never stops, it doesn't have an origin nor an end, because there is always a moment that precedes and a moment that follows any point on the straight line of time. If the universe began at the time of the big bang, there was a moment that preceded the big bang; and if the universe must disappear one day, there will be a moment that will follow that end.

Time as we perceive it is based on regular cycles, like those of the rotation of the earth on its axis in twenty-four hours – which gives us the unit of a day, divided in turn into hours, minutes and seconds; and of the rotation of the earth around the sun – which gives us the unit of a year, divided into months, weeks and days. New and more precise systems of time measurement have been discovered, like the vibratory rate of quartz crystals. Thus, scientific observation of

the material world – whether it is the movement of stars or particles – gives us a precise quantitative definition of time, that enables us to adjust our watches, our clocks and our chronometers.

It seems, however, that our perception of time possesses another dimension, which one could call qualitative. We don't function like clocks, according to a regular and invariable rhythm. Sometimes, it seems to us that time passes very quickly, that we don't manage to do everything that we would like to do, that we live at a run and that we are always late. At other moments, time seems to move in slow motion, or even to stop. And there are yet other moments when we lose the sense of time completely, for example, during sleep, in meditation, or when we are completely absorbed in an activity that fascinates us and occupies all our attention.

The perception of the different qualities of time shows us that time is something relative, and not an absolute dimension as the scientists would like us to believe. The sages of the past said that time does not exist, that it is an illusion that imprisons us in the infernal round of existences. If one observes the world, it is true that time, schedules, deadlines... all imprison most people in the infernal round of their everyday life. This is exactly what those in power want to control the world and get richer at its expense!

Why did human beings become slaves to time? Because they have been conditioned to live in an illusory reality based on linear time. And this reality only exists in the mind: it is created by our mind. In true reality, only the present moment exists. The past has ceased to exist, it won't ever exist anymore, it is only a memory. And the future doesn't yet exist; it will never exist, because, when it does exist, it will be called the present. Yet we live the largest part of our life in memories of the past and projections into the future. We live in our thoughts and not in reality.

The fact of living in the illusion of time, in the ignorance of the true nature of reality, in the past or in the future, is the cause of all our problems and our suffering. As the past and the future don't exist, we live in a reality that doesn't exist. We are concerned about situations, circumstances, events, phenomena, people, things... that don't exist, here and now. And these concerns give rise to thoughts, emotions and negative reactions that disrupt our life. Memories of the past generate regrets, resentments, guilt, pride, frustration... Expectations of the future produce stress, fear, desire, anxiety... When we identify with these thoughts, we take them for real. They become real and we truly suffer from them.

On the other hand, if we live in the present moment, the only one that really exists, we live an experience that is not conditioned by the past and the future; a new, pure, vibrant, luminous experience, that is beyond any duality of good and evil, and any concept created by the mind. The fact of being completely present to this experience places it outside of time, in eternity, and also in peace, serenity and joy, free of any suffering. The difficulty is to remain in this instant presence, without being distracted by thoughts of the past and the future. And if one has the misfortune to identify with one of those thoughts, one is instantly projected into time again, into the cycle of causality, and into the cycle of suffering.

Thus, every time one feels any dissatisfaction, one knows that one has lost the present moment. One is living in time, instead of living in reality. As soon as one becomes conscious of this, one can return to the present moment, and find the light again... Awakening, or enlightenment, is to remain constantly in this presence, without being distracted. It is not easy, but each moment of presence is a moment of

bliss that enables us to escape from the wheel of time, and gives another dimension to our life.

Microcosm and Macrocosm

To really understand the present situation of the world and to consider it from a wise and reasonable perspective, it is good to take the old principle of microcosm and macrocosm. Let's compare the world, the planet Earth, with a living being, let's say a human being. Because this is exactly what the earth is, a large being composed of billions of small living beings, plants, animals, humans, and also of a complex mineral structure that, if it is not living in the sense in which we generally perceive life, is composed, however, of the same atomic particles in perpetual movement and the same fields of energy.

If one uses this comparison, the impact of the event of September 11, 2001, on the being Earth, would be as a little pimple on the tip of a nose of a human being. Evidently, for persons who are very attached to their personal image, this could be dramatic! But it should not be exaggerated either. The seriousness of a discomfort depends on the way in which one reacts to it. One could bear one's pain with patience, endeavour to understand the causes of it and try to cure it with wisdom. Alternatively, one could panic and find oneself in a state of deep psychological upheaval dominated by anger, frustration and anxiety, go out of one's mind and make decisions and measures completely disproportionate and inefficient for solving the problem.

A person can decide to undertake a powerful antibiotic treatment in order to eradicate forever the microbes that dared to give birth to this small pimple. The pimple will disappear, but others will soon appear on other parts of the

face, because the cause of these little infections is a diet that is too rich, saturated with chemical poisons and not properly balanced. Moreover, the antibiotics are going to cause serious damage in the intestinal flora and to the person's immune system. He will be severely weakened, as well as looking bad – which is not going to improve his precious image – and he will be the prey to a quantity of other troubles that are going to affect all parts of his body...

Prayer

Prayer is an efficient practice to materialise our desires, our goals and our aspirations. There are, however, several rules to follow for our prayers to be efficient.

It is important to first determine with precision our desires, our goals and our aspirations; for the short-term, one to two months; middle-term, six months to one year; and long-term, three to ten years. It is preferable to write a list. This list is not definitive, and one can go back to it and modify it regularly, let's say once a month.

This first stage is not easy, at least for me. We notice that even though we are not really satisfied with our life and would like things to change, we often don't know precisely what we want. Be careful, however, because the things for which you pray may happen! Are you completely sure that this is really what you want? Are you certain that what you want is really good for you?

It is up to you to find out to whom you want to address your prayer. To God, to another divinity, to a guide or a spiritual master, to the Source, to the universe or the cosmic energy, to the Tao, to the light, to your Buddha nature or your higher Self. Everyone must find their own words and must invoke the superior power that they believe will be the most propitious to granting their prayers.

It is good to find a moment of calm, for example, in the morning or in the evening, at the end of your meditation or of another spiritual practice. Choose a harmonious place, where you feel comfortable, in the presence of images or

objects that inspire you and create a sacred space. Perform, if needed, a small ritual, light some candles or burn incense. It seems that to recite one's prayer aloud is more powerful, but this is not necessary.

The way of expressing one's prayer is very important. Never use any sentences in the negative form, in other words, say what you want and not what you don't want. Don't express a desire, but the manifestation of this desire, otherwise you are going to remain in the state of desire. It is good to visualise what you want as precisely as possible and to imagine the situation as if you already have it. Express your thanks, your gratitude, for having already received your desire. Say, for example, "thank you for my house in the countryside", and not "I want to have a house in the countryside" or "I don't want to live in the city anymore". Prayers of gratitude are more efficient than prayers of supplication.

Your prayer can be long; don't hesitate to express all your desires and your aspirations.

For the thought-form of your desire to manifest on the material plan, it is necessary to build it, to strengthen it and to fortify it. For that, it is important that you are convinced that it is really what you want and have the faith that you are going to get it. Perseverance is very important, especially if your desire is big and important. Don't get discouraged after a few days or a few weeks, but persist. It may not be the moment yet, or you may not be ready yet for this important change in your life. Stand fast and don't give up.

The prayer must come from the heart. You must feel what you want, rather than develop stratagems with your mind. Control the purity of your motivation as well. Is it based on love and compassion, or on fear, aversion, jealousy, greed, pride? Make sure that your desire will be beneficial not only for you, but also for the people close to you, for others,

for the world. If you pray for the misfortune of others, it will fall back on you sooner or later.

When one of your desires has been granted, don't forget to express your deep gratitude.

Oneness in Duality

Experience on the Path of Painting

What is duality? Literally duality is the coexistence of two things of different nature, but actually, it is the process of differentiation. From the differentiation of two things, the ten thousand things are born, variety and diversity develop, and the universe expands, with its incalculable number of particles, atoms, molecules, cells, living beings, plants, rocks, mountains, rivers, seas, continents, planets, stars, galaxies... all separate from each other, and separate from their creator, the mind that observes them. Separation creates duality of subject and object. From duality of subject and object comparison arises, with all pairs of opposites: big and small, near and far, good and bad, beautiful and ugly, pleasant and unpleasant... Pairs of opposites breed judgement, judgement produce concepts, and concepts make up the world. In the world, the relationships between subjects and objects create the feelings of like and dislike, and all kinds of emotions: attachment, hatred, pride, desire, fear, joy, love, compassion, equanimity... As even the purest of these emotions arise from duality and are impermanent, they cannot bring us complete freedom and fulfilment, and the world of duality is always beset with difficulties.

Now what is oneness? It is obviously the opposite of duality. Oneness is the situation in which there are not two things, but only one thing; there is no differentiation, but identification. In oneness there is no diversity, no separation, no subject and object, no comparisons, no pairs of opposites, no judgement, no concepts, no relationships, no feel-

ings and no emotions. This state seems very different from the world we see around us, and is very unlikely to ever occur to us. If we want to understand how the state of oneness can occur, we must first discover the primordial cause of duality, and if we can suppress this cause, oneness will remain. The primordial cause of duality is very simple, it is time. Time allows us to perceive different and separate things, and to compare them. Two different things must be separate, either in time or in space. If two things are separate in time, even if they happen in the same place, one is happening before the other, and we need to live in time, to wait, to perceive them both. If two things are separate in space, are located in two different places, we need time to go from one place to the other. Even if they are close to each other, our mind, which cannot perceive two different things at the same time, needs time to go from one thing to the other, or to go from itself, the subject, to the object.

What does it mean to suppress time? First, on the level of physics, it means that the whole process of the universe – where everything, from particles to living beings and to galaxies, is impermanent and constantly moving – will stop, and everything will become permanent and perfectly still. As the nature and locality of things are conditioned by previous causes and by temporal interrelations, it would be impossible, without time, to know the actual nature and locality of things, because the past information that should define them would not be available. But this does not mean, however, that things have disappeared and don't exist. To use a simile, the situation would look like the projection of all possible phenomena onto the surface of a sphere. The surface of a sphere is a good representation of oneness, because, though it is finite, it has no beginning and end, and though it abides in space, none of its points can be differentiated from the other. The projected phenomena would not manifest in

perceptible forms, but would all be contained on the blank surface of the sphere. A bright clear light would radiate from the sphere, produced by the superposition of the light images of all the projected phenomena. If we take out all the projected images of the infinite array of potential phenomena except one, this one will manifest in its precise perceptible form. The bright clear light of oneness, even if it seems empty of any sign or form, contains them all, it is the melting pot of all phenomena, and the womb of omniscience.

Now, on the human level, how can we approach the state of oneness? Of course, with our physical body, we cannot live in a world without time, neither can we live as a mere projection of light on a sphere. What we can do, however, is to live in the present moment, only in the present moment, in one present moment after another, with constant mindfulness of every successive flash of consciousness, without distraction. Distraction is jumping into the past – in memories – or into the future – in imaginations, desires, fears, expectations, plans – and then comparing and judging the present on the basis of the past or the future. These travels in time are the primordial causes for the arising of duality in the mind. The present moment is oneness, it is permanent, eternal, and completely still, and it contains infinite potentiality. In oneness, we are never separate from the present moment, we are the present moment, we are infinite potentialities, we are omniscience, and we radiate love and peace. But as soon as distraction arises, we fall again into time and into duality, and lose sight of the infinite potentialities of oneness. We fall again into ignorance, and forget that we are omniscient. Our love and peace dim, the stillness of eternity vanishes, and we are compelled to struggle again in the restlessness of the world. But hopefully, the experience of oneness will not forget us...

The experience of oneness can manifest at different levels. The pure experience of the blank clear light only happens in meditative states; it is not perceptible by our physical senses, but only by the mind. As it is formless, it cannot be represented by a painting, as it is non-conceptual, it cannot be expressed by language. At the level of our physical senses functioning in the world, we cannot completely suppress time, and even the present moment, the shortest flashes of sense consciousness that we can perceive, have a duration in time, and the appearance of oneness is no longer a blank clear light, because colours and forms have time to arise in these very short moments. Nevertheless the duration of one moment of consciousness is too short for the formation of precise figurative concepts. The colours and forms that arise are what the artist sees, when his vision transcends time and the duality of the figurative perception of the world. These abstract patterns may seem random and chaotic, but they may well be the web of primordial reality arising from the clear light of oneness. In his timeless play with the infinite potentiality of colours and forms, even in a world of duality, the artist can always pick the bloom of oneness!

This text is quoted from the book *Oneness in Duality*, by Erika Dias and Pierre Wittmann, published by Wisdom Gift Publications in 1993.

The twenty paintings illustrating this book, created in Bangkok in 1990 and 1991, have no titles. They try to capture the non-conceptual patterns arising from oneness, and dissolving into it. A selection of these paintings are presented on www.wisdomlight.org.

Daily Practice and Disengagement from the World

During periods of difficulty, of tension, of crisis, whether on world level or personal level, it is important to remain centred, to keep one's calm and one's inner peace, not to let oneself be influenced or carried away by outside circumstances, as dramatic as they may be, or by negative energies and emotions.

This is not an easy task. In difficult circumstances, the most reliable and strongest help than one can find is inside oneself. This is an opportunity to understand the benefit of a regular personal practice, a spiritual practice, such as yoga, meditation, prayer, Qi Gong, Tai Ji Quan (or Tai Chi)... or an activity such as sports, gymnastics, walking, music, painting... It is important that it is an activity that pleases us, and that enables us, every day, to disengage ourselves from the world and from our problems, to quickly regain our centre and our inner calm.

Discipline, and if needed a routine or a ritual, are necessary to encourage us to remain faithful to these intimate appointments with ourselves. The efficiency of the practice results from the fact that it enables us to centre ourselves in our body or our heart, rather than in our mind and our thoughts. This is why it is preferable to choose a spiritual, physical or creative practice, rather than an intellectual one. The problems, the difficulties and the outside world only exist in our mind. It is our mind and our rational intelligence that create stress, anxiety, discouragement, resentments...

and all the negative emotions that drain our energy, weaken our immune system, provoke disputes with the people around us and feed our inner conflicts.

When we disengage ourselves from the world created by the mind, we use the intelligence of the heart or of the body. They take over from the mind, and bring us inner peace, well-being and contentment. Our biological rhythms calm down, our body fortifies itself, our energy increases, and we are able to live in the present moment.

Then the energy, the harmony, the calm and the positive feelings that live in us will not only help us to face outside circumstances with equanimity, but will also allow us to act with kindness towards the people around us and to have a positive and calming influence on others, on our environment and on society in general.

Therefore, during periods of difficulty and crisis, it is even more important to have the discipline to do our daily practice. In many cases, it is when we disengage ourselves from the world that we help it the most!

Feng Shui

Feng Shui is a ancient Chinese art that deals with the harmonious arrangement of our environment. The Chinese discovered that the environment in which we live has a direct influence on our well-being, our health and the success of our life. Our environment is firstly the places where we spend most of our time, our home and our workplace. But all places where we stay for long or short lengths of time have also their relative importance.

Feng Shui, which dates back several millennia, is closely linked to other teachings of Chinese wisdom like Taoism, Chinese Medicine and the Yi Jing. It is based on the fundamental principles of Chinese culture, the *yin* and the *yang*, the five elements (water, wood, fire, earth and metal) and the eight trigrams (*ba gua*). Even though these basic principles are simple, the techniques of application are vast, multiple and complex.

There is an abundance of literature on Feng Shui, especially in the Chinese language. I remember that in one of the large bookstores in Taipei where I enjoyed plunging myself into the energy of books, a whole floor was reserved for Feng Shui. Today, there are also many works in English, but these are mainly for the general public. The real teaching of Feng Shui is in oral transmission. It is quite difficult to understand its essence and to learn how to practice it from books. However, some general ideas on Feng Shui may give you the desire to reconsider the disposition of your environment, to consult a practitioner of the art, or to find a master who will be able to teach it to you.

One of the aspects of Feng Shui that fascinates me is that our environment – whether our whole house or our apartment, or more specifically our room or our office – is formed of a geometric structure called the “*lo shu* square”, divided into nine houses, or zones, each representing one of the aspects of our life. Each of these houses is at the same time linked to a number, a trigram, an element, a colour, a shape, a cardinal point, a season, a moment of the day, a type of energy, a sense, an inner organ... The nine aspects are:

1. Career
2. Relationships and marriage
3. Parents, family, authorities
4. Prosperity, abundance, good fortune
5. Health
6. Helpful friends, philanthropy
7. Creativity, children
8. Meditation, knowledge, wisdom
9. Fame, recognition, enlightenment

Thus, when energy circulates well and harmony reigns between the nine houses and within each of them, in the same way energy circulates well and harmony reigns in our being and in our life. The microcosm is a reflection of the macrocosm, and vice versa. When anything is not going as you would like it to in your life, observe your environment. And one of the first things to do, for which there is no need to be a specialist of Feng Shui, is to clean, to tidy up and to get rid of all the old useless things that pollute your environment, your life and your health.

Love

If one looks for love in the *Robert Dictionary*, one notes that love has three main meanings, that is to say that there can be three kinds of love. First, the most popular definition, which is “the inclination towards a person, usually of passionate character, founded on sexual instinct, but leading to various behaviours”. Be sure to note the last part of the definition, the various behaviours! This includes the love of movies and novels, and also the romantic or not so romantic periods of our life. Next we find “the affection between family members”, which is the love for one’s children, for one’s parents and for one’s brothers and sisters, that also leads, even though it is not specified, to various behaviours. Finally, “the disposition to want good for another (God, one’s neighbour, humanity, one’s homeland) and to devote oneself to it”.

It should be noticed that the dictionary mentions these three kinds of love in the inverse order, maybe in order to go from the noblest to the most vulgar. The first two on my list are those that we know best. We all practice them and we know their satisfactions and frustrations from our personal experience. It is rather of the third one that I would like to speak: divine love, love for one’s neighbour, loving-kindness, unconditional love for all living beings. This is the type of love that is considered by all religious and spiritual traditions as the apex of human emotions.

But as in our world of duality nothing exists without its opposite, it is also in the name of love for one’s homeland and of love for God, that the worst atrocities in the history

of humanity were – and still are – committed. Fanaticism and terrorism are therefore extreme forms of love; and these forms are also found, differently named, in our individual relationships with our family and our partners. The collective feelings and the machinations of societies are the reflection of the emotions and actions of the individuals within the society.

I think that it is necessary to make a distinction between unconditional love and love for another as it is defined in the dictionary. Indeed, the love for God or for the homeland is not, in my opinion, an unconditional love, because it is a love for **my** god and **my** homeland. It often comes with hatred without mercy for the followers of other gods and the citizens of other homelands. They become the infidels and enemies. They are often not even considered as fully-fledged human beings, and our divine or patriotic love gives us the right, or the duty, to slaughter them mercilessly.

Unconditional love, or love for one's neighbour, is a love without reservation for all beings, without discrimination and without conditions. There are no more enemies nor infidels. There is no more hatred, attachment, nor indifference for any being. This is much more difficult than to love, to want only good, to protect, to defend one's family, one's friends or one's country. If one thinks about it, if one deeply contemplates what this means, it seems almost superhuman, unreachable, utopian. But, in spite of all the love that we may have for our near and dear ones, the world is what it is, a world of fear, of suffering, of conflict, of frustration, more than it is a world of love, peace, harmony and joy.

Unconditional love doesn't only ask us to be kind to all those we are close to, to forgive those who offend us and to help those who are more deprived than us – which we all do more or less well when responding to particular circumstances – it requires a deep transformation of our percep-

tions, our beliefs and our level of consciousness. In most cases, it is a process that requires an effort of will, a deep motivation and dedicated practice. The path is long and the progress is gradual.

However, those who follow this spiritual path are numerous, those who have a daily practice, who meditate, who pray, who read or listen to teachings, with regularity and perseverance. And, as the years go by, they notice the progress. But there are also fast transformations, sudden realisations, often following an unforeseen and painful event, an accident, an illness, a break-up of a relationship, the death of a dear one, the loss of a job, a natural disaster or a tragic event. This shock can produce a change of consciousness, a new perception of the world and of oneself, turning upside down the beliefs and the habits that blocked us or imprisoned us.

For unconditional love to manifest, our perceptions must change: first the perception that we are beings isolated and independent from each other, separate from nature, from the earth, from the universe; then the perception that we live in a world of lack, where there are not enough resources, food, energy, money for everybody. These erroneous perceptions instinctively push us to fight to survive, which means to put our needs and those of our dear ones before those of others. We live then in fear of lack, with greed to acquire what we lack and with aversion for those who may prevent us from satisfying our needs or take from us what we have.

The right perception is first that we are part of a whole, we are one, we are all intimately interconnected, as the multiple cells of an immense body that is the earth. And everything that affects one individual, good or evil, affects us all, in the same way as the illness of one part of our body affects the whole of our being. Thus, when one does good or harm to others, at the same time one does good or harm

to oneself. The right perception is also that the nature of the universe is abundance and not lack. Everything we need to live is available for us. We have the power to create it and to manifest it.

This way of perceiving things radically changes our vision of the world and our level of consciousness. Unconditional love thus becomes evident, the normal behaviour to adopt in all circumstances, and the only way to find abundance, health, and harmony. When we care about the happiness of others, about the happiness of all beings, we inevitably create the conditions for our own happiness.

Knowing How to Connect

With whom, with what, does one choose to connect? Although we have the impression that we are individuals separated from each other and isolated in the middle of a universe that often appears to us as cold and unwelcoming, this is not the reality. We are part of a living whole, which is benevolent towards all of its most minute parts. These are closely interconnected, and interact constantly with each other, even if it is without our knowing.

We have, however, the choice and the power to encourage some connections, and to limit others. Our connections are not limited to our relations with other human beings. We have relations with all material objects, with minerals, plants, animals, the stars and all phenomena in the visible world. When we speak of the visible world, we think of the material world. However, the visible world is not limited to our environment, to what we perceive here and now in our life. It contains also that which is not directly visible to us at this moment, that is visible in other places, that was visible in the past and that will be in the future, that is not visible to the naked eye, the infinitely small and the infinitely big.

We are also connected to the invisible world, which is considerably more vast and more varied than the visible or material world. It contains the souls of our non-incarnate fellow creatures, and also all kinds of other beings, entities and deities who live in other worlds and in other dimensions. It also contains energy in all its forms, material and non-material, and manifested and non-manifested consciousness. It contains all existing and potential ideas and all the

thought-forms that they generate. It contains the source of wisdom and omniscience, and the primordial intelligence that conceives and creates the universe in all its aspects and with all its innumerable parts. It contains everything that we can imagine and everything that we cannot imagine. It contains the potentiality of everything that exists and of everything that doesn't exist.

Among all these connections, which are the ones we are conscious of in our daily life? Which are those that we use to improve the quality of our life, to widen our perceptions, to solve our difficulties or to heal our illnesses? Which are those that make us suffer, that cause us stress, that drain our energy, that make us sick – but that we have regular and priority relations with nevertheless?

These connections are not only relations with people, but with what we eat, the information that we receive from the media, our emotions and our beliefs, the pollution of our environment, our work, the places that we frequent, our leisure activities... Which are the connections that we neglect – like nature, the ingredients of a healthy life, beauty, love and kindness for others, meditation and the other spiritual practices, art, inspiring readings...? Which are the connections that we never dare to contact – although they appear in our cosmic address book – like our guides, our guardian angels, the wisdom of the Source, healing energy, universal abundance or, nearer to us, our own power of creation and our divine nature...?

The next time that things are not going the way you wish them to in your life, step back a little and listen to your intuition. Decide to limit or to phase out some of your usual harmful connections. Then find the courage to see again those that you have neglected for a long time, but that are beneficial to you. And contact those that you have never yet dared to speak to, who wait patiently for your call. The

quality of our life depends upon the choice of our connections!

The Miracle of Water

Water is one of the vital needs of our physical body. It is also the crucible of life on our planet. The increasing pollution of the oceans, the lakes, the rivers, the ground waters and the atmosphere is becoming one of the main threats for our survival, unless we quickly find radical ways to purify water and clean it of pollution. Fortunately, numerous encouraging research in this domain has come into being over the last few years.

One of such study is published in a beautiful book by Dr. Masaru Emoto, *The Message from Water*, that contains a hundred and twenty-five superb photographs of water crystals. Through analysing and photographing water crystals, Dr. Emoto discovered a new manner in which to study water and its moods. Every crystal of water, or of snow, is different, like every human being or every individual of any living species.

Dr. Emoto first discovered that crystals of water are very different if the water is pure or polluted, living or dead. Then he found that the crystals of water change if water is exposed to music, and also to words, thoughts or emotions. If one writes words like thank you, beautiful, love, angel... on a bottle of water, the crystals of this water become beautiful and harmonious. If one writes words like dirty, evil, ugly, kill... the crystals become ugly and deformed. Dr. Emoto asked five hundred people in Japan to meditate while concentrating from a distance on a bottle of polluted water. After the meditation, analysis of the water produced one of the most beautiful crystals he had seen. A Japanese monk

prayed for one hour on the shore of an artificial lake and, after his prayer, the aspect of the lake had changed completely!

“The message of water tells us to look inside us” says Dr. Emoto in the subtitle of his book. As seventy percent of our body is composed of water, it is easy to imagine how pollution, our environment, and also the words, the thoughts and the benevolent or aggressive emotions to which we are exposed, can affect the water that for a large part composes our billions of cells. These effects don’t limit themselves to our body, but they influence our ecosystem and the whole life of the planet.

Another astonishing revelation in this book is the recent discovery that water arrives on earth, coming from space in the form of small comets – similar to large snowballs – that transform into clouds when they enter the atmosphere. While analysing this water from space, it was found that it contains organic substances that could well prove the extra-terrestrial origin of life on earth.

A second volume, *The Message of Water – Volume 2*, was published at the end of the year 2001. On the internet, you will find additional information on the miracle of water and numerous photographs of water crystals on www.hado.net and www.wellnessgoods.com/art_wat_messages.html.

A New World

Some speak of a new world, of a new age – the age of Aquarius – and of a new paradigm, that is emerging, being born; a world of peace, love and harmony that should replace the chaotic, decadent and polluted world that we know today. Numerous prophecies, visions, and revelations announce or describe this new world. Even though these prophecies have proliferated during the last decade, they are not new, and all religious and spiritual traditions have announced for millennia big changes for the time in which we currently live. More and more people feel the arrival of this transformation, understanding that things cannot continue as they are, that we are arriving at a crossroads, at a choice between the self-destruction of our civilisation and the birth of a new world.

In fact, it is probably both that are going to occur, the old world must disappear to leave room for the new. It is, however, difficult to imagine this new world. Something new is something as yet unknown, and the unknown frightens us. But what frightens us most is to let go, to abandon the present – which is also the past – and what we possess, what we have acquired with such effort. To let go of the things we are attached to, the pride in our human achievements, our technology, our powers, our material riches, our culture, our art, our science, our institutions...

We would like to keep all these treasures, these fruits of the untiring labour of innumerable generations, while renouncing, in this heritage, all the turpitudes of our society, war, pollution, poverty, social problems, illness, hunger,

suffering, overpopulation... This is unfortunately not possible, because the positive and negative aspects of our society go together, are inseparable.

It is war, illness and overpopulation that make our economy work. This economy finances science, that encourages the development of our technology, which in turn pollutes the planet and causes illness. It is a vicious circle. In the same way, our greed and our attachment to the material objects that we think are going to bring us happiness, are the very causes of our miseries.

The foundations of a new and different world should not be looked for in the structures, the institutions and the values of the present world. Change is not patching up. But this doesn't mean that it is necessary to destroy everything and give up all that we have today, because there will necessarily be a period of transition. We should, however, be ready to throw everything back into question, to transform everything. It is only at that moment that things will change by themselves, spontaneously, smoothly and without effort.

The image of a new world shows us that everything that we possess today is no longer appropriate, no longer corresponds to our needs, has become completely obsolete. I believe that we should not be timid in our vision for the future, nor be afraid to imagine the unimaginable. After all, most of our technology was unimaginable a century ago. But technology and science don't have the answers to the changes that are awaiting us, because they are still based on the old beliefs and the old values of humanity.

It is human beings who must change. It is us, our level of consciousness, our understanding of our nature, our vision of reality, our aspirations, our capacities and our moral values which must transform. And it is the birth of these new human beings that will change the world. Because the world

is only a reflection of our consciousness, a creation of our mind, which is at the same time the mind of the universe. It is also a reflection of our love for the whole, of which we are an inseparable part, of our unconditional love for the earth and all living beings. The power of creation of these new human beings is still unimaginable for most people, because it is not based on the material world, on the forces, the energies and the technology that we know today, but on the subtle and immaterial forces of the mind and of love.

A vision of the new world must give free expression to our aspirations and our imagination. It is a vision of a world in which we dream of living, of paradise on earth, of a new reality that has nothing to do with the one that we know... We shall find all our utopian desires there, including:

A new type of human being, of whom indigo children are the prototypes.

A new perception of who we really are, of our spiritual nature, of our power and our capacity to co-create our reality.

New ways to create and to maintain a world of peace, love and harmony.

New forms of energy, renewable, free and non-polluting.

A new education system based on the development of love, intuition and wisdom, rather than on intellectual knowledge, competition and profit.

A new economic system, without money, based on sharing and on the satisfaction of the needs of everyone, rather than on personal profit and blind consumerism.

New ways to clean the earth of all pollution and nuclear waste.

A new medical system based on an holistic view of the human being, without the use of drugs and chemical poisons.

New non-polluting and silent means of transport, without motors or vehicles as we know them.

Healthy, natural and non-genetically manipulated food.
Non-polluted water and air.

A new type of society based on community, transparency and wisdom, rather than on power, lies and ignorance.

A new art of living based on simplicity, love, freedom and responsibility, rather than on slave labour, fear, stress and manipulation.

A non-polluting technology that uses renewable and spontaneously created materials, for the construction of lodgings and the manufacture of useful everyday objects.

New forms of media that broadcast true, useful and fulfilling information.

New means of non-verbal communication, such as telepathy and spontaneous knowledge, without the use of electromagnetic devices.

One can certainly go much further in this vision of a new world. We should not hesitate to consider big changes. I have the impression that there won't be much to keep of what we have, believe, do and are... in the present world.

Wonder

Wonder is an emotion produced by a perception accompanied by astonishment and admiration. Wonder provokes a deep feeling of joy. It is the heart that perceives, and not the mind. There is no judgment, concept, or duality in wonder. It is a warm emotion, spontaneously produced by the spectacle that is offered to our senses. Without preconceived ideas, without reference to past experiences, the perception is completely pure, new, innocent, authentic. Children often wonder at what they discover for the first time. Adults wonder with more difficulty, because they have already seen everything; they are blasé. They have expectations, requirements, prejudices, and they are easily disappointed.

Wonder requires a little effort, we must deserve it. We have to forget everything that we have already seen or experienced and change our way of perceiving, cast a new glance at things or lend them another ear. In daily life, we rarely perceive things as they are. Our mind, once it has recognised them, covers them automatically with a conceptual label that doesn't correspond to reality, and classifies them without a moment's hesitation. The heart doesn't intervene in this process, which is why there is no wonder. But when we manage to disconnect the mind and perceive with the heart, a completely different picture appears.

I am very sensitive to the wonder that accompanies visual images because I am a painter, but wonder is not limited to the sense of sight. We can wonder at all the objects of the senses, sounds, odours, tastes, physical sensations and ideas. The mind too, in spite of its tendencies to logic and reason,

can come out of its coldness and have emotions, for example when it has a brilliant idea. Actually, all perceptions of the senses and all ideas are brilliant and wonderful. They are magical and miraculous, when we take the time to really perceive them, which means to be present to our perceptions.

The simple fact of perceiving, seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting, touching, having ideas – and being conscious of these perceptions – is a cause for wonder. The difficulty is to remain in the present moment and to be attentive to these perceptions. If we make the effort to really look at something, even something that we see every day, we will realise that we may never have truly seen it. What we usually perceive is an approximate and stereotyped mental image, but not reality.

Direct perception shows us all the details of the object, its individuality, its changing appearance, and also its immutable essence. The separation between the object and the observer disappears, and we become this object, because we are part of a same omnipresent whole. At the same time as we perceive objects, we perceive ourselves, we discover our true nature, who we really are. We discover the world, the universe, life... and this realisation is a wonder. In front of this vision, joy sweeps through us and carries us to another level of consciousness, to another dimension, where all is beauty, purity, harmony, love.

All phenomena respond to an immutable order, to a perfect and undeniable intention. The ancient traditions speak of the realm of pure perceptions. What prevents us from staying there permanently? Merely our way of perceiving. The dualistic and conceptual perception of the mind leads us to judge reality and to want to manipulate it so that it conforms to our desires, instead of accepting it as it is. This is the cause of frustration, greed, aversion and of all

our problems and our suffering. The pure perception of the heart, on the other hand, enables us to accept things as they are with wonder, joy and gratitude. It is the cause of peace, contentment and kindness. It is our choice...

Epilogue:

Being in Love with Life

The happiness I am speaking about in this book – as you realise – is not material happiness, the one that promises a life dedicated to distractions and mundane activities. Its secret doesn't lie in a new piece of software, a more beautiful car, a house in the countryside or vacations on tropical islands. You may have tried all of that already. Even though the excitement of these pleasures brought you temporary satisfaction, they probably didn't grant you lasting happiness...

The goal of this journey is inner happiness, a new state of being that one doesn't find in the outside world, but in the depths of one's heart. It is a state of consciousness that has always existed in us because it is our true nature, as well as the nature of everything that exists in the universe. Sometimes we have access to it: in moments of joy, of wonder, of love, in the bliss of a meditative experience, or the luminous revelation of an instant of truth. Unfortunately, this doesn't happen every day. Most of our time is spent immersed in our daily problems, conflicts, pains, worries, fears, negative emotions, stress... All the difficulties that overwhelm us, we cannot solve in an efficient way on a worldly level, the level of our ordinary consciousness. When we live in inner happiness, on the other hand, negativity and suffering dissolve, and disappear absolutely.

The happiness that this guide tempts you to discover is the happiness of the heart. It is interesting to note that in oriental languages the same word means both 'mind' and 'heart'. Because the sages of the past knew that the heart is

the home of the mind, of our consciousness. The heart is the centre of our being. The cardiac *chakra*, the source of the energy of love and compassion, is also the core of our energetic structure. It is this that makes the link between the three lower *chakras* – that connect us to the earth and to the material contingencies of our incarnation – and the three superior *chakras* – that unite us to heaven and to our spiritual aspirations. The heart is the sacred place where our masculine and feminine principles merge. It is in the heart that we are complete, that the true nature of our essential being replaces the separation of our small “I”s.

A good way to be happy is to be in love. Happiness of the heart is indeed what one feels when one is in love. This very particular feeling manifests when we have finally found unity, when we are no longer separate beings. Because the feeling of separation is what has always prevented us from being really happy. The happiness of being in love we generally find in a relationship with another person. The fragility of this situation is that if the other person stops meeting our expectations, disappoints us or leaves us, the happiness that depended upon this union disappears with it. The secret of happiness of the heart is to find this feeling of unity and completion inside oneself, without depending on the moods, the whims and the preferences of others.

Ayya Khema, in her book *Be an Island unto Yourself*, proposes that we be in love with the Buddha. This is a good way to be sure that our lover is not going to disappoint us, or to leave us for another. She recommends that we visualise a beautiful statue of the Buddha in our heart, and carry it around with us everywhere. The Tibetan Buddhists also visualise their favourite deity, Chenrezig, Guru Rinpoche, Tara... in their heart or on the top of their head, and are always accompanied by this divine presence. In the same way,

when one is in love, one is never separated from the one whom one loves.

We regain this feeling of love every time that we connect to the energy of the heart. When we draw our strength from the source of love that is in us, there are no more fears or expectations; and we are naturally disposed to love all beings. We accept things as they are, and nothing prevents us any longer from being in love with life, whatever the circumstances. To reach the wisdom of the heart, it is important to disconnect from the body, from its needs, its illnesses and its continual annoyances; and also from the mind, from its restlessness, its anxieties and its preoccupations with the past and the future. The heart always lives in the present. It is calm, luminous and benevolent. When we are able to focus our attention and our consciousness in it, the heart becomes our guide, our protector, and also our main source of energy.

It is by using the energy of the heart that yogis can spend winters in Himalayan caves, clothed in a simple veil of cotton. The technique that they use is the *tumo*, or inner heat, an esoteric teaching of Tibetan Buddhism. Other techniques exist to create this feeling of love, happiness and heat in the heart, in particular the first two meditative absorptions, named *jhana* in Pali. These are the fruits of concentration and reward to those who practice *samatha*, the meditation of calm. I also recently discovered with a lot of interest the modern techniques proposed by the book *The HeartMath Solution*. They teach us to use the intelligence of the heart to reduce stress, to improve our health and to increase our mental and intuitive capacities.

The simplest technique, according to my personal experience, is to concentrate on the force of love situated in the heart while visualising it like an incandescent light ball, until one feels a strong heat in the middle of the chest. this is a

fast and efficient way to get rid of our negative emotions and to heal conflicting or painful situations.

It is very important to find this space of happiness and peace in oneself, not only to transform the quality of our own existence – which is certainly desirable – but mainly in order to change the quality of life on our planet. If we don't bring peace, harmony and happiness to all beings, without exception, our own happiness will never be total and permanent. The well-being of society is inseparable from the well-being of each of us, and to create a world of peace and harmony, it is necessary to begin inside oneself. Heaven on earth is born in the heat of our heart!

Every time that you feel frustrated, irritated, stressed, depressed... disconnect the infernal machine of worries, demands and complaints of the mind, and return to your heart. It is there that true happiness resides...

Dedication

Thanks to the merits of those who practice the path of happiness

*May all beings find happiness and its causes
May they be free from suffering and its causes
May they know the great joy that erases all pains
May they stay in equanimity, without desire and without fear
May they live in inner peace and universal harmony*

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The following works are mentioned in the text or are directly concerned with some of the topics in this book. I strongly recommend that you read them if you wish for a good understanding of these topics. Not all are translated into English, as far as I know. You will find a more complete bibliography, as well as a list of addresses and contacts for courses and workshops, on www.wisdomlight.org.

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About the Author

Pierre Wittmann is a painter who explores the implications of art, healing and spirituality. He creates therapeutic paintings and extra-sensory light structures. For the past twenty years he has cultivated truth, wisdom and happiness, and his journeys have driven him to numerous spiritual masters, in the Orient and in the West.

He teaches Reiki and meditation, practices therapy and Angelic Healing, and contributes to spreading the light of a new era of peace, love and harmony on the planet. Writer when the mood is on him, he feels today a deep need to share his personal experiences and the fruits of his spiritual quest.

He shares his time between Thailand and France.

To know more about the author, his activities and the stages of his spiritual quest, please visit his bilingual website www.pierre-wittmann.com.