

N O W Roger Horrocks

I always read John Wren-Lewis's accounts of his experiences, *Self & Society* 27, 5, with awe, as they are so total and ongoing. He is one of the clearest examples of how enlightenment is available to all of us, and is not some kind of esoteric phenomenon restricted to Himalayan monks.

My own experiences are very different and much more spasmodic, but I have written a book about them, and possibly they are interesting to others. I have been meditating for over 20 years; a mixture of Zen sitting, Enlightenment Intensives, and my own form of meditation which just evolved over the years. It was in Intensives that I first had a break-through experience, and realized that it was possible to completely let go of the ego and the mind and experience the totality that is now. It seemed pretty obvious that the experiences of Buddha and Jesus were not esoteric, were not reserved for special people, but were available to everyone.

But one of the problems with such breakthroughs which happen in Enlightenment Intensives and other fast-track meditation systems is that the experience fades. The re-entry problem is considerable, one has to go home and go back to one's ordinary life, and many of one's friends and family can think you're a bit mad if you wander around talking about suchness or the present moment. And of course the mental habits and constructions are still very powerful and soon exert their grip again. Reality seems divided up again into self and other, matter and spirit, past and present, and so on.

For a period this disjunction was so strong for me that I completely gave up all meditation and all forms of spiritual teachings. I studied theology from 1983-86, and then I just turned away from it all for ten years. As I look back at that time, I feel that I was too young to integrate such spiritual upheavals. If you like, I wasn't ready to give up my ego, for it was pretty fragile, and my life was a mess in many ways, I had to get that in order.

This taught me a lot about the integration of spirituality into life. Enlightenment does not lead to a going beyond life or withdrawal from it, but an embrace of it, including all the unpleasant and painful bits. In fact, it's the unpleasant bits that start to train one in spiritual development. The ego seems at first to be the enemy or the barrier to enlightenment, but in the end, it turns out to be the gateway. Furthermore, the spiritual path is not some soft option - for many people it brings up agonizing feelings and aspects of oneself.

I came back to meditation in the 90s, and it was as if I'd never been away. But getting older definitely leads to a deepening of the process, as one is nearer to death, and one is not so enamoured of one's ego and one's image. One is more prepared to face existential death in the eternal now.

My experiences during the 90s followed a kind of logical sequence- I began to experience the divine nature of everything that existed, but still there was the strong stench of holiness and a kind of egotistical favour to it all, I was having an experience. The real breakthrough for me happened one day in Bath, doing a day of meditation with friends, when the present moment fell on me like a four storey building, crushing me to rubble. There was only the present, time and space were obliterated. Roger Horrocks was obliterated. My fear had gone, and there was only the infinite creativity of the Mind or God, or whatever label you want to give it. There was nothing, but the nothing gave birth to the universe in an instant and then annihilated it in another instant. In fact, it is created and destroyed in the same instant.

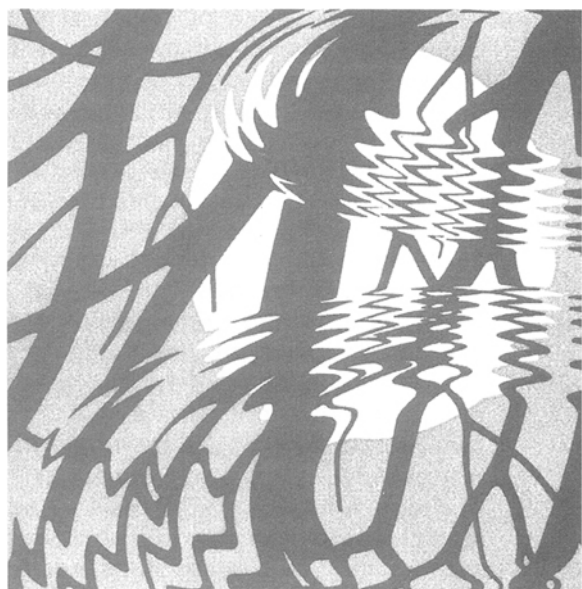
After that day I spent several months writing about it, and getting flashbacks. There seemed to be a kind of multiple letting go going on. First, letting go of the constructions of the mind, which tell us that there is a physical universe, there is a separate self, that I am a body, there is a sequence of time units, and so on. In the now, these things just disappear, and there is utter simplicity and unity.

With the disappearance of the I, the sound of the car going past becomes the entire universe. There is no experiencer. There is no subject and no object. Even to say 'there is letting go' is a complete fiction, but we're trying to bend language to describe the indescribable.

In the end there is a deep emptiness, but amazingly the emptiness is totally creative and loving, and is able to

create or recreate time and space, Roger Horrocks, and all the other accoutrements that go with being 'a person' in a physical universe.

Everything collapses; what I am, what another is, what life is, what God is, what Buddha is, what now is, all become one moment. This moment exists everywhere. There is neither self nor other. Many problems and key events in spirituality become transparent;



karma, reincarnation, Christ's crucifixion, Buddha's enlightenment. There is nothing esoteric about these issues; they are centred in our daily life.

What is delightful is that the mind still constructs all of its structures and one can go back to them, and one is also caught up in them as well at times. I feel also that the ego wages a fierce battle against such experience, for it dreads losing its hegemony. There is little doubt that serious meditation leads most people into very heavy

confrontation with the shadow. I define a saint now as someone who is conscious of the massive extent of their shadow. But paradoxically this leads to a further letting go, for one is unconsciously identified with the shadow.

My own meditation changed completely at this time. I no longer wanted to sit in a quiet room, in peaceful surroundings, and so on. What for? I relished meditation in noisy streets, raucous pubs, and so on. I realized that there could be no distractions, for the distraction itself is the everything-from-nothing. There could be no barriers to the truth or the essence of reality. The barrier is the truth itself.

I sent an e-mail to a friend in America, and wrote, 'there was never anyone to be enlightened'. This seems the greatest delight of all, and a complete liberation. It probably sounds mad or dangerous to some people, but it is not. I can now enjoy being Roger Horrocks more than ever, but can also abandon it totally. I also realize that we all do this every day, in those moments which are spontaneous. At the moment that you turned the tap on, or lifted the first spoonful of cereal in the morning, or just blinked, there was no self, no universe, no time, not even blinking. But the mind is lazy and deceitful and tells us that there are all of these things.

I feel deep gratitude to all the spiritual teachers; they have not lied to us. I also respect the great spiritual traditions such as Christianity, Buddhism, Sufism, and so on. They all encapsulate the truth, even if it often gets turned into historical stories which miss the essence of now.

Above all, Zen has hit the nail on the head about these matters, with its utterly concrete grasp of reality. Of course, as soon as one conceptualizes about it, one is back in the coils of the mind - but who cares? Even the coils of the mind are the absolute presence of the present. When the ego has died and returned, it seems clear that the ego itself is perfection, as is everything.

I think one has to reach a certain age to permit this degree of inflation without feeling crushed by the attendant guilt. But then we can embrace the guilt as the gift of God!

The other day I was listening to one of the great Christian hymns for Advent, borrowed from Judaism of course, 'Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel is come to Israel', and the tears ran down my face. I felt that Emmanuel has come, is always coming to us, as the Second Coming is always coming to us. This is the gift. They say in Zen that complete awakening does not differ from everyday life by one jot. That is the miracle.

Those twenty years often seemed like a desert, or in fact, I often seemed totally uninterested in spirituality. Yet the yeast carries on working in other ways. In the end, we have to reject the distinction between the spiritual and the non-spiritual, just as we have to reject the split between God and non-God, or the self and the not-self. Our life is an endless contemplation of what is. 'Spirituality' 'itself' dissolves into the present moment.

Roger Horrocks is a psychotherapist and writer. His publications include Masculinity in Crisis, Male Myths and Icons, and An Introduction to the Study of Sexuality. He has a book on Freud coming out in Autumn 2000.