

PROLOGUE

I discovered the Centre one night on a bridge over the River Chao Phya. I was thirty.

I was thinking about Prince Siddhartha. At twenty-nine, the Prince, going out from his palace, had seen an old man, a sick man, a dead man and a wandering ascetic.

He realised that sickness, old age and death happened to men whether they had palaces or not. He came to the conclusion that,

“This world has fallen on hard times.”

He left his family and home to seek the Truth.

Six years later, he had become the Buddha and proclaimed that the solution to the problem of suffering lay in *giving up this world* and all attachment to it.*

During the Buddha’s lifetime, some monks, on attaining the stage of Arahant (the final stage of perfection), did not wait for their lives to come to a natural end, but “took the knife”. That is, they killed themselves. This really did seem an uncompromising way of “giving up the world”.

The Buddha did not condemn them for this. He said it was a decision they were entitled to take and did not in any way affect their level of attainment. He did, however, discourage other monks from doing it, as it was getting the Order of Monks undesirable publicity among those who did not understand.

I walked across the river on one side of the bridge and back again on the other side. Several times. I stopped in the middle and looked down at the muddy water. It seemed that if life was in fact undesirable and the very source of suffering, and that death at some time was in any case inevitable, then it was perfectly reasonable to put an end to it sooner rather than later. I could find no attraction or attachment in myself at that moment for anything in the world. My hand rested on the handrail.

**or any other world*

I realised that, for all its reasonableness, it was nevertheless a jump in the dark. Unlike the Buddha and his Arahants, I had not already discovered where I would be heading.

Furthermore, if they had discovered something “beyond the world”, how had they discovered it while still “in the world”?

I continued to walk to and fro across the bridge. I noted the odd fact that, although it was not particularly late and it carried a main road out of Bangkok, no traffic or pedestrians had appeared on it since I arrived.

I resumed my train of thought. How do you find out what lies beyond the world before actually leaving it? This did not seem to be something that thinking could resolve.

At this point, various names given to the Buddha began to arise spontaneously in my mind as a kind of list. The Perfect One, the Fully Enlightened One, the All Knowing One, the Blissful One, the Blessed One... What caught my attention was the repetition of the word “One”.

Of course these titles are English translations. The original Pali does not have (nor need) an equivalent of our “one”. Nevertheless, the titles continued to present themselves in this way and I found myself quietly murmuring:-

One and not two,
That’s all you have to do.
One and not two,
That’s all you have to do.

My thinking petered out and came to an end. But I did not jump.

To my surprise, a feeling of good humour *arose*. Where from? It came from deep in the centre of my stomach where something, unexpectedly, became bright and smiled.

I didn’t quite feel as though I had found something. I didn’t quite feel that something had found me. I felt a sense of boundless integration.

I saw that the whole world, together with the senses that contacted the world, were, and had always been, *outside* and were and had always been the source of every conceivable form of suffering and inconvenience.

Later I came to see that all beings had this luminous Centre at the centre of their being and were, for the most part, unaware of its significance or even its existence.

This book contains the results of some of my researches into the Centre. Some may find it interesting.

However, in these matters as in others, the only experience that is of any use to you is your own. People can eulogise a particular brand of tea, but until you have tasted it yourself, it is second-hand experience. It may even be coffee.

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When the buffalo comes to the edge of the enclosure, horns, head and body pass through the bars quite easily. But not the tail!