

## **Some Personal Background**

### **An Awareness of the Transcendent**

Beginning in my childhood years, I began to be aware of something deeper in life – a spiritual dimension. In school, I was given a pocket-sized New Testament gift by the Gideons International; also, coincidentally a young pastor couple moved opposite to our home in a country town in southern Australia, and invited my two brothers and me to attend Sunday School.

I found meaning in the narratives and principles of the Scriptures during high school, teacher's college, university, and my adult life. Much later in life, Christian spirituality beckoned my interest, and I enjoyed learning about the contemplative life. I've also had a penchant for an inter-faith perspective.

### **Study in England**

In early adulthood (aged 23), I had an opportunity to follow my heartfelt desire for theology by studying at a small co-educational Christian college, set in an idyllic, peaceful, Hertfordshire country estate setting, close to Bricket Wood (between St. Albans and Watford).

During the two years (1972-74), important lifelong spiritual disciplines were developed – daily morning prayer, study and reflection; daily evening prayer; weekly day retreat; occasional fasting; and celebration of special feast days during the year.

Mornings were spent in classes; afternoons in work tasks (toward the maintenance of the property, such as gardening, janitorial work, kitchen duties, etc.)

Retrospectively seen, this experience partly paralleled a monastic life in that our lives were devoted to a spiritual calling!

In the years that followed, I completed a Bachelor of Arts (with an emphasis in theology), as well as two Masters degrees (with an emphasis in Christian spirituality). Additionally, I completed a Masters degree in education.

### **Introduction to Daily Meditation**

Much later in life (early sixties), a distinct turning point occurred when I came into contact with The World Community for Christian Meditation (<https://www.wccm.org/>). This group teaches the Christian tradition of meditation, and it was a vital introduction to the faithful practice of daily meditation. I also appreciated learning more about the contemplative life.

Father Laurence Freeman is the head of the WCCM, and has been involved in inter-faith dialogue with His Holiness the Dalai Lama. A good book in this context is *The Good Heart: A Buddhist Perspective on the Teachings of Jesus* by His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Also, a pivotal book for me (written by theologian Paul Knitter) was *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian*.

In listening to a CD recording, Laurence Freeman caught my attention by quoting the *Dhammapada*. This whetted my appetite and it became a door-opener to learn more of the Buddhist teachings because of the resonance I felt with Christian living principles.

### **Buddhist Studies**

To summarize, I came into contact with Buddhist teachings relatively late in life (beginning of 2012). Since then, I have taken online Buddhist courses and purchased many books.

The following teachers, in chronological order, have been as “spiritual friends” (*Kalyāna-mitratā*, Skt.):

<http://vipassana.com/> (Andrew Quernmore – *Vipassana Fellowship*; following the Theravada tradition of Buddhism)

<https://fpmt.org/> (Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche – *Discovering Buddhism* program; following Mahayana Buddhism)

<https://www.jamyang.co.uk/> (Geshe Tashi Tsering – *Foundation of Buddhist Thought* program; completed ‘The Four Noble Truths’ and ‘Relative Truth, Ultimate Truth’ modules)

<http://www.chungtian.org.au/> (Venerable Master Hsing Yun – Chung Tian Temple [Foguanshan Buddhist order]; Humanistic Buddhism; location for my Taking Refuge)

<https://www.southwales.ac.uk/> (Nick Swann – distance *MA Buddhist Studies* program with the University of South Wales. Completed ‘Buddhist Traditions’ module, but exited from program due high tuition cost as a foreign student)

<http://media.sbinstitute.com/> (Lama B. Alan Wallace – Shamatha meditation; Dzogchen teachings)

<http://www.samyeling.org/> (Ken Holmes – *Home Study Dharma Course*)

<https://tergar.org/> (Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche – Vajrayana teachings; Mahamudra teachings)

<https://ahs.org.uk/> (Lama Shenpen Hookham – training in meditation, reflection and insight from one’s own home)

## **Making a Commitment to Buddhism**

By November 2013, I had a desire to become more committed to Buddhist spiritual practice. In Buddhist circles, this is known as “taking Refuge”.

A memorable location for participating in the “Refuge” ceremony was the Chung Tian Temple, about half an hour’s drive from our home. I was kindly received, and given the name Zhen De (meaning “Appreciation of Virtue”) during the ceremony.

Yet, the Chung Tian Temple did not become the Buddhist community that I would wholeheartedly participate in – even though the Sangha (community of followers) is exemplary in its Buddhist devotion and outreach. Still, my wife, Eva, and I always enjoy visiting the Temple, located in a peaceful, Australian bushland setting (<http://www.chungtian.org.au/>).

## **In Closing . . .**

Interestingly, my contact with the Buddhism emerged from within my Christian background in Australia. While differences exist, many meaningful points of convergence also occur between the Buddhist and Christian understanding of life’s meaning.

Therefore, there has been continuity in my spiritual path, rather than an abrupt new beginning with Buddhism, and a total abandoning of all prior spiritual teaching. By the way, I have found the Dalai Lama’s affirmation of other faith traditions most reassuring.

Much more could be written. For example, only recently have I discovered the rich spiritual heritage of Hinduism (particularly Vedanta) – and again I see wonderful convergence with my Christian and Buddhist studies. But, that will have to be writing for another day . . .

Alexander Peck (December 13, 2019)