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Brentyn Ramm

Our friend and regular contributor Brentyn Ramm reports that he will be returning to Australia in 2023. Brentyn is the pioneer of Headlessness in Academia. A very brave and necessary enterprise in my opinion. I think the last time we met Brentyn was at Richard Lang's Chatswood workshop which I think was in 2010. Brentyn studied for his degree under David Chalmers at ANU and is now completing his post-doctoral programme at Witten/Herdecke University in Germany. In his last message Brentyn referred to the professionally produced audio version of his Technology of Awakening article which Richard Lang has now made available on the Headless Way app. Access requires downloading of the Headless Way app from Google Play. <https://play.google.com/store/games> then go to 'Apps & Games' and put Headless Way in the search box and download. The audio is filed under the heading 'Audio Articles'. It is presented in a short series of 5 to 15 minute sessions which give the listener time to absorb and reflect on the content before moving on. I think it is the perfect tool for overcoming misunderstandings, or what can be regarded as a natural resistance to, or mystification about, Headlessness, and about Zen for that matter. It is a powerful means of making plain the necessary attitude, that which enables the perspective to which these two approaches are pointing.

We referred to this paper in the April 2021 NOWletter, issue 228. The article is available online and as a PDF download at: <https://philpapers.org/archive/RAMTTO-9.pdf>

A loss of something ever felt I

Poem 959

A loss of something ever felt I —
The first that I could recollect
Bereft I was — of what I knew not
Too young that any should suspect

A Mourner walked among the children
I notwithstanding went about
As one bemoaning a Dominion
Itself the only Prince cast out —

Elder, Today, a session wiser
And fainter, too, as Wiseness is —
I find myself still softly searching
For my Delinquent Palaces —

And a Suspicion, like a Finger
Touches my Forehead now and then
That I am looking oppositely
For the site of the Kingdom of Heaven

Emily Dickinson

Postscript to The Wider View

The September NOWletter No. 231 <https://www.capacitie.org/content/now/Now231.pdf> was dedicated to poetic examples of what I refer to as 'The Wider View'. I came across some postscripts when reading Michael Pollan.

(Extracts from "How to Change Your Mind: The New Science of Psychedelics" by Michael Pollan)

"Ralph Waldo Emerson crossing a wintry New England commons in "Nature":

Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball. I am nothing. I see all. The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God.

Or Walt Whitman, in the early lines of the first (much briefer and more mystical) edition of Leaves of Grass:

Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and joy and knowledge that pass all the art and argument of the earth; And I know that the hand of God is the elderhand of my own, And I know that the spirit of God is the eldest brother of my own, And that all the men ever born are also my brothers ... and the women my sisters and lovers, And that a kelson of the creation is love.

And here is Alfred, Lord Tennyson, describing in a letter the "waking trance" that descended upon him from time to time since his boyhood:

All at once, as it were out of the intensity of the consciousness of individuality, the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade into boundless being; and this was not a confused state, but the clearest of the clearest, the surest of the surest; utterly beyond words, where death was an almost laughable impossibility; the loss of personality (if so it were) seeming no extinction, but the only true life.

Michael Pollan writes: What had changed for me was that now I understood exactly what these writers were talking about: their own mystical experiences, however achieved, however interpreted. Formerly inert, their words now emitted a new ray of relation, or at least I was now in a position to receive it. Such emissions had always been present in our world, flowing through literature and religion, but like electromagnetic waves they couldn't be understood without some kind of receiver. I had become such a one. A phrase like "boundless being," which once I might have skated past as overly abstract and hyperbolic, now communicated something specific and even familiar. A door had opened for me onto a realm of human experience that for sixty years had been closed.

(from "How to Change Your Mind: The New Science of Psychedelics" by Michael Pollan)

Returning To Israel 2022 from Trisha English WA

Recently, I spent a month in Israel (from the end of September to the end of October.). I returned to Australia just before the Israelis elected Benjamin Netanyahu as the Prime Minister of Israel making him the longest serving Prime Minister in the history of Israel.

Since returning home I purchased Netanyahu's biography: "Bibi: My Story" and although I am only halfway through the book, I can tell you unequivocally it is enthralling. Life is not only about luck, but also about perseverance and the formation of character which human beings tend to inherit in part from their parents. Bibi's whole family is presented as exceptional, though he writes in a factual, non-emotional way about his journey through life and those who made their mark on his personal development.

An objective study of history will show that human beings in the main, do not like "tall poppies". So, it was no surprise to me that I found the Israeli people divided into those who loved Bibi and those who loathed him. In many discussions with Arabs and Jews I could never really get to grips with the cause of the division, nor what might be a solution.

Before arriving in Israel, I made it my business to view every single YouTube production about Israel: good, bad and indifferent. Coupled with various articles of diverse views, I felt I had adequately prepared myself to discover what the situation really was in this ancient land. I had also revised the mainstream religious views.

These are my impressions, and like all impressions they are my personal experiences and not to be taken as anything but ephemeral. Israel shares one thing with India - the history and fabric of the people can only be truly understood by the people who are born into the culture.

This was my fifth or sixth visit to Israel since the late 70's. In that time, I have seen many changes, but the world itself has changed, so why should it be different from one country to another?

The first thing that struck me from the moment I arrived in Israel was the pervasive atmosphere of conflict. People did not hold conversations, but they seemed to me to be closer to screaming matches. In the midst of what I can only describe as a culture shock, a couple of Jews from Jaffa helped me through the passport nightmare. I caught a "sherut" (shared taxi) from the Tel Aviv airport to Jerusalem. The driver looked on the verge of a breakdown, and aggressively dealt with passengers who wanted to negotiate the price, rather than accept the going rate. Subsequently, I arrived safely at my hotel in the heart of Jerusalem. The staff were Moslem, or Arab, if you prefer. They were helpful and everything went smoothly. The next morning at breakfast, a couple of Jewish tour groups from Europe turned the place into chaos. They shouted, they dominated, they completely appropriated the entire restaurant. Later, I was to learn that unless you spoke Hebrew you were invisible. It was a kind of unspoken mantra. "Israel for the Israelis" or if you prefer, "don't mess with Israel".

I seemed to remember (probably incorrectly) that in past visits most people spoke English, or were generally helpful to the tourist. This trip the parameters were completely altered. The message seemed to be: "If you don't speak Hebrew, then go back to where you came from". Everything from cafe menus, bus timetables, shops etc. were exclusively in Hebrew. But I found

a friend. I looked for someone over the age of 70 and asked how I could get around Jerusalem (bus drivers, and open rail drivers, do not sell tickets or help with information) and I was directed to buy a monthly ticket that would allow me to travel all over Israel, if I wished to do so. I found a store that sold these passes and was subject to a tirade from the Jew who was in charge. I got the ticket, so whatever he was screaming at me, I accepted. This turned out to be the best buy of all.

It enabled me to ride for two or three hours a day on public transport. No, I wasn't crazy, but I figured if I wanted to mingle with the people, the way to do it was to avoid the tours - which seemed to me to be propaganda outlets. I'd heard it all before anyway. Yes, I would like to have seen Masada again, but it was a 10-hour day, and that was beyond my limited resources.

What I was not prepared for was the speed and recklessness of the bus drivers. Either they hated themselves, or they hated their passengers. I'm not sure which, but every trip I felt would be my last. In a month of travelling every day on public transport, my feelings never changed. At any moment, I felt that an accident would end my life. It was part of what I came to name the "conflict syndrome".

After a week in Jerusalem, I journeyed to Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee. This is one of the most beautiful places in the world as far as I am concerned. I had one week in an apartment with a fabulous view of the "sea" and a week at Emilys Hotel where I had stayed in 2014 also with a glorious view and including breakfast and dinner. They were booked out when I first tried to get accommodation and that was because for all my "homework" I had overlooked Yom Kippur celebrations (the Feast of Atonement) and Sukkoth (The Feast of Tabernacles). The Jewish people do not do things by halves. A holiday, whether Shabbat (Fri-Sat) or on other festivals as above, the world comes to a halt.

I walked a great deal (my doctor would have approved) since there really wasn't any choice. But I couldn't eat the street food. I might as well tell you the truth, even though it broke my heart. Tiberias is one of the dirtiest places I have ever come across. The inhabitants treated the place as one gigantic garbage dump. Someone told me it was because the Mayor had absconded with a vast sum of money and the place was broke. I didn't have any way of authenticating this information, and I really didn't care anyway. Dirt is dirt.

Unlike the Dubai copied constructions along the coast of Israel, from Jaffa to Tel Aviv, the traditional dwellings of the Jews and Arabs in places like Jerusalem and Tiberias and the Settlements, resemble slums. That is the view of a Westerner, who resides in a paradise called Western Australia. It was a fact of great sadness to me. It resembled the land out of Cairo, as if time and tide would turn it into Syria or Lebanon at any moment.

By talking and listening to Jews and Arabs alike, I ended up feeling sad for everyone. I learned that Bethlehem and Nazareth were now 70% Moslem, and that tourism in Israel had decreased by 33%. This explained in part, why, when I asked the locals in Tiberias how I could get to Capernaum told me that they had never heard of the place! Unbelievable.

But I was defiant. I managed to get on a boat that sailed out of Tiberias to the middle of the Sea. No, it didn't go anywhere near Capernaum, and the many children on the boat, were given a lesson in how to prepare St. Peter's fish!!! There was an old man sitting next to me on the boat, furiously taking photographs. It turned out that he had been a teacher but had now retired to a Kibbutz. He seemed reflective, but I didn't press my luck.

The time came for me to return to Jerusalem and with a last throw of the dice I caught a taxi (they are horrifically expensive) to take me to Tabgha, near Capernaum and wait for me. We made a wrong turn initially and ended up in an area where the Armenians had built a church and nearby where the Catholics had staked a claim. Parking cost \$20 shekels or \$10 Aus. We only stayed about 10 minutes, the time it took for me to realise we were in the wrong place. We drove onward, and ended up breaking the law, by climbing into a restricted area where I took some fabulous photographs, reminiscent of long ago. We returned to Tiberias and I felt satisfied.

Yes, I did buy two souvenirs. The first was a walking stick because my balance was so bad. The second was a bullet, a 32, on the end of a chain. An ex-soldier told me about his time in the IDF and how his sons were currently serving time. I must record here that the people who were wonderful to me personally, were the IDF soldiers and elderly Arabs.

I listened intently to their stories. I listened to everyone who would talk to me, including a wonderfully helpful receptionist who confided to me that she was Latvian by birth, and had relatives in Russia and Ukraine. She also volunteered the information that the Ukrainians were barbarians, and she had no time for them at all.

Another young graduate from the IDF told me that he simply couldn't stand Netanyahu - he was a man of broken promises etc. etc.

There were many other encounters and exchanges which belong to my journey to Israel. How would I sum things up? I have no idea. I wouldn't even try. It seems to me that the entire world is in pieces and to some extent I blame the media which delights in conflict and scandal.

However, if you are thinking of making the journey yourself, please be sure to take your money with you. Forget Australian currency. Try American dollars or a debit card. Inflation in Israel is at an all-time high. Authorities say it is one of the most expensive countries in the world. Amen to that. Try 17% VAT, plus 17% service fee, plus an obligatory tip of between 10% and 15%. Receipts are in Hebrew of course, so make sure that as a tourist you get them to drop the 17% VAT.

Most of all, good luck. Travel safely and remember what Shakespeare said: There is no such thing as good or bad but thinking makes it so.

Trisha English

Greg Campbell and Hotei from 2011

Here is a reminder of Greg Campbell who contributed his characteristic poetry from time to time.

The Happy, Barefoot, Buddha Could Be Us Also! The so-called "Happy" Buddha is more accurately understood as an Embodiment or Archetype of what it is living in - Thankful Contentment and Full Receptivity. In Japanese Buddhism this Embodiment is known as "Hotei" a semi-legendary Zen Monk who lived in the early middle ages. Wandering barefoot, wearing only a ragged seldom washed monk's robe, playing with Children, he carried a mysterious cloth sack over his shoulder which he occasionally sat on.

There are various views as to what Treasures that sack contains - Snacks and/or Toys for Children; perhaps even The Secret of Perfect Peace.

The following is Part of an ancient poem:

"Bare-footed, bare-chested,
entering the market place empty-handed! Smeared with mud and ashes –
Still How Shining A Smile fills that Face! We have no need of
supernatural powers -
Bare Attention Alone is Enough
to bring even Withered Trees to Beautifully Bloom..."

Every Baby Born even Here in-Our-World In any case, in any time, in any place and every Race,
Every Baby Born is indeed, "The World Honored One"- yet another Buddha ! At Your Birth You
were also But Tragically no one could See that and so Tragically You Forgot Too.

Ignore Truth If You Will But Truth does not ignore Us.
The Always Happy. Always Barefoot Buddha Is Us !
"Rejoice, Rejoice,
We Have No Choice"

Greg Campbell



On the last full day of our visit to the USA in 2011 Margot and I met Greg who was a regular contributor at the time. He was the manager of the Jikōji Temple near San Francisco there is a picture of Greg and a short report of our visit at:

<https://www.capacitie.org/content/now/Now155.pdf>

C. S. Lewis, Barfield & Harding from Alan Mann

I recently came upon a three series essay booklet of writing by C. S. Lewis, a present which Louise Joy she sent us in 1986. The booklet is entitled 'The Abolition of Man', and whilst I think I get Lewis's point, I find his expression unnecessarily complicated and obscure. It carries an endorsement on the back cover from Owen Barfield, another writer who tends to over-complicate things. In these essays Lewis is pointing out the relevance of 'right apprehension' to the appreciation and understanding of Tao, which the author of the classic Tao Te Ching opens with the words, *The Tao that can be described/is not the eternal Tao./The name that can be spoken/is not the eternal Name*. No wonder Lewis was overwhelmed with delight on discovering Douglas Harding's simple means of replacing our customary explanatory perspective and 'wordy' overload with that of direct experience, the revelation of the ever-present origin as our fundamental being.

This led me to wonder about all the books written about the perennial philosophy. How can this complexity of method they propose reveal what is at hand rather than obscure it completely? I thought of my own patient attention to Krishnamurti over the years in the hope of coming upon what I imagined to be missing, a missing ingredient, only to discover that it was not something I had to get but rather an assumption to be rid of. My reaction to Harding was not unlike that of Lewis, and Lewis's recognition of the significance of the Tao to his own life and work is something that Jim Clatfelter has shared and addressed in his Headless Tao¹. More recently the work of another friend Peter Lim² has added helpful commentary from a contemporary perspective.

Alan Mann

¹ Headless Tao by Jim Clatfelter. <https://terebess.hu/english/tao/clatfelter.html#Kap32> also available on Kindle.

² The Gentle Art of Tao Leadership. Peter Lim (Lim Meng Sing) Various sources.

Cross Stitch a story by Margot Mann

Ben sat on the saddle of the stationary bike, adjusted his ear-plugs to drown out the music and flicked the switch which activated the screen in front of him. He selected the Italian Alps option and began to pedal. Almost immediately he felt the wind warm in his ears and hair. He pedalled easily through small towns perched on hillsides, buildings casting deep shadows as the sun lit white-washed walls. He could see the road as it wound ahead and felt an unstoppable exhilaration, as if he could ride forever.

"Will you be much longer?" asked a voice at his elbow.

He slowed down, turned, and saw that it was the same guy. Ben knew there was a certain protocol about not taking too long on any of the pieces of gym equipment, especially in the peak hours of early morning and later in the evening, but only yesterday this person had intimidated him into relinquishing one of the rowing machines before he had finished his programme. Now he felt a surge of anger and involuntarily his feet picked up speed. Alas, the Alps were as serenely beautiful as ever but the moment had passed.

He stepped off the bike, picked up his towel and waterbottle and walked towards the showers without a backward glance. Because he wasn't watching where he was going he bumped into Nick. "Steady on mate," Nick said, lunging at a parcel which Ben had accidentally knocked out of his hands. "Now look what you've done..... I say, are you O.K., you don't look very well." Nick bent down to pick up some knitting which had fallen out of the plastic bag he was carrying. A ball of bright turquoise wool ran along the slightly sloping gym floor, unwinding as it went, until it finally came to rest at the bicycle Ben had so recently ridden through the Italian Alps. Ben chased the wool and began to wind it. "How's it going Nick," he said, handing over the wool. "Sorry mate, wasn't watching. What are you knitting these days?"

Ben and Nick were casual friends who met occasionally at places frequented by a lot of people, such as the pub, or the football, and sometimes even the gym, but they rarely spent time alone together. Ben liked Nick. He was a big ex-footballer whose nose had been broken several times and who was well-known in the local community as the President of the Handcrafts Club. He was an inventive knitter and felter; some of his felted pots had won prizes at exhibitions all over the State. His wife was the family's principal bread-winner. She was a small red-haired woman with porcelain skin slightly freckled, and she drove a Big Mack truck between Sydney and Melbourne. As she sometimes laughingly said of herself, "I couldn't knit a boiled egg."

Since Nick had become president of the Handcrafts Club, the membership had increased to such an extent that the club had to move to new premises in the old town hall building. Ben sometimes thought of joining, especially after he made his daughter a skirt and top when she got into the hockey team. He liked the way sewing produced results so quickly and he was fond of his mother-in-law's old Singer sewing machine, even if it could only sew backwards or forwards, nothing fancy. His wife had suggested he join the club more than once, especially while he was going to the anger workshops. As she pointed out, sewing could be good therapy, except for the time he put a sleeve in back-to-front and swore so violently she had had to rush the children into the next room. She herself preferred golf and played several times a week.

In reply to Ben's question, Nick said, "We're having a huge competition next month - you've probably heard about it?" When Ben shook his head, he said "it's a dog's coat competition. We're all making winter coats for dogs in refuges who don't have anyone to take an interest in them. You can crochet a coat if you like, or make one out of an old jacket, anything really. I've already started on a felted one. Do you think it would look too much if I decorated it with crocheted daisies?" When Ben didn't reply, Nick said, "Anyway, you've got a few weeks to get going. Why don't you come to some of our meetings? Even the Mayor comes sometimes. He does some lovely fine French knitting and he's agreed to judge the best dog coat - and we've just persuaded Jim from the butcher's to run a few classes on making fabric handbags. Have you seen any of his work? Absolutely brilliant." He paused, looked at Ben, and continued, "You'd have to say that this is all a far cry from the macrame lampshades and crocheted bikinis they used to make years ago - remember those awful things, was it the 70's?" He laughed so loudly that people on rowing machines briefly lost their rhythm. "Well I'd better be going, that wool shop in the city is having a sale. Good to see you." He pumped Ben's hand and walked towards the exit.

Ben left the gym without showering and wandered along the footpath towards the carpark. He was pleased with himself for not losing his temper with the guy who bumped him off the bike, although he could feel his heart beating faster when he thought about him.

"Hullo Ben, long time no see. How's everything?" said a voice at his side. Ben had met Andy at the anger workshops earlier in the year. He was a small man and Ben remembered that he had had to be restrained more than once from thumping the facilitator, while at the same time insisting that he didn't know why his GP and the local magistrate thought he could benefit from taking steps to deal with his anger. One day he had stormed out of the course forever after accusing everyone in the group of deliberately trying to upset him. Ben noticed that today he had a dog with him, a labrador nearly as tall as Andy with gentle eyes. The dog was wearing a coat made from harlequin patches in colours that harmonised with its golden fur. "Meet Cindy," Andy added, scratching the dog behind the ears. The dog wagged its tail and looked at Ben. "Wow Andy, that's some coat," said Ben, who had never noticed a dog coat before, "and what a beautiful dog. Don't tell me - you're entering the coat in the competition? Nick was just telling me about it."

Andy smiled. "Glad you like it. Cindy seems to like it too. I ran it up at the Handcrafts Club. You should come along some time. I'm there most days since Nick showed me how to use the sewing machine." He leaned confidentially towards Ben and lowered his voice. "I'm entering five coats in the competition - one for Cindy and the others for the refuge dogs." Ben took a step back. He looked closely at Cindy's coat and said, "Did you know that some of the stitching is coming undone near the tail here?"

Andy gave Cindy's lead a sharp flick, turned on his heel and walked quickly down the street. "Typical," he shouted over his shoulder.