

Reflections

To Whom It May Concern

An essay in the form of a letter -- by Sarada (Ruth Tate)

July 22, 2007

It is difficult for me to imagine that what I intend to explore in writing to you does not concern us all. To put it bluntly—we're all doing it—unconsciously—and we suffer from the doing. What do I mean by this doing? (I'll get to that in a bit) And this doing, being unaware doing, akin to sleep walking, begs the question of how can we begin to arouse ourselves to awakened living? It has been done, and is being done. I want to point, but not devoutly, to the acknowledged enlightened teachers. Forinstance, the Buddha is honored as an ordinary human being like you and I who “woke up” and became an example of our own innate capacity to *see*, as Steven Hagen puts it in his *Buddhism Is Not What You Think*. I will include quotes from his writings as well as others throughout this letter. Hagen again: “Turning over authority to others in our life is a form of spiritual laziness. You'll be disinclined to pay careful and critical attention to what is actually going on, and you will be left wide open to being manipulated, misled and scammed. The Buddha recognized this and warned against it. Forinstance, he told people not make images of him. (And the people didn't at first) You need to realize that you are the Buddha. Yet the more we glorify and deify the man we call the Buddha, the more difficult for us to wake up. After all, if you make the teachers into gods, how can you realize the Truth that you are fundamentally no different from them?”

The world was aghast when the Taliban blew up that magnificent sculpture of the Buddha. It might seem shocking to say that the Buddha could have said, “good thing.” And the saying of an ancient Chinese sage, “If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him” might seem equally dismaying. But wasn't he bringing home the same point?

And to quote from Sam Harris in his *End of Faith*: “Take Christianity as an example: It is not enough that Jesus was a man who transformed himself to such a degree that the Sermon on the Mount could be his heart’s confession. He also had to be the Son of God born of a virgin, destined to return to earth trailing clouds of glory. The effect of such dogmas is to place the example of Jesus forever out of reach. His teaching ceases to be a set of empirical claims about the linkage between ethics and spiritual insight, and instead becomes a gratuitous, and rather gruesome fairy tale. According to the dogma of Christianity becoming like Jesus is impossible. One can only enumerate one’s sins, believe the unbelievable and await the end of the world.” I ask, could we not see Jesus as a human being that awoke to Christ Consciousness, which is hidden within us all?

I want to come back to my provocative statement that we’re all doing it, and suffer from the doing. This ‘doing’ is a process that we might well become aware of if we would touch such depths of consciousness within us. I would not deny that we need teachers and teachings that point the way. However, as a Zen Master reminded us, “the pointing finger is not the moon.” I personally found the book, *Language Habits in Human Affairs*, by Irving J. Lee, an important pointer. I spoke of this discovery in my *Long Letter to a Friend*. Initially the reading was like “moving boulders in my brain” (or of it’s hard-wiring) to grasp what I intuitively realized could help me in dealing with my own dilemmas. At the time of reading Lee’s book I was deeply involved in *Vedanta*—both as a non-dual philosophy as well the following of the Hindu traditions of worship that are meant to be seen as based on non-duality. I was having difficulty making the connection. I was originally attracted to the non-dual *Vedanta*, and I would make attempts at feeling such precepts as “The basic Truth (*Brahman*) was the Real, and the world, being transient, was unreal.” But I experienced a feeling of being stuck in a sense of myself as something fixed and separate in a world of other separate selves, and an endless array of “things” that I perceived as fixed and

separate entities. Each of which I took as pleasurable, painful, useful or neutral irrelevancies—in themselves—and therefore quite Real!

We all learn to share a language heritage. In inheriting its subject-object dualism we are taught to say as a child, I see a doggie, or it is raining. What is this mysterious “it?” “Through this grid of our language structure we separate our perceived world into this and that, self and other, good and bad, right and wrong, by the process of conceptualizing — provisionally useful in getting through the day,” as Stephen Batchelor puts it in his book, *Buddhism Without Beliefs*. Apparently almost everyone else, as well as myself, took such conceptual dualistic talking and naming for granted—unexamined as though our language was something almost sacred and not to be questioned. Understandably there was a feeling of “moving boulders in my brain” to realizing my experience of “what is going on” was largely through the structure of the language I had inherited, and which structure passes on unquestioned cultural values and belief systems. As Alan Watts said, “We all have a philosophy of life, and an unexamined philosophy is a bad philosophy.”

“Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication and reflection. The fact of the matter is that the ‘real world’ is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community

predispose certain choices of interpretation.”

Edward Sapir

Alfred Korzybski, who came to notice with his *Science and Sanity*, mentored Lee. His insights, based on looking at the facts, were that we abstract at different levels and identify them—unconsciously. At first I had a problem with the terms abstract and abstracting. I understood something about abstract paintings. An artist looks at what is taken as a ‘realistic’ view with separate object, etc., and eliminates the distinguishing lines that separate a flowing, interweaving display of colors. Such a painting could be, for me, an illustration of Korzybski’s first level of abstraction, which represents our direct sensory experience before we attempt to describe it with words. Such verbal describing is the next level of abstraction. As newborn’s we reach out through newly opened senses and not only do not draw distinguishing lines around what we see, nor around sensations of touch, sound, tastes, and smell, etc. Nor do our fellow critters of this earth. I notice that my cat, and the birds, squirrels etc. are always in their senses, the first level of abstraction, unless asleep. They instinctively move toward that which insures biological survival and reproduction. Animals show no sense of being a separate ego nor did I as an infant.

Stephen Batchelor speaks of the “marvelous freedom into which we were born then learn to substitute a pseudo independence of a separate self.” I see the contribution of Korzybski with Lee and others to the process of this “substituting” from our unconscious abstracting and identifying of different levels—from which “doing” we suffer. In becoming aware of what we have learned to do we can consciously reverse the process, and indeed enjoy the “marvelous freedom in which we were born.”

This sense of a separate “I”, and its “pseudo independence,” comes into play with the evolution of our human capacity for language. Batchelor again: “names and concepts suggest there are objects in the world every bit as definite as themselves. [and ourselves] Pens, bananas and pots are self-evident, instantly

recognizable things. But things are not as clear-cut as they seem. They are neither circumscribed nor separated from each other by lines. Lines are drawn in the mind. There are no lines in nature.”

He goes on to bring up the well-known example of a rope seen as a snake in semi-darkness. Thus seen there is a reaction of quickened heartbeat, sweating and an impulse to run away. (He also makes a significant observation that “every mental state is known through a corresponding physical sensation.”) Batchelor enlarges with “I do not experience matter, mood, perception, impulse as such but as unique chaotic moments configured in unprecedented and unrepeatable ways. This complex specificity becomes present because I name what I experience.” With the light this “snake” is seen now as a coil of rope. Batchelor asks, “Do we ever perceive a dangerous arrangement of shapes and colors? No, “there’s a snake in the pottery shed!”

And, “might a similar confusion color my experience of life as a whole: a confusion that not only blinds me to what is happening but at the same time anxiously construes a fictional world that seems utterly real?” In other words, an identification of an “arrangement of shapes and colors” identified with all the dangerous things we’ve heard about “snakes!” And he adds a sobering observation as to this “confusion” of naming our direct experiences of our ‘world.’ He speaks of it “as a way of controlling these (experiences) into the bit that is mine and the bit that is not. My body stands in opposition not only to your body but also to all other matter. My feelings are the only ones that really count. My version of events is always right. The imperative of my craving is set against the imperative of yours.” Robert Thurman almost humorously describes this as “our feeling ourselves to be the center of the universe.” In times past the assumption was that the earth was the center of the universe, and that the sun circled around it. We ‘know’ better now but still have the romantic illusion of the sun rising and setting. If we reflect a moment as we watch a beautiful sunset we can feel the earth turning away from the sun, and this gives us a sense of the

smallness of our planet in the vast cosmos. As for Batchelor’s “sobering observation” Hagen suggests a reflection on how we create this “smallness” of self-centeredness as, “It all comes from our marvelous ability to abstract our experience into things and thoughts. It’s a grand illusion that easily takes us over.” As Dzigar Kongtrul points out, “ultimately the most powerful way to counteract delusion is to see through our conceptual mind.” In his book, *It Is Up To You*, Hagen comments lucidly, “When we confine ourselves to a bubble, a cocoon, a limited sphere, it’s difficult for us to see that all our conceptual knowledge floats on the surface of the sea of Reality, which contains a myriad of other bubbles. And from inside any bubble, it’s hard to realize that the Truth is only *seen* when our bubble breaks.” Hagen again, “thus we miss the field and fabric of *just this* — dynamic Reality itself.”

I’m conjuring in my imagination an incident of watching a small child delight in the color, velvety texture, and fragrance of what the child is directly experiencing. The mother bends over and says, “it is a rose.” The child is taught to “name” her experience. She is introduced into the “world of words” as Lee puts it; into a world where, willy-nilly, she will learn to largely live. And to quote Hagen, “Further more, virtually everyone around us is caught in the same way. Thus we create shared delusions.”

To quote Batchelor again, “The world is so saturated with meanings given to it that those meanings seem to abide in the things themselves. We habitually assume the world presented through the senses to exist “out there” just as it appears.” And Hagen adds to this with, “Most of the time we superimpose something onto what is immediate and real. We project onto what we directly experience, and we extend that projection through time and space. Thus we create subject-objects. Then, in relation to these ‘objects’ longings and loathing arise in our mind. Thus we mistake the world that we’ve created in our minds and projected “out there” with Reality.”

I want to add here a gem of an insight, “We see the world as ‘we’ are, not as ‘it’ is, because it is the “I” behind the ‘eye’ that does the seeing.” Annais Nin

I feel that Harris has an important contribution to understanding the process of our coming to project: “The contents of consciousness—sights, sounds, sensations, thought, moods, etc.—whatever they are at the level of the brain, are merely *expression* of consciousness at the level of experience. Unrecognized as such, many of these appearances seem to impinge upon consciousness from without, and the sense of self emerges, and grows entrenched as the feeling that that which *knows* is circumscribed, modified, and often oppressed *by that which is known*”.

As I consider his statement, “the contents of consciousness are merely expressions of consciousness”—but “unrecognized as such.” I’m thinking, If recognized as such it would be a kind of enlightenment or awakening. Again, if we are unaware of experiencing the contents of consciousness through the separating grid of a subject-object language structure, feelings can arise of an ‘I’ being hemmed in and “often oppressed” by an ‘other.’ (And also an imagined sense of being blessed and loved by an ‘other.’) If these feelings are not checked against the observation of ever-changing circumstances, and our projecting, they can lead to paranoid inferences resulting even in murder. (I have the personal knowledge of such a case.) And such inferences of those in power have even led to war!

Harris is describing my felt sense of “stuckness” that I described earlier—as though the world was pressing in on me as a source of pleasure or good to be sought after, or a source of pain to be avoided. I began to grasp projecting from my work with Fritz Perls. (Korzybski influenced Perls in his Gestalt Therapy) In other words, my reaching out to explore my world from birth, got turned around, reversing what I could call the original loving propulsion to know the world even to the depths of our “interbeing” as Thich Nhat Hanh puts it. Through this reversing it became as though the world was doing the knowing, loving or rejecting of “me.” And

the sense arising of an 'I' being at odds with an 'other' inculcated from childhood by the blinding of a subject-object, I-other division of our direct experiencing of what is undivided.

According to Batchelor, "We might have to accept (our projecting) not only of the potential sage hidden within, but also our projecting of a potential murderer, rapist, or thief, on to others "out there." And could our projecting possibly explain our sense of good into a Source of Goodness as a God, and the source of Badness into something Satanic "out there" as many religious dogmas present as the case?

Getting back to that rose. I've often wondered what Gertrude Stein meant with her statement, "a rose is a rose is a rose." Does she imply if you have seen one you've seen them all? Or that a rose is just what it is and not anything else? But as Thich Nhat Hanh points out repeatedly, "when we touch one thing with deep awareness, we touch everything." And to add Hagen's voice, "If we really pay attention to what's actually experienced, it's not just a cup. If we look, we can see the whole universe right here, as this cup. Inside this cup as a Sufi poet Kabir would say, "are canyons and Pine Mountains.""

Our senses are limited. We can't register the "mad dance of atoms" that Lee refers to. But could we but hold on to what we name a rose, just like that child, and for an extended period of time, we would see the changes in color, and feel the textural changes, and the differences in smell. If we hold it long enough it would disintegrate back into the elements, to be "blown away by the wind and the place where it was remembers it not." Even the Bible could be said to speak of observable facts that the Buddhists call "impermanence and no-self." And furthermore, Hagen as a speaker for the Buddhists says, "It's right out in the open. All we need do is look and we'll see that there is no permanence. Birth and death are found in each moment." Besides the number of quotes from the Buddhists on impermanence, Samuel Bois, a teacher of General Semantics, in his *Art of Awareness* says, "Both the world that surrounds us and our own organism undergoes

subtle changes from moment to moment, and the relationship between the observer and the observed constantly varies. There is no real permanency anywhere but in our delusional static picture of what is going on in the world and in us”

I look out of my window on to Lake Ontario here in Canada. The edge of this oceanic-seeming expanse of water is about twenty feet from my concrete porch. Depending on the season the waves will crash against it. I particularly respond to the Buddhist’s “con-dependent arising”, of an interrelated universe ever in movement. This is so visually evident in my contemplation of the waving of the water. Harris speaks of the contents of consciousness as *expressions* of consciousness. I can consider the beginningless and endless arising and falling of the waves as the *expressions* of the water. Thich Nhat Hanh often uses the analogy of waves in becoming aware of the ultimate dimension of reality as, “we suffer if we touch only the waves, but if we stay in touch with the water we feel the greatest relief.” And again he says, “when you see only the waves you might miss the water. But if you are mindful, you will be able to touch the water within the waves as well. Once you have touched the water you will not mind the coming and going of the waves.”

The waving of the water symbolizes “impermanence”, but the existence of a ‘self’ is not possible because of the fact of impermanence. We try to fix an image of our self or a wave with a photo or a painting. As for our body, which we often refer to as “my self”, Batchelor speaks of it as, “This marvelous organism, formed of inconceivable numbers of interdependent parts from the tiniest cell to the hemisphere of the brain, has evolved to a degree of complexity of consciousness need to make sense of these words. Life depends on sustaining this delicate balance, on the functioning of the vital organs. Yet I feel it changing with the pulse of blood, the loss of hair, the slipping away with each breath. I witness aging, pain in the joints, wrinkling of the skin. Life ebbs away from moment to moment.”

And to turn to Hagen's contribution on the subject, "we typically think there's only one "me" and that this singular "me" persists, at least for a time. But actually in each moment, there's something new. Moods change; thoughts change; concerns change; the very molecules and atoms that make up what you call "my body" change. There is no particular person who is "you". We may think there is, but when we look closely enough, we don't find one." Never the less we are admonished by parents etc. to "just be yourself." A wiser counseling than we might first imagine. I understand Hagen as meaning we have the need to see through the concept of who "you" are to enjoying the water of 'your' pure awareness, and the waves of experiencing—that arise, that come and go.

I've referred to my original attraction to the non-dual *Vedanta*, but I have come to find the Buddhist non-dual approach more workable. However, I'm attracted and impressed with the realization of Ramana Maharshi of the *Vedanta* tradition. He lived recently and Jon Kabat-Zinn tells of his experience in his book *Coming to Our Senses*. To quote him, "One day Ramana as a seventeen-year old high school student with no previous spiritual training or interest, was overcome by an intense anxiety about death. He decided to go with it rather than resist, and to ask, "what is dying?" He lay down and investigated, pretended to die, even holding his breath and imitating rigor mortis.

What happened, according to his account, and astonishingly enough, was that his personality permanently died then and there, on the spot. Apparently what was left was awareness itself, what he called the Self (with a capital S), an expression of identity with the Atman, or universal Self, or Spirit, in his vocabulary. From that moment on, he taught the path of self-inquiry on "Who am I?" He was described as emanating pure love, pure awareness, and razor-sharp, mirror-like mind, empty of self, with which he responded in dialogue to all inquiries, however, naïve or profound." I regret that on one of my "pilgrimages" to India I missed the opportunity of seeing and talking to him.

Bachelor notes that, "I can see the death of others, but not of my own." So great is our resistance to our own death. He goes on to recommend that we, "keep asking such questions as: *Since death alone is certain and the time of death uncertain, what should I do? And then to act on them.*"

Jesus admonishes us to, "love your neighbor as your self." We need to look deeply and see our neighbor as our self, as sharing a need to breathe, eat, drink, be clothed, and, finally, in Maslow's terms "self-actualize." As Hagen points out, "Enlightened people don't suddenly disappear. Nor do they forget how to eat a meal, drive a car etc. But they understand that they cannot hurt others without doing injury to themselves. In the end what is understood is that *this* is all one fabric."

My purpose in writing this "To Whom it may Concern" essay in the form of a letter, is to show what I see as a significant overlapping of the Buddhists precepts and practices, and the aims and disciplines of Korzybski's General Semantics. This should not be surprising, as Buddhism is an empirical approach to what is going on, as is General Semantics. Korzybski was an engineer and a mathematician. I've repeated, like a drumbeat, Korzybski's observation that we abstract, ignore at different levels, and come to identify them—unconsciously. Without knowing it Hagen echo's Korzybski with, "This is precisely what we do. We overlay our direct experience of reality with our ideas of what is real and we don't even know we're doing it." But, he adds, "When we see how we do this, we can also learn to see how not to get caught up in it. Our thinking and conceptualizing, far from giving us a handle on Truth, obstructs our natural ability to *see* Reality directly."

I see this overlapping in both diagnosis and prescription. Hagen, speaking as a Buddhist says, "Whatever conceptual model we come up with cannot ultimately serve as a substitute for Reality. And while we might be tempted to shrug off this observation, ignoring its implications is potentially devastating." My take as a student of General Semantics is —that we all do it—

unconsciously—and suffer from the doing—an overlapping of diagnosis.

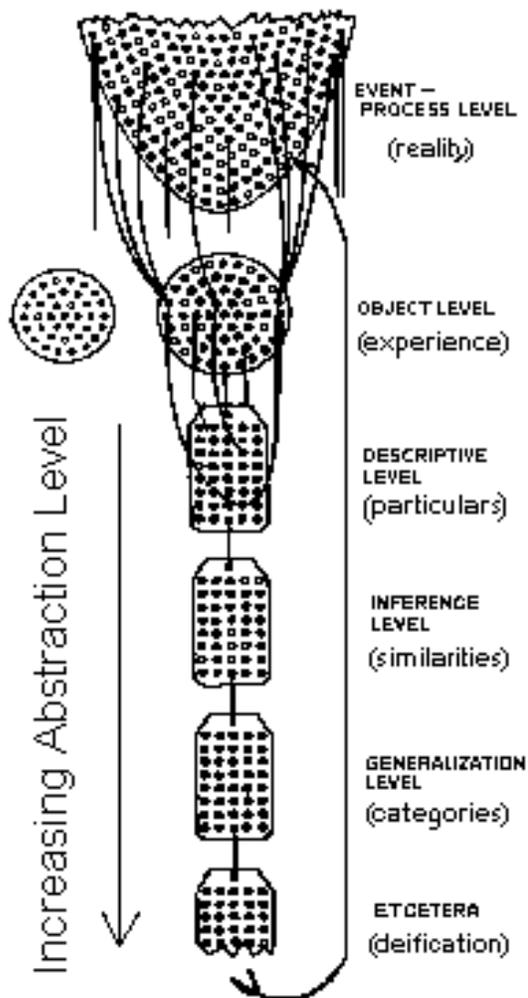
Buddhists speak of the practice of mindfulness or being mindful, which can as well be stated as ‘being conscious of’. In other words we would do well to be mindful of the process of abstracting, and of identifying these levels—an overlapping of prescriptions. To augment this I quote from Thich Nhat Hanh, “Buddhism teaches us that reality is quite different from our concept of “table.” And I see little difference from the well-known statement of Korzybski, that “the word is not the thing.” And to listen to Hagen again, “anything you can package in your mind, anything you can frame and divide from other things, is a concept. And confusing our concepts with Reality is what gets us into so much trouble.”

The Buddha spoke of the Four Noble Truths. The first being that life is suffering — or — broadly, anguish, frustration, a lot of hassle and “so much trouble.” The Second Noble Truth is that there is a cause of this trouble and the Noble Truth that there is a way out of the trouble. Batchelor speaks of “anguish emerges with the craving for life to be other than it is. It is the symptom of flight from birth and death, from the pulse of the present. It is the gnawing mood of unease that haunts the clinging to “me” and “mine.” In face of a changing world, something in us seeks consolation in something permanent and reliable, in a self that is in control of things, in a God who is in charge of destiny. The irony of this strategy is that it turns out to be the cause of what it seeks to dispel—which is for life to be other than it is.” That “something in us” is working unconsciously, and both Buddhism and General Semantics would help us to wake up to that ‘working.’

At this point I want to introduce Korzybski’s Structural Differential. At first glance it may look like a weird assemblage of shapes with holes, hanging strings and connecting string. I fear that my explanation might result in eyes glazing over—however—the holes in the top parabola that has a serrated edge, illustrates an infinity of goings-on. I’m reminded of a lecture about Kant and his

“Thing in Itself as Unknown and Unknowable.” Korzybski refers to the parabola as the Event level, and not accessible directly by the senses or through microscopes.

Those connecting strings remind us of the aspects of direct seeing we have abstracted or “cherry picked” out of the vastness of the world we live in. Those hanging strings bring to our attention



what we are leaving out of what we see, hear, touch, taste etc. etc.

As for this process of abstracting, I particularly enjoy Aldous Huxley’s description of the brain and nervous system in his book *The Doors of Perception*. He speaks of it as “a reducing valve and what comes out at the other end is a measly trickle” or the circle symbolizing the first level of abstraction of the Structural Differential. It is important to note that animals, in fact all sentient creatures, abstract through the limiting structure of their senses. Korzybski has included that circle jutting out from the main circle to refer to Fido’s level of abstraction, which proceeds no further. But these creatures are without a

sense of “I” see, touch and so on. (The sense of “I” emerges later!) Apparently these creatures form memory associations of what was experienced as pleasurable, or harmonious with the needs of the organism, or painful, being disharmonious to those needs, an

instinctive guide to what to eat, flee or ignore. As infants we also begin to create such memory associations, but we are soon taught to stamp them with words represented by the rectangle descending from the circle. Words, names and labels take care of our perception of similarities between ‘things’ that we share with Fido, but they hide our human capacity to perceive perpetual on-going changes. Naming is a way of making the world stand still “to have and to hold” the pleasurable. (Later I will speak of Korzybski’s devices of Indexing, and Dating to counteract the ways language can lock us into our animal instincts.)

Mark Twain quipped wisely, “ We should be careful to get out of an experience the wisdom that is in it—and stop there, lest we be like the cat that sits down on a hot stove-lid. She will never sit down on a hot stove-lid again—and that is well, but also she will never sit down on a cold one anymore.” Korzybski deplored how we “copy animals.”

Aldous Huxley in his article Culture and the Individual adds an important observation of how we humans go on behaving like that “cat”, or Fido.” To quote him, “those who accept their culture totally and uncritically, words in the familiar language do not stand for things. On the contrary, things stand for familiar words. Each unique event of their ongoing life is instantly and automatically classified as yet another concrete illustration of one of the verbalized, culture-hallowed abstractions drummed into their heads by childhood conditioning.”

What Huxley writes about “childhood conditioning” takes me back to the child being conditioned into identifying her experiences with words, and in that initial lesson, as a “rose.” Our child is delighting in the “measly trickle” of her direct experiencing; I want to change my former imaginative picture, to a child touching a rose on a rose bush. This time the mother, as a wiser hander-downer of the use of talking to communicate with ourselves and others—might bend over and say—pointing to what the child is absorbed in and say, “This we call a rose. It looks to me that you are enjoying this rose just now. Look over to see and

touch the budding of a rose that will come to be full-blown in a day or so. Also see and touch those faded, fallen petals that the rose you enjoy will come to appear in a day or two.” The substitution of “call” for the “is of identity” brings home to the child her own part in her perception of the world. As does the mother’s “to me” and the use of “appear.” A child can learn these adaptations to our language use more easily than we think to counteract our tendency to project our own agency “out there.” It would be best to begin this teaching as early as possible. As Einstein remarked, “common sense is the collection of prejudices acquired by age eighteen.”

The use of “just now”, at this moment, or an actual date, is a device that Korzybski calls “Dating” The word ‘rose’ just as it stands, covers the abstracted similarities and ignores—leaves out—the differences from moment to moment. We thus tend to see and react to our named objects as if to sameness’. The child does not know yet of Stein’s “A rose is a rose is a rose.” She begins to see that a rose now is not a rose of yesterday, which covers the differences in time. But Korzybski’s device of Indexing, such as rose(1), is not rose(2), is not rose(3), points to the differences useful in avoiding talking or thinking of particular things and people as though they could fit into fixed categories. And since there are endless aspects of what can be talked about, that we can never say “all” about anything, Korzybski recommends the generous use of the Etc.

As I mentioned, the world of words, useful for describing our sense experience, is a rectangle with strings connecting it to the circle and it has hanging strings. The descending rectangles refer to interpretations and inferences. If we have used words as “fingers” pointing back to our direct observations we are better able to make more fitting inferences, such as those of Darwin, Einstein and of other scientifically based inferences. These inferences, never considered final, are shown to loop back up and point to the inferred Event level.

As I study Korzybski's Structural Differential, Jacob's Ladder comes to my mind. In Jacob's dream he saw angels ascending and descending between heaven and earth. As Korzybski pondered over how to present his General Semantics—not so called at the time—he had a sudden mental picture of the process of abstracting at different levels, which he had constructed and called the Structural Differential. I am glancing up at a large print of that Differential. It is hanging on the wall behind the desktop on which I am composing this letter to whom it might spark a concern!

To describe this Structural Differential as similar to Jacob's Ladder might seem strange indeed, but it also represents visually how we descend through these abstracted levels—unconsciously. Importantly we can ascend—consciously, back up the Ladder—undoing the identification of our inferences with our direct descriptions of our experiences. We can ascend the next rung of the Ladder and undo the identifying of our descriptions with the silent, wordless level. Can we ascend any further to the Event level? Not apparently with our ordinary senses or any of our electronic sensory devices.

To quote Sam Harris, as representing a Buddhist position, may contradict the controversial picture of him from his writings — such as *The End of Faith*. But he has practiced the Vipassana, or Insight Meditation of Buddhism for many years. I feel he has a contribution with his, “Discover that consciousness inherently transcends its contents.”

This is the “Discovery” of the Buddha. He did not “descend the mountain” with tablets of stone or gold, nor as a prophet or savior, to be worshipped, believed and obeyed. To quote the Buddha, “Don't believe me because you see me as your teacher. Don't believe me because others do. And don't believe anything because you read it in a book. Don't put your faith in reports or traditions or hearsay or authority or religious leaders or texts. Don't rely on mere logic or inference or appearances or speculation. Know for yourself that certain things are unwholesome and wrong. And

when you know for yourself that certain things are wholesome and good, then accept them and follow them.”

And there is the well-known quote of the Buddha, “Be a light to your own feet.” Both Buddhists and General Semantics agree in the importance of that “light” in not identifying the “world of words” with our direct experiencing. They both would move to the wordless, “silent level”. But the Buddhist would include Korzybski’s Event level in that wordless level, as ‘consciousness transcending and including the “whole show”, as Alan Watts put it.

This describes the Buddhist Enlightenment, and also Hagen’s statement, “The awakened *see* that enlightenment is nothing more than not being deceived by the conceptual world each of us creates.” But this is the thrust of Korzybski’s work — of becoming aware of the very process of how we create our conceptual world. Korzybski would point to the Structural Differential that illustrates this process through abstracting. He would have us date our static conceptualized world to keep us looking back to the world of ever-changing goings-on. He would remind us of the facts that “The word is not the thing, and the map is not the territory” etc., to help facilitate our seeing through the way we’ve been deceived by the conceptual world we’ve unconsciously substituted for the real thing. ETC.

It might be asked how I find the overlapping of Buddhist practices and the means of General Semantics useful. I spend time in giving attention to my breathing. This Buddhist practice helps to bring me down out of my abstracting-identifying ‘head’, to experience my organism as a part of the whole ecological connectedness. Korzybski would call this, approvingly, extensional orientation, and living in our ‘heads’ intensional orientation. Contemplation of the Lake also reminds me of the same interdependence of what I call others, all creatures and myself, as an ever-changing diversity of ‘waves’ of one water.

Unfortunately I have never had any direct instructions in the practices of General Semantics either in person or as a part of a workshop. Just reading Lee and others awakened a life-long

passion for this discipline that I see as relevant for everyone who verbalizes. I have taken part in a number of Buddhist retreats. As Hagen describes it, “As we sit in meditation thoughts keep coming up. Sometimes they can be disturbing. Sometimes they’re wonderful. But they keep coming and we grab, build on them constructing mental worlds. Our practice is to see that we do this.” I ‘hear’ General Semanticists saying virtually the same thing. However if my meditation is restless and distracted I can’t blame the techniques of the practice. As Hagen remarks, “What are we actually afraid of (resisting)? We’re not afraid of putting up with pain etc.— we’re afraid of egolessness.” I get glimpses of my continuous replaying of the past and the fore playing of the future with its robot-like planing—if only the preparing of my next meal! Again, it is a the “practice of seeing that we do this.”

As Hagen observes, “It is commonly thought to live a full life we must set goals for ourselves.” For years I tended to follow this introjected “common thought” from the time I woke up in the morning. There is the saying about “taking one step at a time.” I would get out of bed, and begin stepping toward some planned end. My day often became—this step, and the next and the next and the next, always the next step, and usually hurriedly, toward some expected goal of satisfaction. To be dependent on then next thing is to be jolted with a loss, a disappointment because of expectations, and the wish for this blissful feeling ‘to go on forever.’ Those who *see* find joy in the depths of the moment, in the now and now and now—a better mantra to repeat as we step through life.

I’ll add a personal experience of awareness of what I was doing. Here in Canada we have a system of canals and their locks. One morning I was stopped by the opening of the lock to a very l-o-n-g boat moving very s-l-o-w-l-y. I grew impatient. I could not, of course, physically move that boat any faster, but I noticed that I was substituting myself for the boat by pulling or pushing my muscles—subtly but futilely in the attempt to control a situation that was not to my desire! After that I began to notice my tensing

of different muscle groups in the same attempt to push, stop, pull around what was happening in my world. To quote Hagen, “We’re part of a world, and the world is constantly acting. Indeed, it’s nothing but activity, motion and energy.” If I hear Hagen I recognize that I am a part of a world of constant activity. The point is to recognize my “craving for life to be other than it is” and let go, allowing my cat to do its own thing, and the world to move in its own way. At the same time I release myself to move with more awareness and freedom without the self-constricting effort to control my world.

I’m coming to see the importance of coming back again and again to the richness and depths of what is going on now. “If we touch anything deeply we touch the whole universe.” And this, according to Batchelor, “is a good definition of a Buddhist practice of meditation. (I’ve paraphrased him a bit) Maharshi’s almost instant enlightenment is possible, but not the usual. But he is an example, as are many others, of our capacity for *seeing*. One emphasis for Korzybski’s General Semantics might be for the clarity of perception that is the basis of sane, appropriate behavior in the many aspects of living—social, political, economic, local and international, for the benefit of our ever- changing world. “For the Awakened what comes first is simply being awake—seeing what is going on. And in seeing what’s going on in this moment, appropriate—that is, natural action can occur.”—To quote Hagen. I see a similar point of view between the Buddhists and the General Semanticists in this statement.

The Buddhist, again, speaking metaphorically, descends the Ladder, Bodhisattva like, to serve all sentient beings and their well being, physically-mentally-emotionally. And to inspire them to explore and vigorously test the way on a path to Awakening. “The awakened *see* the same Reality. It cannot be otherwise, and this *seeing* is utterly liberating.” As Batchelor an exponent of the Buddhists has said.

Unconscious abstracting has, it would seem, an evolutionary ‘intent’ of biological survival. My cat gets along happily with its

instincts, as I, a human, cannot do. Could there be an ‘intent’ in our evolution as a human being? We, also, have descended the ‘Ladder’ unconsciously, but with our more highly evolved nervous system we have the capacity to ascend consciously. We, then, could freely descend with the wisdom to contribute to the awakening of the joy of our full human potential. Persuaded of this possibility I present the overlapping of Buddhist practices and the means of General Semantics as a collaboration to explore.

With passionate concern

Sarada (Ruth Tate)

July 22, 2007