

Non-Volitional Living

By Wei Wu Wei

Some of our readers are interested to know who Wei Wu Wei is. All we are authorised to say is that he is widely known in spiritual circles as the author of the three books: *Fingers Pointing Towards the Moon*, *Why Lazarus Laughed* and *Ask the Awakened* (All three published by Messrs. Routledge and Kegan Paul), the last of which is reviewed in our issue of January 1964, to which readers are referred.

We are taught that "Enlightenment" is the true nature of all sentient beings, and most of those who read these words are hoping by some means to arrive at an Awakening to that state, some by understanding and practice, others by understanding only. In either case understanding is an essential factor, and no essential element of that should be overlooked or misunderstood. These few lines are to suggest that one such is in fact both misunderstood and overlooked. That to which I refer may be described as "non-volitional living", which is the way of living of those who live in Enlightenment.

First let us ask what, is meant by 'volition'. I recollect Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi as having said that volition and an ego are one and the same manifestation. More analytically considered, perhaps we may say that volition is the functional aspect of an I-concept, an 'ego' appearing to function in phenomenal life, the 'ego' being the supposed entity and its functioning being cognised as volition. That, being so, it is evident that this apparent functioning can play no part in the enlightened state. It is evident also that as long as we continue to live volitionally we are unlikely to awaken to that state ourselves. Moreover it is volitional living alone that produces, indeed constitutes, what is called 'karma'.

Instead of repeating here what has already been suggested on this subject elsewhere, I propose to offer some brief citations from masters who spoke to us from the state of whole (undivided) mind, which is that of what is called 'Enlightenment'.

First one may remember that non-volitional living is implicit in the teaching of the Lao-tze book, contemporary with the teaching of the Buddha but spatially separated from it by thousands of miles. It is explicit in the teaching of the most profound of Chinese philosophers, Chuang-tze, whose many references to the matter may be summed up in the devastating statement that "he who is not absolutely oblivious of his own existence can never be a ruler of men", for to be oblivious of one's own existence is to be cut off from the source of Volition.

Coming down to the third century of our era we find the great Tao-sheng (circa 360-434), founder of Ch'an Buddhism in China some three generations before the assumed dates of Bodhidharma, in a discussion of his teachings by Hui-yuan (334-416), founder of the Pure Land Sect, stating a doctrine succinctly described by Prof. Fung Yu-lan as follows:

"Here we find a combination of Taoist and Buddhist ideas. What we call retribution results from the activities of the mind. Our aim, therefore, should be to respond to external situations without interposing the mind, since such a course permits physical activity, yet involves no mental activation. This is the way to transcend the cycle of transmigration, so that our acts no longer entail any retribution."

'Retribution', of course, is what we know as karma.

This is spontaneous response without volitional activity.

Let me now quote a little-known statement of the famous and fully-enlightened sage Huang-po of the T'ang dynasty, died 850, who taught at the height of the great period of Ch'an Buddhism. His advice was:

"Simply void your entire mind: this is to have unpolled wisdom (pure non-objective in-seeing or prajna). Daily go out, stay at home, sit or sleep, but in every word you say be not attached to the things of purposeful activity. Then, whatever you say or wherever you look, all will be unpolled (undefiled by objects and karma-free)." (from the Sayings of Ancient Worthies). That is spontaneous non-volitional living.

Is someone asking how this to be done? I wonder if such a question is in order. We may ask the Awakened. But if their answer implies aim, intention or practice, then some ingenuous translator has made himself responsible for that part of the answer, for would not that be looking for the moon in a puddle? The doing of it is non-doing, and volition cannot be abjured

by an act of volition, or a thief caught by telling him to catch himself. Moreover it is not an act of non-doing either: it is neither doing nor non-doing, but the utter absence of both.

Let me recall Sri Bhagavan's statements on the subject, statements as categorical as any he ever made, his earliest statement made in writing to his mother, and one of his later statements made not very long before he died. It may be objected that he was specifically referring to the reputed incompatibility between free-will and determination, but that context is as good an example as any other, and where is there to be found an entity to have will, free or fettered, and what could a phenomenon do if it were not determined? I will not quote them here, for anyone who does not remember them can readily find them, but by dealing with the question as he indicated and solving the specific problem he was referring to - a pseudo-problem, as all problems are - we will automatically solve the general problem which is the subject of this Note.

It is for those better qualified to comment on Bhagavan's teaching; so let me finish these suggestions by returning to the above quotation of a drill-sergeant commanding some voluntary action, but, Chinese characters being for the most part devoid of syntax and parts of speech, the statement may equally be rendered "The voiding of your entire mind is to have pure in-seeing, then your every action will be free of purposeful activity." He quite certainly did not mean to imply that a purposeful act of voiding your mind would produce a state devoid of purposeful activity.

Somebody made a memorable remark when he stated that we only have one freedom, which is to affirm or deny our own existence just as Bhagavan used to say that our only freedom is to identify ourselves or not with the body whose destiny is already shaped by karma. But that is not even a freedom: at most it is a recognition, and the affirmation and denial are identical. Such a recognition is devoid of volitional interference, and it is the voiding of the mind.

In all forms of Buddhism, add indeed perhaps also in Vedanta, we are constantly urged to abjure all such activities as 'attachment', 'discrimination,' 'clinging,' vikalpa, samskara, and others. This, surely, is swallowing a bowl full of rice, grain by grain, for all are just manifestations of volition, that is living volitionally, and such diffusion is unending. The heads of a Hydra grow again; is it not simpler to seek the heart of the Hydra herself?