

PART 3

AWAKENING TO WISDOM FROM ASIA

Introduction to Part 3

In his informal talks on Zen meditation and practice, the Zen master, Shunryu Suzuki, opened his book, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, with these words:

In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few.

We are a civilisation of experts and this has arguably led us into the present global crisis. While cultivating our expertise, we have forgotten how to be beginners. We may think we know a great deal, but the truth is, the more we know the more we realise how little we know. Even Newton described his understanding as that of a person playing with pebbles on a beach. In classical Asian thought ignorance is a supreme knowledge. Openness to our ignorance is the beginning of wisdom.

Scientists are now saying that we know only 4% of reality, 96% of the universe being unknown to us. Given that we are created in the image of the universe the implication is that we know only 4% of ourselves. But while our senses - and the cognitive mind - reveal only a fraction of what there is, there must be more to us. The key to a more subtle reality is within us if we look. The challenge is how to unlock it.

The poet William Blake wrote in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* those lines that Aldous Huxley made famous: "If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite". "Cleansing the doors" implies opening ourselves up to the ignorance - the emptiness - of our normal perceptions and the many possibilities for the "beginner's mind".

The central concept of Buddhism is *shunyata*, often translated as emptiness and otherwise known as the "void" or "abyss". It is realised by means of a "cleansing of the doors" but also by a contemplative or meditative practice that looks through the doors to the infinite which they lead to. In chapter 9 - "The Field of Our Being" - I explore the importance of understanding "emptiness".

In chapter 10 - "The One Taste Universe" - I write about another concept which would transform our thinking, that of "non-duality". The universe is a unity, it has "one taste", which we miss with our instinctive habit of thinking only in terms of opposites. Non-duality is not a denial of dualism but adds that unifying perspective, absent from Western thought. In Asian traditions opposites are not opposite but complementary

Chapter 11 - "Wrapped in Tattered Rags" - explores the notion of buddha nature, which has been forgotten by our modern psychological sciences, which focus on a limited human nature. Buddha nature is no more than awakened human nature. It is often described in Buddhist literature as a precious jewel within us, which is obscured - and revealed - by the flaws or imperfections of our human nature. There are a multitude of ways of discovering this treasure.

Chapter 12 - "On Compassion and the Art of Happiness" - suggests that awakening to buddha nature leads to compassion and the recognition that our true identity is to be found in our relations with others. Moreover this leads to happiness or ultimate bliss. Simple kindness, for instance, can open the door to happiness.