

## VIEWS & REVIEWS

### Engaging the Void

#### Emerson's Essay on Experience and the Zen Experience of Self-Emptying

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IN "THE TRANSCENDENTALIST" (1842), Emerson asserts that "if there is anything grand and daring in human thought or virtue, any reliance on the vast, the unknown; any presentiment; any extravagance of faith, the spiritualist adopts it as most in nature" (*Essays* 197).<sup>1</sup> Such amplitude of mind, Emerson explains, is especially visible among Buddhists:

The oriental mind has always tended to this largeness. Buddhism is an expression of it. The Buddhist who thanks no man, who says, "do not flatter your benefactors," but who, in his conviction that every good deed can by no possibility escape its reward, will not deceive the benefactor by pretending that he has done more than he should, is a Transcendentalist. (*Essays* 197)

<sup>1</sup> Quotations of Emerson's essays are from the Library of America edition: *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte, New York: Viking Press, 1983, and appear in text as *Essays*. Quotations of the journals are from *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 13 vols., ed. William H. Gilman et al., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960-1977, and appear in text as *JMN*. References to the early lectures, compiled in *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 3 vols., ed. Stephen E. Whicher, Robert Spiller, and Wallace E. Williams, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959-1972, appear in text as *EL*. References to *The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle*, ed. Joseph Slater. New York: Columbia University Press, 1964, appear in text as *Correspondence*.

Despite the confident tone of this proclamation, Emerson was uncomfortable with the sweeping inclusiveness of the Buddha-mind. In a journal entry for December 1842, he wrote that "this remorseless Buddhism lies all around, threatening with death and night. . . . Every thought, every enterprise, every sentiment, has its ruin in this horrid Infinite which circles us and awaits our dropping into it" (*JMN* 7: 474). And again, in April 1843, he associated Buddhism with "Winter, Night, Sleep" and viewed it as a dark void of "chaos" drawing the individual towards the oblivion of "trances, raptures, abandonment, ecstasy" (*JMN* 8: 383).

Perhaps, as some readers have declared, Emerson's understanding of Buddhism at this point in his life was insufficient or confused with Brahmanism and Neoplatonism.<sup>2</sup> Or possibly, as Emerson remarked in a letter to Carlyle, "I only worship Eternal Buddh in the retirements & intermissions of Brahma" (*Correspondence* 359). Both considerations might explain his unwillingness to treat the subject at length. More likely, however, Emerson, as a relentless "spiritualist" himself, understood the enormous challenges involved in any quest after interior infinitudes and knew as well the futility of addressing such immensity of mind in terms derived from the systematic explication of philosophic and religious treatises. In 1835, for example, after reading the biographies of Swedenborg, Guyon, Fox, Luther, and Boehme, Emerson wrote: "Each perceives the worthlessness of all instruction, and the infinity of wisdom that issues from meditation" (*JMN* 5: 5). Attempting to convey the Buddhist sense of this infinity, Gyomay M. Kubose writes: "Buddha's mind is large enough to receive and accept all things

<sup>2</sup> Emerson was probably familiar with Buddhism as early as 1833, when he attended Burnouf's lectures at the College Royal de France (see *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 6 vols., ed. Ralph L. Rusk, New York: Columbia University Press, 1939, vol. 3: p. 290n; hereafter as *Letters*). The material in these lectures would doubtless have found its way into Burnouf's *Introduction a l'histoire du Bouddhisme Indien*, which began appearing in 1844, and which Emerson certainly knew. By 1846, Emerson knew Upham's *The History and Doctrine of Buddhism* (1829) well enough to recommend it as the "principal book" on the subject, though he regarded the text as an "imperfect apparatus" (*Letters* 3: 360-61). References to Buddhism, though brief, appear throughout the Emerson canon (see, for example, *Essays* 357, *JMN* 7: 363; 12; 143, and *Letters* 3: 91; 6:174).

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just as the ocean receives all the dirty waters of the rivers and purifies them. . . . There are no tensions or complexes of any kind in the great ocean-mind" (*The Center Within*, Union City, CA: 1986: 46). For someone like Emerson, the appeal of this mind-state must be measured against the sacrifices it demands. If Emerson was a high spiritualist committed to a pursuit of the infinite, he was also an active participant in the business of culture, an individual who read voraciously, who dealt in ideas, who not only gloried in the word, but who made his living by it, who valued Plato, Montaigne, and Kant among countless other writers. To such an individual, the oceanic dimensions of the Buddha-mind, with its ability to eliminate all tensions, would also appear, at least on the surface, to obliterate all distinctions in a void of cultural nihilism.

Nevertheless, Emerson's pursuit of the vast and the unknown, to use his own vocabulary, had deep roots in his life and drew him on despite his fears. "All loss, all pain is particular," he declared in the winter of 1836-37 in his "Ethics" lecture; "the universe remains to the heart unhurt. . . . For it is only the finite has wrought and suffered; the infinite lies stretched in smiling repose" (EL 2: 144-45). The ideas espoused in this lecture can be traced to the so-called Goose Pond Manifesto of 1836.<sup>3</sup> Of the eight principles set forth in this manifesto, the first two deal with mind in terms that reveal both the attractiveness of Emerson's quest and the difficulties it entails: "1. There is one mind common to all men. 2. There is a relation between man and nature so that whatever is in matter is in mind" (EL 2: 4-5). Significantly, the preposition *between* is subordinate to the more demanding, more troublesome preposition *in*. If the first of these principles announces the commonality of mind among humans, the second points beyond the duality of relationship between mind and matter to the radical continuity or identity of the two. Emerson's understanding of this continuity surfaces in "The Transcendentalist" in reference to the Buddhist's refusal to flatter his benefactors. As true compassion results neither from adherence to moral precepts nor from a separately existing human will to generosity, so the mind that such compassion manifests

<sup>3</sup> I am indebted to Robert D. Richardson, Jr., for his discussion of the Goose Pond Manifesto and its impact on Emerson's early work, particularly on the Philosophy of History lecture series.

is of the nature of life itself. What we know of the spirit is a function of practical experience, not simply of principles gleaned from religious and philosophical texts. If Emerson knew the Buddhistic amplitude of mind, he also knew the leading principle of its expression. *The Diamond Sutra* states the case succinctly: "As to any Truth-declaring system, Truth is undeclarable; so 'an enunciation of Truth' is just the name given to it." The journal entries in which Emerson disparages Buddhism suggest more importantly that his wrestling with the "horrid Infinite" into which ideas, enterprises, sentiments, and even individuals fall had by 1843 passed well beyond the stage of conceptual engagement to that of lived experience.

The profile of this experience corresponds remarkably with that of the practicing Zennist in his moments of greatest doubt just before the instant of illumination during which he drops through all sense of a separate self and its reliance on conceptual schemas into the creative void of cosmic being. Describing this period of radical skepticism, the Zen master Hakuin (1686-1769) writes: "Suddenly a great doubt manifested itself before me. It was as though I were frozen solid in the midst of an ice sheet extending tens of thousands of miles." Giving himself completely to this doubt, however, and without thought of or hope for conceptual relief, Hakuin, awakening suddenly to the wonder of eternal being as the ground of his own existence, proclaims loudly: "Wonderful, wonderful. There is no cycle of birth and death through which one must pass. There is no enlightenment one must seek" (Yampolsky trans.). Emerson's "Experience," published in October 1844, records a similar process of doubt leading first to self-loss and then to a wondrous sense of cosmic plenitude as the lived reality of the moment. A Zen reading of the essay refines our understanding of what Emerson knew of Buddhism and yields a vital religious and philosophical context for exploring Emerson's spiritual life as it centered on his efforts to resolve the tensions between the individual's love of ideas and the spiritualist's quest for the infinite.

From a purely textual and intellectual perspective, much of what Emerson knew of Buddhism by 1844 came to him through his reading in Burnouf and through a joint effort with Thoreau to glean key passages from a selection of important Oriental texts and to publish them in *The Dial* over a two-year period from 1842 to 1844. The work on Buddhism, which fell primarily to Thoreau, appeared in the

January 1844 issue of *The Dial* under the title "The Preaching of Buddha." The text was a compilation of sayings culled from a French translation of the "White Lotus of the Good Law" (392–401) and was prefixed with a brief extract of an article by Eugene M. Burnouf "on the origin of Buddhism" (391–92). Based on this work alone, Emerson would have been substantively familiar with two important concepts in Buddhism: first, in the words of Robert Linssen, that "Everything moves, is transformed, both materially and psychologically" and, second, that all things are void or empty of identity, that, to rely again on Linssen, "There is not really any continuous entity always identical with itself but a perpetually changing succession of 'cause and effect'" (*Living Zen*, trans. D. A. Curiel, New York: 1958: 50). Burnouf expresses the first of these principles as Buddha's "opinion . . . that the visible world is in a perpetual change; that death proceeds to life, and life to death . . ." ("Preaching" 391). The second and more difficult principle appears throughout the cuttings in several references to the void and in several parables, one of which goes as follows:

It is . . . as when a potter makes different pots of the same clay. Some become vases to contain molasses, others are for clarified butter, others for milk, others for curds, others inferior and impure vases. The variety does not belong to the clay, it is only the difference of the substance we put in them, whence comes the diversity of the vases. So there is really only one vehicle, which is the vehicle of Buddha; there is no second, no third vehicle. ("Preaching" 393)

Buddhist thought is grounded in the perceived impermanence of all beings, things, and phenomena. Because all is change, nothing can be said to have self-existence or existential particularity. The nature of everything, so far as anything can be said to have a nature at all, is emptiness (*sunyata*)—a ubiquitous, eternally undivided, ineffable ground variously called the Void, the Buddha-mind, the Buddha-nature, the Unborn, or the Absolute. The *Prajnaparamita Sutra*, a text recited daily in Zen monasteries throughout the world, states the thesis in the context of a seemingly paradoxical assertion that eliminates all thought of self-nature, including the possibility of anything, of any perceivable or even allegeable presence lurking behind the processes of life and making them happen: "Form here is only emptiness, emptiness only

form. Form is no other than emptiness, emptiness no other than form. Feeling, thought, and choice, consciousness itself, are no other than this" (Kapleau trans.).

For the Buddhist, however, the Void is not vacuity or absence, nor is it cause for anxiety. Perception of the Void is, rather, freedom realized as the ontological ground of existence. "Zen is the essence of Buddhism, freedom is the essence of Zen," says Thomas Cleary. In a later refinement of this definition, Cleary explains that "liberation of the human mind from the inhibiting effects of mesmerism by its own creations is the essence of Zen" (*Zen Essence: The Science of Freedom*, ed. T. Cleary, Boston: Shambhala, 1989, xv, 80). Emerson would have seen this concept of freedom expressed more poetically, perhaps, in "The Preaching of Buddha": "The four medicinal plants are these four truths; namely, the state of void, the absence of a cause, the absence of an object, and the entrance into annihilation" (397). The source of Buddhist liberation is the realization that there is no such thing as self, that the very concept of self-existence is delusive. Asserting that people are so reliant upon the perceived need of a self that they will fabricate a "supposititious Self and use it disastrously as the living centre of their behavior," Nolan Pliny Jacobson, in *Buddhism: the Religion of Analysis*, argues that "all minds have, in fact, the great 'stream of Being' as their indispensable condition; it is this life-continuum, and not a unitary soul or self, which sustains each individual in his struggle" (83). The life continuum Jacobson here exalts in place of self as the vital center of existence emerges not as a form of nihilism but as a condition of universal interdependence. Eihei Dōgen, a thirteenth-century priest and philosopher generally credited with founding the Sōtō school of Zen, views the Buddhist understanding of continuum as a process of self-forgetting and concurrently as a means by which the universe of myriad things realizes itself through the individual: "To study the buddha way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things" (*Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen*, ed. K. Tanahashi, San Francisco: 1985: 70). For Buddhists throughout the world, freedom from self is identity with all things, a means by which the perceived harmony of life is the actual lived and living center of one's being. The "Ocean Seal" of Uisang (A.D. 625-702), the First Patriarch of Korean Hua-yen Buddhism, describes this vital cosmic unity as a mode of inter-

being: "In One is All / In Many is One." But this concept of interbeing is predicated on the essential identity of all things: "One is identical to All, / Many is identical to One." The unity Uisang here celebrates is not a monotheistic oneness resulting from a separate organizing force, principle, or logos, but a nondualistic harmony realized in the complete interdependency of everything. As Abe Masao explains: "Monotheistic oneness does not include the element of self-negation and is substantial, whereas nondualistic oneness includes self-negation and is nonsubstantial" ("The Problem of Self-Centeredness as the Root Source of Human Suffering," in *Japanese Religions* 15 (July 1989): 15-25; cited from pp. 24-25).

Emerson's "Experience" articulates a path to the Zen condition of enlightened selflessness Abe describes. The essay opens with a famous image of the self trapped "in a series of which we do not know the extremes" and moving upon a set of stairs that "go upward and out of sight" (471). The early stages of the essay depict the human condition as one of epistemological insecurity grounded in the apparent impossibility of our knowing anything about life. "Ghostlike we glide through nature, and should not know our place again," Emerson says in the first paragraph, and then repeats his claim in the second with "We do not know today whether we are busy or idle" (471). In the third paragraph, following a reference to the death of his son, Emerson complains that even "grief can teach me nothing, nor carry me one step into real nature" (473). The direction of his thought concludes in paragraph four with a dark judgment on the entire process of change: "I take this evanescence and lubricity of all objects, which lets them slip through our fingers then when we clutch hardest, to be the most unhandsome part of our condition" (473).

The implied subtext in these early paragraphs is a quest for permanence and stability in an endlessly changing and unstable world. All things change, including one's moods. But the persona of these opening paragraphs—a figure best viewed perhaps as a strategic composite of Emerson himself and a rhetorical ego serving as the occasional "I" of his sentences—cannot accept this change, for he sees it from the viewpoint of an opposing self, desirous that its experiences teach it something about "real nature." The very idea that experience should culminate in something more "real" than the existential pulse of the moment, that it should be answerable, as it were, to the individual's

need for meaning, particularly in compensation for pain and loss, exalts the self above the life it seeks to understand, compelling reflective expectations that only widen the perceived gap between the individual as thinker and her experience as a living organism. This radical dualism of self and other, together with efforts to extract from experience object lessons in metaphysics, results in profound suffering, in grief that even grief has nothing to teach. The source of this suffering is, according to Lama Anagarika Govinda, a mode of ego-assertion that uses knowledge to grasp reality for the self: "It is not the 'world' or its transitoriness which is the cause of suffering but our attitude towards it, our clinging to it, our thirst, our ignorance" (*The Psychological Attitude of Early Buddhist Philosophy*, London: 1961: 55). We see this "thirst," this "clinging," in Emerson's disappointment that the "evanescence and lubricity of all objects" allow them to slip "through our fingers." From the Zen perspective, however, there are no mutually exclusive categories of self and other, thus no opportunity to view the self as in any way outside what might be construed as "real nature." Zen ontology is predicated, rather, on the understanding that, in Thomas Merton's words, "The fundamental reality is neither external nor internal, objective nor subjective. It is prior to all differentiations and contradictions. . . . The mature grasp of the primordial emptiness in which all things are one is *Prajna*, wisdom" (*Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, New York: 1986: 68).

Emerson begins a journey to *Prajna* when he opens paragraph five with the assertion that "Dream delivers us to dream, and there is no end to illusion. Life is a train of moods like a string of beads, and, as we pass through them, they prove to be many-colored lenses which paint the world their own hue, and each shows only what lies in its focus" (473). In claiming that "Dream delivers us to dream," Emerson initiates the process of dissociating himself from the dualistic belief in a separately existing "real nature" that functions either as the goal of human experience or as a universal, indwelling *elan vital* or *anima* motivating all things toward some presumed end. We might say that Emerson begins divesting himself of what Newton Arvin, attempting to define Transcendentalism, calls "a purely idealistic belief in an ultimate spiritual reality, an impersonal and timeless Absolute, a transcendent One" ("Ralph Waldo Emerson: 1803-1882," in *Major Writers of America*, Vol. 1, ed. Perry Miller et al., New York: 1962.



477–891: 481).<sup>4</sup> So far as all is illusion, and human existence motion through illusion, life emerges as an empty ground or what the modern Zen philosopher Nishitani Keiji calls a “horizon of nihility” (*Religion and Nothingness*, trans. Jan Van Bragt, Berkeley: 1982: 4). The recognition of this eternally shifting ground, what Emerson identifies as a train of moods, leaves the covetous ego with nothing to cling to, no place to rest. For the Zennist, however, the individual’s encounter with this field of nihility at the ground of existence is not an occasion for despair. Rather, it marks, again in the words of Nishitani, “a conversion from the self-centered (or man-centered) mode of being, which always asks what *use* things have for us (or for man), to an attitude that asks for what *purpose* we ourselves (or man) exist” (ibid., 4–5). A similar conversion surfaces in paragraph five of “Experience” when Emerson commences a series of questions for which there can be no answers acceptable to the intellect but which offer nevertheless a methodology that preserves the seeker from despair as she commits to motion through illusion. “Of what use is fortune or talent to a cold and defective nature?” asks Emerson. “Who cares what sensibility or discrimination a man has at some time shown, if he falls asleep in his chair; or if he laugh and giggle . . . or has gotten a child in his

<sup>4</sup> Most commentators view the relationship between the self and the “timeless Absolute” of Transcendental oneness in what Zennists would see as unavoidably dualistic terms. Anthony J. Cascardi, for example, employs a Kantian perspective in claiming that “The abiding or ‘transcendental’ self cannot of course be located in experience, and for roughly the same reasons that Kant argues: it must stand outside experience, must precede actual experience, if it is to form the grounds of any *possible* experience” (“The Logic of Moods: An Essay on Emerson and Thoreau,” in *SiR* 24, Summer 1985: pp. 223–37; cited from p. 229). Lawrence Buell reveals a similarly dualistic posture in viewing Emerson as caught or trapped in language, “forced, by the conditions of oral performance, to recognize the difficulty of extricating his personal voice from intertextual bondage” (*New England Literary Culture from Revolution through Renaissance*, Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 161). Particularly insightful pages of comparison and contrast between Zen and Kantian metaphysics as both relate to Western thought in general occur in Abe (*Zen and Western Thought*, 83–134). Amelie Enns, pursuing the relationship between Heidegger’s theory of language and that of Zen, argues that “the division between subject and object is built right into Western language . . .” (“The Subject-Object Dichotomy in Heidegger’s *A Dialogue on Language* and Nishitani’s *Religion and Nothingness*,” in *Japanese Religions* 15, 1988: 38–48; cited from p. 45).

boyhood?" (474). After questioning the use of genius and of heroic vows, Emerson turns finally to the religious sentiment with a question that annihilates any distinction between humankind and nature: "What cheer can the religious sentiment yield, when that is suspected to be secretly dependent upon the seasons of the year, and the state of the blood?" (474). Following his assertion that life is a dream comprising an endless train of illusions, these questions, both in their method and in their effect on Emerson, are remarkably similar to Zen koans. The koan is a seemingly paradoxical question, problem, or anecdote that the Zen student, particularly in the so-called Rinzai tradition, is assigned to meditate on. Typical koans may ask questions like "What is the sound of one hand?" or "What was your original face before you were born?" Others may involve a brief story, as in "Jōshū's 'Mu' ": "A monk once asked Master Jōshū, 'Has a dog the Buddha Nature or not?' Jōshū said, 'Mu!' " *Mu* is a bewildering and nearly untranslatable word vaguely corresponding to "not" and evoking roughly the concept of nothingness. The student may contemplate such a koan for years, not with a view to acquiring an intellectual understanding of Jōshū's response so much as with the intention of achieving a spiritual breakthrough into an entirely different mode of perception. "Mumon exhorts the Zen student to work at mu," says T. P. Kasulis, "to become it, rather than to understand it" (*Zen Action, Zen Person*, Honolulu: 1981: 11). The koan's purpose, so far as it can be said to have a purpose, is to help the individual annihilate all sense of separation between himself and his environment, his mental as well as his physical environment. The student awakens to discover that there was no problem to begin with. "There is no knot because the 'mind seeking to know the mind' or the 'self seeking to control the self' has been defeated out of existence and exposed for the abstraction which it always was," explains Alan Watts. "And when that tense knot vanishes there is no more sensation of a hard core of selfhood standing over against the rest of the world" (*The Way of Zen*, New York: 1957: 166).

Like Jōshū, whose response eludes the dualisms implicit in a simple yes or no, Emerson veers from an intellectual answer to his own questions and from the interrogative mode itself, launching an assault on human temperament, the final refuge of selfhood. "Temperament . . . shuts us in a prison of glass which we cannot see" (474), he says in the sixth

paragraph. Complaining that for all people temperament forms "boundaries they will never pass," he asserts in the next paragraph that "Temperament puts all divinity to rout" (474-75). Clearly, Emerson has passed from a purely intellectual to a religious frame of mind. Much in the manner of the Zen student brought to an abyss of complete frustration over questions she must become rather than answer, Emerson can do nothing but plunge through the self as an observer might watch the passing train of his own moods, aware of them, wondering who or what is watching them, but allowing them nevertheless to go by. The process of self-observation is thus a yielding, an act of giving up not only the quest for a definitive mood, image, or theory on which to found identity but also the quest for identity itself. In effect, Emerson gives up the very process of the knowing mode as it relates to the traditionally bounded or circumscribed self. "The grossest ignorance does not disgust like this impudent knowingness," he says, while condemning phrenologists, physicians, and, by implication, the entire secular community of knowledge-seekers: "But the definition of *spiritual* should be, *that which is its own evidence*" (475; italics Emerson's).

Emerson's efforts to escape human temperament first by questioning its logic and effect, then by condemning it as a power of limitation parallel the Buddhist's struggle to achieve a generative openness as the grounds of his being, a productive emptiness comprising not a specific presence but simply presence itself. From the Zen perspective, Emerson affirms through a discursive *via negativa* what Huang-po, a famous ninth-century "Chan" (Zen) patriarch, calls "the One Mind, which is the substance of all things, is co-extensive with the Void and fills the world of phenomena" (Blofeld trans.). Asserting that one-mindedness manifests itself more as a path or method than as a specific state of being, Huang-po maintains that "the way of the Buddhas flourishes in a mind utterly freed from conceptual thought processes, while discrimination between this and that gives birth to a legion of demons" (127). For the mind freed of "conceptual thought processes," the act of seeing and the thing seen are perfectly continuous. To see in the contextual freedom Buddhist thought inspires is to see one's self-nature, but in a state completely beyond selfhood understood as ego or even as indwelling cosmic soul. To be fully awake is to be utterly transparent, not something seeing as from the viewpoint of a stable

central consciousness, but the very act of seeing. Thus, D. T. Suzuki writes: "So long as the seeing is something to see, it is not the real one; only when the seeing is no-seeing—that is, when the seeing is not a specific act of seeing into a definitely circumscribed state of consciousness—is it the 'seeing into one's self-nature'" (*The Zen Doctrine of No-Mind*, London: 1983: 28–29). The "no-seeing" that Suzuki here describes corresponds to Emerson's view of the spiritual as "*that which is its own evidence.*" It is to see without the distorting energies of a self motivated by separate emotional and intellectual needs and desires. So far as we can speak here of a self at all, it is, rather, that which, in Huang-po's terms, "fills the world of phenomena" or what Dōgen affirms in the *Shōbōgenzō* when he says that "The way the self arrays itself is the form of the entire world" (*Moon in a Dewdrop*, p. 77). Commenting on this line from Dōgen, Joan Stambaugh says: "The self set out in array . . . is, so to speak, a meeting-place or confluence for the presencing of all things in a total situation" (*Impermanence Is Buddha-Nature: Dōgen's Understanding of Temporality*, Honolulu: 1990: 28).

For Emerson, freedom from temperament is freedom from circumscribed consciousness and forms the essential ground of religious experience. The result is an awakening to intellectual powers infinitely greater than those which the separate self, in its "impudent knowingness," can possibly realize. It is not surprising, therefore, that shortly after condemning the secular community of his day, Emerson, in describing his new intellectual awareness, employs imagery recalling Huang-po's reference to discriminatory thought as giving "birth to a legion of demons." "The intellect," says Emerson at the end of paragraph seven, "seeker of absolute truth . . . intervenes for our succor, and at one whisper of these high powers, we awake from ineffectual struggles with this nightmare. We hurl it into its own hell, and cannot again contract ourselves to so base a state" (476). To awaken from the nightmare of selfhood is to cast out the demons of discriminatory thought.

The existential hallmark of this radical wakefulness is a serene and abiding acceptance beyond yet inclusive of such apparent dualisms as self and other, reality and illusion, change and permanence. Hence, the seemingly paradoxical opening to paragraph eight:

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The secret of illusoriness is the necessity of a succession of moods or objects. Gladly we would anchor, but the anchorage is quicksand. . . . Our love of the real draws us to permanence, but health of body consists in circulation, and sanity of mind in variety or facility of association. We need change of objects. Dedication to one thought is quickly odious. (476)

The flexible, accepting, health-conscious persona of these sentences contrasts sharply with the self Emerson depicted earlier as a ghostlike being stranded in a trenchant teleology, moving along the inclinations of a perceived need for some good end or other, some first cause available to the groping intellect. In paragraph eight, Emerson jettisons the very self trapped on the stairs by accepting the illusoriness of life and its endless succession of moods as the requisite, ever-shifting contents of consciousness. In so doing, he moves beyond all notions of a stable central life and of containment on any level, writing instead from the viewpoint of change itself.<sup>5</sup> The result is a much more unitary, Buddhist perspective on reality: "A Buddhist does not think *about* the world, as a subject surveying a range of objects," says Jacobson in *Buddhism & the Contemporary World*; "the point is to think *in* the world, as part of its organic unity" (9).

The new power that engages Emerson, that takes him up, as it were, is one that abides nowhere. In its freedom from intentionality, it eludes all containments. "Like a bird which alights nowhere," says Emerson at the end of paragraph ten, "but hops perpetually from bough to bough, is the Power which abides in no man and in no woman, but for

<sup>5</sup> Emerson's readers have difficulty accepting the decentering process of "Experience"; see for example David Wyatt, "Spelling Time: The Reader in Emerson's Circles," in *On Emerson: The Best from American Literature*, ed. Edwin H. Cady and Louis J. Budd, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1988, pp. 171-82; especially pp. 181-82). Much of the problem inheres in the Western tendency to reify Emersonian emptiness as "a chasm of nothingness between shifting modes of selfhood" and as a "vacuum between points of truth" (Robert M. Greenberg, "Shooting the Gulf: Emerson's Sense of Experience," in *ESO* 31, 1985: 211-29; cited from p. 211). Richard Poirier views Emerson's nothingness as a content against which artists assert themselves in obedience to the "human desire to make its presence known to itself and to the world. . ." (*The Renewal of Literature: Emersonian Reflections*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987, p. 14).

a moment speaks from this one, and for another moment from that one" (477). If "Experience" rejects the self, it also rejects absoluteness as stability, accepting impermanence itself as the absolute. It comes as close as any Western document to the Zen claim that "Impermanence is Buddha-nature" (Stambaugh 26), that the "Mind is no mind of conceptual thought and it is completely detached from form" (Huang-po 33), and, finally, that the mind is the "'Non-abiding Origin' through which all things are established" (Abe, *Zen and Western Thought*, ed. Wm. R. LaFleur, Honolulu: 1985, 117). Like the sourceless energies of the enlightened Buddhist mind-state, the power Emerson engages at the end of paragraph ten generates, in the absence of a discernible self, an essentially reflective mentality notably free of ulterior intellectual purposes, of any quest for meaning, stability, and plan in the universe. The remainder of the essay, which should be read in response to the first ten paragraphs, evokes a discursive open ground in which divergent, even contrary thoughts, moods, and images surface not to compete with each other for attention but simply to appear and dissolve in the onward flow of the language of the moment as it alternates between liberative skepticism and muscular affirmation. "What help from thought?" Emerson asks in the eleventh paragraph, and then responds with "Life is not dialectics. . . . Unspeakably sad and barren does life look to those, who a few months ago were dazzled with the splendor of the promise of the times" (478). Emerson's skepticism here complements such affirmations as "To fill the hour,—that is happiness; to fill the hour, and leave no crevice for a repentance or an approval. We live amid surfaces, and the true art of life is to skate well on them" (478). Skepticism varies into affirmation; affirmation flows again to skepticism: "Life itself is a bubble and a skepticism, and a sleep within a sleep" (481).

Significantly, neither skepticism nor affirmation dominates "Experience."<sup>6</sup> "I accept the clangor and jangle of contrary tendencies," says Emerson, and then asserts that "The middle region of our being is

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Tebeaux views Emerson's philosophical skepticism here as "an attitude essential to the process of truth seeking" ("Skepticism and Dialectic in Emerson's 'Experience,'" *ESO* 32 (1986): 23-35., p. 29). She sees Emerson as pursuing the truth in "a web of discontinuity" (*ibid.*, p. 33), the result, perhaps, of her conviction that "only by dealing with human limitations can man hope to achieve moments of insight" (*ibid.*).

the temperate zone" (480). We tend to think of a middle region as a point between two extremes or as an energy field that balances polar opposites. But Emerson does not speak of balance. He talks, rather, of acceptance. In this sense, his middle region corresponds to the oceanic consciousness described by the early Zen master Ma-tsu: "When successive thoughts do not await one another, and each thought dies peacefully away, this is called absorption in the oceanic reflection" (Cleary 2). This reflective absorption is not, however, a condition of despair or a form of anti-intellectualism. It is, rather, a function of radical independence at the very ground of existence and consciousness so mingled as to be virtually identical. Thus, Hui-neng (638-713) writes: "We say that the Essence of Mind is great because it embraces all things, since all things are within our nature" (26). Hui-neng's assertion is itself a reflection of and comment on *The Diamond Sutra*, which counsels that "The mind should be kept independent of any thoughts which arise within it." Later in his essay, Emerson will celebrate this magnitude of mind by insisting that skepticism is a positive and liberating force:

The new statement will comprise the skepticisms, as well as the faiths of society. . . . For, skepticisms are not gratuitous or lawless, but are limitations of the affirmative statement, and the new philosophy must take them in, and make affirmations outside of them, just as much as it must include the oldest beliefs. (487)

On this shifting ground of affirmation and skepticism, the developing thrust of the essay evokes a perception of relationship radically different from that generated by the traditional conceptual schemas of Western thought. Winston L. King remarks that the "Cartesian division of reality into immaterial, invisible, subjective consciousness and material, visible objectivity is the epitome of Western thought. . . . Out of this climate has arisen the Western dichotomous type of logical assertion that A is *not*, *cannot* be B" (Foreword to *Religion and Nothingness*, xi). In breaking through the very concept of selfhood early in "Experience," however, Emerson implicitly rejects the dichotomy King describes and affirms instead a unity and a mode of consciousness grounded in motion itself, in an emptiness of flux:

If I have described life as a flux of moods, I must now add, that there is that in us which changes not, and which ranks all sensations and states of mind. The consciousness in each man is a sliding scale, which identifies him now with the First Cause, and now with the flesh of his body; life above life, in infinite degrees (485).

The sliding-scale consciousness, indistinguishable as it is from the "flux of moods" that constitutes the very life whence it comes, works not to illuminate but to identify, not to define limits but to destabilize boundaries and affirm infinitudes. Here, skepticism and affirmation, like the particular and the general or like devotion both to First Cause and to flesh, fold upon each other in an amorphous unity of nondistinction similar to what Nishitani calls "circuminsessional interpenetration" (*ibid.*, 148). This is not a denial of autonomy, but an affirmation of being in a context that collapses individual and cosmic existence into a state beyond the traditional relational models of Western systems of unity. "In short," says Nishitani, "it is only on a field where the being of all things is a being at one with emptiness that it is possible for all things to gather into one, even while each retains its reality as an absolutely unique being" (*ibid.*, 148).

Nishitani's "field" is Emerson's "ocean." "Suffice it for the joy of the universe," Emerson says in paragraph sixteen, "that we have not arrived at a wall, but at interminable oceans" (486). Here, communication *between* gives way to the implosive communication of one thing in or *as* another: "I am explained without explaining, I am felt without acting, and where I am not" (486). To insist on oneself, on one's autonomy, in this state of oceanic consciousness is to be affirmed by all others. Communication so conceived is not a directive act of one thing towards another but a mode of being in which one thing folds upon or emerges from within another. Hence, Emerson's claim that "all just persons . . . communicate without speech, above speech . . ." (486). Robert E. Carter, commenting on Nishitani's field of nihility as the common ground of identity shared by all beings, sees identity-based communication in terms closely resembling Emerson's reference to being "felt without acting" and without signaling proximity:

Individual and whole, birth and death are but aspects of the



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same reality, and the one is inextricably connected with the other because each is the other. Each interpenetrates each and is in turn interpenetrated. . . . I care about another as I care about myself because I am, in fact, the other. The result is clearly a cosmic compassion. . . . (*God, the Self and Nothingness: Reflections: Eastern and Western*, ed. Robert E. Carter, New York: 1990, p. xxxi)

In the absence of selfhood perceived as having objective existence, the power Emerson describes in paragraph ten services a creative unity beyond all notions of self and other as relative phenomena:

The great and crescive self, rooted in absolute nature, supplants all relative existence, and ruins the kingdom of mortal friendship and love. Marriage (in what is called the spiritual world) is impossible, because of the inequality between every subject and every object. The subject is the receiver of Godhead, and at every comparison must feel his being enhanced by that cryptic might. (487-88)

The subject of these lines is rapacious and threatening only so far as we conceive its contents as having objective existence. From the Zen perspective, the self rooted in absolute nature, which is itself in constant flow, is radically free of essence, hence of threat. "Our true self is the Great Self; our true body is the Body of reality," says Ruth Fuller Sasaki, an American Zennist (qtd. in Nancy Wilson Ross, *Three Ways of Asian Wisdom: Hinduism, Buddhism and Zen and their Significance for the West*, New York: 1966: 145). In this context, relationship is not, cannot be a function of the linking or joining of two objects, as in a marriage; it is, rather, a function of identity in a field of mutual polarities. "While it is necessary for one to be accurate and refined in one's discrimination of apparent opposites in daily life," says Chang Chung-yuan, "it is even more important for one simultaneously to recognize the invisible, mutual solution of multiplicities and the perfect identification of polarities" (Introduction: The Meaning of Tao and Its Reflection in Western Thought, in *Tao: A New Way of Thinking*, New York: 1975, xv-xvi). Such identification replaces empathy or transference of feeling from one being to another and displaces marriage as the metaphor of relationships: "Transference

or participation is based upon the dualistic interpretation of reality whereas the identity goes more fundamentally into the root of existence where no dichotomy in any sense has yet taken place," says D. T. Suzuki (*Mysticism Christian and Buddhist*, London: 1957: 76). Emerson states this perception more forcefully when, near the end of "Experience," he says: "All I know is reception; I am and I have: but I do not get, and when I have fancied I had gotten anything, I found I did not. I worship with wonder the great Fortune" (491).

Emerson's pious sense of wonder here is conveyed through deliberately primitive verb structures ("I am and I have") that emphasize being and identity rather than questing for roles or for hidden principles that impel the experience of the moment. His receptivity, like that of the "subject" he described earlier as "the receiver of Godhead," is absolute and sufficient unto itself because it is, to use Sasaki's vocabulary, the "Body of reality" itself. Emerson understands that he is himself the "great Fortune" he worships with wonder.

Zen philosophy is particularly useful in helping us understand that such perceptions are not merely solipsistic reveries but forms of religious experience in which knowing emerges as a mode of actualization, what Nishitani calls "the self-awareness of reality" (5). Adopting the English word "realize," with its twofold meaning of "actualize" and "understand," Nishitani says that "our ability to perceive reality means that reality realizes (actualizes) itself in us . . ." (*Religion and Nothingness*: 5). This mode of perception differs from philosophical cognition in that it is basically a two-way process of appropriation: reality appropriates us in realizing itself through us, and we in turn appropriate reality in realizing that we and it are essentially one and the same. I am all that I realize; all that I realize appropriates itself through me. For Nishitani, this mode of seeing is itself the spiritual life: "It is extremely rare for us so to 'fix our attention' on things as to 'lose ourselves' in them . . . to become the very things we are looking at. To see through them directly to 'God's world,' or to the universe in its infinitude, is even rarer" (*ibid.*: 9). Emerson's definition of the spiritual as "*that which is its own evidence*" constitutes his effort to see the "God's world" of all things. To see beyond the obtrusive, distorting lenses of the human intellect perceived as the instrument of a separate, desirous, expectant self is to understand that each thing is complete in itself, that nothing stands behind it, impelling it, and that it is yet the

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whole cosmos. Hence, Emerson's claim that there is a "gulf between every me and thee," that "All private sympathy is partial," and that "Two human beings are like globes, which can touch only in a point. . . ." (488). Emerson is anxious to show that "Life will be imaged, but cannot be divided nor doubled. Any invasion of its unity would be chaos" (488). Any thought of selfhood constitutes an invasion.

Critical access to this sense of unity, however, requires us to yield the tendency to view the essay as obedient to the opening images of loss and alienation.<sup>7</sup> "Experience" is neither dramatic in the sense that it offers roles for the reader nor linear in the sense that it pursues an argument point-by-point from paragraph to paragraph. It is, rather, contextual, moving like purling waters, in the manner of a stream continually folding back on itself, augmenting earlier statements. Near the end of his essay, for example, Emerson returns to the theme of subjectivity: "Thus inevitably does the universe wear our color, and every object fall successively into the subject itself. The subject exists, the subject enlarges; all things sooner or later fall into place. As I am, so I see. . . ." (489). The color of the things we see in this state is not an affect, the product, as it were, of the subject's intention towards a perceived object, but the mark of interpenetrative identity or of an awakening to the sourceless identity of all things—"As I am, so I see." Bunan, a Zen poet of the seventeenth century, views this condition of identity as a shared thingness:

The moon's the same old moon,  
The flowers exactly as they were,  
Yet I've become the thingness  
Of all the things I see.  
(Stryk and Ikemoto trans.)

Like the subject which absorbs all that falls into it, Emerson's prose is subsumptive, a pulsation that contains the whole. The discourse tends to blossom or open, impelling the reader downward into a swirl-

<sup>7</sup> For example, R. A. Yoder says: "In 'Experience' Emerson is true to his initial awareness that the spiral stairs go upward and out of sight, and the slumbering Eumenides dramatize the gap between man and god as well as the endlessness of that condition" (*Emerson and the Orphic Poet in America*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978, p. 47).

ing, non-linear, dimensionless vortex in which earlier and later statements form contexts for each other and invite the reader to a process of continual return.<sup>8</sup> The work emerges thus as a kind of spatio-temporal quantum field similar in its method to the syncretic harmonization processes Whitehead sees functioning at the ground of existence when he says: "Each actual entity is a throb of experience including the actual world within its scope" (*Process and Reality*, ed. D. R. Griffin and D. W. Sherburne, New York: 1978: 190). Whitehead's vision of entities as pulsatory space-time events corresponds to Zen's perception of reality as a continually emergent conjunctivity in which, as Fa-tsang expounds, "the one and the many established each other" (Chan trans.).<sup>9</sup> Emerson's prose in "Experience" issues as a pulsation of nature in conformity with his perception, stated earlier, in paragraph fifteen, that "Nature hates calculators; her methods are saltatory and impulsive. Man lives by pulses; our organic movements are such; and the chemical and ethereal agents are undulatory and alternate . . ." (483).

So far as we can speak of "Experience" as having a discursive method at all, it embodies a process remarkably similar to the involutions of Zen sermons. A particularly notable example of the form is Ch'ing-yuan's famous disquisition on mountains and waters:

Before I studied Zen I saw mountains as mountains, waters as waters.

When I learned something of Zen, the mountains were no longer mountains, waters no longer waters.

But now that I understand Zen, I am at peace with myself, seeing mountains once again as mountains, waters as waters.

<sup>8</sup> Gayle Smith remarks that Emerson's "is a style in which the differences, even between apparently contrary entities such as cause and effect, subject and object, action and inaction, are consistently blurred to reveal the One underlying all" ("Emerson's Prose Style: Following Nature with Language," in *ATO* 56 (March 1985), pp. 19-30; cited from p. 20). Smith implies a dualistic understanding of oneness in her claim that Emerson's sense of being felt where he is not is his effort to forge "a bold new identity between the spirit and himself" (*ibid.*, p. 27).

<sup>9</sup> For an extensive analysis of Hua-yen Buddhism and Whiteheadian process metaphysics, see Steve Odin, *Process Metaphysics and Hua-yen Buddhism: Critical Study of Cumulative Penetration vs. Interpenetration*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1982, pp. 69-153).

In the first stage of awareness, the I or the ego is the basis of discrimination. In the second stage the Zen student realizes that, as Abe puts it, "there is no differentiation, no objectification, no affirmation, no duality of subject and object" (*Zen and Western Thought*, 8). Lu Yen, an early Taoist poet, captures the essence of the second stage in the delightful assertion that "Green mountains are white clouds / In a passing transformation" (Blofeld trans.). There is, however, the possibility of a hidden form of differentiation in the second stage, a tendency to objectify or conceptualize the non-self as distinct from the ego-self. We could, for example, view the shared "thingness" of Bunan's enlightenment as a separate condition of being. To avoid the tendency to reify emptiness as a thing, Buddhism insists on the absolute identity and indivisibility of form and void. "Furthermore, Emptiness does not have any mark of its own," says Fa-tsang; "it is through forms that [Emptiness] is revealed" ("Treatise on the Golden Lion" 225). Hence, the necessity for a third stage in which, as Abe says, "Emptiness empties itself, becoming non-emptiness, that is, true fullness" (*Zen and Western Thought*, 10). Donald Mitchell, relating Zen emptiness to Christian kenosis, notes that "lived Emptiness empties *itself* out as compassion" (*Spirituality and Emptiness: The Dynamics of Spiritual Life in Buddhism and Christianity*, New York: 1991: 121).

Regardless of the perspective, however, the third stage is involuntary and subsumptive, not the result of linear progression. It contains the first and second stages and, however paradoxical it may appear, returns us to a state from which we have never really departed. "The latter," says Robert Linssen, commenting on what we are calling the third stage of spiritual growth, "is devoid of any sense of progression: it is instantaneous. . . . It is a question here of an integration that can neither be described nor thought" (*Living Zen*: 252-53). This mode of spiritual insight reflects a sense of the temporal interpenetration of all experience, a moment of adequacy in which, as Odin remarks, "Each moment-event is itself an eternal here-now, a unique quantum-whole of actuality" (96). In these moment-events, there is no sense of past and future, no sense of linear progression from one point to another. Past and future fold, rather, upon the present. Commenting on the "musical perfection" beneath the perceived chaos of our skepticisms, beneath "the inharmonious and trivial particulars" of life, Emerson says, to recall paragraph eleven, that "every insight from

this realm of thought is felt as initial, and promises a sequel. I do not make it; I arrive there, and behold what was there already. . . . And what a future it opens! I feel a new heart beating with the love of the new beauty" (485).

So far as Emerson's prose seeks to return us to a condition of acceptance perfectly identical with the very grounds of seeing and hearing, it moves beyond the dynamics of linear progression, beyond the notion of one thing's becoming something else, and offers as the axis of spiritual being only the immediacy of our opening to the adequacy of the present moment. Robert E. Carter explains such openness in terms of what he calls "self-contradictory unities": "I see the mountains. I see that there are no mountains. Therefore, I see the mountains again, but as transformed. And the transformation is that the mountains both are and are not mountains" ("Paradox, Language, and Reality," in *God, the Self and Nothingness*, pp. 245-264; cited from p. 255). The unity of subject and object Carter affirms is not the result of linear progression, as in the Hegelian effort to evolve or to make a synthesis out of a prior thesis and antithesis. Rather, it is predicated on belief in the prior unity of all things. "To think of one thing is to distinguish it from the other," says Nishida Kitarō. "In order for the distinction to be possible, it must originally have something in common with the other" (Yusa trans.). It is the both-and structure of perception rather than the synthetic progress of Hegelian dialectic that Zen seeks to preserve in exalting a preconceptual, prelingual ground of mutual identity for all things and that Emerson affirms in his claim that he does not make thought but rather arrives there or, if you will, at the place where thought emerges free of the intentions and expectations of an obtrusive ego.<sup>10</sup>

Viewed in the light of consciousness as an ever-opening field of acceptance, Emerson's fall, the unhappiness he records in paragraph eighteen at the discovery that "we exist" and that "we suspect our

<sup>10</sup> Ray Benoit provides a typical Hegelian view of unity in commenting on Emerson's understanding of Plato: "Explicit is the dichotomy and desire for union—not one into the other but both into a third of 'spiritual creatures' and 'solid fact': both into a dualism which is nevertheless monistic, a oneness of two" ("Emerson on Plato: The Fire's Center," in *On Emerson: The Best From American Literature*, ed. Edwin H. Cady and Louis J. Budd, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1988, pp. 127-38; cited from p. 135).

instruments" (487), is a fortunate event. The very assertion that knowledge of existence is a fall, what Emerson calls "the Fall of Man," occurs in the discursive context of experienced non-being—a preconceptual state free of the very instruments, of the very energies of desire and repulsion that form its contents. To suspect our instruments is not to reject them; it is to see them in a new light and to use them without being captured by them, entangled by them. As *The Diamond Sutra* explains, "The mind should be kept independent of any thoughts which arise within it. If the mind depends upon anything it has no sure haven."

In this perspectiveless state, one comes to one's experience, including one's sadness, free of attachment to the emotion. One understands that true fullness is absence of expectation. "And yet is the God the native of these bleak rocks," says Emerson, after commenting on the compulsive private tendency to see things as "saturated with our humors" (490). If the rocks are bleak, they serve as well to return us to true selflessness: "We must hold hard to this poverty, however scandalous, and by more vigorous self-recoveries, after the sallies of action, possess our axis more firmly" (490). This axis comprises a poverty of selfhood, not of emotional and intellectual content. As Sekida Katsuki writes: "It is not that you are without desires, but that while desiring and adhering to things you are at the same time unattached to them" (*Zen Training: Methods and Philosophy*, ed. A. V. Grimstone, New York: 1975: 34). If then for Emerson the life of truth is "cold and so far mournful" (490), if there is sadness in his sense of the impermanence of things, it is a sadness that he seems now able to experience entirely for itself and as a gift of the moment. Zen speaks of this condition as *aware*, the sadness that inheres in the realization that things are lost to us even as they are found. In "Experience," Emerson engages sadness in its spiritual dimension as "*that which is its own evidence.*" The emotion, like the objects that fall into the expansive, dimensionless subject of paragraph twenty, exists for itself, and so can be experienced for itself, as part of the richness, the fullness of being at this point in time. In the absence of self, Emerson makes no demands upon the emotion, has no intellectual expectations of it, so to speak. There is only the freedom of acceptance. "At times the sense of aware is so powerful," says Lucien Stryk, "that the only way of coming to terms with it is to identify with it totally. . . ." (*Encounter with Zen: Writings on Poetry*

*and Zen*, Athens, OH: 1981: xlii). In lines recalling Emerson's image of bleak rocks as the ground of our true Godhead, the Zen poet Jakushitsu says: "In old age mountains / Are more beautiful than ever. My resolve: / That these bones be purified by rocks" (qtd. in Stryk, *ibid.*, 60).

Not surprisingly, therefore, Emerson concludes his essay on a positive note, worshipping "with wonder the great Fortune." The work that began with a dark image of the self trapped in an endless quest for meaning comes round to a celebrative mood of unconditional acceptance of life unhindered by the demands of an intrusive self: "Illusion, Temperament, Succession, Surface, Surprise, Reality, Subjectiveness,—these are the threads on the loom of time, these are the lords of life" (490–91), says Emerson near the end of his essay. The self-purging of "Experience" is complete. In his new humility, Emerson asks nothing for himself: "This is a fruit,—that I should not ask for a rash effect from meditations, counsels, and the hiving of truths" (491). What he acquires instead is a new sense of the refulgence and necessity of solitude, a realization that "in the solitude to which every man is always returning, he has a sanity and revelations, which in his passage into new worlds he will carry with him" (492). The revelatory sanity of these lines invites us to revisit earlier sentences, to meditate whatever resistance we may have felt in the presence of such unconditional acceptance as Emerson reveals, say, in paragraph eleven: "Without any shadow of doubt, amidst this vertigo of shows and politics, I settle myself ever the firmer in the creed, that we should not postpone and refer and wish, but do broad justice where we are, by whomsoever we deal with, accepting our actual companions and circumstances, however humble or odious, as the mystic officials to whom the universe has delegated its whole pleasure for us" (479). The vertigo of this sentence, its downward movement through the cultural detritus of acquired habits of expectation and discrimination to the deep pleasure ground of contentment in the moment, embodies the entire purling process of the essay.

Gay Wilson Allen says that "Emerson was too much a child of the West to seek the Void as an ultimate goal, but he was increasingly fascinated by the Hindu doctrine of *maya*, the illusory appearance of the world" (*Waldo Emerson: A Biography*. New York: 1981: 577). "Experience" gives us pause to consider that much of Emerson's abil-



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ity to cope at all with maya was the result of a continuous process of self-emptying in a life-long growth toward spiritual understanding. A key focus of this understanding was Emerson's increasingly Buddhistic realization of consciousness as a transpersonal, transintellectual empty ground infinitely larger than the ideas that form its contents at any point in time and space. The structure of the last paragraph, as it moves from the self to the nonself and from the intellectual to the universal intuitive, underscores the force of this realization. "But I have not found much was gained by manipular attempts to realize the world of thought" (492), says Emerson near the beginning of the paragraph. The last sentence, however, omits even the I of the thinker, asserting that "the true romance which the *world* exists to realize, will be the transformation of genius into practical power" (492; italics mine). All our thoughts, conditions, experiences are collective, the culmination of an endless train of incalculable moments whose source is an interrelatedness with no beginning and no end. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of "Experience" is, after all, its invitation to surrender, as Emerson does, the very self that divides us from the refulgent, eternally emergent contents of individual being in order to engage the freedom of limitless creativity that forms the ineffable ground of all being, what "the world exists to realize."