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"Han Shan's Carousel".

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Diamond
Sangha, Santa Rosa, Cal., USA
Enquiries: The Editor, "Mind Moon Circle", Sydney Zen Centre, 251 Young
St.,
Annandale, Sydney, NSW 2038, Australia. Tel: + 61 2 660 2993

JOHN TARRANT ROSHI

(This is an introduction to any selection of the poems in "The Real
Naturally Appears.")

Han Shan's Carousel

My daughter's first words were "Mummy," "Daddy," and "Dojo." Over the
past few
years, Roberta and I have been travelling to sesshin with her. I didn't
want to
be the kind of teacher who goes off and leaves his family at home. So,
through
carting diapers to Perth and Sydney, and preparing talks while my hair is
being
pulled, it's come to me that the best way to convey the Dharma to my
daughter is
to immerse her in the attention that, through zazen, we've learned to
give to
breath, the rain, the garden, the person in front of us, the world.
Being in
retreat feeds this kind of attention but intrinsically it has nothing to
do with
retreat. Complete attention is itself a kind of love and is one of the
true
gifts that we can give to one another. In the Hua-yen vision of the
universe
each thing contains each other thing, its Buddha nature shining out of
it. We
are all held in the great matrix, parts of each other, and a family is a
fragment of this net. One thing we've found is that having young
children
around seems to deepen the retreats. The children circle in their own
bright
dream while we, the meditators, circle in ours. Their ancient voices,
the
freshness of their view of things, and the splendid, primary colors of
their
toys -- the presence of the children is like a single hibiscus flower on
the

altar. Among the dark robes and black cushions it begins to sing, it
recovers
for us the pleasure of walking this arduous way of ours, and we know by
experience how awareness honors the things of our lives, so they come
forward to
greet us and we are never lonely again. There was an old and great
Chinese
master named Han Shan who left the worldly world, went into his hermitage
and
shut the gate, never expecting to open it again. It occurred to me that
having
a child was like this gate closing so that something else could open, a
kind of
before and after division of my life. After Sarah things are more
constricted,
even sleep is not guaranteed; everything demands more attention and, like
that
little hut in the mountains, is more infinite. My monastery lies in
daily
things, persuading Sarah to get dressed, taking her to preschool on the
way to
work. And I began to know in the cells of my body that it is the
commonplace
life that, fully inhabited, contains eternity. What Han Shan is doing
today is
teaching his daughter letters on the keyboard. So I wrote some of my own
Han
Shan poems. Here are a few of them.

John Tarrant
Santa Rosa Winter 93

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