
Charlotte Selver, 1901-2003

At first I wondered what she taught,
for I was still entombed in thought.

It seemed exotic (par for then),
a new-age con called 'Western zen.'
What gall to teach us how to breathe,
and charge for it! It made me seethe.

Despite all that (I now can see)
she introduced myself to me.

I watched and tried to understand,
to figure out this foreign land
of bare sensations without thought.
I flopped upon the shore, fresh-caught,
a soi-disant philosopher
to whom such things did not occur---
yet, silent and unknown to me,
I'd just been "bitten by the flea."

It's passing strange to wonder why
it matters where we cast our eye,
but where attention's eye alights
forever molds those very sites:
wherever drifting focus lands
defines the bounds of our demands.
(You scoff, but merely being blends
each moment with our private ends.)

"So tell me, fella, where's this place,
this oh-so-special 'inner' space?"
"I touch your arm---you feel my touch?
Don't pull away, for feeling such
you know it's you, the one within
who knows exactly where you've been."
(So simple, that, and yet no doubt
the heart of what it's all about.)

The secret wrapped in sensing lore
consists of this, and little more:
to give up effort serves us best
(a strange commandment in the West!).
"Attend instead to what's at hand,
ignoring what was duly planned
and feeling how each moment's text
awakens you for what comes next."

"Cease all effort? I'm not buying!
Only cowards give up trying!
Plunge ahead with nothing showing?
How'd I know where I was going?
You sure must be the Devil's tool
to think that I'd be such a fool!
(Of course, I'd like a moment's peace,
but inner pressures never cease.)"



Thus, withdrawing, people shrink
from trusting how their bodies think,
and I, reluctant like the rest,
stayed skeptical and played the guest.
But as the years of classes passed
the twig was bent and I, at last,
could let myself relax and be
the guy that's simply only me.

However much this inner source
became my private guiding force
my teacher knew how doggedly
I shunned her mantra, "Let it be!";
so now I take the greatest care
to be sensorily aware
so that her not-so-patient ghost
won't want to turn me into toast.

Poem by Bill Littlewood