CHAPTER IV

TOWARDS BODHISATTVA IDEAL
Desolation Angels (1965) is a novel in which Jack Kerouac describes his Buddhist visions which he has in the lonely, serene atmosphere of the Desolation Peak, the name he gives to a lonely, sequestered place, surrounded by Mount Hozomeen and hills. His job is that of a fire-watcher and to report to the officials any eruption of fire anywhere on the Desolation Peak. Stripped of all the responsibilities expected of him in the society, he finds the serene atmosphere of the place congenial for meditative thoughts supra-mundane, which he wishes to bring to bear on the society to which he would return after three months.

The Desolation Angels records Jack's awakening to the Absolute Truth of Void or Sunyata, generally translated as Emptiness, and Eternity about which he so often writes in the
novel, indicating that all sentient existence and all phenomena are nothing but void.

Jack is interested in Buddhist philosophy and A Buddhist Bible, edited by Dwight Goddard, serves him as a source book which deals with Mahayana conception of Buddhism.

Jack writes about the universal nature of sorrow: "and all behind me (and you) the ocean of tears which has been this life on earth."

He wants to make a quest which will dispel his ignorance about the essence of life and hopes a great truth will dawn on him some day. His starting point is the first Noble Truth expounded by the Buddha that "All life is suffering", i.e. his starting point is an emotion for his quest and not an idea which is intellection and the "essence of Buddhism consists not in the removal of suffering which is only negative and incidental, but in the attainment of perfection."
Jack tacitly declares his intention:

"...when I get to the top of Desolation Peak and everybody leaves on mules and I'm alone I will come face to face with God or Tathagata and find out once and for all what is the meaning of all this existence and suffering and going to an end in vain"

Having had a full quota of sorrow measured out to him and to his family, like Buddha he wants to find out the meaning of this life.

He feels that his awakening will come through the benevolent Avalokitesvara, the "Awakener" and offers prayer to him:

- I pray and ask Awakener Avalokitesvara to lay his diamond hand on my brow and give me the immortal understanding. He is the Hearer and Answerer of Prayer, I know that this business is self hallucination and crazy business but after all it is only the awakeners (the Buddhas) who have said they do not exist — In about twenty seconds comes this understanding to my mind and heart: "When a baby is born he falls asleep and dreams the dream of life, when he dies and is buried in his grave he wakes up again to the Eternal Ecstasy"
Jack often refers to William Blake who praises innocence in children as a sign of purity undefiled by any mundane forces. When Jack talks about the death of a baby and then its awakening in the Eternal Ecstasy he refers to the consciousness, the sixth sense that constitutes human existence, and which passes into nature living eternally, therefore a matter for "Ecstasy".

Avalokitesvara stands pre-eminently among Bodhisattvas, who are the embodiment of compassion and throughout the far East he ranks as an object of devotion second only to Amitabha. In Tibet he stands second to none. Far Eastern Devotional Buddhism emphasized the maternal characteristics of Avalokitesvara so much that this male Bodhisattva was eventually metamorphosed into a goddess known in China as Kwan Yin, in Japan as Kwannon, the "Regarder of the cries of the World". It is but natural that Kerouac prays to Avalokitesvara to reveal him a diamond truth that governs this cosmos.
When the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara was engaged in the practice of Prajnaparamita he perceived that there are five Skandhas and he saw them in their self-nature to be empty:

O Satiputra, form is here emptiness, emptiness is form; form is no other than emptiness, emptiness is no other than form; what is form that is emptiness, what is emptiness that is form. The same can be said of sensation, thought, confection and consciousness.

Jack emphasizes repeatedly that there are no awakeners and no awakening, thereby underlying the doctrine of void. He writes:

Then I think of the World Series, the coming of football across America —— I think of shelves of wine in stores along the mainline of the California Railroad. I think of the pebbles in the ground of the West under Vast Fall booming skies, I think of the long horizons and plains and the ultimate desert with his cactus and dry mesquites stretching to red tablelands far away where my traveler's old hope always wends and wends and only void returns from nowhere,———
and

--- I sit suddenly perfectly in diamond silence--- even then
--- I would realize that there are, there is no Buddha, no awakener, and there is no Meaning, no Dharma, and it is all only the wile of Maya.

This is attributed to Jack's conception of void and is an echo of Buddha's preaching in which he refers to the unreality of the objects and reactive mind making mental discriminations.

Buddha says:

I teach that the multitudinousness of objects have no reality in themselves but are only seen of the mind and, therefore, are of the nature of maya and a dream.

The Bodhisattva aspires to emancipate all sentient beings out of compassion for them and by means of transcendental wisdom he realizes that in truth no beings exist. The Bodhisattva traverses in a realm of transcending logic,
therefore, though the statements appear to be stultifying they are independent of one another.

Lankavatara Sutra says about the Bodhisattva:

Further, besides understanding the emptiness of all things both in regard to substance and self-nature, it is necessary for bodhisattvas to clearly understand that all things are un-born. It is not asserted that things are not born in a superficial sense, but that in a deep sense they are not born of themselves. All that can be said is this, that relatively speaking, there is a constant stream of becoming, a momentary and uninterrupted change from one state of appearance to another. When it is recognised that the world as it presents itself is no more than a manifestation of mind, then birth is seen as no-birth and all existing objects, concerning which discrimination asserts that they are and are not, are non-existent and, therefore un-born; being devoid of agent and action things are un-born.

When the goal of spiritual life is attained, things are seen as they are although it should not be supposed that the world exists in duality,
that is, there is the world of appearance and the world of reality. The two worlds are one. The means by which this goal is achieved is the eradication of ignorance and desire.

"The spiritual life is nothing but progressive loosening of the bonds of separative individuality, of self-hood and egoity. Then the universe no longer appears as an unchanging system of static things and rigid relations but as a delightfully free and fluid interplay of constantly changing terms. It is not so much that reality changes as that reality is change."

To one of the questions asked by Irwin to Jack, the latter answers: "It was our old argument about Sansara vs. Nirvana tho the highest Buddhist thinking stresses that there is difference between Sansara (this world) and Nirvana (the no-world), and may be they're right."

While other religions believe in personal God, Buddhism has no such a faith for it discards
the theory of Creator and Creation and believes in Cause and Effect theory. Theistic religion tries to combine two different Gods into one. "These two Gods we can call the God of Power and the God of love, or the God of nature and the God of morality and the fact that theistic religion tries to combine them into one, creates many difficulties for the poor theists."  

We cannot reconcile God of Love and power for such a conception is antithetical. Natural calamity like Lightning striking men is an act of God for lightning is, after all, a part of nature and behind nature there is God, so God is responsible for what happens in nature. How could the God of Love strike men? This is the kind of painful dilemma that we get into if we are theists. We experience the effects of power but we have to convince ourselves that they are the effects of love because the source of both is supposed to be the same.
In theistic religions, in addition to God there is God's representative and love cannot be represented in the way that power can be represented. In theistic religions the representative always exercises power and for this reason they tend to be group religions. "They tend to become power structure; and to that extent they cease to be spiritual communities."¹³

This is what Jack infers when he says "for those who believe in a personal God who cares about good and bad are hallucinating themselves beyond the shadow of doubt, the God bless them, he blankly blesses blanks anyway—"¹⁴ and Jack comes down heavily on God with the scathing remark.

It's just nothing but Infinity infinitely variously amusing itself with a movie, empty space and matter both, it doesn't limit itself to either one, infinitude wants all ---
He ponders:

"How can the universe be anything but a Womb? And the Womb of God or the Womb of Tathagata, it's two languages not two Gods - And anyway the truth is relative, the world is relative - Everything is relative.

Jack's ponderance on the essential nature of universe is to see reality as it is. Hence the universe is the Womb of Tathagata and this has been amply clarified in Surangama Sutra which is mystical in the sense that it speaks of our experiencing a complete spiritual regeneration called Paravritti. This is the 'turning about' of our entire personality whereby the original Buddha-nature, here called the Tathagatagarbha (the tathagata Womb) reveals itself. This phenomenon may be called a spiritual revolution leading to Enlightenment.

Buddha tells Ananda:

"...within the Womb of Tathagata the essential nature of perception of sight is intuitive and..."
enlightening, and that the intuition of the one and all embracing Essence, manifests its faculty of seeing, hearing, understanding and feeling everywhere, and that the essential nature of perception of sight, within Tathagata’s Womb is ever in freshness and purity, permeating everywhere throughout the universes, and are being manifested freely and perfectly in correspondence to the amount of karma accumulated by the conscious activity of sentient beings."\(^{17}\)

He further says:

"You will realize that Tathagata’s Womb and pure Mind of Enlightenment and the Mind of Intuition are of one Essence, radiant in Wisdom, integrant in Compassion, Vibrant with Purpose and Life but unmanifest and in perfect balance and thus abiding in perfect and blissful peace." \(^{18}\)

And Jack writes:

I look at the distant fires in distant mountains and see the
little imaginary blossoms of sight discussed in the Sura-
gama Sutra whereby I know it's all an ephemeral dream of sensation — What earthly use to know this? Of what earthly use is anything?

This brings him to the phenomenal world which he thinks is Maya:

— it means we're being fooled into believing in the reality of the feeling of the show of things — Maya in Sanskrit, it means tricks — And why do we go on being fooled even when we know it? — Because of the energy of our habit and we hand it down from chromosome to chromosome to our children but even when the last living thing on earth is sucking at the last drop of water at the base of equatorial ice fields the energy of the habit of Maya will be in world, embued right in rock and scale —

Jack describes two kinds of knowledge: transcendental and sense knowledge. He calls the first Moumena and the second Phenomena and says
"Noumena is what you see with your eyes closed – 
Phenomena is what you see with your eyes open." 21

In his case phenomena is "the debris of one 
thousand hours of the living—conception in a 
mountain shack—" 22

This is a reverberation of what Ananda says 
to Buddha in Surangama Sutra:

I have constantly learned from 
the instruction of my Lord and 
from the teaching of all four 
classes of Thy disciples that 
all the existences of phenomena 
are simply the manifestation 
of the mind itself and vice versa 
that all the existences of mind 
are the manifestations of pheno-
mena. Now it seems to me that 
this thinking mind is really the 
essence of my mind, and that 
whatever it happens to meet outer 
objects, there is a manifestation 
of mind. That is the perceiving 
mind is neither inside, nor 
outside, nor between the body. 23

And Jack writes:

"If a follower should cherish any 
limited judgement of the realness
of the feeling of his own self-
hood, the realness of the feeling
of the selfness of others, the
realness of the feeling of living
beings, or the realness of the
feeling of a universal self, he
would be cherishing something
that is non-existent"—and now
tonight more than ever I see
these words to be true—For all
this phenomena, that which shows,
and all noumena, that which shows
not, is the loss of the Heavenly
kingdom (and not even that)—
"A dream, a phantasm, a bubble,
a shadow, the lighting's flash—"

He has paraphrased this from the Diamond
Sutra where Buddha preaches to Subhuti:

Should there by any sentient
beings to be delivered by the
Tathagata, it would mean that
the Tathagata was cherishing
within his mind arbitrary
conceptions of phenomena such
as one's own self, other selves,
living beings and no universal
self. Even when the Tathagata
refers to himself, he is not
holding in his mind any such
arbitrary thought. Only
terrestrial human beings think
of selfhood as being a personal
possession.
Jack's practice of generosity finds source in Diamond Sutra. He writes "---it says in the Diamond cutter of the Wise Vow 'practice generosity but think of generosity as being but a word and nothing but a word" 26

And the Diamond Sutra says:

Subhuti, by what I have just said about kindness, the Tathagata does not mean that a disciple when making gifts should hold in his mind any arbitrary conceptions about kindness, for kindness after all is only a word and charity would be spontaneous and selfless. 27

Likewise Jack refers to Karma and says that man's Karma is already laid out for him and wirtes,

You get good karma and bad karma, the good makes up for the bad, somewhere down that road" 28
Trikaya is another most important Buddhist doctrine to which he gives credit for his success in his religious pursuit: "...and I am being ferried to the other shore by Nirmanakaya, Sambhogakaya and Dharmakaya Buddhas all Three, really One..."^29

The Mahasanghikas conceived of the Buddha as supramundane and transcendental and this conception was accepted by the Mahayanists who thought of the Buddha in three ways: Nirmanakaya is the Universal Buddha, manifested in the world of sentient beings, adapting himself to earthly conditions, possessing an earthly body yet maintaining purity. He is the representative of the Absolute in the human world, bent on teaching sentient beings in order to relieve them of their sufferings and through enlightenment to lead them to salvation.

The Nirmanakaya is generally rendered as Transformation Body because the body as used in
manifestation by Sakyamuni and other human Buddhas, partakes of the characteristics and qualities of mortality, and is subject like that of other mortals to sickness, old age and death. The human Buddha expresses the perfect man, pure, wise and wielding power. He possesses all the marks of physical excellence, having strength combined with beauty and his mind is a union of intelligence and compassion.

In Hinayana Buddhism the historical Buddha is revered as a man among men, yet we discern a tendency to idealize him. In Mahayana, there is frankly a preference for the ideal Buddha.

The Nirmankaya is a manifestation for the benefit of more or less ignorant beings such as Sravakas, pratyekbuddhas and Bodhisattvas of lower ranks.

The Sambhogkaya is sometimes called the Body of Recompense because it enjoys the fruits of its
spiritual labours, but it is often called the
Body of Bliss because it is enjoyed by all the
Bodhisattvas. The Sambhogakaya is visible to the
Bodhisattva. It is a symbol of transcendental
perfection and personifies wisdom. It is the
Buddha Ideal. The Dharmakaya is the sum-total
of the body of all the Tathagatas. It is a
body or person that exists as principle and is a
symbol of highest reality.

To take refuge in the true
Buddha is to take refuge in
our essence of Mind. He who
takes refuge within himself
must first get rid of the
evil-mind and the jealous
mind, the flattering and
crooked-mind, deceit, and
falsehood and fallacious
views, egotism, snobbishness,
contemptuousness, arrogance,
and all other evils that
may arise at any time. To
take refuge within ourselves
is to be always on the alert
to prevent our own mistakes
and to refrain from criticism
of other's faults. He who is
humble and patient on all
occasions and is courteous to every one, has truly realized his mind-essence, so truly in fact that his path is free from further obstacles. This is the way to take refuge in (the Buddha of) oneself.

Jack reiterates several times the transitoriness of things viewed through senses. He says:

"I look at the distant fires in distant mountains and see the imaginary blossoms of sight discussed in the Surangama Sutra whereby I know it's all an ephemeral dreams of sensation."

And Lord Buddha replies to Manjushri and all his disciples:

The Tathagatas in the ten quarters of the universe, together with all the great Bodhisattvas-Mahasattvas, as they are intrinsically
abiding in Samadhi, regard all of the perceptions of sight, their causes and conditions and of all conceptions of phenomena, as being visionary flowers in the air, having no true nature of existence within themselves.

Jack's image of 'hairnet' in "look sirs, a marvelous sad hairnet" is an echo from Lankavatara Sutra. The Buddha uses it to bring out the discrimination which the mind makes as a result of confusion which, in effect, is a product of attachment due to ignorance and mental discrimination. The Buddha is talking about those people whose 'mentality is being conditioned by the habit-energy of these "false-imagination", and this sounds like nihilism but is not, because Buddha does not negate the world but through negation he leads us to understand this world positively.
It is like the dim-eyed one who seeing a hairnet exclaims to one another: "It is wonderful! Look, Honorable Sirs, it is wonderful!" But the hairnet has never existed; in fact, it is neither an entity, nor a non-entity, for it has both been seen and has not been seen. In the same manner those whose minds have been addicted to the discriminations of the erroneous views cherished by the philosophers which are given over to the realistic views of being and non-being, will contradict the good Dharma and will end in the destruction of themselves and others.

Cody and Jack are arguing about God and the former argues in favour of God and Jack wants him to stop about it. Jack talks about the oneness and mental discriminations the people are prone to make through words. He says, "words":

I keep saying words and really mean it - I'm trying to get Cody to shut up so I can say "God is words--"
Buddha, while talking to Mahamati about Transcendental Intelligence, says:

When Transcendental Intelligence is considered, four things must be kept in mind: words, meanings, teachings and Noble Wisdom (Arya-Prajna). Words are employed to express meanings but they are dependent upon discriminations and memory as cause, and upon the employment of sounds or letters by which a mutual transference of meaning is possible. Words are only symbols and may or may not clearly and fully express the meaning intended and moreover, words may be understood quite differently from what was intended by the speaker. Words are neither different nor not different from meaning and meaning stands in the same relation to words.

II

Jack's visit to the Desolation Peak is fruitful in the sense that his concepts of mundane life suddenly get dispelled and he is
awakened to the Truth of Void which is the Absolute Truth. In the placid atmosphere of the mountain, where he is able to concentrate his mind on unravelling the mysteries of existence, he is rewarded for at one moment all life stands exposed before his spiritual life. This is like a Zen Satori. He says:

---after that first time suddenly realizing "It's me that's changed and done all this and come and gone and complained and hurt and joyed and yelled, not the "Void" and so that every time I thought of the void I'd be looking at Mt. Hozomeen — until I realized Hozomeen is the void — at least Hozomeen means the void to my eyes."

Habituated to the mundane life, Jack encounters a number of difficulties and inconveniences and at one time he thought he would die and soon after this he sees the "face of reality". He writes:
and it finally comes that afternoon of August 8 as
I'm pacing in the high alpine yard on the little wellworn path I'd beaten in dust and rain on many a night, with my oil lamp banked low inside the cabin with the four-way windows and peaked pagoda roof and lightning rod point, it finally comes to me, after ever tears, and gnashing, and the killing of a mouse and attempted murder of another, something I'd never done in my life --- it comes in these words. "The void is not disturbed by any kind of ups and downs, my God look at Hozomeen, is he worried of tearful? Does he bend before storms or snarl when the sun shines or sigh in the late day drowse? Does he smile? Was he not born out of madbrained turmoil and upheavals of raining fire and now's Hozomeen and nothing else? Why should I choose to be bitter or sweet, he does neither? — Why can't I be like Hozomeen ——"

Another truth dawns on him and it is that of Anicca, that is, the truth of Impermanence.

"---Even Hozomeen'll crack and fall apart, nothing lasts"
Jack is further awakened: "Hope is a word like a snow-drift - This is the Great knowing, this is the Awakening, this is Voidness."  

To a person who lives in the ordinary rut of life and conditioned by it, even the simplest truth is beyond his capacity to understand:

"The simplest truth in the World is beyond our reach because of its complete simplicity, i.e. its pure nothingness - There are no awakeners and no meanings."

And further:

--- and I sit suddenly perfectly in diamond silence - even then, and I wouldn't be surprised - even then I would realize that there are, there is no Buddha, no awakener, and there is no Meaning, no Dharma, it is only the wile of Maya."
He continues:

Enough I've said at it all, and there's not even a Desolation in Solitude, not even this page, not even words, but the prejudged show of things impinging on your habit energy - O Ignorant me! There's nothing to write about, everything is nothing, there's everything to write about.

Void and Compassion are inseparable and Jack cannot forget his mother who is an embodiment of sacrifice to him who has gone through the wilderness of suffering. Jack on the Desolation Peak remembers her and has a word of consolation for her. He has a great love for her and knows well that it is his responsibility to see her live happily.

Don't despair, Ma, I'll take care of your whenever you need me - just yell - I'm right there, swimming
the river of hardships and
I know how to swim - don't
ever think for one minute
that you are left alone.

This awakening fortifies Jack and encourages
him to live a life of love and adventure:

Hold still, man, regain
your love of life and go
down from this mountain and
simply be, be you what it is,
it is only what it always is -
so shut up, live, travel,
adventure, bless and don't
be sorry."

And Jack comes back into the house "a new
man". But he is fully aware of the outcome of
his adventure which shows him his place in the
world:

"Desolation Adventure finds
me finding at the bottom of
myself abysmal nothingness
worse than that no illusion
even - my mind's in rags"
III

In part II of the novel which Jack calls "Desolation in the World", he narrates his experiences in the world on the background of his attaining suprema knowledge. The second part is a narration of his "confession, of his failure and achievement face to face with the world."46

When he returns to the world with his supreme wisdom he still finds it very trying and unsettling and uncompromising to come to terms with the world as it is:

What I'd learned on the solitary mountain all Summer, the Vision on Desolation Peak, I tried to bring down to the world and to my friends in San Francisco, but they, involved in the strictures of time and life, rather than the eternity and solitude of mountain snowy rocks, had a
lesson to teach me themself - Besides, the vision of the freedom of eternity which I saw and which all wilderness hermitage saints have been, is of little use in cities and warring societies such as we have - What a world is this, not only that friendship cancels enmity, but enmity doth cancel friendship and the grave and the urn cancel all - Time enough to die in ignorance, but now that we live what shall we celebrate, what shall we say? What do do?  

His first encounter in the world is with the people who have spent time in indolence, petty rivalry, having casual and perfunctory attitude towards life:

The very first thing I noticed and arrived in S.F. with my pack and messages was that everybody was goofing - wasting time - not being serious - trivial in rivalries - timid before God - even the angels fighting----
Jack, the protagonist of the novel, is also a dharma 'bum' and is one of the desolation angels, undertaking spiritual quest. His job done and yearning to pass on his enlightenment to the world, he returns to the world to join his Beat friends whom he has temporarily left. In dealing with them he finds his armour of enlightenment too weak. He visits big cities of America, i.e. San Francisco, Seattle, Mexico, and New York, extending his visits to London and France, in 1957. He takes to the life of road, visiting whore houses, enjoying sex life, bordering on promiscuity and betraying young girls with whom he has acquired acquaintance and who exhibit love for him: meets friends jealous of each other over girls and quarrelling among themselves. He experiences the world swept by the whirlwind of horror and terror, countries torn by riots, people overriden with superstitions, and the world facing a new kind of murderer who will kill without reason:
Pretty soon there'll be a new kind of murderer who will kill without any reason at all, just to prove that it doesn't matter, and accomplishment will be worth no more and no less than Beethoven's Last Quarters and Boito's Requiem — Churches will fall, Mongolian hordes will pass on the man of the West, idiot kings will barp at bones, nobody'll care, then the earth itself'll disintegrate into atomic dust and the void still the void wont care, the void'll just go on with that maddening little smile — That "secret God-grin" but what a God is this who didn't invent justice? So they'll light candles and make speeches and the angels rage. Ah but "I don't know, I don't care, and it doesn't matter" will be the final human prayer.

The indifference of the world to human misery is jarring, for apathy amounts to worst kind of moral aberration:

We have sex in our loins and wander beneath the stars on hard sidewalks,
pavement and broken glass
cant receive our gentle
thrust, our gentle thrust
Everywhere bleak faces,
homeless, loveless, around
the world, sordid, alleys
of night, masturbation

Jack's own life does not offer a different story. After he was implicated in a murder incident his father refused to pay the bail money. He had two wives. He sent one away and ran away from the other:

He had "hundreds of lover—girls everyone of our betrayed or screwed in some way by me, when I was young and open-faced and not ashamed to ask -- Now I look at my mirror face scowl and it's disgusting."

Jack can't have a word of praise for American diplomacy which practises discrimination among the Americans, founding its ideas on the consideration of people's status which is
disgusting to Jack.

One look at the officials in the American Consulate where we went for dreary paper routines was enough to make you realize what was wrong with American "diplomacy" throughout the Feisheen world:— Stiff officious squares with contempt even for their own Americans who happened not to wear neckties as tho a necktie or whatever it stands for meant anything to the hungry Berbers who came into Tangiers every Saturday morning on meek asses like Christ, carrying baskets of pitiful fruit or dates, and returned at dusk in silhouetted parades along the hill by the railroad track. The railroad track where barefooted prophets still walked and taught the Koran to children along the way. Why didn't the American Consul ever walk into the urchin hall where Mohammed Maye sat smoking or squat behind empty buildings with old Arabs who talked with their hands or any thing? Instead it's all private limousines, hotel restaurants parties in the suburbs, an endless phony rejection in the name of "Democracy" of all that's pith and moment of every land.
This brings about a tired feeling in him, prompting him to put an end to his bohemian life. This happens when he is on trip to Tangiers, France and London, the trip marred by a huge tempest racking his ship. This ultimately is a "complete turning about" in his life. He writes:

But it was on this trip that the great change took place in my life which I called a "Complete turning about" turning from a youthful brave sense of adventure to a complete nausea concerning experience in the world at large, a revulsion in all the six senses."

He notices desolation everywhere and death reminds him of the transitoriness of human life:

I look up, there are the stars, just the same, desolation, and the angels below who don't know they're angels—

And Sarina will die ———
And I will die, and you will die, and we all will die, and even the stars will fade out one after another in time.

He has the full nausea of the world and he unequivocally gives vent to it at more than one place. He says 'I'm tired, I'm already tired of all this, where will I go? what do? how pass eternity?'

The same feeling is voiced below:

"Nothing, nothing, nothing
O but nothing could interest me any more for one good damned minute in anything in the world. But where else to go?"

And the answer to his last question comes to him when he takes an overdose of opium:

"On the overdose of opium this was intensified to the point where I actually got up and packed to go back to America and find a home."
He remembers his own house, where his mother has been spending her days in loneliness, a Bodhisattva. He is totally disillusioned and is at the crossroads as to where he should go. But he has reached a point where he has to turn about. He puts down:

Experiencing as I say that "Turning-about" which said: "Jack, this is the end of your world travel - Go home - Make a home in America — Tho this be that, and that be this, it's not for you — The holy little old roof cats of silly old home town are crying for you, Ti Jean - These fellas dont understand you" ——

But the world situation is not wholly hopeless. There is a redeeming feature inherent in the world itself, "The world wouldnt exist if it didnt have the power to liberate itself." This has been specified by Simon: "The World is a place of infinite charm. Give everybody
love and they'll give it right back.\textsuperscript{60}

So this world could be sustained by love, which could very well be expressed by Metta Bhavana.

IV

Jack is trying to understand, as a Bodhisattva the reality and the Essence that lies behind all the things but he has not attained full enlightenment like Buddha. He is conscious of desire or 'tanha' being the root cause of suffering. Early Buddhism stressed restraint. Zen Buddha pleads for a detached indulgence of desires. His detachment does not come as a result of satiety but as a result of revulsion. This is first revealed to Jack in his sex attitude towards Sarina where while indulging sex feeling, he thinks about the end of her
life. Though sex has appeared as a dominating feeling in Jack, towards the end he reveals detest for it. He makes a remark as though to baulk at his critics. 'As though sex was the be—all of my love for the woman.'

In his approach to sex Jack follows Tantric Buddhism. This system of spiritual culture is founded upon a non-dualistic doctrine—Therefore, it neither creates conflict in the psyche nor does it dissipate psychic energies. It teaches the devotee neither to fight with nor to fly from mundane realities, but simply to view them in their Absolute or Diamond aspect.

The Bodhisattva should feel that he is really all the time living in the Realm of Truth, the Diamond world, and that it is only the blindness of his ignorance which prevents him from realizing this fact. He try to view all the impor—
tant relationships and experiences of life in their noumenal aspect, feeling even though he cannot clearly perceive, that the mundane things in the midst of which he lives and moves and has his being, are simply the shadows of these bright realities which collectively make up the Diamond World of Perfect mutual interpenetration. However gross the relationship, however mundane the experience, the Bodhisattva knows that the Diamond aspect of it is there all the time, and upon this he, therefore, seeks to direct his gaze, this he strives to develop and cultivate so that it gradually absorbs all the psychic energies which were formerly sucked by its mundane counterpart.

The Tantric Buddhist religious discipline permits cultivation of relationship which in its lowest form is based upon sexual desire. Instead of denouncing sexual relations as sinful and demanding complete inhibition of sexual feeling, it exhorts the aspirant to understand and develop the transcendental or Diamond aspect of these relations and feelings. Even in
ordinary sexual desire there is often present a quality of self-sacrifice or self-abnegation which helps to sanctify it. If this aspect of the relation is cultivated, the creative energies usually absorbed in the gratification of desire will be liberated in the direction of self-trance. This does not mean that the Tantric Buddhist teaching in its purity encourages the physical gratification of sexual desire. It merely states that the way in which that desire, even the act of its physical gratification, can be dealt with when it happens to be present, or chances to occur so as to make ultimately for liberation instead of for bondage.

Jack's character does not come before us as one having attained total Buddhahood or Bodhisattvahood as he is still subject to conditioning of this life. His friends in San Francisco call him "a Zen Lunatic, at least
Drunken Lunatic". The problem of spiritual life is essentially dynamic. The path chosen for spiritual life is also the Path of Inner life as contra-distinguished from the Path of Outer life. The first step along the Path of the Inner life is to become indifferent to the objects of perception. But this indifference is not the result of satiety but is a result of constant perseverance in renunciation. Since the Path of the Inner life consists essentially in a series of experiences and since all experiences are by this very nature ineffable, it is also an Esoteric Path as opposed to Exotic. Nothing in the religious life is truly esoteric save spiritual experience. Jack's experiences are not completely spiritual and he is yet on the spiral Path which leads to enlightenment. His compassion, an essential attribute of Bodhisattva, extends even to animals. He believes in Karmic theory and man's bad Karma, he thinks, results in his rebirth.
"— I thought of gentle Buddha who wouldn't fear a tiny rat, or Jesus, or even John Barrymore who had pet mice in his room in childhood Philadelphia. —— Expressions like "Are you a man or a mouse?" and "the best laid plans of mice and men" and "wouldn't kill a mouse" began to hurt me and also "scared of a mouse" — I asked for—giveness, tried to repent and pray, but felt that because I had abdicated my position as a holy angel from heaven who never killed, the world might now go fires — Me thinks it has — As a kid I'd break up ganga of quirrel murderers, at risk of my own hurt — Now this — And I realize we are all of us murderers, in previous lifetime we murdered and we had come back to work out our punishment, by punishment under—death which is life that in this lifetime we must stop murdering or be forced to come back because of our inherent God natures and divine magic power to manifest anything we want ——

As has been earlier pointed out Jack is an imperfect Bodhisattva, for though he indulges sex not from any evil thought but for the reason that for him any experience is valuable for its
own sake and sex experience is an attempt
to fill the chasm of duality as man and
woman, yet in the Surangama Sutra where Buddha
asks a question to Ananda regarding thirty-two
marks of excellency, Ananda replies:

From that time I have
constantly thought about
them and have been more
and more convinced that
these marks of excellence
would be impossible for
anyone who was not free
from all sexual passion
and desire. And why?
Because when anyone becomes
inflamed by sexual passion,
his mind becomes disturbed
and confused, he loses self-
control and becomes reckless
and crude. Besides, in
sexual intercourse, the blood
becomes inflamed and impure
and adulterated with impure
secretions. Naturally from
such a source, there can
never originate an aureole
of such transcendentally pure
and golden brightness as I
have seen emanating from
the person of my Lord.

The redeeming feature of Jack is that
wherever he sees cruelty his heart aches and
his compassion flows out to the suffering beings. Disillusioned in the world, he comes to the thinking that a kind act of man is to pray for others. "At the time I sincerely believed that the only decent activity in the world was to pray for everyone, in solitude." 65

Acknowledging his initial spiritual debt to his deceased brother, Gerard, Jack says:

--- though I don't remember a word, or may be I do remember a few, - But said things to me about a reverence for life, no, at least a reverence of the idea of life, which I translated as meaning that life itself is the Holy Ghost. 66

Jack's mother is the next very important character in the novel whom he remembers even on the Desolation Peak, epitomizing her life in one single sentence: "She is 3000 miles away living in bondage to all kin." 67
He calls his mother "a real Bodhisattva". He gives the whole Kaleidoscope of his mother's life, from the beginning till the moment he comes home. She had worked in shoe factories and when he makes for home she is a retired woman. Jack's father had remarked that he had never realized how great she was. She suffered like a Bodhisattva. In early childhood she had lost her mother and after some years her father, too. Then she lost her son, Gerard, whom everyone loved so dearly. She had to carry out the whole burden of family responsibilities which she did without a word of complaint, with loving kindness and as his sole caretaker she gives him warning to be careful about his friends.

Jack sees his mother as an embodiment of suffering:

Sometimes during the night I'd look at my poor sleeping mother
cruelly crucified there in the American night because of no money, no hope—of money, no family, no nothing, just myself the stupid son of plans all of them compacted of eventual darkness.

Jack idealized his mother, who held such a sway on him by exemplifying the spirit of benevolence and sacrifice. She had wonderful capacity to adjust herself in any circumstances.  

- I see her with basket of wet wash going out with clothespin in mouth, and when we have no yard, right in the kitchen. Duck under the wash and get your beer in the icebox. Like the mother of Hui Neng, I'd bet, enough to enlighten anybody with the actual true "Zen" of how to live in any time and just right.

He expresses his indebtedness to his mother who has given him inner strength i.e. the means for peace and good sense.  

His mother is an epitome of sorrow.
since I live with Mem'ere in a house of her own miles from the city, it's peaceful sorrow. A peaceful sorrow at home is the best I'll ever be able to offer the world, in the end, and so I told my Desolation Angels goodbyes. A new life for me.

Angie, or Mem'ere is overcome with a feeling of pity for the old man kneeling in the aisle with his arms outstretched, in penitence, in the Church of Mary. She is even more sorry for the poor woman in the Church "dressed in black, barefooted, with a child in her arms, advancing slowly on her knees up the aisle to altar. Mem'ere eyes blurred with tears." 

She dutifully reminds Jack. "Home is with your family - You've only got one sister - I've only got one grandson - And one son, you - let's all get together and live quiet."

As an artist Jack practises Racism, the function of which is to undo the inevitable damage done by the conventional discipline and
not only to resolve but also to develop the original spontaneity which is termed as "Tzu-jan" or "self-so-ness".

"Taoism is a way of liberation which never comes by means of revolution. To be free from convention is not to spurn it but not to be deceived by it. It is to be able to use it as instrument instead of being used by it."

The origins of Zen are much Taoist as Buddhist. Taoism fuses with Buddhism in spite of the fact that it was an independent faith in the beginning. The word Tao is of Chinese origin and originally it meant 'a way' or 'road' and sometimes 'to speak'. Philosophically it stands for the process of the world, the way of life. The Chinese word for Tao is "wu-wei", "wu" means 'not' or 'non' and 'wei' means 'action', 'making', 'doing', 'striving', 'straining' or 'busyness". 
Taoism stands for spontaneity, naturalness, simplicity and humility. Since spontaneity and power of liberation require superior ability, it has superiority aspect, but without manifestation of it. This philosophy conceives the creation as composition of two factors, the "Yin" and the "Yang". Therefore, everything is treated with love and brotherhood.

Jack as literary artist has drawn much from Taoism.

I know now that my life was a search for peace as an artist, but not only as an artist — As a man of contemplation rather than too many actions, in the old Tao Chinese sense of "Do Nothing" (Wu-Wei) which is a way of life in itself more beautiful than any, a kind of cloisteral fervor in the midst of mad ranting action-seekers of this or any other "modern" world

The condition of desolation angels, thrown helter-skelter by choice in the world, underlines
calm beneath the façade of their turbulent existence, a desperate search for an oasis in the desert of this world. To the squares they may appear impe- 

tuous, but it is not the audacity of the ones who care nothing for the world, but of those who feel greatly concerned with it. Hence a need to register protest and make an attempt to forge a new society which will be governed by peace and austerity.

The Desolations Angels exhibits the highest Buddhist consciousness. This is the culmination of Jack's experiences which he has described in Visions of Gerard, Tristessa and The Dharma Bums which range between mundane and spiritual. The doctrine of 'Void' reaches the peak of consciousness for it sees oneness in all phenomenal world which, to a thinking mind, exists in duality. The Trikaya Doctrine encompasses the existential aspects of a spiritual being whose Dharmakaya transcends all other 'kayas' or bodies. A Bodhisattva is one who
does not seek liberation until all other sentient beings are liberated. The Desolation Angels does not give the messages of abandoning homes but making it comfortable by practising 'dhamma' by which causes of suffering are eliminated and one is able to sustain life.