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As Buddhism grows in the West, we wish to share the Buddha's Teaching through our Journal; we can also share our experience of practicing the Buddha's Way, thus encouraging and supporting each other's training. Lastly, the Journal helps to keep friends and members informed of activities and events within the numerous training places of our Order.

We warmly invite our readers to send letters and articles for the Journal. If at all possible, we appreciate receiving Rich

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Editors: Rev. Berwyn Watson & Rev. Alina Burgess

Journal Assistant USA: Rev. Master Scholastica Hicks

Production: Rev. Berwyn & Rev. Alina

Proofreading help: Chris Hughes, Dixie Feiner

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This is a Bodhi tree at Bodhi Gaya, which is descended from the original tree the Buddha sat beneath. (Rev Master Seikai centre back.)

Photo from Rev. Master Seikai, see [Pine Mountain Buddhist Temple News](#) for his account of his visit to India.

Old Questions on Karma: News from the Council of Patna in 246 B.C.

Rev. Master Daizui MacPhillamy

This is a lightly edited Dharma talk offered by Rev. Master Daizui in 1998 to a group of lay trainees at Shasta Abbey. The audio recording was distributed in the Dharma Tapes programs of both Fugen Forest Hermitage, Rev. Master Daizui's temple, and Shasta Abbey.

Homage to the Buddha
Homage to the Dharma
Homage to the Sangha

SOME FOLKS HAVE ASKED ME TO SAY A LITTLE SOMETHING on karma. It happens to be one of my specialties and I can run on for hours. I will try not to do that. I thought you might find it interesting if I talked on some of the debates on the topic of karma that occurred at the Council of Patna in the year 246 B.C.

What I have found in reading over some of this material is that it is amazing how the things that people are talking about, wondering about, worrying about—the topics of karma some 2250 years ago or so—are very familiar and very much relevant to us today. Not all of them are, but some of them are. And, hopefully, those are some I've

picked to talk about.

Now, first I'm going to assume a few things, such as that you know some of the basic teachings about karma. I'll review it briefly, because that would be a whole series of lectures in and of itself. I'm going to assume that you know that karma is considered in Buddhism to be a natural law of the universe, one of a set of five groups of laws of the universe.¹ Karma is volitional action, and that's all. Nothing else makes karma other than volitional action—volitional action of body, speech, and mind—and only that volitional action which is, in some sense, ethically relevant either for the good or for the ill. Many things have only very slight aspects of that sort of relevance. But if there is something that is entirely neutral, ethically, it will not have karmic effect. There aren't many of those because these things get very subtle. So causation is limited to volitional action.

The mechanism that links the cause and the result is by and large unknown. We use the word 'karma' for it, but we've never really seen the karma. We don't know where karmas go and how they get stored. It is, in one sense, a theoretical connection that is made without really understanding it fully. And the observation is that whatever this mechanism may be, it is impersonal and it is inexorable. In other words, it is not something you and I can wish to be different or get in there by some magical process and alter it. It's interactive, i.e., different karmas interact with one another, merit interacting with negative karma, different negative karmas interacting with one another, etc. And there are different types of karmas—

karmas that tend to have their fruit in this life, karmas that tend to have their fruit in the next life, karmas that will tend to have fruit at some future life down the line, if all goes as it would be normally expected to go. And there are other whole bunches of other types of differences as well. And all these things interact in a rather complex way.

The result of karma, called sometimes, technically, *vipaka* [Sanskrit, Pali], is also quite limited. It's limited to sensation among sentient beings. And it's limited to sensation in those beings that are somehow connected with the actions that set the karma in motion—whether they are connected directly by the fact that this set of psycho-physical connected stuff that I conveniently refer to as 'me' is the same set of stuff that did the volitional action—so that there is a direct connection, or an indirect connection through the process of rebirth, which is again a very complex topic.

I'm going to assume that you know that this sensation, karmic consequence, arises if and only if the four other laws of the universe provide an opportunity for the fruition for that karma to occur. In other words, the karma is opportunistic. It doesn't change the other laws of the universe. Karma doesn't alter things like gravity and quantum physics and the effects of DNA, etc. But it operates through the other laws of the universe. For instance, let's say that there is a karma that would normally have its effect in this lifetime if the other circumstances do not provide opportunities for that fruition to occur. That karma will either delay its effects until later or in some cases actually become inoperative. That's often not

understood well. Some karmas, usually some of the more minor ones, simply, if they don't get their chance, as it were to go 'phut'—but this is an important aspect of karma as well.

And further I'm going to assume that you know that these sensations are related in kind to the type of karma, i.e., pleasurable sensations generally being related to the production at some previous time of merit, good karma, ethically positive actions, volitional actions; and unpleasant sensations related to demeritorious karma the other way.

That's a five minute crash course on the basics of karma. Almost everything I've said is wrong in one sense, grossly oversimplified.

Now, let's get to some of the debates that occurred way back when about karma and its implications. Here is an interesting one. This, by the way, is from a text called the *Katha-vatta* or *Points of Controversy* out of the *Vinaya-Pitaka*. There were a lot of different sects in this point in time. Buddha had been dead for 200 and some years, and there were lots of splits that had already occurred. There was a particular group of monks called, at least now, the Pudgalavada Sect. This group asserted that “because there is karma there is a self. Because there is karma there is a real ‘I’, there is, in fact, a soul, because how else can karma get from one life to another if there isn't an ‘I’? And how else can ‘I’ get the karmic consequence of ‘my’ actions if there is no ‘I’?” It's sort of just obvious, at least it was for them, and it kind of makes sense now.

The commentator, a Theravadin (Th), responds to this position:

“Does a self or soul transmigrate from this world to another and from another world to this?”

Pudgalavadin (P): “Yes.”

Th: “Is it then the identical soul that transmigrates from this world to another and from another to this?”

P: “No, that cannot truly be said.”

Th: “Is it then a different soul that transmigrates?”

P: “No, that cannot truly be said either.”²

[If] the Pudgalavadin one adopts either one or the other of these positions, they know they are falling into a pitfall, either the eternalist or annihilationist one.

Commentator (Th): “Then is it both the identical and also a different soul who transmigrates?”

P: “No, you can’t really say that either.”

Th: “Then it is neither the identical nor a different soul.”

P: “No, you can’t really say that either.” Etc., etc....

P: “Then is it wrong to say, ‘A soul transmigrates from this world to another?’”

Th: “Well, yes.”

P: “But didn’t the Exalted One (the Buddha) say,

When he hath run from birth to birth

Seven times and reached the last, that soul

Endmaker shall become of ill,

By wearing every fetter down?

Didn’t He say that?”

Commentator (Th): “Yes.”

P: “Well, then surely a soul does transmigrate from this world to another.... And, again, did not the Buddha say, ‘*Without a known beginning, O monks, is the way of life ever renewed? Unrevealed is the origin of souls who, shrouded in ignorance and bound by the fetters of natural desire, run on transmigrating.*’ Didn’t He say that?”

Th: “Yes.”

P: “Then surely a soul does transmigrate?”

1.1.159

Commentator (Th): “Surely if the identical soul, without becoming different, transmigrates, then in a sense there is no dying if the destruction of life ceases to take place. There is action and there is action’s effect, action and karma, and there is the result of action (vipaka). But when good and bad acts are maturing as results, you say that the very same soul transmigrates.” 1.1.160

What the commentator is saying here is that the newly reborn person is not the same or different, but is simply a result of the deceased one’s karma continuing on. Not the person, no soul, just the karma. That’s the catch, because there isn’t any person or soul. But karma continues and it has effect.

Footnote (Th): “Hence, the notion of an identity passing on is in conflict with the law of karma.”

1.1.160, FN 3

Now before I explain why, you might ask, “Why pay attention to this sort of abstruse logical stuff?” There is a good reason. Let me read to you a famous poem that

summarizes the understanding of how this actually works. This is from a writing called *The Path of Purification* by Buddhaghosa, who lived the fifth century of the Common Era.

*'There is no doer of a deed
Or one who reaps the deed's result;
Phenomena alone flow on—
No other view than this is right.*

*'And so, while karma and result
Thus causally maintain their round,
As seed and trees succeed in turn,
No first beginning can be shown.*

*'Nor in the future round of births
Can they be shown not to occur:
Sectarians, not knowing this,
Have failed to gain self-mastery.*

*'They assume a being, see it as
Either eternal or annihilated,
Adopt the sixty-two wrong views,
Each contradicting one another.*

*'The stream of craving bears them on
Caught in the mesh of their views:
And as the stream thus bears them on
They are not free from suffering.*

*'...A disciple of the Buddha,
With direct knowledge of this fact,
Can penetrate this deep and subtle
Void conditionality.*

*'There is no karma in result,
Nor does result exist in karma;
Though they are void of one another,
There is no fruit without the karma.*

*'As fire does not exist inside
The sun, a gem, cow dung, nor yet
Outside them, but is brought to be
By means of its constituent parts,*

*'So neither can result be found
Within the karma, nor without;
Nor does the karma still persist
[In the result it has produced.]'*

Here's the part that is rather famous:

*'The karma of its fruit is void;
No fruit exists yet in the karma;
And still the fruit is born from it,
Wholly depending on the karma.*

*'For here there is no Brahma God,
Creator of the round of births,
Phenomena alone flow on—
Cause and component their condition.'*³

So, is there or isn't there a self? And how does this relate to karma? The middle position that the poem refers to is subtle, kind of complex. Therefore, it's rather hard to stay with. The trouble is that if you don't try, you fall off on either side of it, and you get into a mess, one that is not terribly productive. On the one hand, you can get so caught up in dealing with 'my' karma that you tend to forget there is no 'me' in it. [laughter] Therefore, you can spend who knows how long chasing after one aspect of your karma and another and another and another, and cleaning them up—and that is good. There's nothing wrong with that—it is a good thing. And yet if you never take it beyond that, you miss out on 'the important thing'.

This, in a sense, was the debate that went on regarding the poems that were written on the wall of the temple at the time of the Fifth Chinese Ancestor. I'm sure most of you are familiar with that story. His chief monk, Shen Hsiu Yen, said, "*The mind is as a jeweled mirror./ Always we must polish it lest the dust alight*" or "*lest the dust builds up.*" Always we are cleansing our karma. There is nothing wrong with that, but he missed something.

What he missed was what Hui Neng, the Sixth Ancestor—or the person who was to become the Sixth Ancestor—pointed out: "*Since there is nothing from the first,/ Where can the dust alight?*" So don't get caught with the good thing of cleansing one's karma to the extent that you forget the even more important thing that there is no one doing the cleansing—and no self or soul to continue on. On the other hand, don't get so enamored of that that you forget that karma exists. Otherwise, you get into this

situation where you think, “Ah, well, I know that ‘this very mind is Buddha’. What do I need to think about karma for?” And that takes us to the story of Hyakujo’s fox.

Hyakujo, [a Chinese Zen Master who was a contemporary of our lineage ancestor Yakusan Igen], encounters this fox on his temple grounds and the fox says to him, “I’m not actually a fox. I’m a former Zen Master, and I told my disciples that the enlightened person is not subject to the law of karma. I’ve been 500 lives as a fox. Can you help me?”

Hyakujo effectively said that the enlightened person is one with the law of karma—not apart from it, and yet not controlled, in the negative sense, not subjected by it; but free within it, because one with it; not free from it by being apart from it.

So, on either side of this rather complex stuff that lies in the middle—and it’s a bit uncomfortable because it’s so hard to grab onto—you have two things that are definitely not the best way. This is one of the reasons, I think, why they debated this sort of thing for all these years and why trying to stay in the middle on this one is an important thing, or at least to try to bring oneself back to the middle, as one does tend to get off on one side or the other.

What else were they talking about back in 246 B.C.? Ah, here’s a good one: “The cause of all things is predetermined.”

Commentator (Th): “Some, like the Andhaka (A) sect, hold that, because the Buddha said, ‘*There is a cause and that is primary,*’ each term in the chain of causal origination is primary and therefore

predetermined.” XI.7

Commentary on this in footnote: “In this passage it is stated”—the passage just quoted; the commentary explains what he happened to be talking about”—that whether the Buddhas arise to point it out or not, the natural order holds that 1) the laws of causation, whether in a physical or mental realm, go on; and 2) all things are impermanent, fraught with suffering and void of any soul.” XI.7, FN 7

In other words, these things are not subject to whether the Buddha says so or not; they basically are. That’s what they meant by ‘primary’. But these folks aren’t taking it that way.

Commentator (Th): “Is then the cause of one cause determined by something else? This you deny, for if you assent, you commit yourself to the following: that, because of the continuing eventuating due to endless causation, there can never be an end of suffering—or any cutting off of the round of rebirth, nor any nirvana free of residual stuff at rebirth.” XI.7.1

That is, if karma implies predetermination, it’s an endless chain, and it’s a totally mechanical endless chain, therefore there is no point to anything. It’s all predetermined by this law of karma. And karma is one of these links in the chain of causal origination they are talking about.

Similarly, the way this could appear to occur is—this isn’t the way it does occur, but this is the way one would

think about it occurring—

“If for instance, karma was capable of producing not just sensation, but something else. If karma could produce action this would lead to exactly that series of unending predetermined link. Why? Because action is that action, karma, which could produce action, karma, which produces karma which would produce that which produces karma, etc., etc. forever, infinitely an infinite progression.” XI.7

And there would be no room for free will, personal responsibility, etc. Why is that relevant? Well, I have oftentimes heard folks say, “It’s my karma to be doing this.” This view appears easy to understand, but look what it implies: it’s my karma to be doing this. It implies an understanding of karma that karma can produce action, not just sensation, and, in effect, puts someone into this endless loop of no responsibility.

Let me show you one more example how some of the other things that this can lead to. The sub-point here is:

“That all this world”—everything we have here—“is due to karma. Because of the scripture recited below”—they’re again taking the Buddha’s words to produce something he hadn’t intend from them—“certain folks like the Rajagirikas and Siddhatthikas (RS) hold that everything is the cycle of karma.”

Commentator (Th): “Do you then include karma itself is due to karma? And do you imply by ‘everything’ that it is all simply the result of bygone causes?”

And then he goes through this line of implications, for instance,

“Again, if you imply by your proposition that everything is the result of karma, then you can say, for instance, one could commit murder through the result of karma. Since murder is self-productive of karma, then the result of karma is to produce karma. But this you deny.”

XVII.3.2

Then he goes through a number of other things. How did they get into this? This is the line they were quoting from the scripture,

(RS) “‘Tis karma that makes the world go round,
Karma rolls on the lives of men.

All beings are to karma bound

As lynch-pin is to chariot wheel.

“By karma praise and fame are won.

By karma too, birth, death and bonds.

Who that this karma’s divers modes discerns,

Can say “there is no karma in the world”?”

“Hence, folks say everything is due to karma...”

XVII.3.4

(This is a parenthetical point here. Buddhist scriptures, as you know, are extensive. Just the canonical scriptures of the Theravada occupy a row of books about as long as this wall, and the canonical scriptures of the Mahayana, the Taishō Daizōkyō, is even longer. If you look carefully in these scriptures you will find some passage somewhere that can be used to justify almost anything if you take it out of context. And frequently the Buddha, as do all teachers, would speak in ways that were intended to act as an

antidote for a particular situation, or would act as a way of communicating to a particular audience. In the first set of scriptures we talked about, where he used the word ‘soul’, he used it several times. Does that mean the Buddha wasn’t Buddhist? No, presumably not. Does that mean that the Buddha actually believed in the existence of a soul? No, he didn’t. But he used the word ‘soul’ in that context to communicate with some folks.

(I can remember my own master, Rev. Master Jiyu, using similar terms, and she wasn’t afraid of using the term ‘God’ to communicate with folks. Does that mean she was a theist and not a Buddhist? No. In speaking with others, when we monks would talk about exactly what we’re thinking and speaking of in terms of ultimate things, she would not be using ‘God’ in that sense. She would be using words like ‘the Unborn’, ‘the Buddha-Mind’, ‘That Which Is’, and ‘the Eternal,’ ‘the Uncreated’, etc. But sometimes she would say ‘God’ because that was what communicated most effectively to her audience, as did the Buddha in those situations.))

From this particular set of scriptural quotations, it looks like who the Buddha was talking to was a bunch of folks who were saying, basically, karma doesn’t matter. And he was saying, “Look at all the stuff that karma does.” Another bunch gets hold of that and says, “Does that mean karma does everything?”

So karma can produce what? Feeling, sensation; but not doing, not action. Now this does not deny that past acts can influence future actions. They can through other laws of the universe, particularly with psycho-social sort of stuff

in the fourth law of the universe. Where I went to school it was called [behavioral] conditioning. Yes, past actions do influence at least the probabilities of future action. But that's not karma, that's the consequence of habitual action within the psycho-social laws that take effects through the biology of the brain, etc. Is habitual action important? You bet it is. In fact, habitual actions of an ethical or unethical sort produce their own special subset of karmas, called habitual karmas. They are very difficult to undo and will tend to influence the next rebirth if nothing else comes in from left field or nothing else major influences it, simply because of the habitual nature of them. But that's not to say that karma produces the actions. There is always free choice. There is always the ability to turn around, as we talk about in Jukai for instance, and as talked about by Dōgen in the *Shushogi*. There is always the opportunity for *sange*, there is always the opportunity to follow the Eightfold Path. No matter how strong the pull of our sensation is, no matter how strong the conditioning of our past action is, it is not karmically predetermined what you're going to do in the next moment.

What else in this same area? "That matter is produced by karma." Stuff. This one seems a little odd, but you'll see why it's relevant in a moment. Okay, some, like our two previous friends, the Andhakas & Sammitiyas (AS),

"Hold that, just as consciousness and its concomitant attributes arise from karma," i.e., the sensation of stuff, "so also do material [corporeal] things." XVI.8

Commentator (Th): "Do you mean to imply that

matter is of the same nature as feeling, pleasurable, or painful or neutral, etc.? Are all material things, then, mental characteristics?” XVI.8.2

The answer, of course, being “no.” But the objection to this is, though,

AS: “But is not consciousness and its concomitant attributes, which arise through actions done, a type of result?”

Th: “Yes.”

AS: “Then surely material qualities which arise through actions done are equally ‘result’?” XVI.8.3

We do actions and they produce material qualities, or changes in material qualities, so isn’t that karma, action producing result? Makes sense? Yes, but there are four other laws in the universe. Actions can produce results through karma if they result in sensation, but actions can also produce the results through the physical laws. That’s what physics and chemistry are about. We’re producing results all the time. That’s not karma.

Actions produce results also through the biological laws. We’re doing that when we do medicine and nursing and all sorts of things. [And actions] can produce results through the psycho-social kinds of laws. That was the business I was in [psychology]. And ‘stuff’ can get created and transformed, etc. through these physical and biological laws—and that’s not the operation of karma. Now why does that matter?

Well, we often speak loosely about the consequences of our actions being karmic. I do this, too, Rev. Master Jiyu used to do this, and when we speak loosely about things we

do, it makes a valid point. The only difficulty is that when you start trying to think of it in terms of a type of causation, you get balled up by something that was intended as a much looser off-hand comment. For instance, someone will say, “Lung cancer is the karmic consequence of smoking.” That sounds good, lung cancer can well be a consequence of smoking. That’s been pretty well demonstrated. But is it a karmic consequence? Well, lung cancer is a thing, stuff, not sensation. Sensations go along with it and karma may well be coming along for the ride in that opportunity provided by all sorts of unpleasant sensations through which the law of karma may be operating and through which old karma and consequence may be burned up. But the cancer isn’t a sensation. The cancer is a set of cells. It’s not karma that causes certain chemicals in the smoke to produce changes in the cellular DNA. And furthermore, since there’s been some research that smokers that take certain antioxidants reduce their risk of lung cancer to some degree, does that mean that vitamin E and vitamin C are merit? [laughter] These things get all twisted up when one starts taking these off-hand ways of thinking about it which have their own validity at their level and trying to make that into a hard, fast rule type thing. So it in fact does matter that karma does not produce ‘stuff’.

Well, that leads us to perhaps a more important one. “Controverted point: That decay, old age and death are the result of karma.”

Commentator (Th): “Inasmuch as some action does conduce to deterioration that we call illness, decay and old age, and that curtailing of life we call

death, some, like the Andhaka sect, hold that old age and death are the karmic result (i.e. vipaka) of action. Now there is between morally bad action and material decay a certain sort of relationship according to our karma. (Footnote 2: This relationship is one of twenty-four relationships between things mental and physical.) But the moral cause and the physical effects differ in kind. Hence, the latter—the physical effect: illness, decay and death—is not a subjective result of karma. It is not vipaka. It is unlike any mental state:—feeling, sensation, etc.—such as would be produced by karma. It is, at least in part, due to the physical order”—the first and second laws of the universe.

VIII.8.2

Commentator (Th): “You admit, do you not, that decay and dying in bad states of mind is the result of previous bad states? But then you must admit that decay and dying in good states of mind is the result of previous good states—which you deny,” etc.

VIII.8.5

The commentator gets all twisted up in this, effectively saying that you can’t have it one way and you can’t have it the other way, so there is something wrong with your proposition. The response to all of that comes back as,

A: “You say my proposition is false, but surely acts do conduce to the deterioration and the curtailment of life, so my proposition is true.”

VIII.8.6

That makes sense. Acts do conduce to the deterioration of life, but by what laws of the universe? If illness was the result solely of karma, why would we try to do anything about it? Why would doctors be able to do anything? There wouldn't be any point. If it was our karma to get better, we would get better. If it was our karma to not get better, we wouldn't. Why don't we happily sit back and allow ourselves to rot if that's our karma? But something inside says there is something wrong with that. And that's good: it should. Remember, karma is opportunistic. It works through things created by the other laws of the universe. So could, or does, karma affect health, illness, etc.? Yes, of course, but indirectly.

For example, say we undertake some volitional action which is non-preceptual, ethically unwise, and let us say that has its *vipaka* in this lifetime of some sort of unpleasant sensation, say, something that we refer to as some sort of tension, anxiety, some sort of unpleasant sensation. Karma produces sensation. Then, we choose to react to that sensation in some way with some other actions. That's a choice, that's karma. Those actions then—let's say we choose to react to our tension by abusing drugs, abusing alcohol, or something of that sort—may well produce illness through the biological laws. But it wasn't the karma that produced the illness. Karma produced the tension, the unpleasant sensation, and we chose a further action that influenced our body in a certain way.

Or, for instance, more subtly, suppose we continue to do whatever this unwise action is that's producing this tension and unpleasant sensation in our lives. We choose to

ignore the lesson that the karma is offering us: “Hello, something is wrong with what you’re doing here.” If we choose to ignore that, that’s another choice, that’s an action of doing nothing, of ignoring something. And gradually the body responds to the chronic tension in ways which are of the sort that breaks down under the chronic tension. It wasn’t the karma that produced the illness. The karma produced the sensation, we chose to ignore the sensations, and gradually the build-up of that tension in and of itself through the interaction of the psychological and physical laws produced the tension. Here we see the operation of the second and fourth laws of the universe. So, it’s a subtle business, but an important one, again.

Because otherwise you get easily into either the fatalism that there is no point in doing anything about my health because “it’s my karma,” or, worse sometimes, that “If I’m sick, I must have been bad.” Well, if karma is related, it must be. That conclusion is not supportable. There may be a connection, there may not be. It’s a connection, it may be real, but it will be indirect. And so forth. Well, perhaps worse yet, “Ah, you’re sick, you must have done something bad.” How many times have you encountered that in subtle forms? Again, the same fallacies and to which another may be added, which I’ll go into in a minute, that gets us to a sort of judgmental place like that.

A final point to play with: “That karma is inflexible, that karmas which work out their own effects under the present conditions in this life or the next or the next after that are fixed with respect to one or the other.”

Commentator (Th): “Do you mean that they all belong to that Order of things by which the wrong doer is assured of immediate retribution upon rebirth?” XXI.7

It’s technical. There is one sub-set of karmas, some really bad ones, the ones that are referred to as the ‘seven perfidious acts’—the slaying of a Buddha or an arahant, the slaying of mother or father, etc.

He (Th) continues, “Do you mean that everything is one of those?” Obviously not.

Th: “Or do they belong to that other special set of karmas by which a path winner is assured of final salvation?”

The meritorious karmas of acts leading immediately prior to enlightenment. Well, obviously not that sub-set, but a sub-set here that is a very special sub-set.

Th: “Is there not a third, very large, class of karmas that are not fixed as to one or the other?”

The answer, of course, being “Yes, there is.”

Th: “Do you mean that the karma which eventuates in this life is fixed as one of those two?”

Of course you have to deny it. It’s not one of those two.

Th: “And the same holds true with respect to karmas that will be experienced at the next rebirth, or in a succession of rebirths.” XXI 8.3

Interesting footnote here:

“With regard to the karma that takes effect in this life: this kind of karma, if capable of having its consequences at all, must work itself out in this life.

If no opportunity for this arises, it becomes inoperative.” XXI.8.4, FN 1

Some of these minor consequences become inoperative like that. Okay. What’s the implication of that?

One of the other things which makes me growl under my breath slightly, in addition to “It’s my karma to be doing this,” are simplistic Buddhist Sunday School texts that will give you a list of bad things that you shouldn’t do and what your karma is going to be if you do....These itemized catalogs, which we either come across—or in our heads make for ourselves—of actions and karmic consequences that are fixed and determined, aren’t the case. At most there are general likelihoods, probabilities, things that tend to follow, all else being equal, and it usually isn’t.

So, if the karmas are not fixed, then it means one has to keep a very open mind about karma and its consequences, both for oneself and also, especially, others. There is no judging of others. The thing is so complicated, these karmas interact so much, and they are so flexible—rather than inflexible—that quite frankly no one but a Buddha can fully understand how they operate. Therefore no one but a Buddha has any business judging anybody else’s karma. In fact, he even said so. This is from the *Gradual Sayings*. This is Buddha speaking to Ananda:

“Consider, Ananda, one well-restrained, a comely person in whose company his fellows in the godly life take pleasure....

‘Godly’ life: it was the Buddha talking, but he wasn’t a theist. ‘Take pleasure’: these are observable things; you could tell that about this person.

“Yet, in whom hearing Dharma has little effect. In whom much learning is of no effect. In whom there is no view-penetration and who does not win temporary release.”

These are things you can't tell by looking at somebody.

“This person, upon the breakup of the body after death, sets out to fall, not to excel; fares to a fall not to excellence.

“Now consider another person equally well-restrained, equally comely in whose company his fellows in the godly life equally take pleasure, etc., but in whom hearing Dharma has an effect, in whom much learning has an effect....”

We're not talking about academic stuff here, but understanding of Truth.

“...In whom there is view-penetration, and who wins temporary release—he, after death, sets out to excel, not to fall; fares to excellence, not to a fall.

“And the measurers measure them, saying: ‘His stature is just this, the other’s just that; in what way is one wanting, one exalted?’”

Why is the karma of one going up, as it were, and the other going down?

“And that measuring of these measurers, Ananda, is to the measurers’ harm for many a day.”

“Now the one...in whom listening has an effect, etc., who wins temporary release, etc.—that person, Ananda, has marched further forward and is more exalted than the former.’

“And why is that? It’s because the stream of Dharma carries him forward, Ananda. But who, save the Tathagata, a Buddha, can judge that difference? Wherefore, Ananda, be no measurer of persons; measure not the measure of persons. Verily, Ananda, he digs a pit for himself who measures the measure of persons. I alone, Ananda, can measure their measure....”⁴

All right, friends, I’ll stop at this point. It’s an interesting book, with literally hundreds of these controversies. They’re not all about karma, but about all sorts of things—*Points of Controversy* is the English translation—all of them dating back to around third century B.C. What questions have I stirred up?

Question: One discovers that one has a lot of karma to clean up. For me, when I heard that, I knew I had stuff I was working on. I’ve worked on myself for years, and to get to a point of realizing that I still hold this karma feels like I’m condemned to it. Periodically I get feedback in one way or another that I have this karma to clean up, and to me, it’s like saying, “Hey, your room’s dirty.” I then want to plunge in and clean it up and get it done with. Or at other times it feels overwhelming and there’s this element of futility. How can I do anything good, worthwhile, serviceable? How can I glimpse the Eternal if I have this much karma that I can’t seem to get past?

Answer: We’re talking primarily here of karma that seems to come along with the package in this lifetime? You are not a murderer of arahats, I assume. Let’s trace it back a little further. That which occurred in times before this set of

skandhas was congealed into this particular little lumpy form that's sitting over there produced, set into motion, karma. And that being, or all those beings more likely, unfortunately died before they could set those things to rest. Fair enough. That happens. It's unfortunate, but it happens. OK, how is that karma going to be resolved? Well, the only way we know of is another being coming along, a set of skandhas congealing itself into a being, that in some sense shoulders that bag, that heavy weight, that heavy sack. That is a Bodhisattva act—to shoulder such a sack. So we bow to you for having such a sack. Truly. You, what we will conveniently, short-handedly call 'you', did not create the sack. What we will conveniently call 'you' are the one who in some sense is willing to give it a try in setting that to peace. And in the process are learning a whole lot. Come back to that from time to time when it looks overwhelming: "Seeing as how I am not a murderer of arahats, it's okay. I'm doing a good thing here." Is it tough? You bet it's tough. But if not you, then who will clean this up? It's a little bit like going out for a hike in the woods and coming back with a knapsack full of beer bottles. Well, if you aren't going to pick them up, who is? They're not your beer bottles.

Question: If karma does not produce action, then karma does not produce a physical thing or a physical condition.

Answer: Not directly, karma can't make viruses.

Question: Help me a little bit. A child is born who's happy and healthy into a good family. Another child is born with significant congenital problems. A third child is born

into an abusive family or a war, and a fourth child is a Mozart. How does karma, in general, affect these, or how is it related to these phenomenal conditions?

Answer: You're talking about rebirth, not about the effect of karma in this lifetime, something about its effect across lifetimes through rebirth. It is said that karma affects rebirth. Now, how you understand that frankly differs to some extent in different schools of Buddhism. I'll tell you how I understand it. I'm not claiming this is gospel or that this is the way.

Presumably, as I understand karma, the karma is not producing the birth defect; karma is not producing the war or the abusive parents. What the karma is doing is being opportunistic again; i.e., we have here a sack of karma. (There is, of course, no such thing. We simply have a concept in our heads. We're using shorthand again; don't ask me to show you a sack of karma.) We have here a sack of karma that can best be set to rest in certain conditions, let us say, through the sensations, sufferings. The sensations come about as a result of certain birth defects, let's say, or certain genetic proclivities that don't take effect until you're 83. That karma will, in some ways that I have no idea how it works, that sack of karma will get attracted to that particular rebirth—to the birth of that particular psycho-physical organism with that particular set of DNA that produces those birth defects or genetic proclivities. Or it will get attracted, in ways I have no idea how it works, to a set of psycho-physical set of skandhas that are coming about in a situation of great conflict. That, somehow, is where that particular set of karmic stuff most likely can

find resolution. It can either be burned up through experience of the pain or can find some psycho-physical entity who through training can understand and set it to rest. It will be somehow attracted to that, rather than the karma producing those physical conditions.

Question: Taking from the point where you just left off. Say one's karma has been resolved; however, enlightenment has not been achieved. What is the work between those two? I'm not even sure 'work' is the right word, but clearing just happens. The sack is put down.

Answer: That does happen. There is sometimes a feeling of "That which brought this particular bunch of stuff into this world has been dealt with," or "Okay, the purpose has been served."

Question: But enlightenment has yet to be achieved. There is this sense of loss or aimlessness. What then?

Answer: That's a very good question, and one which in that state one needs to ask oneself very deeply—what do I do with the rest of this life? What is a worthy purpose? What is the best and highest use of the rest of this life of this particular bunch of skandhas? Different people come to different answers for that. One is clearly implicit in your question, and that is okay—there is the finding of Truth, there is Enlightenment, there is the bringing to fruition of the Eightfold Path. And that's certainly a possible answer to that. It's not the only answer you can come to, however. There can be simply a sense of the life of service to other beings or the world in trying to do as little harm as possible in the process. That's another answer we can come to. It is a very profound question to ask. How one answers it

depends on one's understanding of what's important, and how one answers it will influence the rest of one's life and what one does with it.

Question: If I say something unkind about somebody, then part of the karma is what they feel and part of the karma will be the shame that I will feel for having done that?

Answer: The karma, by definition, of a volitional act of person A (assuming that there are such things as people, speaking shorthand again) produces sensation only in person A within this lifetime. The fact that person B over here is feeling hurt is not the karmic consequence of what person A has said. It may be that through the psycho-physical or the socio-physical laws of the universe, probably is, we react to each other all the time. The sense of shame of person A may well be a karmic result.

Question: Karma produces that sensation only in the person who has done this. Is that right? [Yes] So, in cleaning up karma, one has to learn to be aware so that you can see or feel the sensation one is creating.

Answer: Yes, very good. You're certainly more motivated to [clean up the karma] because it hurts, which in one way is another whole way of looking at the law of karma. As you know, in Buddhism there is not a Creator God who designed all this stuff. So in one sense, there is no purpose to any of the laws of the universe, there is no purpose to karma. On the other hand, imagine the world without it for a moment. If we could freely go about doing all sorts of unpleasant things to each other and not feel any pain ourselves, it would be a lot harder to stop doing it.

This is a reason, by no means the only one, why in many forms of Buddhist training, including this one, we put so much emphasis on awareness. Another reason involves why meditation sometimes makes it seem like, “Good grief, I’m feeling more pain now than when I started. Is something wrong with me?” Not necessarily, it may be that you’re more aware of what you’re actually doing. Therefore, you have more opportunities to do something about the habitual actions that are producing those unpleasant sensations.

And there is a third reason, it is that sometimes when you clean up a whole bunch of stuff and/or jump to a different level or type of understanding, a clearer understanding of something in the course of your training, it seems like all of a sudden everything breaks loose. It’s just awful, in terms of all sorts of stuff seem to go wrong, and you wonder, “Am I totally on the wrong path here?” Of course, it’s useful to talk to someone about that, but sometimes what it means is that what you’ve broken through to is a level of awareness of what you’ve actually been doing to yourself all this time. And it hurts. Great! Don’t do it anymore.

[In response to a question about the physical sensation (pain) of stubbing one’s toe not having a karmic cause] Remember karma is not the only thing that produces sensation. You’ve got the biological and psychological as well. So hitting your toe and feeling pain isn’t necessarily karma. The hitting of the toe is not karma, it’s an action. However, karma is opportunistic. There is even a story of the Buddha where he hit his toe on a rock.

He stopped for a minute and told a story of what he became aware of at that point. I've forgotten what the story was, but it had to do with the pain, the throbbing in his toe at the moment he recognized as related to a little piece of karma that hadn't been put to bed yet the karma took the opportunity.

Question: The statement I've often heard, and I've found it helpful, is "The Wheel of the Law is just." Maybe I misunderstood it, but I've often thought of it as a way of seeing that what happens to us is 'good', that to trust what's happening to us is to see the good. Is the 'Wheel of the Law' similar or is it an expression for karma?

Answer: To see the opportunities even in the painful stuff. In one sense you're talking about the one law of the universe we haven't talked about yet, and that's the last one, the fifth law, which is purely spiritual. Sometimes it's put in terms as "The Wheel of the Law is always turning" or "In the long run, or inevitably, the Truth prevails," or that there is in this funny old universe of ours some something of a progressive nature in the spiritual sense that one can put some faith in ultimately.

You're talking primarily of Fifth Law stuff. That's a different principle than karma. But all these things ping one another, however, there is a fundamental thing there that is other than karma, that is, in one sense, almost deeper than karma. I may get in trouble for saying this but I'll say it [laughter]. It is deeper than karma, more fundamental than karma. Yet they all intertwine.

Question: To some extent, is trusting in the 'Wheel of the Law' how we cleanse karma?

Answer: It's one of the ways, yes, because it allows for all-acceptance. As long as you're fighting the karma, you can't really know what you're dealing with. You can't really allow the process to take its effect without you producing, in the process of fighting, more difficult volitional actions which, guess what, make more karma.

Question: Are reaping the results, or sensations, part of the process of cleansing karma? In other words, if one sits and accepts the results, is that all one needs to do?

Answer: There are other things you can do, but in the long run that one will be sufficient. As long as you are not producing more, the bag is finite. It will run out after a bit. Now 'a bit' may be another life-time, but it will run out. And there are other things one can also do.

Question: Since volitional acts create karma, what are we talking about when we cleanse karma? It sounds like a process of doing.

Answer: Which in part it can be. There are two types of volitional acts, meritorious and demeritorious. You don't need to clean up the merit. That's not a problem. So when we talk about 'cleaning up karma', we're talking about the hard stuff. And one of the other ways you can help clean that up is through the production of the good stuff, i.e., merit, because they interact. Not in a one-to-one easily predictable way such as, "Hey, if I do this good thing, it will counteract that bad thing." Unfortunately, it's not that simple. Nonetheless, merit does have its effect. It does influence, sometimes counteracts, and sometimes entirely wipes out the karmic stuff, the stuff in the karmic bag, whether it be stuff done by this set of skandhas or that

which came with you from the start. So there is the production of merit.

There is also something which we might call short-circuiting, and that has to do with the ultimate things of our religion. It's getting to a place of all-acceptance and meditation in which the self is indeed seen as non-existent, in which there is simply the flow of *ūji*, in which, in one sense, then, it doesn't matter anymore. You're not producing further difficult volitional action, karma, and yet, there is painful sensation. So what? You do not react with suffering. Suffering, in a technical Buddhist sense, is something that you do. Simply allow that sensation to burn itself out. The merit of doing that is so large that it wipes out all kinds of stuff, things the Buddha was talking about earlier in the Four Noble Truths—the complete all-acceptance of the end of craving.

So you get it both ways when you go for the gold, as it were, with the Four Noble Truths. In one sense, you get to a place where it simply doesn't matter anymore; it's just another sensation. And also, the extreme merit of doing that is so huge that it wipes out the whole lot. Compared to items on lists of merit such as making offerings, building stupas, etc.—which are, by the way, not all that much better than lists of karmic consequences—“the merit of training is thousand-fold.” You've heard scriptures like that? I'm not sure it's exactly a thousand-fold. It might be a thousand-and-one-fold, it might be a tenth-fold. I can't go into it more than that. I don't know. It's complex stuff that only Buddhas really know for sure. So there are a lot of different ways.

[In response to a question about confusion around all-acceptance] This is why we have a Sangha refuge. These things are not always clear. There may be circumstances in which doing what you've just said is exactly the best way for person X to proceed. On the other hand, for person Y in a slightly different circumstance, that may not be the wisest way to proceed. One may be, let us say, ignoring something that would be well to look into. Or it might be attributing to karmic or other spiritual reason something which is operating in the sphere of the biological laws of the universe—that if you attend to it now, you'll have many more years of training left, and if you don't, your life will be shorter. It has to do with biology. One ignores it to one's peril. These things are not always, even not frequently, obvious. We help each other and together try to figure these things out.

One thing I want to end with is that one of the other implications of all this is, keep an open mind. There are five laws of the universe. Karma is a very interesting one, and it's one we Buddhists use a lot because it's so different from how most other folks think. On the other hand, we run risks of over-using it and attributing too much to karma and ignoring physics, biology, and psychology, and the great fifth law of the universe as well. This is why we have each other to help each other out: It's not always obvious.

Homage to the Buddha
Homage to the Dharma
Homage to the Sangha

[Light editing by Rev. Oswin Hollenbeck; some questions have been condensed and re phrased because of space considerations. Transcribed by Dixie Feiner]

Notes

1. See “The Five Laws of the Universe” by Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett in *An Introduction to the Tradition of Serene Reflection Meditation* (Mount Shasta, California: Shasta Abbey Press, latest edition 1997); also <http://www.shastaabbey.org/pdf/IntroSRM.pdf>
2. *Points of Controversy or Subjects of Discourse: Being a Translation of the Katha-Vatthu from the Abhidhamma-Pitaka*, trans. Shwe Zan Aung and Mrs. Rhys Davids, Book 1, chapter I, section 158 (1.1.158) (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1993, first published 1915) page 26. All subsequent quotations to this work may be found in this volume, with the book, chapter and section numbers noted in the text above. Some of the quotations were paraphrased by Rev. Master Daizui.
3. *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, Bhadantacariya Buddhagosa, translated from the Pali by Bhikkhu Nanamoli, XIX.20 (Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Editions, 1991, first published in 1956) pp. 622-623; ‘karma’ substituted for ‘kamma’.
4. *The Book of Gradual Sayings (Anuttara-Nikaya)*, trans. E. M. Hare, Vol. 3, “The Book of the Sixes,” Chapter V, ii (44). (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1998 reprint, first published in 1934) pp. 247-249; some slight paraphrase.

Form and Pure

Fer de Deken

— *Dharmatoevlucht – Netherlands* —

Translation: Nanette Idzerda

THERE IS A SCRIPTURE IN WHICH THE WHOLE OF BUDDHISM IS REFLECTED. It is the *Scripture of Great Wisdom*. It says:

*O Shariputra, form is only pure,
Pure is all form; there is, then, nothing more than this,
For what is form is pure – and what is pure is form.*

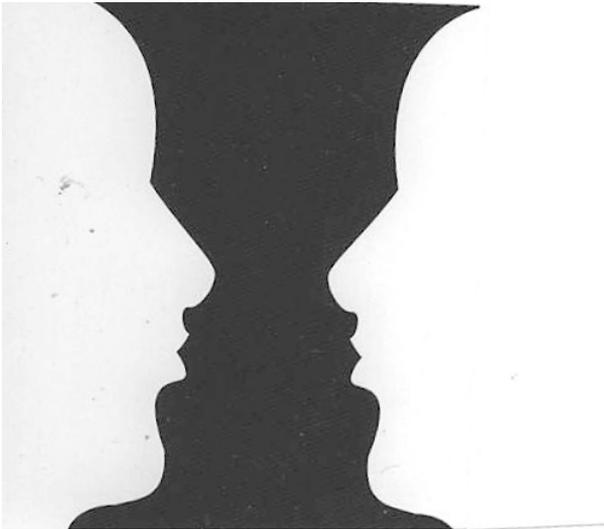
This puzzled me deeply and reflecting on it while on a hiking holiday of a couple of hundred kilometers some of this clarified for me. Below is my account.

Lego:

When my son used to play with Lego he would start off by building a nice castle with all the little blocks until he got fed up with it and demolished it into small pieces. This heap of loose Lego pieces were then seen by me, the parent, as chaos, ugly, uncomfortable and very much in need of tidying up. Not until he had made a new form, for example a ship, did the bricks seem acceptable and allowed to remain in the living room. ‘From the chaos of loose pieces (emptiness, pure), the ego creates a ship (form) and then feels good.’¹

Seeing:

Pure seeing is simple awareness of loose parts, but the ego is continually trying to make a meaningful whole of them. In the drawing below you can see two forms, a vase, or two faces looking at each other. Because this image is not stable, you will notice that it switches all the time, from one picture to the other. It is a restless image. That is because the ego cannot see both forms at the same time (this is only possible in the intuitive 'being mode'). The ego constantly looks for one fixed form, or a 'gestalt'² with which it feels comfortable. It clings to a form because that prevents restlessness, as the ego is dependent on form. This clinging to a view, the attachment to form, is a common prop in our lives.



Told-you-so-ism:

I had a colleague at work who, if someone clung tightly to his opinion of how the world ticked, would call that ‘told-you-so-ism’; a way of filtering all information so one would always be right; an attempt to fit everything into that one form. A common example of this is scapegoating, where gross generalizations are made about certain groups on the basis of a partial (prejudiced) view and are held, even in the face of conflicting evidence. Contradictory information gets denied —filtered away — because it does not fit and one cannot call out: ‘I told you so!’ A woman who has had a couple of failed relationships may decide that ‘no man can be trusted.’ Fixing and holding to a view is satisfying, because it gives a feeling of being in control.

The wheel turns from emptiness to form through the ego that cannot exist without a form.

The next turn of the wheel:

Above I have shown how the wheel turns from emptiness to form. But how does it go on turning when it turns from the form mode to emptiness? This is the focus of Zen training, learning not to cling to the form our ego is so comfortable with, but to let go and to see things in a ‘looser’ way.

Rain:

During the hiking vacation, it rained a lot. Well, every disadvantage has its advantage, so I had a good opportunity to train with what was happening to me during the rain. The first thing I became aware of was that I could not accept the

fact that it was raining, I wanted sunshine. The form of ‘walking and sun go together’ was compelling. This resistance obstructed me from simply seeing what was happening to me. Not until I let go of that resistance (with the help of compassion for what *is*), could I really experience the raindrops; first a cool touch, then water running down my face, noticing what happens with the wind just before it starts to rain, hearing the few fat drops tapping against my poncho, the smell that emerges. By observing that which is and surrendering to it, I could let go of the form: ‘only sunshine is nice’ and therefore I could enjoy walking in the present moment.

Creativity:

This also happens with creativity. Below you will see a photo of the monster of the Gévaudan, which we encountered on the way.



It is built of old farming tools. If you want to make such an object you must drop your view of what the parts were originally used for. So a chain must not be seen anymore as something you use to fasten the harrow to the tractor, rather it must be seen in its individuality, just as it is. This seeing something without ego-view or contaminated by the self, one can see as pure, as emptiness. Only thereafter can one give it in a new form; in this case as the tail of the monster.

Of course Zen Buddhism is all about how this works in daily life. Below an example:

Neighbors:

During the three weeks we were on the hiking vacation our neighbors looked after our cat. When we unexpectedly came back earlier we saw a huge, room-filling plant standing in the sun parlor. The neighbors had bought it and found it was much too big for their room so for the time being had parked it in our parlor. When they noticed our return, they felt ashamed because good form requires that one asks permission before using someone else's private territory. They thought that we would return at a later date and would not have known, so now the shame. Compassion lets go of the idea of good form and sees what is there, the 'separate parts' i.e. plant, shame, own irritation, etc. and finds from the 'emptiness' or pure of the separate parts enabling a new form; so I referred to the plant as a 'guest' who "behaved very well, made no noise, nicely emptied his water bowl, and provided fresh air. He may come and stay again."

By offering a new form, i.e. the plant as a guest instead of improper use of my room, the awkwardness of the situation was resolved and everyone felt fine. This is a much more powerful way than using a soother like: “Oh, it’s all right, it doesn’t matter”. For then the existing way of viewing things is just being denied, although it endures. While a new way of looking pushes the old way to the background (the ego cannot live in two forms at the same time, see the vase), which can have advantages, as was the case with my neighbors who were relieved and, in the newly offered form (the plant is a guest), could join in the banter.

Please note that I don’t define emptiness as an absolute nothingness here, but as a relative emptiness in which constructed form is let go of and observed in all its separate parts. (Like you can see a Lego castle as little separate blocks.)

From the form one can experience emptiness through the help of compassion. That closes the circle of form and pure.

What is the significance of this theme in our training?

If you don’t cling to forms, but see them as temporary, you become fluid; this makes it possible to live in the present moment. Because in the ‘now’, everything is transient and you are continually in a new situation. When you become more fluid your boundaries with the surroundings subsequently become thinner, as a result of which you feel more at one, united with everything around you and the larger whole. Through which, among other

things, empathy grows and fear disappears. There is another important experience. If you can let go of the form, in that same moment, in a very subtle way you experience something of ‘dying’. Seeing that the self is so very attached to the form, that it can only exist because of form, the moment the form is let go of, the self also ‘dies’ a little to be born again in a new form. Just as the making of the beast with the farmer’s tools. One element used to be a four-pronged fork, then you see it as it is, and in letting go of its form, the ego ‘dies’ a little, after which you can use the fork in a new way—it becomes the hairs on the animal’s neck. The moment you let go of a form, you are in emptiness. Even though this takes only a fraction of a second, it is pure and ‘death’ together. By being attentive during this experience, you can become more familiar with emptiness in meditation.

Notes:

1. In the *Sandokai* it says:

“.....Each sense gate and its object all together enter thus in mutual relations And yet stand apart in a uniqueness of their own, depending and yet non-depending both.”

2. ‘Gestalt’ is a concept, particularly used in psychology, and stands for ‘an overall picture’ in which the whole is more than the component parts. Thus a table is more than four posts and a plank, and a family is more than the individual members.

Undertaking Great Compassion Without Delay

Rev. Master Oswin Hollenbeck

— *Shasta Abbey, Mt. Shasta, CA – USA* —

This article is a lightly edited version of a Sunday Dharma talk offered at Shasta Abbey on 18th November 2012 to the local congregation and introductory retreat guests.

Homage to the Buddha

Homage to the Dharma

Homage to the Sangha

SINCE WE CHANTED THE *AVALOKITESHWARA SCRIPTURE* for our Transfer of Merit Ceremony this morning, I thought I'd talk about Great Compassion. I draw my inspiration from a passage in the *Avatamsaka Scripture*, in English, the *Flower Ornament or Flower Garland Scripture*, which declares the teaching of Avalokiteshwara to be, "Undertake great compassion without delay."

Most of our scriptures are dialogues. They start with where it happens and who is there, and then there is usually a dialogue between someone and the Buddha or among other people. The *Avatamsaka Scripture* is one of our longest scriptures. Some might find it too flowery for easy reading, but it has many beautiful passages that describe

aspects of our practice, and much of our liturgy is developed from it.

Volume Three of this Scripture is about the pilgrimage of a young man named Sudhana; he is the archetypal Buddhist pilgrim. Someone set him on the road and he's going around talking to all these different people, asking, "How do I train? How do I become a bodhisattva?" This is 'bodhisattva' with a lower case 'b,' which includes all of us. Any of us who step onto the path is a bodhisattva—we're in training to be a Buddha, we're becoming a Buddha.

Sudhana talks to 53 different people. Some dialogs are very short; others are rather long. He talks to people from all walks of life: monks, teachers, lay people, both genders, gods and goddesses, all different professions, ages, and races. You name it—almost everyone is included. Sudhana wants to learn from everyone, including a courtesan. So that points as well to a useful attitude for us to cultivate in practice—we want to learn from whomever we can.

One of the people he meets and learns from is Avalokiteshwara. Sanskrit and Chinese names are descriptive of qualities or character, like English translations of Native American names, for example, Running Deer. 'Avalokiteshwara' translates literally as 'Regarder of the Cries of the World.' I'll talk later more about what her name means, but for the moment just remember that Avalokiteshwara means Great Compassion. She is depicted in the side shrine there [pointing to painting of Avalokiteshwara in side shrine at Shasta Abbey].

So Sudhana goes up to Avalokiteshwara, pays his

respects and says, *“Noble One, I have set my mind upon supreme, perfect enlightenment but I do not know how to learn and carry out the practice of enlightening beings.”* ‘Enlightening beings’ is this translator’s way of translating bodhisattvas with a lower case ‘b’. We are all ‘beings’ who are ‘enlightening’ ourselves—and others (more on that later). Sudhana goes on to say, *“I hear you give enlightening beings instruction and I ask you to tell me how to learn and carry out the practice of enlightening beings.”*

I’m going to shift from here and talk about the practice of compassion in my own words. It’s my answer to Sudhana. At the end of this talk we’ll return to the Scripture to hear about compassion in Avalokiteshwara’s words. If we don’t have time, you can look it up for yourself. It’s in Volume Three, about the middle of the volume, under the heading ‘Avalokiteshwara’.

It has probably been mentioned in your talks and introduction that compassion is a key principle in our practice. This is so, not only in our own tradition, Serene Reflection Meditation, but also in all of Buddhism. I think if you ask the ordinary person on the street, “What do you associate with Buddhism?” you’re likely to get a reply of ‘Compassion.’ Part of that may be due to the Dalai Lama’s prominence in news and current events, I don’t know, but I certainly find that response to be true and consistent. In Eugene [Oregon], where I just spent fourteen years as the prior, or resident monk, it was very interesting. You would find people who would say, “Well, if I was going to practice anything, it would be Buddhism, because I really like the compassion aspect.” So it’s something that

everyone knows, that everyone is drawn to. It's one of the things that drew me to Buddhist practice.

The founder of our abbey here, Rev. Master Jiyu, used to say that compassion is the doorway into meditation practice. She devotes Chapter 4 in her first book, *Zen is Eternal Life*, to describing zazen, or formal sitting, and then launches into Chapter 5, "The Necessity of Understanding the Heart of Avalokiteshwara." She describes this heart, which is our True Heart, or Buddha Nature, in great detail and explains that this compassion is the key attitude to take up in daily life once we start sitting.

Our tradition is called Sōtō Zen in Japanese. 'Zen' is a Japanese word that simply means meditation. Zen Buddhism is often thought of as very severe and austere with a focus on 'emptiness'. I don't know if you've run across writings or scriptures which talk about 'emptiness'. One way it's illustrated is through a circle that is drawn on a scroll or paper. It's called an *ensō* and is usually associated with our Japanese Zen heritage. How do you show 'emptiness'? Well, one way is to draw a circle with an inked brush, a minimum of line that encloses nothing. Other than leaving the paper blank, that's as close as you can get to showing 'emptiness'. But once you draw the circle, you immediately create an inside and an outside. So it's not a perfect illustration, but it points us in the right direction that there is no duality, all is one. Still, it can come across as stark and severe, just a black line on white paper.

Great Master Dōgen himself, who brought this tradition to Japan from China, always emphasized "just

sitting and wonderful practice.” It’s like the left hand and right hand in meditation, you need both. The formal seated meditation is the ‘just sitting’: we try to just sit. Sometimes this form of meditation is called ‘silent illumination’ because it’s quiet and still. But sitting’s only part of the practice. ‘Wonderful practice’ arises from illumination, or reflection, and encompasses, among other qualities, compassion. We want to express both stillness and brightness in daily life and benefit other beings in doing so.

Most of our lives, both yours, I imagine, and certainly ours here at the monastery, are not spent on a meditation cushion. Except for occasional retreats, we spend a good part of every day engaged in energetic or concentrated labor. This, too, is part of ‘wonderful practice.’ The emphasis on everyday life, sometimes called ‘working meditation’, or ‘every-minute meditation’, was developed in China. Because the monasteries were often far off in the mountains and because begging in the way renunciants did in India was anathema in Chinese society, the monks said, “Well, if we’re going to eat, to ‘not grow lean and die,’ I guess we’ll have to grow our own food.” So the monks began to garden, and then they also began to cook. (According to the old monastic rules in India, monks weren’t allowed to do either.) And because the monks didn’t want to waste any time, they considered, “What if we cultivated these activities as a meditation practice?” Consequently, the Chinese monks honed this ‘every-minute meditation’, or what I like to call ‘daily life practice’, into a deep and valuable method of training.

Here at the monastery we still spend a lot of our time

in the kitchen. It consumes our greatest ‘work force’, it’s considered one of the best places in the monastery to train, and the chief cook, next to the abbot, is considered one of the best teachers in the temple. Working there is an opportunity to cultivate mindfulness. We learn to cut carrots meditatively, if you will, with gratitude and respect. We learn to work with other people, and to work with deadlines. What do you do when everyone is in the dining hall waiting and breakfast isn’t ready yet? What if you’ve burned the oatmeal? What if your kitchen assistant is having a bad day and breaks down crying when you ask him to do something outside the usual routine? The kitchen provides a microcosm for ‘the world’ and shows us that meditation can be practiced any and everywhere.

Simple, practical, physical work in the monastery does indeed prove to be invaluable for learning daily life practice. It doesn’t take a lot of esoteric knowledge to cut carrots. It doesn’t require a deep understanding of the scriptures to take out the compost. Someone has to show you where the bin is, where the pile is, but once it’s pointed out, it’s an easy enough task to do. And lest we get caught up with judging what is or isn’t important about what we’re doing, we can call to mind the value and potential of such humble jobs as offered by Great Master Dōgen in one of his writings, “There’s no such thing as a worldly task.”

Now another part of ‘wonderful practice’ is ceremonial and the various forms of respect and gratitude that we practice at the temple. If we come to this practice at Shasta or at a priory and have heard about ‘zen’, ‘meditation’, and ‘emptiness’, such as described above, we

can wonder, “What the heck is all this other stuff in the temple about? I wasn’t expecting to see a statue; I wasn’t expecting to see an altar; I’m not keen on chanting scriptures in medieval plainsong. I came to get away from religion and here I am right smack dab in the middle of it again. I’ve glanced into the monks’ meditation hall. It’s nice and simple, just a place to sit. Why can’t we do that? What do all this art work and symbols, music and ceremonial have to do with meditation and daily life?”

I think at least part of the reason can be found in Rev. Master Jiyu’s statement that she would often make about emptiness. She’d say, “It’s the fullest emptiness, or nothingness, that you’ll ever bump into.” Emptiness is not empty. If we can truly sit with that emptiness and let go of everything completely, we’ll know that. But, in one sense at least, most of us are still on this side of enlightenment. Most of us are still trapped in our old ways and judgments, most of us are still traveling, most of us are making our pilgrimage, most of us are still learning. These other things are helpful, they’re pointers. They’re other ways of working with our minds. You may not realize that ceremonial is actually a form of meditation, but it is. It may have other purposes, but it’s also a form of meditation.

So what is this great compassion? And why do we call it great compassion? What are its characteristics? How do we practice it? One clue is the name we give to this figure or form which represents great compassion. She’s called ‘Avalokiteshwara’ in Sanskrit. That’s quite a mouthful. When I first came here we were still calling her ‘Kanzeon’, which is the Japanese form. Much easier to say and

remember. But at one point we shifted to using Sanskrit names for the various Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. So we end up with three different ways of naming Great Compassion: in Sanskrit, *Avalokiteshwara*; in Chinese, *Kuan-shi-yin*, and in Japanese, *Kanzeon*. These languages trace out the journey of Buddhism from India, to China, to Japan. In all three languages, the names mean exactly the same, which is ‘Regarder of the Cries of the World’.

I had the opportunity to learn some Chinese in the past few years, and I discovered that the Chinese characters for *Kuan-shi-yin* are helpful in understanding and remembering what she’s about. I’m not a Chinese scholar or experienced linguist. All I know I got from books and a *RosettaStone* computer program, so please forgive me if my pronunciation is poor or my explanation is lacking. This is what I learned. *Kuan* is the character for seeing, for observing, for regarding. It has to do with sight. *Shi* means world. And the third syllable *yin* means sound or sounds. So you put that all together and you’ve got hearing or observing, seeing the world’s sounds. Very simple. And I find, quite elegant.

Now, let’s explore further about the practice of compassion and see how that relates to formal meditation and daily practice. Another scripture we use is the *Shurangama Scripture*. Again there is a story taking place. There is the gathering of the Buddha, there are disciples and a whole host of other beings, and the Buddha asks a question. He asks each of the Bodhisattvas present to describe the specific practice which enabled them to realize the Unborn. There are twenty-five Bodhisattvas, if I

remember correctly, and each of them tells their story. Each of them relates, “This is what worked for me. This is what I did.” Avalokiteshwara is there, she’s one of the Bodhisattvas. She describes her practice as listening. She goes into detail about what that means. Then at the scripture’s end, someone asks the Buddha the question, “Which practice is best? What’s the best practice for human beings?” The Buddha says that Avalokiteshwara’s practice of listening is the best practice for human beings. She’s “the One Who Listens and Responds to the World’s Cries.”

When we meditate some part of our brain or mind has to be still or quiet so that we can observe or see or hear what’s going on. It’s why we try to choose a quiet, unadorned place to meditate so we don’t get too distracted. Part of our mind becomes like a mirror that’s reflecting everything. But it is a silent mirror. I’ve never heard of a talking mirror for that matter, but it’s a silent mirror. It reflects everything, and unless it’s cracked or warped, it reflects everything exactly.

Then we have ‘the world’ which Avalokiteshwara is contemplating. The word ‘world’ has a figurative meaning when we talk about ‘renouncing the world’. Yes, it can mean formal renunciation. As monastics we leave the world, we cut our hair, give up our livelihood, live apart from our families, and we practice. And that’s giving up the world in one sense. But it has a deeper level, and that deeper level is accessible to all of us, whether monastics or lay. That’s because ‘the world’ also means our own karma, our karmic inheritance. I don’t know if you’ve had much discussion this weekend on karma. It’s an important

Buddhist teaching and is one way of talking about what each of us is, or at least appears to be. It's what makes up our individuality, our personality; it's what brings us into the world.

So we're sitting there in silent meditation, we're listening, we're looking, we're seeing how we are—what's going on in our minds, how we're reacting to things, how we're thinking about things. And one of the things that can pop up—usually over time, but some people may get it much more quickly—is that we hear the sounds of our own suffering. We can hear ourselves getting very angry because the chief cook didn't let us cut the carrots the way we wanted to. Can we hear ourselves? "I had a better way. It's much better. Why do we have to peel them first? It's important to get the vitamins that lie just beneath the skin." We begin to listen to our minds reeling out resistance in dislike for what we're doing or craving to do something else.

One of the benefits of a monastery as a place of training is that often we don't get to choose what we do. We're asked to do something. We can find ourselves all of a sudden in a situation that we've spent our lives running away from. Here we are. We have to deal with it again. It's like a housewife who's spent most of her life ironing her husband's shirts so she divorces the husband, she's tried of that, she goes into a monastery to find a little peace of mind. Then what do they ask her to do? [laughter]. They ask her to do some ironing. This isn't planned. We don't look at someone and say I wonder what will really get at them. It just naturally happens. It's how what we often call

the cleansing of karma works. Our part is to put our mind in gear, we try to be mindful and non-reactive, and we endeavor to open to whatever is requested or happens. I used to make the work assignments for the guests. The main thing we have to know is whether folks have a good back or not. That's the usual dividing line. And beyond that, then we just look at the name and think, "Well, I think I'll put them in the garden. Oh, I think I'll put them in the kitchen." So it's not some intentional thing going on, rather it just naturally unfolds. It's the universal law of karma working itself out.

Then along with dislike comes its companion, we also find 'like'. We want to do this or that, we don't want to meditate as much, and we'd rather go collect fire wood. We'd rather not work in the kitchen, we'd rather not do x, y, or z. We'd rather do something more peaceful. This is what our mind does. Observe it. It likes things and it dislikes things. And if we start listening to our mind we find a lot of that going on. It's not a bad thing. That's the norm. We're not trying to stop thought. We're not trying to stop our minds.

The Buddha taught that when we truly look we find this world, with its likes and dislikes, with our likes and dislikes, to be impermanent, to be dissatisfactory. What makes us happy at one moment, the next moment—"Well, I don't think so, let's do something else." We often call this state, the human realm, the 'ocean of samsara'. 'Samsara' is another Buddhist word, which means the endless round of birth-and-death. And, Avalokiteshwara, as depicted here in our shrine, is often depicted rising above the water. That

is the ocean of samsara, the sea of suffering that she's responding to. In the monastery we're reminded of this teaching in all sorts of little different ways. For monks, one of the ways we illustrate it is with the clip on our Kesa, or meditation robe. If you look at it carefully, it is a hook. That's Avalokiteshwara's hook with which she's rescuing us out of the sea of samsara. The ring is our life buoy. It's where she catches us, where we hang on. And she pulls us out of the sea. You may see this illustrated in other places, but for monks we're reminded of this every time we put on our kesa. We remember, "Oh, yes, pulled out of the sea. Thank you." And for those of you who don't wear a formal kesa, you can bring that thought to mind every time you see a monk wearing a kesa. It can be very helpful.

Compassion is woven into all aspects of our practice. We've talked about the mind. We're trying to talk about not judging the mind. Let things arise, let things pass, just listen, observe. The Abbess here, Rev. Master Meian, likes to say our practice is simple but not easy. I don't know whether that was original with her or not, but her teaching on that is the first time I heard it. I repeat it a lot, so I try to give her credit. Our practice is simple in that the instructions are very simple. There is no esoteric knowledge. If we look at your retreat schedule, I imagine you recited Dōgen's *Rules for Meditation*. Right there in 15 minutes you've got everything, the whole of the practice. The difficulty is keeping it up. Establishing a regular meditation practice and keeping at it day in and day out, month after month, year after year. It can be boring; it can be unexciting; it can be just plain hard. And people are

different, so the experience can be different. Sometimes when we first start to meditate we're zealous, we're very eager to do it, we're as regular as clockwork. It's making us feel very good and it changes our lives and it's wonderful. And it is. But sooner or later we hit a dry spell. Things don't feel so wonderful. It's then hard to keep our mind attentive and enthusiasm bright.

This is one place where compassion comes into play in a slightly different way. Compassion is not sentimentality, it's not emotion. It is a quality we can actually cultivate. It's a great strength of mind and spirit. It's sometimes compared to the love of parents for their offspring. We're going to feed the child every day, two or three times. When it's a baby, it's six times. We keep doing it. We don't skip a feeding just because we don't feel like it. In the same way we keep coming back to meditation no matter what has happened, no matter how we feel, because we have this compassion. The compassion is, in this sense, compassion for the world, compassion for ourselves. We don't give up. It's non-emotional compassion; it keeps going. We keep going.

As we've talked, you learned this weekend about working meditation and how it is interwoven into our daily lives. And then we also have the Precepts, the third main part of our practice. What part do they play in this? How do they work into great compassion?

The Buddha gave different sets of precepts to different people because people were different. He also gave different sets at different times. They all point to the same thing; they all get us to the same place. Our particular set is

called the Bodhisattva Precepts. They are Precepts that are practiced by people who are trying to keep equal emphasis on compassion for other people and on the effort to realize the end of our own suffering. We want to live in such a way that there is more to our practice than simply “I want to get rid of my suffering.” The Precepts show us what that compassion looks like in daily life. You can work most of this out for yourself, but here’s an example: Do not kill. That’s a very short, telegraphic, Japanese way of saying it: “Do not kill.” The original way the precepts were worded was: “I undertake the rule of training in order to teach myself not to kill.” It’s a process, an ongoing activity.

Then there is usually a positive aspect that goes along with that short “do not kill.” Well, we’re not killing, and we’re not doing because we want to respect all life. It’s not just about not doing something. There is an active part that goes along with that refraining. We express this compassionate outlook in different ways and cultivate various positive qualities, such as the Four Wisdoms—charity, tenderness, benevolence, empathy.

The Precepts also provide a good check when we’re considering a particular action, when we wonder what is the good thing to do, the compassionate thing to do. The Precepts are useful to check out our intentions. We can ‘run’ a given action through the Precepts: Am I killing? Am I stealing? Am I indulging anger? If we don’t have the stillness of meditation, this process is very hard to achieve, or allow to happen. It’s usually the stillness of meditation that help us stop and look. We don’t just run headlong into a decision. Something says, “Stop and think, okay, is this

really good to do?” Through continued practice something, which is not ‘a thing’, grows in our mind. That is great compassion—great compassion that’s interwoven with the Precepts.

We’re running out of time, but I wanted to mention a few other things about Avalokiteshwara and what we aspire to in practice. We call this quality ‘great’ compassion because the compassion is for other people as well as for ourselves. It’s even expressed as “for the benefit of all beings.” That’s a pretty tall order. But we start with where we are. When we see how we can help others, we do. Avalokiteshwara’s vow also includes appearing in whatever way is most helpful to people. We don’t insist on our way. We don’t insist on our own take on things. Avalokiteshwara can take any form if it would be helpful for the individual involved. That shows us that we can be flexible. We don’t have to be stuck with one idea of what compassion is, or how to act in every circumstance. Circumstances change; can we be flexible, can our compassion be something that is alive, that is bright, that is loving, that isn’t caught up in black and white thinking?

Another part of Avalokiteshwara’s vow, or commitment, is to appear in any circumstance that suffering beings find themselves in. That is part of what’s talked about in the Scripture this morning. There is a list of various situations where if we reflect on Kanzeon, she will help. One thing that can be helpful to remember is something I didn’t learn until I had been a monk for many years—that because most of our Buddhist scriptures come out of India, they reflect Indian spirituality which has a

particular way of looking at things. There is both a concrete and a figurative meaning to what is going on.

Rev. Master Hubert, our translator here, has talked in depth with the monks here about this feature in relation to another scripture we do, the *Shurangama Litany* (it's part of the *Shurangama Sutra* mentioned above). To help us Westerners who might not cotton on to the figurative meaning of events or people or beings, in translating such things he spelled out the figurative meaning. So, the *Litany* talks about wanting to be “free from storms” (literal) and “whatever else that may thunder down upon me” (figurative)—whatever else we feel that is upsetting and blowing us over.

In the *Avalokiteshwara Scripture*, we hear all these situations described. We want to develop the mind that sees the figurative possibility as well as the actual. We don't want to deny the possibility that if we're in jail someone might come and give us the key and let us out. It could happen. We want to keep our mind open to that. But it may be that she just helps us accept the fact of being imprisoned and make good use of it in our training. Or even if we are not physically in prison, we just feel imprisoned by our thoughts, by our feelings, or what other people are doing. There's always that figurative meaning that runs through our scriptures so that we don't get caught in expecting an external deity to come and save us, to expect something to work outside the law of karma. We simply ask for help. We focus on compassion and accept whatever way she comes, whatever answer she gives. It may not be the answer we want to hear, or in the time-frame we would like things to

happen.

Sometimes she leaves it up to us. We just make the best decision we can. We don't want to pull this down into the trivial. An example might be, "What kind of toothpaste should I buy?" Kanzeon (the universe!) expects us to use our own good sense. Look at the ingredients in the toothpaste, how much it costs, is it a good deal, are there any significant karmic consequences, and so forth.

So when we ask for help, it can sometimes seem that we don't get an answer. I can remember growing up in a household in which my father was a Protestant minister. We had to go to church every Sunday—and sometimes several times at that. I don't remember anything he said from his sermons from the pulpit all those years [laughter] except for one thing. One thing stuck that I've found really helpful. He said, "God answers prayers in three ways: 'yes', 'no', and 'wait.' Sometimes we just have to be patient. Rev. Master Jiyu in talking about this would give only two ways: 'yes' and 'no' or expand it into, "No's just as good an answer as 'yes.'" But I like extending it a little more and giving ourselves the third option, 'Wait.' Patience.

The other final thing about great compassion is that it's not something we manufacture. It's not something we're trying to put into ourselves; it's not something we're praying to outside of ourselves; and it's both inside and outside of ourselves. One Buddhist writer described it as "the Beyond that is Within." And It is not ours as an individual possession. It flows through all things, and meditation opens us up to that. Rev. Master Jiyu used to

say, or some variation of, “I am not Great Compassion, and there is nothing in me that is not of Great Compassion.” When someone announces that they are Avalokiteshwara/Kanzeon, or Buddha, we begin to worry. It’s the same as someone believing they’re Jesus or Mohammed. We usually consider them mentally ill and in need of medical attention. The attitude we want to develop is, “I’m going to allow Kanzeon to work through me.” The compassion isn’t something that we create and that exists as a separate thing apart from everything else. Our attitude and intent should point toward selflessness, or unselfishness. We don’t want the self in the way, we try to relinquish the self-centered universe for a moment and allow compassion to flow through us.

Sometimes Avalokiteshwara is depicted with a thousand arms, a thousand hands, and an eye in each hand, to show how boundless is her sight and all the many different ways she can respond to circumstances. But usually there is always one pair of hands in *gasshō* or in the meditation *mudra* (hand position). This doesn’t show up in the Avalokiteshwara Shrine painting, but you are likely to see it elsewhere from time to time. Often she will hold a variety of items such as a Dharma Wheel, the Sword of Buddha’s Wisdom, the Conch as the Voice of the Eternal, etc. She has all these different ways to help people, and conversely, we’re the ones who provide her with hands and eyes. She’s that compassion within us, that flows through us, that we can learn to sense through meditation. No matter what idea we have of what would be good to do, we try to listen to our meditation and hear both the world’s

sounds and Compassion's response within us. We put our minds in meditation and reflect: Is this truly good to do? Is it the compassionate thing to do? This is a practice, and we learn from experience. Remember that she always has one pair of hands in meditation or *gasshō*—stillness and brightness.

There are many different things we can learn about compassion, much that's written, much that's described. This talk is only a little overview to try to show how great compassion is, and how it pervades all aspects of our practice: when we sit in meditation, when we express it through the precepts, and when we demonstrate it in daily life through 'every-minute meditation'. It's the vitally important non-judgmental attitude of mind we bring to seated meditation itself. We want to have a compassionate mind when we sit. I don't believe you can do this practice if you don't have compassion for yourself. I think it's too hard. And then that compassion flows through the Precepts, through all of life, through everything. All that we do, say, or even think can be part of 'wonderful practice'.

I'll end with a story of how great compassion appeared to me. I was here as a lay person, I lived two thousand miles away. I'd been here for a week or two, at a retreat. It was the last day of the retreat. I had to go back into a really difficult situation and I was a bit depressed about having to leave. Sometimes when you get here you don't want to leave. It's so helpful and can be so good. So I was sitting on the wall out there by the fountain and preoccupied with my thoughts. At that time the monastery or one of the monks had this lovely dog. I think she was a 'Lassie' dog, a collie.

She had this preoccupation with chasing pine cones, particularly those great big ones, those from the sugar pine trees. She would chase them endlessly for some reason. I was sitting there preoccupied. Here she comes and she brings me a pine cone, sets it down at my feet. I say, “Oh, I don’t want to do that right now, I’m busy. Go away, come back later.”

As was her style, she kept insisting, so I say, “Okay I’ll throw it once.” So I did. She goes to get it and brings it back [laughter] for another throw, and then another, and another. Pretty soon she had managed to get my mind off myself. I really felt that through that nutty dog Kanzeon had responded to my need. In such a simple way she showed me another perspective.

Compassion can appear in any form, in a dog, in another animal, in a person, perhaps even in a tree. The universe is constantly trying to help us, using all means and forms. Great Compassion can appear in any circumstance, whether it’s mundane or disastrous. We’re never apart from It, and it’s the meditation that opens us up to that. It opens us up to that realization—this is how it truly is. It’s wonderful to think about it, but we have to do more than think about it, we have to do the practice.

If this talk sparks any interest, I encourage you to read what Avalokiteshwara said to Sudhana. She starts off by saying, “The practice I did was undertaking great compassion without delay.” In less flowery language, she might say, “Don’t waste any more time. Get on with it. This is important. There are a lot of people who need help. We’ve each got a pretty big pile of karma we’ve got to

work through, so don't delay. Think about it. Undertake it. Do it." And then in the Scripture she talks about all the ways that she accomplishes that aim. I hope what I've expressed here today shows some of those ways, too.

Thank you all very much for the opportunity to be here and talk with you.

AVATAMSAKA SUTRA, Volume Three

Then Sudhana went up to Avalokiteshvara, paid his respects, and said, "Noble one, I have set my mind on supreme enlightenment, but I do not know how to learn and carry out the practice of enlightening beings [bodhisattvas]. I hear you give enlightening beings instruction, and I ask you to tell me how to learn and carry out the practice of enlightening beings."

Avalokiteshvara said, "It is good that you aspire to supreme perfect enlightenment. I know a way of enlightening practice called 'undertaking great compassion without delay,' which sets about impartially guiding all sentient beings to perfection, dedicated to protecting and guiding sentient beings by communicating knowledge to them through all media [all means—written and verbal, for example]. Established in this method of enlightening practice 'undertaking great compassion without delay', I appear in the midst of the activities of all sentient beings without leaving the presence of all buddhas, and take care of them by means of generosity, kind speech, beneficial actions, and cooperation [the Four Wisdoms mentioned by Great Master Dōgen in Shushogi]. I also develop sentient

beings by appearing in various forms: I gladden and develop them by purity of vision of inconceivable forms radiating auras of light, and I take care of them and develop them by speaking to them according to their mentalities, and by showing conduct according to their inclinations, and by magically [sic] producing various forms, and by teaching them doctrines commensurate with their various interests, and by inspiring them to begin to accumulate good qualities, by showing them projections according to their mentalities, by appearing to them as members of their own various races and conditions, and by living together with them.

“Perfecting this practice of unhesitating compassion, I have vowed to be a refuge for all sentient beings, to free them from fears of calamity, threat, confusion, bondage, attacks on their lives, insufficiency of means to support life, inability to make a living, ill repute, the perils of life, intimidation by the crowd, death, miserable conditions, unknown hardships, servitude, separation from loved ones, living with the uncongenial, physical violence, mental violence, sorrow, and depression. I have undertaken a vow to be a refuge for all beings from all these fears and perils. I have also caused a way of remembrance to appear in all worlds, to extinguish the fears of all beings; I have caused my name to be known in all worlds to drive away the fears of all beings. I have caused the tranquility of all beings, in endless forms, to appear in my body, to communicate to all beings individually according to the time. By this means I release beings from all fears, inspire them to seek supreme enlightenment, and cause them never to regress in the

attainment of the qualities of buddhas.

“I have only attained this way of enlightening practice through unhesitating great compassion. How can I know the practice or tell of the virtues of the universally good enlightening beings, who have perfected the vows of all enlightened ones, who have gone the way of the practice of the universally good enlightening being, who are uninterrupted streams of performance of good works, who are always focused on the perception of the concentrations of enlightening beings, who continue their practice without deviation or regression through all ages, who continuously adapt to the times everywhere, who are familiar with the changing currents in all worlds, who continuously work to extinguish all sentient beings’ bad thoughts and to increase their good thoughts, who continuously work to turn all sentient beings away from the repetitious circles of the mundane whirl?”

NEWS OF THE ORDER

The Americas

Shasta Abbey

—Mt. Shasta, California – USA —

Ordination and Anniversary: On Dec. 14, 2013, Rev. Master Meian ordained a new monastic disciple, Alex Platt of Salt Lake City, Utah, giving him the religious name of Houn Trahearn which means “the Iron man within the Dharma Cloud.”



Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett wrote in *The Wild White Goose* of her meditation under difficult conditions: "I just sat

there still, magnificent as a rock, as if an iron being, an iron man" We were happy to welcome Rev. Trahearn's parents and other family and friends who spent the weekend with us and participated in the monastic schedule. We are delighted to welcome Rev. Trahearn as a member of the Abbey community and wish him well as his monastic training unfolds.

We recently marked the 40th anniversary of the ordination of Rev. Master Daishin Yalon, which took place on February 10, 1974. We enjoyed a donated pizza lunch and a celebratory tea. Congratulations to Rev. Master Daishin for his lasting commitment to monastic practice and for the example of his strong and steady practice in the everyday life of our community.

Head Novice: Rev. Valora Midtdal entered the Meditation Hall as Head Novice at the start of the Spring Training Term on February 1. The Head Novice term is a time of stepping forward to lead all trainees with wisdom, enthusiasm, and kindness. Rev. Dilys Cromack will serve as Head Novice's Assistant. We extend our gratitude and best wishes to Revs. Valora and Dilys as they take these next steps in their training.

Conservation of Resources: In January, Governor Brown declared a drought emergency for California. Although we in the north are faring better than the southern part of the state, it's obvious that this fall and winter have been particularly dry. Mt. Shasta itself has been almost bare of snow until recent days, and our winter has featured persistent sunshine. These conditions moved us to begin discussions within the monastic community and with the local lay sangha for the purpose of bringing climate change and conservation of resources into greater awareness. We have discussed possible ways of bringing aspects of our teachings and practice to bear on the issue of conserving water and other precious resources and have invited suggestions, some of which have already been put into practice. We continue to welcome suggestions.

Our thanks go out to members of the lay sangha who have been carrying many carloads of materials to their local recycling facilities.

Memorial Ceremonies: Rev. Master Jisho Perry was the celebrant for a memorial for Thelma Halkas Jones, stepmother of Jay Fulcher (the former Rev. Alden), who died on December 14, 2013; also for a memorial for Harold Hartel, father of Diana Hartel. Diana and her mother stayed on for tea and shared memories of Harold's life.

On January 11, Rev. Master Daishin Yalon was the celebrant for the funeral of Nikita, feline companion of lay minister Laurie Ottens. Although Nikita had reached a venerable age and had been in failing health, the loss of a dear human or animal friend brings sadness, and we extend our sympathy to Laurie and all others affected by the loss of friends and family.

Extern Sacristy Projects: One of our ongoing efforts to reduce the use of fossil fuels for heating has been the installation of solar panels. On December 27, the new Guest Office passed inspection.



The construction of this building was motivated by the wish to add more solar panels to the Vimalakirti Hall (Guest House). Adding panels to that roof proved unrealistic due to code requirements, so we decided to build this new structure not only to accommodate the solar panels, but also to free up two additional guest rooms by providing a new space for the offices. The Guest Office monks moved into the new quarters on December 31st and used the month of January to settle in and get the improved computer system up and running.

Late November during damp, chilly weather, the Extern Sacristans spent several days improving the surface of some sections of cloister walkway to make it as safe as possible. This meant first cutting sections of the existing sidewalk, removing each section with a jackhammer, hauling the heavy chunks of concrete away (to be used in future projects), building frames and pouring new concrete.

Travel: Rev. Veronica Snedaker, the monastic disciple of Rev. Master Jisho Perry, departed early in January to spend four months visiting temples of the Order in Europe and the U.K. including Great Ocean Dharma Refuge in Wales, Dharmazuflucht Schwarzwald in Germany, and Throssel Hole Abbey in England. Such monastic visits promote harmony in the sangha by enriching communication and understanding among various temples and their resident monks. We will be happy to welcome Rev. Veronica home in early April.

—Rev. Margaret

Lions Gate Buddhist Priory

— Lytton, British Columbia – Canada —

On the night of January 31, Rev. Valeria received Transmission from Rev. Master Kōten at Prajnatara Hall. We congratulate Rev. Valeria on taking this important next step in her monastic training, and we wish her continued success.

The new room for Rev. Master Kōten attached to Bodhidharma Hall is completed and he has moved in. The room is spacious, airy and bright. Thank you to everyone who helped out on this project, by donating their time, skills, money and labour to complete it. The room offers the Prior much needed privacy as well as the opportunity to host guests and the community for visits.

In mid-November we welcomed Michele, Christine and her son Max, who visited from Vancouver for a couple of days. It was delightful to see them, and they very generously treated everyone to a delicious feast at a local restaurant. They were able to attend the funeral ceremony held on Saturday, November 23 for Chris and Terry Hurst's dog Max. Terry's parents, David and Michiko, and several of their friends from the nearby community of Lillooet were also present.

During the first week of December, we held our annual Winter Monastic Retreat celebrating the Buddha's Enlightenment. We all managed to stay warm during an unusually cold week. The four resident monks were joined by Lama Tsewang and Rev. Sukha, monks in the Tibetan Tradition. It was an excellent opportunity for all of us to deepen our training, and we appreciated the opportunity to do so.

The retreat was followed with the Festival of the Buddha's Enlightenment on Sunday, Dec. 8. We were happy to have local lay people join us. Also on that day we celebrated the Transmission Anniversaries of Rev. Master Kōten and Rev. Brian.

The monastic community was honoured to attend Christmas Eve service at St. Barnabas Anglican Church Hall in Lytton. During the ceremony, Rev. Master Kōten presented a hand-carved statue of the Virgin Mary with the Christ Child to the Church of St. Mary and St. Paul on the Lytton First Nation Reserve. Rev. Master had bought the statue when he was visiting Edmonton. It is a unique image made from yellow pine. John

Haugen received the statue on behalf of the congregation. The church recently had all its items stolen – altar cloths, tapestries, icons, and organ. We are very grateful and honoured to be invited by Rev. Danny Whitehead and the congregations of Lytton to be present at this ceremony.

We had a chimney fire in Bodhidharma Hall just before the New Year. By the time we discovered it, flames were spreading along the loft ceiling. There were four monks present, and we managed to keep calm and work together to contain the fire. We have received sound advice from a neighbour on how to make the chimney safer. For the remainder of the winter we are using the back-up stove in the main living area. We are fortunate and very grateful that damage was minimal and no one was hurt.

On New Year's Eve we held a meditation vigil followed by the New Year's Ceremony, during which Rev. Master rotated the Scripture of Great Wisdom. We toasted with sparkling apple juice and afterward enjoyed festive snacks, rang the temple bell, and blew the conch in the Four Directions, in gratitude for the past year of training and to welcome the new one.

The Annual World Religions Day was held in town on Sunday afternoon, January 19, and the monastic community attended this event. Christian, Baha'i, First Nations and Buddhist Traditions were celebrated by people in their prayers, chanting and drumming. A potluck dinner was shared, and Rev. Master Kōten was invited to recite the Five Thoughts prior to eating.

We welcomed a visitor from Vancouver, Lucian, who came to train with us for a week in mid-January. We don't get many people coming to stay during the winter, and it is always a lift to our spirits when someone comes.

— *Rev. Master Aurelian*

Pine Mountain Buddhist Temple

—*Ventura County, California – USA*—

An opportunity to go to India on a pilgrimage to the holy sites was made by the Vietnamese Sangha, a branch of which is in Ventura, the nearest city to Pine Mountain Temple. The trip was led by Ven. Thich Thong Hai, whose home temple is in Hawaii. It seemed like a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to Rev. Master Phoebe and myself, and never having been to Asia in my life, I jumped at the chance to do so. Several people made donations to the temple's travel fund, including the OBC, to defray the cost of the trip, and the full amount was received; by doing so, the donors share in the merit of the trip.

The Four Holy Sites, which the Buddha himself recommended as destination points for Buddhist devotees after his death, are Lumbini, his birthplace (which is in present day Nepal); Bodh Gaya, where he was enlightened (in the state of Bihar, India); the Deer Park in Sarnath, outside of Varanasi, where he gave his first sermon, turning the Wheel of the Dharma; and Kushinagar, the location where he died at the age of 80, which is also in India. Varanasi and Kushinagar are in the state of Uttar Pradesh.

We initially landed in Delhi and then flew to the ancient city of Varanasi, also known as Benares, on the Ganges River. Outside of Varanasi is the town of Sarnath, where the Deer Park is located; this was the first of the holy sites that we visited.



A very ancient stupa marks the spot where the Buddha set the Wheel of the Dharma in motion. It is surrounded by scaffolding, towards what purpose I never heard. We circumambulated the stupa and held a chanting ceremony. There was to me a very serene atmosphere at the Deer Park, surrounded as it is by an urban area, which in India is always dense with people, buildings crowded together, stray animals, and street traffic which at first seemed impossibly chaotic to me, a Westerner used to the orderly flow of traffic on an American road or highway.

From Varanasi we traveled by bus north first to Sravasti and the next day into Nepal to Lumbini. In the 1980s, a temple-like structure was built over the actual excavation site of the original garden where Queen Mahamaya gave birth to Siddhartha.



Outside the birth site temple there is a pool of recent construction, around which we sat in meditation, a large Bodhi Tree—undoubtedly a descendant of the original tree—and a modern pillar representing the one erected by King Ashoka a few hundred years after the life of the Buddha, in front of which we chanted scriptures. We made a day trip to Kapilavastu, which is an hour or two distant from Lumbini, and then traveled back into India to Rajgir, the site of the Buddha’s death.

There are extensive ruins in Kushinagar, both temples and stupas. A modern Parinirvana temple and stupa have been built, which are now the main focus of activity there. As it was early November, not too long after the end of the rainy season in India, vassa—the monastic rains retreat—had ended, and lay Buddhists were making offerings of cloth to the monastic Sangha.

So we performed a kattina ceremony as well, offering a bolt of gold fabric to the Buddha statue in the Parinirvana temple. The Buddha is of course lying down in the Parinirvana position, making it possible to drape long pieces of fabric over it.



The chanting was in Vietnamese, but at all of the places we visited, I was asked to chant in English as part of the ceremonial. So I typically chanted The Scripture of Great Wisdom and, in this case, the *Adoration of the Buddha's Relics*; there were Theravada monks chanting at the same time as me, so I harmonized my voice with their chanting note—I thought it was very beautiful. A short distance from the Parinirvana temple is the site where the Buddha was cremated and his ashes gathered up and distributed. There is an ancient stupa there where we did more chanting.

From Kushinagar, we continued on into the Indian state of Bihar to Bodh Gaya. After managing a few hours of sleep, we walked from our hotel into the Mahabodhi Stupa complex, which has the Bodhi Tree on one side of it. That it was so close to our hotel was a real boon, because it meant that I could walk there several times on my own to meditate at the Bodhi Tree. We had a chanting service and circumambulated the Stupa, which has a shrine in the interior of it with a largish Buddha statue seated there. I spent quite a bit of time on the north side of the Stupa, which is “The Cloister Walk”, i.e. the place where Shakyamuni Buddha did walking meditation for a week following his enlightenment. There was a narrow aisle between the two where I was able to do walking meditation and not get in anyone's way; there are always a lot of people at the Mahabodhi Stupa and the Bodhi Tree, and I noticed some people circumambulating the stupa continuously for periods of time.

To the south of the stupa there is a manmade pond containing a statue of the serpent Muktalinda, who is said to have shielded the Buddha from the sun. On the west side is the Bodhi Tree, where groups of people would hold various activities, usually chanting or Dharma talks. Set further back are dozens of stupas, any one of which would be fairly impressive on their own, and some largish platforms where monks would hold services every morning. On the north side, where there is another Bodhi Tree and many stupas, there was what appeared to

be an encampment of Tibetan monks. Around this whole complex is a raised walkway, making it possible to circumambulate everything in the complex of perhaps five acres.

There is a very high level of energy around the Mahabodhi Stupa and the Bodhi Tree, which is almost palpable. Being the most important location and shrine in the entire Buddhist world, it is the focus of constant devotion and spiritual practices. Being able to sit under the Bodhi Tree and do walking meditation on the ground where the Buddha did so many centuries ago was an experience I will treasure the rest of my life.

There are definitely challenges attendant to traveling in India. In some ways, I felt at home in India generally, but especially at the holy sites of Buddhism. They are very powerful places to visit, very inspiring, and definitely worth the rigors of the journey. To physically be at these places where important events in the life of the Buddha took place has a powerful and profound impact, which, having been back just over a month at this point, I am still pondering.

—*Rev. Master Seikai*

Portland Buddhist Priory

—*Portland, Oregon – USA*—

Winter has come to Portland quite late this year. February, which is usually our gradual warm up period, with buds and a few blossoming flowers showing their faces, found us covered with snow and ice for about five days a week or so into the month (see photo).



It came at the time Ambrose Schofield was moving to the priory to live as a lay person. In his own words:

“I left Crescent City, California on February 7th intending to travel half way to Portland, Oregon by the 8th. In reaching Roseburg, due to the snow and ice storms hitting the Portland area over the weekend, I had to stay two extra nights in a hotel waiting for the ice storms to pass. On Monday, February 10th I was finally able to make my journey north and reach the priory without risking the icy streets and dangerous snow conditions. On my arrival, there were priory sangha waiting to help me unload the 14 ft U Haul truck which contained all my belongings.”

After returning the empty truck in the late afternoon, we were finally able to sit down, take our meal of hot soup, salad and bread together and have the opportunity to welcome and greet Ambrose properly and he was able to express his gratitude to all for the assistance received. We at the priory wholeheartedly welcome Ambrose and wish him well in Portland and in training with this sangha.

In early November, two lay ministers from California, Pam Johnson and Andrea Spark, made a trip to Portland to visit

with Rev. Master Meikō and take some time for rest and retreat on the Oregon coast in Gearhart. All had a restful and beneficial time with an opportunity to meet and have a meal with Catherine Martin. Later in the month, having celebrated our Thanksgiving ceremony the Sunday before, the Priory had an open house on the official Thanksgiving day with a number of lay sangha stopping by to say hello and have a bite to eat.

In December on the 25th we once again had Open House. This time we had pizza available, and the presence of a few children who accompanied a number of us on a short walk to a local park. In mid-December Rev. Master Meikō offered a House Purifying ceremony for Allison Coe and her family. Family members assisted Rev. Master Meikō with making this offering which was well received by all who live with Allison.

On New Years Eve, a few of us gathered to celebrate the end of another year and welcome the New Year that was approaching. We watched a holiday film followed by meditation and the New Years Eve ceremony. As we rang the Big Bell to make our New Years wish at the end of the ceremony, fireworks were set off in the neighborhood where the priory is located, adding bright, beautiful colors to the scene as we each made our New Year wishes for training in the coming year.

The priory continued to be open as the New Year unfolded, for the first two weeks in January. During that time, with the assistance of a handyman, Rev. Master Meikō was able to repaint and lay new carpeting in the back room on the ground floor. For the rest of the month the Priory was closed with Rev. Master Meikō taking some rest time out on the Oregon Coast. Now into February, this New Year is bringing many changes to the Priory with Ambrose Schofield coming to train and assist here. Also, Doshin the dog and Mr. B the cat are aging with various weaknesses appearing, and doing so with great dignity. It is an honor to witness, and a good reminder of how quickly time passes and the importance of staying fully aware and present in

each moment, interacting wholeheartedly with whatever appears before us. These changes and the fluidity of life are the opportunity to train with Serene Reflection Meditation and making it a living experience.

— Rev. Master Meikō

Vancouver Island Zen Sangha

— Victoria, British Columbia – Canada —

This is being written in mid-February as signs of spring show themselves. The camellia plant right by the front porch here has been blooming and now many little buds are popping up. We are looking forward to a visit by Reverend Master Meidō in a couple of weeks for some renewal. She has visited before from her flourishing temple in Wallowa Valley and offered her teachings to the Sangha here. We were junior monks together in the early 80s and formed a lasting friendship, so it wonderful when we have the opportunity to be together.

This month we finally have made available through our website www.vizs.org both books of reflections: *Reflections on the Path* and *Reminders on the Way*, which are also available as E-books. We still have printed copies of *Reminders on the Way* available by donation, and the information for ordering a copy is on our website.

We have started selecting reflections for a third book, *Returning to Stillness*, and anticipate its completion sometime this fall. These writings have been an important part of my own training over many years, and it is wonderful that they have been so well received by others. Sharing in the Dharma—the Dharma Treasure—melts right into the Sangha Treasure, which fills me with a kind of wonder at how karma unfolds in this life.

In line with this sense of awe is my turning eighty-eight in early April. I feel so privileged to be able to continue to share in

the special way that the teaching has been given to me for more than thirty-five years of commitment to the religious life. It's now been over ten years since I came to Vancouver Island where a group formed shortly after. First in Sidney and now closer into Victoria, we continue to meet two times a week, have periodic potlucks, and periodically a two-hour Dharma-Intensive, in which a basic teaching is presented more systematically than is appropriate for a Dharma talk. Probably in mid-March we'll have the next one on *The Scripture of Great Wisdom*, which is chanted after our morning meditation. It's termed *The Heart Sutra* because it expresses the basic Buddha's teaching of *Anatta*, no separate self, and as the Scripture puts it, we can only comprehend this by *going on beyond the human mind*.

—Rev. Master Meiten

Wallowa Buddhist Temple

— Joseph, Oregon – USA —

This winter has been a quiet one at the Wallowa Buddhist Temple, its five acres of temple grounds gently blanketed with snow. The slowing of activities related to the building of the new guest house has allowed more space and time for inner reflection and the simple work of keeping firewood stacked and snow shovelled. In our ongoing weekly schedule of Sunday retreats and Tuesday evening meditation and Vespers, there has been a deepening of our practice with the local congregation. This is in part because of a number of recent deaths of loved ones within the congregation – two fathers, an uncle, a close friend, a beloved dog – and the death of a dear long-time Sangha member, Linda Lucas-Schatz, whose individual retreats at the temple over the years were such a joy to share.

Since the last journal news, we completed the exterior trim and siding of the new guest house in a warm golden cedar, thanks to lots of helpers who came to oil, cut, and put up the

many long rabbeted bevel boards. Then, the insulation was blown into the ceiling and walls, and laid by hand beneath the floor. It is becoming a lovely little structure, finely wrought, and we are all truly blessed to have a facility made with so much thoughtfulness and care. The next step will be the drywall installation, when weather conditions are a bit more favorable. Once the sheetrock has been installed, and additional funds for the project are raised, we can begin the interior finish work. We look forward to being able to offer accommodations especially designed to facilitate individual spiritual retreats in the near future and for many years to come.

It is one of the temple's main purposes to offer a place where both congregation and monks of our wider Sangha can come for individual retreats in the Serene Reflection Meditation tradition. Those interested in arranging such a retreat are welcome to call or write for more information. Please visit our website, www.wallowabuddhisttemple.org. We also offer private spiritual counseling and a variety of ceremonial functions (such as weddings, memorials, naming ceremonies). If you are visiting the area, we would be glad to offer a tour of the temple grounds and buildings, as well as meditation instruction for those who are new to the practice. Please phone ahead to arrange a time, at 541-432-6129.

—*Rev. Master Meidō and Rev. Clairissa*

Europe

Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey

—Northumberland, England – UK —

Monastic news: The New Year brought changes in the monastic community; on 3rd January Rev. Jishin left Throssel to become Acting Prior at Reading. The community gathered to wish her well as she set off for the long drive south. She has begun a three months settling in time at the Priory to see if this is a good step for all, and we wish her well with this. Two days later Rev. Alina returned from Reading after her three years as Prior there and was welcomed back into the community during the January Winter Sangha retreat.

On 25th February Rev. Alicia left the community to move to premises she has found in Wirksworth, Derbyshire for the new charity she has started, the *Field of Merit*. She gives details in her news post *Field Of Merit* above. She will be much missed after nearly 23 years with us. Apart from a year at Reading Priory she has worked in the kitchen, was Journal editor, Prior, Sacristan and was Bursar for a good period of time. We wish her all the best in taking her next step.

Visiting monks: Rev. Master Haryo arrived on February 12th for a seven month stay with us. It is a delight to welcome him back and to have him with us again.

Rev. Caitlin left on 19th December after her few weeks stay with us. We enjoyed her presence and appreciated her many offerings and sent our best wishes back with her to Great Ocean Dharma Refuge.

Hexham Quakers visit: Members of the Hexham Quaker group came for an evening visit on 17th December. They joined

us for a period of meditation and afterwards we enjoyed having tea together and the chance for a discussion.

Retreats and Festivals: We had a very good attendance at both our annual Buddha's Enlightenment Retreat and Festival and the New Year Retreat. A talk given by Rev. Master Leandra on the teaching of the revolving of the *Scripture of Great Wisdom* at the New Year ceremony is available on the Throssel website: <http://www.throssel.org.uk/revolvingscriptures>

January Winter Sangha Retreat; We all appreciated our month-long retreat at the start of the year, a rare time when the monastery has a very light schedule, allowing the community the opportunity to turn within each in their own way. This quiet time was helped by milder weather and the unusual absence of snow which meant no shovelling was needed. Snow-shovelling had become a regular feature of the Winter Sangha Retreat in the past few years. We were joined by a small group of lay Sangha who supported us through helping in the kitchen. This month also provides a unique training opportunity for them and they organised themselves and worked together in quiet and harmonious practice time of their own, as well as treating us to some delicious breads and dishes. Thank you to all who gave of their time to be with us.

Rev. Mildred's 10th anniversary memorial: On 22nd January, we held a memorial ceremony for Rev. Mildred, on the 10th anniversary of her death. It was a moving and beautiful service, and there was an informal gathering afterwards, so we could share memories of her life with us. Four of the newer members of the community had never met her and were able to listen to the many stories we all had of our time with her. It was a poignant occasion of affection, respect and acceptance of loss; for a monk who was committed in her practice and gave much to others in the community and the wider Sangha.



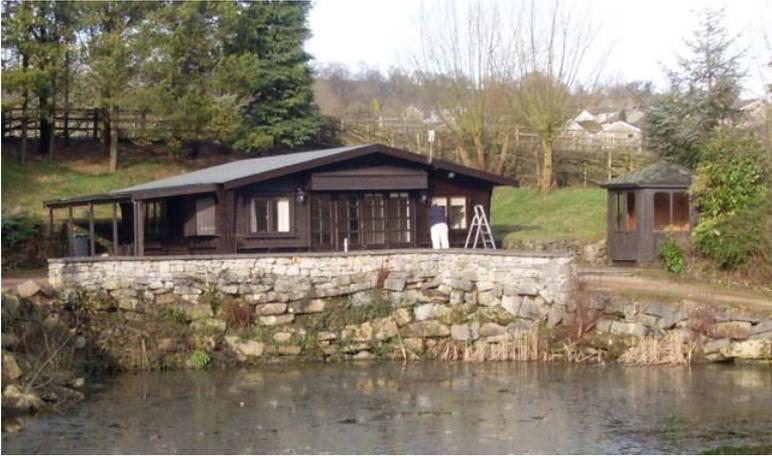
The Memorial service for Rev. Mildred

— *Rev. Alina*

Field of Merit

—*Wirksworth, Derbyshire—UK—*

In January my property researching on the Internet turned up a very suitable-looking property in Wirksworth, Derbyshire and Rev. Master Mugō and I travelled down to view it. We were pleasantly surprised to find that it looked just as good, if not better, than we were expecting. I have arranged to rent it, moving in on the 25th February.



As you can see, it is a wooden chalet complete with small lake as part of the property. The lake is maintained by the owner, and I imagine it will attract much wildlife, though there was none evident in January, understandably. There is a large, light, open-plan lounge/diner/kitchen, two bedrooms, bathroom and utility room. There is also a summerhouse that will make a delightful meditation shrine next to the lake. And I will be able to park a caravan that will serve as accommodation for lay trainees wishing to do individual silent retreat, which is the primary offering of this project.

Wirksworth is a market town in the Derbyshire Dales, just outside the Peak District National Park. The property is on the outskirts of town, with open fields behind it. Wirksworth is well served by public transport and is also easily reached by car.

The temple will be known by the name *Sitting Buddha Hermitage*, and Field of Merit will remain the name of the underlying registered charity.

For more news and information please do look at the website www.fieldofmerit.org where I have also posted a list of items that the new temple could use.

—Rev. Alicia

Great Ocean Dharma Refuge

—Pembrokeshire, Wales —UK—

At Great Ocean Dharma Refuge we welcomed both lay and monastic residential guests during the Rains Retreat month of January. Reverend Master Mokugen was celebrant for a vibrant and peaceful New Year's Ceremony, having also given a wonderful Dharma talk on following the Buddha Heart early on New Year's eve. Looking forward on New Year's Day, we celebrated the Festival of Maitreya Buddha, — 'the Buddha to Come', a time at which we also remembered with gratitude the birthday and life of our Founder, Reverend Master Jiyu. We were pleased to have Reverend Master Willard from Throssel Hole and Reverend Veronica, a disciple of Reverend Master Jisho from Shasta Abbey, with us for part of this retreat month, and are grateful to them both for sharing their training with us.

Reverend Caitlin spent a month training at Throssel Hole towards the end of last year, and was grateful to be able to join in with the December monks' retreat during her stay. We extend our thanks to Reverend Master Leandra and the community there for their supportive welcome.

An unusual resident cared for here over several days in late January, was a pigeon who had been injured by a sparrow hawk. We are grateful to the experts at the Gower Bird Hospital who offered further care for him but sadly were not able to save him. The pigeon's gentle trust and acceptance was deeply touching and on his last day with us he received the animal ordination name 'Beauty of the Dharma Cloud'.

We continue to welcome lay trainees to residential and day retreats, and local Sangha meets here for a half day retreat each Wednesday. You are very welcome to write or phone regarding retreat opportunities.

—*Reverend Caitlin*

Norwich Zen Buddhist Priory

—Norwich, England – UK —

Welcome Day: Our Welcome Day on Sunday 8th December went very well. It was a joy to have not only the local Sangha present but also to welcome some people to the Priory for the first time. The day started with a blessing ceremony for the Priory building, which was given the name The Place of the Flowering Lotus. Afterwards, there was an opportunity for everyone to relax and enjoy each other's company and to sample some of the fine array of cakes which were donated. It was a lovely day, which served to underline that the Priory is now established and getting on with its work.



Some of the Priory Sangha at the Welcome Day, in front of the main altar in the meditation room.

New Year at the Priory: We marked our first New Year at the Priory with two days of meditation and ceremonies. The day retreat on New Year's Eve culminated in the New Year Ceremony that evening, when the *Scripture of Great Wisdom* was revolved in all directions, to express the turning of the Wheel of the Dharma. Later in the ceremony, when everyone

formally drank a glass of juice together, this expression of a shared commitment, a celebration of Sangha, seemed particularly appropriate for us in Norwich at the end of a significant year. Afterwards we enjoyed a social gathering, sharing a homemade Christmas cake. On New Year's Day, we celebrated the Festival of Maitreya, the Buddha Who is to Come, when we negotiated quite well the challenges of singing our first festival litany. Thank you to everyone who came to the Priory over the New Year and made it such a special time.

Charity registration: We were delighted to hear, just before Christmas, that our application to become registered with the Charity Commission had been successful and we had achieved charitable status. Our registered charity number is 1155077. Our becoming a registered charity marks another significant step forward for the Priory. Thank you to the other Trustees (Rev. Master Saidō, Chris Loukes and Chris Yeomans) for their input to this process.

Work Mornings and Cooking Mornings: At a recent steering group meeting, there was discussion about ways that people might be able to help me with the work that needs doing around the Priory (especially as I am limited in what I can manage, due to arthritis in my hands). One suggestion was that working with others was an attractive proposition. So it has been decided to try out Work Mornings, on alternate Thursday mornings, which will be informal opportunities to join in with the various work and cleaning projects around the Priory. Along similar lines, another suggestion made at the meeting was for a Cooking Morning, to share recipes and to help stock the Priory's freezer. More information about these and all events at the Priory can be found on the calendar on our website.

Thank you: Particular thanks go to Julia Clark and Chris Yeomans for looking after the Priory while I was away at Throssel in January and for enabling regular events to continue during that time. Thank you also to Judy and Andrew Moore,

who returned from a holiday in Thailand with a present for the Priory, in the form of a lovely hand-carved Buddha wall-plaque, which has been hung in a prominent place by the stairs.

— *Rev. Leoma Hague*

The Place of Peace Dharma House

—*Aberystwyth, Wales – UK*—

We began 2014 with a peaceful New Year Ceremony and some very wild storms. On January 3rd I was evacuated as it was unknown how high the sea level would rise in Aberystwyth and the temple is not far from the beach. Local congregation generously welcomed me into their home, offering overnight accommodation. Thankfully this was not needed and I was able to return to the temple later in the evening. Many were not so fortunate and our beautiful seafront looked like it had been bombed. Walking amongst the devastation called to mind the uncertainty of life on this planet and the tremendous power of nature.

Thank you to everyone who contacted me and expressed concern for our well being.

Life here at The Place of Peace continues to be a wonderful venture. Thank you to all who support this little temple. Whether your offerings are financial or in the form of practical help each supports the life of faith and every offering is valued.

— *Rev. Master Myōhō*

Portobello Buddhist Priory

—Edinburgh, Scotland – UK—

Here at Portobello Priory we're surviving Winter, with no burst pipes, as in previous years, although our biggest expenditure was spent in replacing our old washing machine which gave up the ghost dramatically, by leaking out over the kitchen floor.

We are starting the New Year with a change of trustee. Many thanks to Rev. Alicia, who is stepping down, for all the years of sterling service to Portobello and welcome Rev. Alina, who has accepted the role, after recently returning to Throssel after a stint as Prior in Reading.

A group from Portobello, including Rawdon and the Prior, visited Throssel for the Buddha's Enlightenment retreat at the end of last year. We also celebrated Rawdon Goodier's 83rd birthday at the end of January. As cake was consumed, Rawdon recounted his role in establishing the Priory and reminisced on early retreats in Edinburgh with visiting monks back in the eighties; a very good evening.

Rev. Finnan has kindly agreed to lead the Outer Hebrides Retreat this year in March on the Ilse of Harris. The retreatants are mainly drawn from the Inverness group but they are more than happy to have other Scottish Sangha members come and join them.

— Rev. Master Favian

Journal news

Welcome to our first digital issue: Thank you for your support and interest in our journal. Some of you have been readers, followers—and sometimes article writers—for many years and have followed us in our move to this electronic format. We may also acquire new followers in this digital form. We hope

you enjoy the new journal format and can appreciate the benefits of the free access to the pdf version, with the option of an eBook version for half the price of our earlier subscription to the paper journal.

Thank you for your kind support: Some of you have generously donated offerings to support us with this transition, which has been much appreciated and have enabled us to simplify the process, by employing a small local firm to assist with conversion from Word to MOBI format (so they can be read on ebook readers, such as the Kindle, and tablets/ipads with a kindle app). The donations have also covered the cost of upgrading our software to Windows 8 and Word 2013.

The eBook version is available on Amazon, and we are able to keep 70% of payments made for the kindle version. This will allow us to cover the cost of conversion to MOBI format and help fund our Journal work.

New donation system: As the journal is no longer funded by subscription we won't have the regular income we have been used to and so appreciate any offerings from our readers and supporters. Currently we have set up a way of donating through **BT MyDonate:**

[BT my donate link to OBC Journal](#)

This allows donations from anywhere in the world with no charge and only the currency conversion rate to take into account. We are still reviewing the best way for all countries and will keep you posted through the Journal website;

www.journal.obcon.org

Change of journal editor: Another change is at the journal desk here at Throssel. We are sure you will all join us in thanking Rev. Berwyn for all his commitment and expertise over the years. He is kindly passing on some of his experience to Rev. Alina as she begins working in the journal office here at Throssel and we worked on this issue together.

Newsletter: Just to say if you have come across this via our website and would like to be kept up to date with our quarterly issues, you can do this by subscribing to our newsletter at: <http://journal.obcon.org/e-newsletter-sign-up>

Invitation to write a piece for the journal: We would also be very pleased to hear from you if you feel there is an aspect of your training you could write something about. Initially we would simply talk it over with you and give you some feedback. You could then decide if you would like it to be included in one of the issues as an article. The journal is comprised of and depends on offerings of this nature, which benefit all who read them.

Thank you for your support.

— *Rev. Berwyn and Rev. Alina*

TEMPLES OF THE ORDER — THE AMERICAS

USA

Shasta Abbey

Rev. Master Meian Elbert, Abbess
3724 Summit Drive
Mt. Shasta, CA 96067-9102
Ph: (530) 926-4208 [Fax: -0428]
shastaabbey@shastaabbey.org
www.shastaabbey.org

Berkeley Buddhist Priory

Rev. Master Kinrei Bassis
1358 Marin Ave.
Albany, CA 94706
Ph: (510) 528-1876 [Fax: -2139]
prior@berkeleybuddhistpriory.org
www.berkeleybuddhistpriory.org

Columbia Zen Buddhist Priory

Rev. Master Rokuzan Kroenke
426 Arrowwood Road
Columbia, SC 29210-7508
Ph: (803) 772-7552
www.columbiazen.org

Eugene Buddhist Priory

Rev. Oriana LaChance
85415 Teague Loop
Eugene, OR 97405-9536
Ph: (541) 344-7377
info@eugenebuddhistpriory.org
www.eugenebuddhistpriory.org

Idaho Panhandle area and Sandpoint Meditation Group

Rev. Master Zensho Roberson
P. O. Box 74
Saint Maries, ID 83861
Ph: (208) 245-4950
RevZenshoR@gmail.com

Pine Mountain Buddhist Temple

Rev. Master Phoebe van Woerden
941 Lockwood Valley Road
Maricopa, CA 93252
Ph: (254) 241-6102
pmbt@pinemtnbuddhisttemple.org
www.pinemtnbuddhisttemple.org

Portland Buddhist Priory

Rev. Master Meikō Jones
3642 SE Milwaukie Avenue
Portland, OR 97202
Ph: (503) 238-1123
prior1@portlandbuddhistpriory.org
www.portlandbuddhistpriory.org

Wallowa Buddhist Temple

Rev. Master Meidō Tuttle
62916 Hurricane Creek Road
Joseph, OR 97846
Ph: (541) 432-6129
temple@wallowabuddhisttemple.org
www.wallowabuddhisttemple.org

CANADA

Lions Gate Buddhist Priory

Rev. Master Kōten Benson
P. O. Box 701
Lytton, B.C. V0K 1Z0
Ph: 250-455-0344
lionsgatebuddhistpriory@lyttonbc.net
www.lionsgatebuddhistpriory.ca

Vancouver Island Zen Sangha

Rev. Master Meiten McGuire
646 Ridgebank Crescent
Victoria, B.C. V8Z 4Y3
Ph: 250-479-8850
www.vizs.org

Affiliated Meditation Groups

CA: Auburn, Chico, Fresno,
Morro Bay, Ventura, San Jose
ID: Sandpoint
MT: Whitefish
WA: Bainbridge Island
CANADA: Edmonton

TEMPLES OF THE ORDER — EUROPE

UK

Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey

Rev. Master Daishin Morgan
Carrshield, HEXHAM
Northumberland
NE47 8AL
Ph: 01434 345 204
gd@throssel.org.uk
www.throssel.org.uk

Dragon Bell Temple

Rev. Master Myfanwy McCorry
14 Albion Place
EXETER
EX4 6LH
Ph: 01392 479 648
dragonbelltemple@gmail.com
www.dragonbelltemple.org.uk

Great Ocean Dharma Refuge

Rev. Master Mokugen Kublicki
Penwern
Felindre Farchog, CRYMYCH,
Pembrokeshire
SA41 3XF
Ph: 01239 891 360

Norwich Zen Buddhist Priory

Rev. Leoma Hague
NORWICH,
NR2 2AH
Ph: 01603 457933
info@norwichzen.org.uk
www.norwichzen.org.uk

The Place of Peace Dharma House

Rev. Master Myōhō Harris
P. O. Box 207
ABERYSTWYTH
SY23 1WY
Ph: 01970 625402
www.placeofpeacewales.org

Portobello Buddhist Priory

Rev. Master Favian Straughan
27 Brighton Place, Portobello
EDINBURGH
EH15 1LL
Ph: 0131 669 9622
favian.straughan@homecall.co.uk
www.portobellobuddhist.org.uk

Reading Buddhist Priory

176 Cressingham Road
READING
RG2 7LW
Ph/Fax: 0118 986 0750
rpriory@yahoo.co.uk
www.readingbuddhistpriory.org.uk

Rochdale Zen Retreat

Rev. Master Peter Bonati
The Briars, Grange Lane
Hutton
PRESTON
PR4 5JE
Ph: 01772 612 112

Sitting Buddha Hermitage

Rev. Alicia Rowe
WIRKSWORTH
Derbyshire
Ph: 01629 821813.
alicia@fieldofmerit.org
www.fieldofmerit.org

Telford Buddhist Priory

49 The Rock
TELFORD
TF3 5BH
Ph/Fax: 01952 615 574
www.tbpriory.org.uk

Affiliated Meditation Groups

UK:

Aberdeen, Aberfeldy,
Birmingham, Cambridge,
Carmarthen, Chichester,
Cirencester, Cornwall,
Dundee, Galloway,
Hexham, Huddersfield,
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Milton Keynes,
Newcastle-upon-Tyne,
North Lakes, Norwich,
Nottingham, Preston,
Sheffield, Teesside.

GERMANY

Dharmazuflucht Schwarzwald
Rev. Master Fuden Nessi
Wonnenbach 4
77793 Gutach
Phone: +49 (0)7833 - 96 56 408
www.dharmazuflucht.info

THE NETHERLANDS

De Dharmatoevlucht (Dharma
Refuge)
Rev. Baldwin Schreurs
De Heze 51
7335 BB, APELDOORN
info@dharmatoevlucht.nl
www.dharmatoevlucht.nl
Ph: +31 55 542 0038

Affiliated Meditation Groups

The Netherlands:
Groningen, Utrecht

*For further details about the
Order, please see our website
www.obcon.org*

*To find out more about our
practice in your local area, contact
your nearest Priory, or the
Guestmaster at Throssel Hole
Buddhist Abbey or Shasta Abbey.*

Further information

*Information on the OBC generally is available on the
website: www.obcon.org*

*Contact details for all OBC temples are available from
the following link: <http://obcon.org/temples-and-meditation-groups/>*

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