



The Journal  
of the  
Order of Buddhist  
Contemplatives

*Serving Members and Friends  
of the Order Worldwide*

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Volume 29, Number 3  
2557 B.E. (Autumn 2014)  
ISSN 0891-1177

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*This beautifully expressive Kanzeon statue is at  
Berkeley Buddhist Priory*

Autumn 2014 issue:

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# Layered Karma

Rev. Master Meiten McGuire

—Vancouver Island Zen Sangha, Victoria –Canada—

*An extract from Rev. Master Meiten's third book of Reflections on practice, 'Returning to Stillness'.*

AT VARIOUS TIMES SINCE 2003 WHEN I CAME TO VANCOUVER Island after over 20 years of living in a monastic setting, there's been a clear sense about this aspect of training—how our karmic conditioning seems layered. Part of this layering is what I've referred to as a cutting edge: the kōan of everyday life. As Great Master Dōgen reminds in *Rules for Meditation*, “The kōan appears naturally in daily life.” Some aspect or aspects of life keep arising that challenge our ordinary stance. The ‘kōan’ is as a red-hot ball in one’s mouth which can’t be swallowed or spit out, and that’s uncomfortable. Typically, we conditioned humans tend to become either just immersed in what has arisen (swallow it) or attempt to push it away (spit it out). The tendencies are habitual ways of being in the world, triggered by the circumstances that have arisen at the time.

At some point, when this palliative approach is recognized as not working, for some of us there is an inner turning to look with new eyes. Again, as Great Master Dōgen wrote “All you have to do is cease from erudition, look within, and reflect upon yourself.” Then we’re in a new ball

game, so to speak. ‘Erudition’ here refers to the very nature of the conditioned mind itself, busily, nervously trying to be comfortable and secure within. Meditation is the art and act of stepping back from this persistent involvement with the mind itself. As I’ve observed ruefully, this can seem like trying to pick oneself up by one’s own bootstraps because we’ve been trapped, caught, in this karmic tangle for so long that it seems ‘natural.’ Of course, it is natural to the conditioned mind itself, and that effectively obscures a greater knowing, a greater awareness.

The willingness to be still within the discomfort involved here allows little by little a recognition of how karma works. There are patterns of cause and effect that to varying degrees had escaped our notice through the automatic conditioning coming out of past experiences. When the teaching about karmic consequence has been overlooked and forgotten, Life generously provides repeated situations to get our attention. When we finally ‘get it,’ we appreciate Dōgen’s rather stark observation, “There is only one thing, to train hard for this is true enlightenment.” The training hard is working with the kōan that appears in daily life. The true enlightenment is the illumination coming from really seeing how the choices we make have consequences and how we truly can make different choices through seeing those that bring distress to ourselves and/or others. It’s as simple as that, from the side of practice, and as difficult as that, when we are more or less sleepwalkers moving through life in old habit patterns that are automatic.

Enter the title of this reflection—layered karma. What one begins to recognize—and this can bring a profound humility right up front—is that buried in the storehouse of this body-mind we take as ‘self’, are old patterns that surface when the ‘right’ conditions come together at a particular time. With the cultivation of awareness itself there is a better chance to see the connection. It’s surprising how blurred this can be. In one scripture the problem here is likened to how a cataract affects what can be seen which then will be taken as the reality. In this analogy, our practice is as removing the cataract, the obstruction of old conditioned ways of being in the world. Then we are taking charge of our lives, taking the responsibility in a way not available before. This ‘surgery’ can be painful and stressful. As a particular layer of karma is seen with new eyes, dismay and inner turmoil are the signal that this is to be looked at. We’re less slaves to the habit tendencies that automatically blind our awareness.

The healing balm of training may not be immediately experienced—it may burn first as we’re willing to question the conditioned reactivity itself. This is the important pausing; it’s a restraint. In one of the verses of *The Dhammapada*, we’re told that restraint in everything is good. We give ourselves the opportunity to implicitly ask ‘What is it good to do?’ which allows a wise discernment to guide us. This brings the challenge of actually following through and risking doing something different. This is the ongoing training because with the cultivation of this quality of awareness, the ‘cataract’ that’s distorted our vision is being removed—in its own time. We cannot make it happen, so the

particular karmic layer may again surface when all conditions ripen. That is not a problem when we truly understand that this is why we train. Faith grows, confusion lessens, and in our hearts we're comforted by Great Wisdom:

*O Buddha, going, going, going on beyond, and always going on beyond, always becoming Buddha. Hail!*

# Erudition

Jan Reed

—Hexham, Northumberland—UK—

IN OUR WEEKLY MEDITATION GROUP WE RECITE DŌGEN’S *Rules for Meditation*.<sup>1</sup> In this there is a phrase which I have thought about and reflected on quite intently. The phrase is the one where reciters are exhorted to “cease from erudition”. This has puzzled and confused me; it is contrary to much of my life, including my working life. I looked at dictionary definitions of erudition, and found that it often meant ‘knowledge developed through scholarly study’. Erudition would therefore involve some study, and this might follow the conventions of academic inquiry.

As a university lecturer I was expected, by students and colleagues, to be erudite, and so this phrase of Dōgen’s seems to point in a very different direction. I gave lectures and tutorials which involved complex discussion of abstract ideas. I would search for research papers to support points, but I would also critique these studies, a process that involved understanding specialised language. I would therefore debate ideas and concepts and also the methods used to explore them.

Writing papers was an activity that was expected of me, and one that I engaged in. These papers would be scored and



counted, and entered into a research assessment exercise. Getting papers published was important in scoring highly and therefore getting funding. Erudition was looked for when decisions were made about what would be published. As a reviewer myself I was told to look for sophisticated language when I was rating papers.

Erudition was therefore used in the course of examining ideas, concepts and theories. Being able to discuss these, using specialised terms demonstrated understanding; an ability to explore and link ideas — identifying similar concepts and their implications and connotations.

My students would become familiar with these ideas, and the language used to describe them. I would mark their work according to the skill they showed in using it. Their erudition would be a sign of this, and I would have to be correspondingly erudite to assess their work.

Theories would be presented and in ensuing debates, alternatives would be explored. This might be augmented by evidence collected in validated processes. This evidence would be presented in ways that adopted customary forms of language.

Erudition, in this way, was a method of analysis, and not a thing to be displayed. Any suspicion of erudition as simply performance would attract low marks. Of course this frowning on performance might be done by teachers, but it might not always be done by peers. Students would admire and emulate each other, trying to find obscure and unintelligible ways of expressing thoughts.

Fellow academics would sometimes do this too. There

was an advantage to being understandable by the elite few — it marked you as exclusive, and your work as prestigious. It was a way of making your reputation as a scholar to admire.

The erudition that I developed in my working life was partly a sign that I understood academic language and grammar, that I was a member of an academic ‘club.’ As such this erudition could ensure acceptance and authority, and, ultimately, promotion and offers of jobs.

In a less formal way, the discussion of ideas has been an interesting part of our meditation group meetings. Interpretations of ideas are offered, and questioned in our conversations. This discussion about complex ideas drew on thought that was sometimes expressed in erudite language. Some ideas were expressed in books or articles, and members would have read them, and talked about what they had read. People would also refer to sutras, i.e. texts which recorded the teachings of the Buddha. These texts would have been written by people who were educated, and had also been translated into different languages by scholars.

These debates, then, included some erudition, both in the proposing of ideas and the creation of the material on which they were based. It seemed a very productive process. It allowed the presentation of ideas and the presentation of critiques.

The reading allowed us to communicate very complex ideas, with all their subtleties and nuances. Without erudition it is difficult to imagine how they could be expressed and shared. Debate also took place, and this was important for

our understanding.

And yet we could see some effects of this that were not helpful. In some discussions awareness was obscured by erudition, by esoteric quotes and arguments. It seemed that some displays were made, about how expert knowledge was, or how specialised texts were. The less accessible the knowledge, the more impressive it seemed.

It seemed that we were often using academic phrases and conventions to block our understanding, to tell ourselves that we had grasped the essence of ideas and that this was equivalent to finding the right words.

This block became more and more apparent as our conversations went on. Sometimes we would suspect that academic conventions were not useful. I was reminded of a Buddhist story about choosing a successor to the head of a monastery. Potential successors wrote poems, and one was: Shenxiu:

The body is the bodhi tree;  
The mind is like a bright mirror's stand.  
Be always diligent in rubbing it—  
Do not let it attract any dust.

This poem pointed to the diligence required in the process of enlightenment, but another poem, pointed to a more sudden, intuitive experience:

Huineng:

Bodhi is fundamentally without any tree;  
The bright mirror is also not a stand.  
Fundamentally there is not a single thing—  
Where could any dust be attracted? <sup>2</sup>

This second poem was composed by a labourer at the temple. He was illiterate, and had to dictate it to someone who could write it for him. One message that can be found in this story is that an understanding of enlightenment does not depend on formal education.

From my understanding I have become aware that the specialised language that I have found in Buddhist writings is a way of communicating complex ideas. What is important, though, is that this erudition does not distract us from understanding the heart of the discussion. We should move away from using erudition as a mark of status, or a way of excluding the less polished speakers, and focus on our understanding and awareness, rather than on language.

The paradox is, for me, that I need complex language to express simple ideas. What is important for me, though, is that I don't use this language as a display of erudition, to intimidate others who don't use this complex language or mistake erudition for substance.

Another form of contemplation is meditation. This is a strong part of the Sōtō Zen tradition and centres on knowing the self. This may be a gradual or sudden process, but meditation is not logical as academic reasoning might be.

Further words of Dōgen are helpful here. He says, in his instructions for meditation “Cease from erudition, withdraw within and reflect upon yourself”<sup>3</sup>

This points us to the work of contemplation, the ceaseless uncovering of our self, and the way that this can be hidden. There is a paradox here too; the paradox of

concentration on the self in order to become selfless. The concentration in meditation is a way of realizing the interconnectedness of everything, an interconnectedness which goes beyond erudition.

This observation points to some strengths of ceasing from erudition. The scholarly summarising of an argument may achieve the goal of accurate classification, but it may miss the heart of the idea. Erudition can seem like we are gaining knowledge or debating enlightenment, but is maybe just distracting us from other work we need to do.

To explore this work I can turn to another saying that is attributed to Dōgen;

‘To study Buddhism is to study the self  
To study the self is to forget the self.  
To forget the self is to be enlightened by the  
myriad dharmas.’<sup>4</sup>

From this, then, the work that I have to do is to reflect on myself.

#### *Notes*

1. Great Master Dōgen, *Rules for Meditation*, in *The liturgy of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives for the Laity*, (Mt. Shasta, CA: Shasta Abbey Press, 1990) pp 97- 100.
2. Huineng, *The Platform Sutra*, this translation from website <http://www.buddhismwithoutboundaries.com/> Thread: Huineng Platform Sutra.
3. Ibid.
4. Yasutani, Hakuun, *Flowers Fall*, A commentary on Zen Master Dōgen’s Genjōkōan, trans. Paul Jaffe, (Shambala, Boston and London 1996) p.102.

# The Dharma as a Tool for Everyday Life

Rev. Master Seikai Luebke

—*Pine Mountain Buddhist Temple, CA–USA*—

YESTERDAY I HEARD A STORY IN WHICH SOMEONE WAS deeply hurt by a friend, who had not told him that a mutual acquaintance had died. Naturally he felt upset, betrayed, and also embarrassed for not having had the opportunity to do the things one usually does when someone dies, paying respect and offering condolences to relatives. After struggling with all these feelings for a while he thought to himself: “Wait a minute, I’m a Buddhist, and there is a way I can handle this better.” So he went to his meditation place, lit a stick of incense and offered it to the Buddha, sat down and asked for help.

And help was immediately given. He began to see that there were several strands to the upset, and that there were things he could do. First he said a prayer for the deceased, and their family. Then he offered blessings to himself, recognizing the sadness over the disappointment in the friendship. And then he also dedicated blessings to the friend, recognizing that this person too could be struggling with difficult feelings and circumstances. After that he was able to get on with the day, grateful that the practice had given him a way to work with what seemed just a great wave of pain at first.

I had a similar situation several years ago, when something bad had happened—I honestly can't remember now what it was—and I was blamed for it. Without anyone bothering to try to find out what had actually happened (or at least my version of it), I had to sit there and take it all in (as I recall it was a situation that I had almost nothing to do with). Upset, outraged and feeling powerless, I did not say anything, but went to my room, took out a rosary and recited prayers and mantras for about 15 minutes. By the end of that time, the sense of outrage that I had felt initially was gone, and I was able to talk about what had happened with a third party in a way that was accepting and didn't wallow in blaming.

That these kinds of situations arise in life is as natural, normal, and unavoidable as wind and rain. What we do in response to them is really a personal decision that we make in the immediate aftermath of such situations, and that is where we can use the teaching of the Buddha—the Dharma—to help us. The Dharma really is like a set of tools which we can make use of to fashion ourselves, and to respond to difficulty with greater acceptance and wisdom than we would otherwise. One of the great tools we can employ is to sit down and ask for help from the Universe, and then see what happens.

If you don't believe that there is an external agency who hears such requests and magically solves our problems, you might say that what we are really doing is appealing to something which we already have within ourselves, an inner wisdom, a higher nature, which we then are able to access as a result of asking for help. Asking for help then is another

term for letting the emotions settle down enough to be able to respond to the situation with more skill. That we all have the potential to tap into something greater than the ordinary thinking mind—call it the unconscious mind if you like—is an aspect of being human which is essentially unarguable. All we need to do is seek out its wisdom.

The willingness to sit down and ask for help from whatever we view as greater than ourselves is a tool that I have used throughout my life. It always works; I may not get an immediate response, or the response I'd like to get, but as long as there is a bit of openness in me I am able to receive what is offered in response to my need. Buddhism says that the Universe is compassionate in nature, despite all the seemingly violent, tragic, untimely or horrific things that regularly happen in our realm of existence. This is not to superimpose an overly optimistic or Pollyanna-ish set of expectations onto human existence; rather, it is a simple reality that we can experience as humans if we have just a little bit of faith and patience that it can work.

There is a perennial question which people ask of spiritual teachers. That question can be framed roughly as follows: “OK, bad things happen, people take advantage of me, or abuse me in some way, I am the recipient of ill treatment. But I don't want to be a doormat and have people walk all over me, because that just isn't right, either. So, acceptance is all well and good, but something more is called for in response to being ill-treated.”

I agree that this is a valid question. The problem is that it cannot be answered in a way which can be applied to all situations. To accept the difficulty of a situation, to sit down



and ask for help with it, to let go of the struggle against it—that is what must come first before the second phase can be entered into, which is to arrive at an appropriate response to what has happened, and deal with it in such a way as to not inadvertently create any more ill-will or hurt than has already been generated. In my experience and in the experience of those who apply the Dharma to their lives, we have to get a rein on our own emotions first before we can begin to find our way clear to an appropriate response.

So let's look at emotions. Some people have viewed Eastern religions, or New Age religions, as providing a methodology for subverting or eliminating ordinary human emotions from their lives, so that they can live in a state of greater if not perfect harmony with a transcendent reality. The problem with this approach is that it essentially cuts off one's nose to spite one's face; emotions are not the problem, it is our emotion management that needs attention. Emotions are extremely useful, and can be seen as an evolutionary product for the human species. Fear is the natural human response to being endangered; anger is the natural human response to being harmed; anxiety results from being threatened; grief is the natural response to death; depression the natural response to loss. All of these have some purpose in our experience as human beings which we need to pay attention to.

As I mentioned above, I could have wallowed in outrage at being falsely accused of something I had little or nothing to do with. Outrage is a normal response to false accusation, but by the same token I didn't have to indulge in it. As human beings, we all have a natural anger response to

various kinds of stimuli, events and situations which trigger off some pre-existent sensitivity in us; weak spots which were created by traumatic or unfortunate past events of which we retain a built-in memory. Living in the monastery in close quarters with all sorts of people, some of whom I didn't particularly like or who I found irritating, was for me a great exercise in having my anger button get pushed repeatedly and working on how I was going to respond to my own anger response. The sooner you notice that you are getting angry or upset, the sooner you can decide what to do with the potentially explosive energy that it is.

Emotions are, in fact, energy. If we indulge the energy, we can prolong its life long past its momentary usefulness; alternatively, if we repress the energy we essentially bottle it up inside the body, and that too has undesirable long term consequences. To give an example from my own life: As I mentioned, depression is the human response to loss; in my life, I chose to live in an environment in which I could practice a high level of control over my own human impulses—the monastic life—and that provided me (and others) with the opportunity to get a handle on all manner of problems like greed, laziness, disrespect, indulgence in food, sleep, sex, drugs and you name it. I made a lot of sacrifices of what I would have liked to do with my time and energy, and in the process at times stifled my ability to communicate what I was feeling and experiencing on an emotional level. In my case, this suppression of normal human emotional energies turned into depression over the long haul. That this happened was largely my own mistake, and it took the wisdom of experience to realize that this was so.

Effective emotion management is one of the really big challenges of being human. Emotions tend to run us around quite a bit, making us do things we later regret when we act on the spur of the moment and its emotional charge. I heard it said once that emotionality is the root of karmic causes being set in motion; I thought about that statement for many years before it became somewhat clearer to me from my own experience. Initially, I thought that the solution was to stifle emotions so that I could avoid a karmic wake being set in motion, avoiding what I heard called emotionality. But my own experience, as I mentioned, showed that that course of action also had its own set of consequences. Blocking emotional energy cost me dearly over the long run, however useful it may have been in the short. But Buddhist practice is not really requiring that we do this; although it may seem in the beginning that we must stifle our emotional responses, as practice deepens naturally we need to find a middle way. We can say that, as meditators, what we are doing is learning to neither grasp onto nor push away anything which arises in our minds. There is theory and then there is practice. We know that there is a place in ourselves in which we can give up both grasping after or indulging emotional responses, as well as learning to embrace the things we find really annoying and difficult. And we all know it is extraordinarily hard to put into practice consistently, especially when it comes to the subtle and instinctive things in life, including our emotional energies.

I recently encountered the following in the book *Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus*, written by the

American psychologist John Gray and published a little over 20 years ago. The book has been enormously popular because of how accurately it pinpoints so many of the typical problems that occur in male-female relationships, and how to iron them out through better understanding of the opposite sex, and better communication. When I read the following, I was fairly well floored by how familiar two of the four “F’s” were to me as an individual:

The Four F’s for Avoiding Hurt:

*There are basically four stances that individuals take to avoid getting hurt in arguments. They are the four F’s: fight, flight, fake and fold. Each of these stances offers a short-term gain, but in the long run they are all counterproductive.*

*Let’s explore each of these positions.*

*Fight. This stance definitely comes from Mars. When a conversation becomes unloving and unsupportive some individuals instinctively begin to fight. They immediately move to an offensive stance. Their motto is “the best defense is a strong offense.” They strike out by blaming, judging, criticizing, and making their partner look wrong. They tend to start yelling and express lots of anger. Their inner motive is to intimidate their partner into loving and supporting them. When their partner backs down, they assume they have won, but in truth they have lost.*

*Intimidation always weakens trust in a relationship. To muscle your way into getting what you want by making*

*others look wrong is a sure way to fail in a relationship. When couples fight they gradually lose their ability to be open and vulnerable. Women close up to protect themselves and men shut down and stop caring as much. Gradually they lose whatever intimacy they had in the beginning.*

*Flight. This stance also comes from Mars. To avoid confrontation [men] may retire into their caves and never come out. This is like a cold war. They refuse to talk and nothing gets resolved. This passive-aggressive behavior is not the same as taking a time-out and then coming back to talk and resolve things in a more loving fashion.*

*These [men] are afraid of confrontation and would rather lie low and avoid talking about any topic that may cause an argument. They walk on eggshells in a relationship. Women commonly complain they have to walk on eggshells, but men do also. It is so ingrained in men that they don't even realize how much they do it.*

*Rather than arguing, some couples will simply stop talking about their disagreements. Their way of trying to get what they want is to punish their partner by withholding love. They do not come out and directly hurt their partners, like the fighters. Instead they indirectly hurt them by slowly depriving them of the love they deserve. By withholding love our partners are sure to have less to give us.*

*The short term gain is peace and harmony, but if issues are not being talked about and feelings are not being heard then resentments will build. In the long run, they lose touch with the passionate and loving feelings that drew them together. They generally use overworking, overeating, or*

*other addictions as a way to numb their unresolved painful feelings.*

I have operated from this stance throughout my life, and witnessed it as the predominant social dynamic governing the group behavior of which I have been a part. It operates within families, peer groups at any age, larger groups of any kind including businesses, corporations, churches and monasteries.

*Fake. This stance comes from Venus. To avoid being hurt in a confrontation this person pretends that there is no problem. She puts a smile on her face and appears to be very agreeable and happy with everything. Over time, however, these women become increasingly resentful; they are always giving to their partner but they do not get what they need in return. This resentment blocks the natural expression of love.*

*They are afraid to be honest about their feelings, so they try to make everything “all right, OK, and fine.” Men commonly use these phrases, but for them they mean something completely different. He means “It is OK because I am dealing with it alone” or “It’s all right because I know what to do” or “It’s fine because I am handling it, and I don’t need any help.” Unlike a man, when a woman uses these phrases it may be a sign that she is trying to avoid a conflict or argument.*

*To avoid making waves, a woman may even fool herself and believe that everything is OK, fine, and all right when it really isn’t. She sacrifices or denies her wants, feelings, and needs to avoid the possibility of conflict.*

*Fold. This stance also comes from Venus. Rather than argue, this person gives in. They will take the blame and assume responsibility for whatever is upsetting their partner. In the short run they create what looks like a very loving and supportive relationship, but they end up losing themselves.*

*A man once complained to me about his wife. He said "I love her so much. She gives me everything I want. My only complaint is she is not happy." His wife had spent twenty years denying herself for her husband. They never fought, and if you asked her about her relationship she would say "We have a great relationship. My husband is so loving. Our only problem is me. I am depressed and I don't know why." She is depressed because she has denied herself by being agreeable for twenty years.*

*To please their partners these people intuitively sense their partner's desires and then mould themselves in order to please. Eventually they resent having to give up themselves for love.*

*Any form of rejection is very painful because they are already rejecting themselves so much. They seek to avoid rejection at all costs and want to be loved by all. In this process they literally give up who they are.*

Again, I have operated from this stance throughout my life, and it fits with the stance of flight: first you flee confrontation and then you fold. And again this stance operates not only within one to one human relationships, but within any larger group dynamic, which can exist in any walk of life. Religious institutions are not only not immune

from this dynamic, they are probably more susceptible to it by virtue of how giving, self-sacrificing, agreeable, and accommodating religious people tend to be.

*You may have found yourself in one of these four F's or in many of them. People commonly move from one to the other. In each of the above four strategies our intention is to protect ourselves from being hurt. Unfortunately, it does not work. What works is to identify arguments and stop. Take a time-out to cool off and then come back and talk gain. Practice communicating with increased understanding and respect for the opposite sex and you will gradually learn to avoid arguments and fights.<sup>1</sup>*

So, is this Dharma? To me it is because it directly addresses human suffering on a very basic level, looking at causes. It pinpoints where human relationships tend to go wrong, which is in the area of meaningful communication, openness, transparency, learning to put aside one's strongly held opinions for a moment and really listen to another person and to honor that they have emotions which need to be brought out into the open and looked at in a non-judgmental way. Emotions are not the enemy in Buddhist practice; inappropriate emotional management is the stumbling block. Fear keeps the lid on our collective inability to look at human difficulties in an honest, patient and accepting fashion. To move beyond the fear requires a basic trust in our ability to be or become mature adults capable of learning to resolve our most difficult inner challenges. Allowing others the opportunity to give



expression to their most difficult inner challenges is an act of giving and generosity that all of us need to make for the people closest to us in our lives; as Buddhist practitioners we should not expect that human difficulties will somehow magically evaporate by virtue of the fact that we are training ourselves. To the contrary, religious practice beckons to all of our latent inner difficulties to come to the surface and show themselves. Once they reach the surface, they need most of all to be accepted as the stuff of being human, looked at, loved, and ultimately let go of.

As Zen Master Dōgen wrote:

Charity, benevolence, tenderness and sympathy  
are the means we have of helping others and represent  
the aspirations of the Bodhisattva.<sup>2</sup>

*Notes*

1. From *Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus*; John Gray Ph.D.; Harper Collins Publishers Inc., NY, 1992, pp. 169-172.
2. Great Master Dōgen, Shushogi, in *Zen is Eternal Life*.

# Reflecting back on Relationships

Rev. Alina Burgess

—*Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey, Northumberland – UK*—

I WAS IN MY MID-FORTIES WHEN I BECAME A MONK. I had been married for some years previously and later had two other relationships. Without my especially thinking about it, my view of these relationships, especially my part in them, has slowly clarified over the years; I now see them and the behaviour that was playing out in a quite different light from my perception at the time. This is quite striking; I can see other viewpoints and possibilities of speech and action which were just not apparent to me then. I recall some of the difficulties I faced—and see how I have learned over the years, through ongoing practice and the simple softening of maturity. And it seems that learning can continue, even when I'm no longer in the position of being in a marital relationship, as all forms of relationship share similar dynamics, while also being particular.

One aspect which has particularly struck me is the prominent role expectation can play in how we approach and view life. It can be easy to miss how much of an influence this has on our interactions with others. I expected certain things, in my first relationship especially, which to me seemed self-evidently reasonable and fair. When my partner's behaviour did not match up to my expectations, I was disappointed, hurt or angry. Holding to my sense of

‘being in the right’. I recall how little I seemed able to appreciate my partner's viewpoint, his intention, actions—and even, at times, to really hear what he said.

Reflecting on this, I see that all this suffering was not due to difficult circumstances (though at times some were pretty complex), but because of how they were perceived and received; it would have been possible to respond in many other ways which would have changed the dynamic. At least three aspects were at work: one was difficulty being still with feelings; another was holding to a hoped for outcome—one which would address the concerns I was so painfully experiencing; and a third was a lack of appreciation of the position of the other person with me.

Expectation is really just an idea, but one which has been accepted as right and fair and has been reinforced by thinking. It is a kind of imaginary blueprint, which by its nature as a mental concept, cannot match with the shifting experience of actual life and the unpredictability of other people. It is astonishing how we can cling stubbornly to a view of what should be, even though it is painful to do so and does not help. Neither of us wanted conflict; what was needed was for one of us to stop.

Charlotte Joko Beck commented on relationships:

It is interesting to me that people don't see any connection between their misery and their complaints—their feeling of being a victim; the feeling that everyone is doing something to them...The truth is that it's not life, it's ourselves who are creating this misery.<sup>1</sup>

I recall the ‘heat’ behind these exchanges—and also fear and a sense of insecurity, of not knowing where I was, and feeling quite unable to deal with this. In other words, it not only hurt, but also seemed as though something fundamental was being threatened; I instinctively felt I had to defend myself. There is a view here which places ‘me’ firmly at the centre, with everything else affecting ‘me’; a terrifying and unreal view. And one which makes it understandably hard to sit still and face things, and so easy to focus on the suffering to oneself and the wish to ameliorate this.

I had no awareness then of what help comes when we let go. The practice of zazen, over time, helps with so many aspects of these difficulties. As we sit and sit, we learn how to be still with difficult feelings. We find that we can and do keep breathing while we are hurting or angry, that the feelings increase with certain thoughts, and lessen when we don't pursue them. There is a steadiness which we come to find, which allows us to be more grounded within situations and see more of what is going on around and within us. This comes along with the difficulty—it's not a before or after; they can co-exist. We learn to listen and to keep open, even as our instincts may be pulling us to react to try to stop our discomfort.

From this patient sitting over time, grows an awareness of our place in the scheme of things, a lifelong exploring which is opening out my understanding of how life works. We are not the centre, we are an integral part of our life. What we do matters and this is within a shifting matrix of change; we are affected by everything and affect everyone

around us, and this is true for everyone else too. The true picture which I point to here is impossible to conceive, but we experience it every moment of our lives. It isn't hidden, but it is ungraspable and easily obscured.

Though a seeming rejection from our partner will naturally hurt, this need not be held onto. We can take it personally, a natural reaction to hurt, but if we can be still with our feelings, we may see more of what is going on in the other person too. With expectation relinquished and the feelings acknowledged, there is just a 'situation'. Letting go of the idea that it is 'either me or you who is in the right', other possibilities, which may even work for both, can be found. There is no standard or rulebook of what should happen. There are many ways this could go. There is the honest attempt of two people to find their way.

Talking together is so important to find a way through the feeling of being separate from each other, the 'either/or' scenario. Talking about an issue that matters to us, we can feel an urgent need to say what we think, maybe feeling it to be surely right enough to change the situation. But when urgency of feelings dominate our thoughts and speech, they are what is mostly transmitted, and the exchange can become an expression and reinforcing of them and the actual issue can be obscured. My sense lately is that the most important aspect of dialogue is listening.

Lately, I have been in a role in the monastery where I have been communicating with other monks more regularly. I am coming to see dialogues which aim to resolve a situation as being like an offering back and forth. An understanding begins to emerge which comes from allowing

another's viewpoint in to merge with our own, which changes both sides if there is not holding on. Any heat present in an exchange is diminished by being still and listening. I don't think you can really listen and be full of yourself, your opinions and views; there has to be a letting go to really hear. And in really hearing the other person, there is a connection with them; they can be seen and appreciated. This isn't easy at all but is far reaching; listening within, it is possible to see how we are experiencing what is going on and accept this, while still keeping open. This has the effect of quietly and naturally shifting attention from 'me' and my views.

Listening within and allowing our awareness to open out seem an impossible and contradictory combination in words, but in experience is not so. Listening 'within' is not really about what is literally within us, not exploring what is within this body and mind, more exploring 'what is'. To speak of turning within is more of a pointer of a direction; letting go of being pulled out is a start and I find increasing depths of what/how this is.

There are no rules, no set standards and few if any predictable scenarios, even if we were to try and plan them. Reality is a much freer and more vivid changing dynamic. Within this there will be all shades of experience; good times, mistakes, irritations. This does not mean that the relationship is good, then flawed, then okay again as different things happen. Some friction is inevitable in human interactions and how this is addressed shapes the relationship. When a challenging or sensitive issue is approached with care and consideration, this naturally

reinforces appreciation and trust in each other. When things don't go well, there is a clearly felt separation. It feels all wrong, most unpleasant and this is the point where things can change or can continue to roll on in the same direction. Not adding to the difficulty is the start. A small and well considered offering may repair the hurt, or one or both can be willing to see the small place of some issues within the shared wish to live well together. By letting go and not insisting, issues can remain at least open and workable, even if there are irritations and disappointments. Given time, some things sort themselves out along the way.

This wider and longer view becomes clearer and more the default to come back to as time goes on. There can be an entrusting to this process as well as to each other. There is a remarkable teaching in this 'just getting on'. It doesn't work though if issues or hurts are being harboured. This is not only painful, it affects our behaviour, our manner; it just cannot be hidden. Anyone who knows us can see there is something going on, it spills out in some way, yet we can find it so hard to just speak. Any thought, held on to for too long, grows out of proportion. It then takes some courage to speak, if this is needed. Sometimes we may see that we can just drop it, at other times letting something just pass by can be unhelpful – it can allow something to roll along which really could do with being addressed. Taking time and asking others we trust, who know both of us, may help clarify what should be done.

When one partner says something that is clearly hard to say (and this can often be about quite sensitive issues) there may well be an initial, possibly heated, reaction. And with

time to digest, the hearer may come to realise and appreciate the trust in them which has been expressed by their partner in taking such a risk, for there is no guarantee that this understanding will happen—this makes the openness even more of an act of faith.

This calls for a lot from us. Of central help in this process is commitment to the relationship. We have a wedding ceremony in our tradition (which in some countries is a legal service; in the UK it can be followed by a legal wedding) in which the couple stand face to face and make a vow to help each other be a success, each in their own way; a far reaching promise to make this one's priority in life. (This need not be through a formal ceremony necessarily, as long as there is a true commitment made.) I see this vow as having limitless potential. It points to an opening out of the natural wish and concern for ourself to include another equally; to come to care about them as we do ourself. Nothing is lost in this and much is found.

When our feelings are not everything to us, it is possible to open out and be simply responsible for our part in this moment—along with whoever else is present. Nothing is at the centre, there's a quite radical change when this can be seen. A relationship is not two people living in separate bubbles of existence; the shared life is clearly intertwined. Relationship may be experienced as meeting each other as we are. Being open to the presence of another, we can appreciate this person with us is in the mix too, wishing to find their way as well, with both affecting each other all the time. We can see each other as true allies, not opponents.





*In the wedding ceremony of our Order, the couple join hands together to form one gasshō. This expression of their commitment to each other is affirmed and 'bound' by the twining of a rosary around both hands. With thanks to Andi and Wendy, here renewing their wedding vows.*

Commitment is always part of the mix, part of the motivation for two people living out the ordinary reality of every day as a couple. It can help hold both together when things are not easy, as a reminder of the bigger picture of the wish for the life together. I sense there is a lot more to this, but am no longer in a position to explore this.

As I go on, I am more and more grateful for the gift of our teaching and practice: what is needed here, is found here, nothing was ever lacking and we could never be apart from it. When this is even sensed, this weakens fear and the need to defend ourselves. We can recognise that we are doing our

best. We can risk being honest and open because we are learning to accept our frailties and trust our inherent good nature too. In doing so we can meet others more openly and thus recognise their humanity and good nature too. There is nothing to defend and always something we can offer. This is challenging, long-term work, and the rewards are great; in offering we are open and able to receive. And there is freedom when we let go of carrying around our past and expectations of the future. The truth is—life is discovered in the living of it, and our perspective and what we bring to it will shape our experience. This applies whether we are in a relationship or not.

I also feel that if this piece were re-read with sexuality in mind, much if not all would be relevant for this too, as one aspect of a committed relationship. I realise I have not mentioned the word ‘compassion’ until now— it is implicit for me in everything I have written, particularly so for sexuality. There will be ‘history’ and unique aspects in both individuals and in every sexual relationship which will make each just what it is, and therefore no need, or place, for comparison. There will naturally and inevitably be variation in the experience of sexuality, being affected by many factors of both individuals and the circumstances of the time. I think these reminders can help with worries about adequacy, or letting others down. There is potential for a depth of learning through giving, as trust and love dissolve fears.

Recognising expectation, listening, considered communication, commitment, letting go of self-centredness and coming to a wider and longer term view of the

relationship and one's role within it—these were all areas where I see I could have learned much if I had continued in a relationship.

And I hope it is clear that most, if not all, of what I have said here is about practice. How could relationships be separate? What we learn in our practice serves us well in all areas of life and can be trusted as it is bigger than any one setting. The points I have made here are part of my ongoing practice in my current roles as a monk and priest, member of a monastic community, teacher and with my siblings and ageing parent. Each of these roles is different, but meeting life as truly as I can is a constant.

#### *Notes*

1. Beck, Charlotte Joko. *Everyday Zen*, (Harper Collins, 1989) p. 89.

# Some thoughts on Gratitude

Rev. Oriana LaChance

—*Eugene Buddhist Priory, Oregon—USA—*

*From a Dharma Talk given in the meditation hall at Eugene Buddhist Priory.*

IT IS GOOD TO CULTIVATE GRATITUDE, AN INNATE aspect of Buddha Nature. Cultivation doesn't create gratitude, but rather uncovers the gratitude that is already present.

Gratitude goes beyond dark and light, beyond yes and no, beyond getting our way or not getting our way, beyond having or not having. Gratitude for the ongoing flow of life and that we are part of it, part of the universal. Gratitude for existence when it is sad and when it is joyful. Are we able to be grateful for things just as they are?

True gratitude is not dependent on how the world is, or how others are, or how we are. Winter is just winter—no expectation, no judgment. Spring is just spring—no expectation, no judgment. Gratitude IS—dependent on no thing. No matter what we do, spring will come. No matter what self-created dungeon we bury ourselves in, spring will come. Can we see it? Can we greet both winter and spring with an open heart? Can we greet death with an open heart?

It takes a certain humility—an understanding that our

way is not the only way, that others can teach us—to take refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha with gratitude. Dōgen tells us that Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are the final place to which we return. At death everything except the Triple Treasure—including winter and spring—drops away. What we have left is thankfulness, gratitude without any separation between being and not being.

Even with nobody listening, we are saying thank you. Living each instant with great care, we are aware that ‘just this’ is our dynamic, dancing life—both when we are building our house on the rock of “no” in our self-created dungeon and when we know quiet, insistent spring. No separation, no duality in ‘thank you’.

Can we be thankful for the hard things in our life? Shunryu Suzuki Roshi said that how we suffer is our practice. What do we do with difficulties? Can we know gratitude in the face of suffering? One Zen monk said, “I don’t say, why me? I say, why not me?”. “Why me?” means we see ourselves as separate beings among many beings, avoiding the painful, seeking after pleasure. With “Why not me?” we know we belong with everything and everyone. Gratitude is wide enough to cover our own suffering, and it is powerful enough in difficult times to ground us in our connection with all beings. How we suffer is our practice: suffering can lead us to awareness, patience, compassion, generosity. Can I be thankful for this experience? Can I see that gratitude has no boundaries?

Tibetan Buddhists have pithy slogans as a ground for training. One is, “Be grateful to everyone.” Can we be grateful to ‘troublemakers’ because they blow our cover?

They expose us, encourage our hidden stuff to be present, show us where we are stuck. It takes a lot of courage to be grateful to those who drive us crazy. Can we still feel what we feel, acknowledge it, and have gratitude? Dharma practice is to find a way to work with what provokes us. Don't try to make what provokes you go away—study it. This is how we wake up.

Can we keep our heart and mind open in the midst of difficulties? Usually difficulty is where we close down, shut off and keep the cycle of misery on the planet turning.

How can I live my life so that when I die I have no regrets?

Be grateful to everyone.

# News of the Order

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## The Americas

### Shasta Abbey

—*Mt. Shasta, California – USA*—

#### **Wildlife and gardens:**

As the season turned to spring and summer, we had the pleasure of sharing the temple grounds with families of deer, nuthatches and ravens in addition to the usual multitude of gray squirrels, Douglas squirrels and American robins. A pair of ravens built their nest high in a tree west of the meditation hall. As the young grew, we wondered whether the birds had figured out our monastic schedule as “flying lessons” so often coincided with morning meditation. After days of steady hard drilling, a nuthatch completed construction of a nest inside the east wall of the Lotus House under the eaves. A small fuzzy head with open beak was later observed in the opening. We closed the footpath leading to the Hotei House in an effort to shield a bird's nest built among low shrubbery beside the cloister. Later in the season one of the does gave birth to two fawns. It is good to have our monastery as a place of refuge for these animals.



We have had to let go of some of our flower gardens due to the severe drought in the State of California; however, in July we hired a local firm partly owned by a congregation member, Native Grounds Landscaping, to install a small drought-resistant garden in front of the new Guest Office building. A lovely, tranquil Shakyamuni Buddha statue now graces it. Our wish is that this small garden will help newcomers feel welcome here.

**Wesak:**

Our joyous annual celebration of Shakyamuni Buddha's birth, enlightenment, teaching and death took place on the evening of May 17 and on Sunday, May 18 about 100 of us, including some children under the age of five, chanted invocations, ladled water over the baby Buddha's head, and rang the Temple Bell 108 times during the Festival of Wesak. Cool, damp weather brought our "picnic" into the Buddha Hall with no dampening effect on the joy of the occasion. Offerings of colorful paper lotuses made by Rev. Sun Moon, our Korean monastic visitor, and of an origami "1000



Cranes” brightened the Hall. We offer our thanks to all who joined us and provided offerings of food and drink for our celebration.

### **Retreats:**

We had an active schedule of retreats this spring and early summer, including some retreats with a special focus. In response to questions on how to establish and maintain a regular practice after an Introductory Retreat or Abbey visit, we offered a “Continuing Your Practice” retreat. Twenty guests spent the weekend of May 23-25 exploring ways to bring meditation, Preceptual practice and mindful awareness into daily lives without the formal structure of a retreat for support.

Nine young adults took part in the “Finding Your Path in Life” retreat July 15-19. Monks who worked with them and who participated in Dharma talks and discussions were cheered by the sincerity and thoughtful attitude of these retreatants. Many already had a meditation practice, and it was clear that they had been reflecting on how best to make a positive difference in the world by helping themselves and others. We appreciate their willingness to enter wholeheartedly into the community life and to share their practice with us.

Rev. Master Andō offered Dharma talks and discussions on “Awakening the Heart of the Bodhisattva,” along with formal spiritual counselling, during the week of June 22-29. Beginning each talk with selected inspirational references from our liturgy, she portrayed ways in which Maitreya, Avalokiteshwara, Manjusri, Samantabhadra, and Kshtigarbha exhibit the boundless love for all beings that is the essence of the bodhisattva heart. We were glad to welcome the 35 guests who joined us for this uplifting retreat, and we hope it was of benefit to all.

### **Memorial Ceremonies:**

Rev. Master Jishō was the celebrant for a memorial on July 12 for Wol Sun Yi Moore and her husband Anthony James Moore. Rev. Master Jishō and Rev. Sun Moon had responded to a request from

a care facility in Yreka to minister to Wol Sun Yi as she was dying of cancer; we were fortunate that Rev. Sun Moon was here at the time, as she was able to speak and recite scriptures in Korean. Two weeks after Wol's death, her husband also died. Health professionals who had cared for Wol attended the memorial and shared their memories of how, despite being deaf, Wol was able to communicate happiness and joy to others.

Rev. Master Meian and other long-time monks attended a memorial ceremony for Dr. James Parker at the high school gymnasium in Mt. Shasta in July. Dr. Parker had been a friend and doctor to many in the monastic community over the years and was a leading citizen of the town.

### **Monastic visitors:**

We were happy to welcome Rev. Aiden Hall from Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey and Rev. Leon Kackman of Columbia Zen Buddhist Priory in South Carolina. During his time here in June and July, Rev. Aiden took an active part in the project of thinning and clearing our forest for fire safety. He also spent time at both Fugen and Compassionate Friend Hermitages.

Rev. Leon has taken up his new office as Lay Ministry Advisor for North America, visiting with lay ministers at the Abbey, in the San Francisco Bay Area and the Eureka-Arcata area. On July 15, he departed on a round of travel that will take him to the Pacific Northwest and Canada before returning to Shasta for the Lay Ministers' Retreat. We are grateful to both Revs. Leon and Aiden for their training and help this summer, and we look forward to seeing them both again.

We were sad to say goodbye to Rev. Sun Moon of Korea, who was with us from mid-April through June 30. During her visit she prepared some delicious Korean meals and shared information about monastic training in the Korean Son (Zen) tradition.

## **Group Visits:**

Members of a Sufi group led by Saul Baradofsky paid their bi-annual visit to honor Rev. Master Jiyu. They recited their own translation of *The Scripture of Great Wisdom* followed by circumambulation of Rev. Master Jiyu's Stupa while chanting. Saul shared stories of his friendship with Rev. Master in the early days of her time in the U.S., followed by a picnic lunch.

On July 19 we were glad to welcome Thich Thien Duyen and a small group of lay practitioners from Kim Quang Temple in Sacramento for a day visit. They joined us for lunch and asked many questions about our practice here. They were particularly interested in our way of chanting Scriptures in Western religious chant and we were happy to offer them some CD recordings of our services together with daily ceremonial booklets.

One week later, two busloads of Vietnamese Buddhists from San Jose pulled up at the gate. 110 visitors made their way to the Buddha Hall to offer bows, chanting, and generous gifts to the Abbey community. Afterwards they visited the Buddhist Supplies Shop and we all enjoyed an outdoor lunch.

## **Classes and talks outside the Abbey:**

Rev. Vivian reports that the local congregation reading/discussion group completed their study of the book *Field Notes for the Compassionate Life: A Search for the Soul of Kindness* by Marc Ian Barasch during the spring training term. Nineteen members took part in discussions of various facets of compassion, and agreed that the study had been useful in deepening their training.

The affiliated meditation groups in both Chico and Meadow Vista (Bear River) continue to flourish. In May, Rev. Vivian led a day retreat focusing on compassion for the Bear River group, in addition to a potluck meal and the group's regular meeting. Rev. Aiden Hall wound up a visit to the U.S. with a weekend retreat in Meadow Vista.

Rev. Master Serena visited the Chico group from May 7-10, where she offered teaching on the theme of “Our Meditation Practice.” She gave a Dharma talk on Great Master Dōgen’s *Rules for Meditation* and led a daylong retreat; the focus on the talk and discussion was on maintaining a meditation practice.

This spring we received invitations to offer teachings to two groups in Klamath Falls, Oregon. On May 3, Rev. Master Jishō and Rev. Amanda visited a group at the Friends Church, where they offered meditation instruction and teaching on how to put meditation into practice in daily life. That same day, Rev. Masters Shikō and Oswin answered an invitation from the director of the Diversity Center at Oregon Institute of Technology to give a presentation on our Buddhist practice.

In June, Rev. Helen spoke to a World Religions class taught by Kathy Krauss at Rogue Community College in Grants Pass, Oregon.

— Rev. Margaret

## Berkeley Buddhist Priory

— Berkeley, California – USA —

The garden behind the Priory's garage had some improvements. We took down the old trellis on the back of the garage and put up a new trellis. We planted new honeysuckle vines to cover the trellis and they are thriving and already starting to cover the wall with some beautiful blossoms.

A local Tibetan monk, Venerable Ani Mauck, had a thirty year old nephew, David Mauck, who committed suicide. We held a Segaki service for David on July 29th. Suicide is naturally very rough karma for the person and it wonderful aspect of Buddhism that we can offer the teaching and merit to those who died in despair.

On July 11, we held an animal funeral for Durga, Paul Bridenbaugh and Cheryl Abel’s fifteen-year-old female dog.



*Durga's funeral altar*

On July 19 we held two funerals for Tobi Zausner cats, Bianca and Gabriel.

— *Rev. Master Kinrei*

## Eugene Buddhist Priory

— *Eugene, Oregon–USA* —

### **A Quiet Summer and a Thank You**

The priory was on “half-schedule” from May through July so that Rev. Oriana could get rest and treatment for her back. We followed our Wednesday afternoon of meditation and book discussion, and our Saturday and Sunday scheduled activities. I would like to thank the congregation for their commitment to practice during this time and for continuing on with Sunday morning with good hearts when I was unable to be present. Thank you to Rev. Helen of Shasta Abbey who spent 10 days at the priory in May allowing me to leave for a short rest. I would particularly like to thank Ernie Rimerman for handling our Saturday work days and meditation days for the last few months, and Doug Carnine for stepping in several times when ceremonial and teaching support were needed.

### **Trip to Throssel Hole Abbey**

Rev. Oriana went to Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey from August 5 – August 31 to visit with the monastic community and Rev. Master Daishin Morgan. Rev. Helen Cummings was resident monk while Rev. Oriana was away. The congregation particularly enjoyed Rev. Helen’s expertise at choir practices.

### **Supporting the Wider Community**

In early May we were notified of the death of Joe Seville, age 17, who had committed suicide on April 24. A close friend asked if someone from the priory could attend the memorial and speak about death from a Buddhist perspective, and Doug Carnine attended the service for this purpose.

The priory also received a call from a social worker regarding the death of a local Vietnamese man, Hien Diep, from cancer. He had died on June 16 and as he requested, they were looking for a Buddhist temple that would put his ashes in the

ceremony hall for 49 days. A small memorial altar was set up in the Kanzeon shrine for this purpose. When Rev. Oriana returns from Throssel, the ashes will be taken to the Oregon coast and put in the ocean and the memorial tablet sent to Hien Diep's only relative in the U.S., now living in Santa Barbara.

### **Update on Priory Projects**

During June and July, a handful of contractors came to the priory to speak with Rev. Oriana and give estimates for doing jobs around the property. As a result, and after discussion with some of the congregation, we have hired a local company—Cutting Edge—to do the following jobs: improve drainage in the front of the property by the main building; put in electrical lights down our long drive; improve the gravel on the drive and gravel our “side drive.” The people from Cutting Edge are both creative and practical in their solutions and came in at a good price. They will also level and prepare the ground for our new storage shed, which will be installed next spring. We have a commitment from Cutting Edge for the work to be completed “before the rains come.” At the same time, we have decided to hold off on work to level the foundation of our main building.

Meanwhile, Ernie Rimerman and Bev Schenler are continuing on with their work of cleaning out our tool shed. That should be completed and the shed taken down by the beginning of September.

— *Rev. Oriana*

### **Lions Gate Buddhist Priory**

— *Lytton, British Columbia – Canada* —

During the third week of May we held the first week-long retreat of the summer. A number of people attended from around the province. Rev. Master Kōten, Rev. Master Aurelian and Rev. Valeria offered Dharma Talks throughout the week, and we ended with a joyful Wesak Ceremony on May 25.

At the end of June we moved back to Bodhidharma Hall from the residence we had been renting at the farm at the base of our property. The move entailed much sorting, packing and cleaning, and we're grateful to all who came to help us throughout the month. Bodhidharma Hall is an old cabin which was here when we bought the land. As our community grows, we've tried to improve this dwelling. It has become apparent that we will probably need more space soon, so we have begun preliminary research into what will be required to build a Meditation Hall and support buildings in Great Wisdom Park. We hired a surveyor to execute a topographical survey of the site, which will assist a designer/architect in developing plans. One of things we discovered from this survey is that the elevation of the highest point of the Park is well below our water well, which will be helpful in getting water to the site. There is still much preliminary work to be done; however, we are seriously considering Pan-Abode buildings. They are very attractive, would look good in the wooded environment, and have a number of advantages. They have been used for churches, public buildings, and dwellings throughout Canada and around the world. Examples can be seen on their website.

On June 22 we held the Annual Kwan Yin (Avalokiteshwara) Festival Ceremony in Lytton. This ceremony is held at the site of the Chinese Joss House in Lytton, which was built by early Chinese newcomers to Canada. "Joss Houses" were common throughout Canada, the U.S.A and Australia with the coming of settlers and labourers to the new worlds. They served as places of worship, healing, and gathering for the Chinese dispora. The one in Lytton was unusual, because it contained a statue of Kwan Yin on its altar. The Joss House was built partly for the protection of Chinese immigrants following a devastating epidemic. The ceremony this year was attended by many congregation members and visitors from Edmonton, Victoria, Vancouver, and the local area. It was followed by a meal at the Anglican Parish Hall.



In late June and July, we had very hot, dry weather, and on July 16, we had to evacuate the temple due to a severe forest fire. A very strong wind caused a small fire to flare up extremely quickly and it was soon out of control. We were only given 20-30 minutes to leave, and we, along with all residents of the valley, left with not much more than the clothes on our back. We were away for a week, as the crews worked to gain control of the fire. Heavy smoke hampered their efforts and made it impossible to employ water bombers. The local Emergency Services provided accommodation and meals for all evacuees, and we were kept well-informed throughout the time by the various branches of the local and provincial governments. Finally, cooler temperatures and an unseasonable rain storm helped dampen the fire. Everyone was very fortunate; no one lost their houses, although a summer cabin and an outbuilding on one of the farms was consumed by the fire. The fire came to within 100 metres of our residence. We are grateful to the heroic efforts of the BC Wildfire Management Branch firefighters, to the various agencies who helped us, and to the people of Lytton who opened their hearts to everyone during this very difficult time.

We have been delighted to welcome many visitors this summer, who have come to stay for various lengths of time, from the local area and other parts of BC and Canada. We were delighted to see Rev. Master Andō from Shasta Abbey, who came for a few hours' visit on the day we returned after the fire, as well as Rev. Master Mugō from Throssel Abbey and Rev. Leon from Columbia Zen Buddhist Priory in South Carolina. Also we received regular visits from our friends Lama Tse Wang and Rev. Sukha, two monks who train in the Tibetan Buddhist Tradition.

— *Rev. Master Aurelian and Meredith Midtdal*

## Vancouver Island Zen Sangha

— *Victoria, British Columbia – Canada* —

Looking back over the past few months with perfect west coast weather of 25 C and a nice cooling breeze off the ocean most days, we can reflect on our good fortune in having a most dedicated teacher in Rev. Master Meiten, an active sangha consisting of both senior and newer members, and a number of future projects to interest us.

We've also had a very pleasant and instructive visit recently by Rev. Master Mugō who was able to stay more than a week this time. While here, she gave talks to both meditation groups, enjoyed a sangha tea and still managed to get some sight-seeing around Butchart Gardens and Victoria's Inner Harbour in.

As is our custom, we now head into a five-week break from our formal meditation groups to allow a renewal period for our teacher and a little more time for lay members to spend with family in summer activities.

Plans for this fall include one of Rev. Master Meiten's Dharma intensives, this time on Great Master Dōgen's *Rules for Meditation*, and the late October launch of our teacher's latest book *Returning to Stillness* which will be available for download, as are the first two books, and also in print form. Donations will be most gratefully received.

— *Frank Bowie*

## Wallowa Buddhist Temple

— *Joseph, Oregon – USA* —

It has been a very full spring and summer in the Wallows, with five retreat guests, numerous ceremonies, a great deal of progress on the Retreat Guest House, and two joyous Open House events at the temple. We were visited this season by three lay ministers, two of whom were able to come for an extended stay in the area and became an integral part of daily life at the temple. Two other

guests joined us from out of town, each for an individual three-day retreat. In May, our Wesak potluck celebration and open house included a memorable gigantic round chocolate cake. The monks offered a house blessing for a vast Victorian mansion, at the start of an undertaking by the new owners to restore it after years of disuse; it was a pleasure to be part of helping that dear old home come back to life. Also, we were glad to offer three memorials and two weddings here at the temple.

Our new Retreat Guest House is nearing completion. The walls are painted, electricity is on, fir interior doors and oak flooring have been installed, the donated woodstove has arrived, and the hearth tile has been laid. After oiling a great deal of wood, we have completed a beautiful octagonal deck leading to the entrance – shaped with eight facets for the Noble Eightfold Path. Gable end shingles go in this week. A short ramp and steps have been designed to access the south porch, to be done in September. Currently we are turning our attention to countertops for the custom alder cabinets handcrafted by a skilled volunteer, to be followed by plumbing fixtures and then inside trim. Both the fundraising and the actual work are now a short distance from the finish, and it is possible that the building could be in use within two or three months. It is a joy to work with the many volunteers and tradespeople who are integral to this process.

In August the congregation and monks were delighted to organize and host a Temple Open House for the public to come and tour the new facility. We estimate that some six dozen people attended over the course of an afternoon, enjoying homemade refreshments together with live music offered by two of the congregation, Heidi Muller and Bob Webb, on a bright summer day here in the mountains of Northeast Oregon.

One of the main functions of the Wallowa Buddhist Temple is 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.

— *Rev. Clairissa*

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## Europe

### Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey

— *Northumberland, England – UK* —

#### **Monastic news:**

Rev. Master Daishin returned from the Hermitage for two weeks during August. All his monastic disciples from other temples came to stay during this time for the opportunity to be with him. Rev. Aiden had also just returned from his three month visit to Mount Shasta. It was a significant time for all the monks concerned to have this time with Rev. Master and also a rare opportunity for all the visiting monks to catch up with each other and the community.

Rev. Master Haryo has visited many of the European temples during this latter part of his visit and is now back with us until he leaves to return to Shasta on September 10th.

#### **August sesshin:**

Our week-long sesshin in August has always been our most popular and again we had over 30 guests come from all around the UK and also from Europe. Rev. Master Leandra ran the retreat with Rev. Aiden's support. She gave a series of four talks exploring the meaning of 'Searching the heart', as well as giving individual Dharma interviews with everyone. The week was a grey windy and wet one for the most part, but there is always a brightness and energy when so many practice deeply together.

**School visits:**

We have a regular but small number of requests from schoolteachers, asking if they can bring along their pupils to find out about Buddhism, meet monks and see the monastery. Who knows what seeds this may sow for some of them in the future? This also helps the teachers with teaching Buddhism in their school. The children can be of any age from 5 years to sixth-formers (17-18 years).

Summer term seems a popular time as we have had several visits lately. For example we have recently had visits from Wearhead Primary School and Allendale Primary School, both very local. It was a delight to see the interest and enthusiasm of the children as they are so appreciative. Following their visit the Wearhead Primary class children all sent personal hand-drawn thank you cards, and Allendale School sent an offering of food from our local Co-op store.

**Grounds work:**

Along with much of the country, during parts of July we had a 'real summer' of bright sunny days and much work was done outdoors. There had already been steady ongoing work of trimming and thinning of trees, gardening and clearing thistles and ragwort by lay trainees and any available monks.

We had one community work morning specifically for work on our property and grounds with monks and resident guests working in teams on various projects; a variety of weeding and tidying around the property, sanding window sills outside the Guest Cottage, cleaning and freshening up paintwork and of course, a team worked in the kitchen preparing lunch and also baking fresh cookies for our morning tea together.



*Rev. Chandra overseeing kitchen work*

One of the work areas was outside the Guest Cottage where we have had a regrading of the driveway to make a smoother turning area which makes it easier for delivery vehicles to reverse and turn. (See photo below) There was extra work to be done tidying and replanting the newly shaped garden outside the Guest Cottage.



*The reconstructed driveway*

### **Green Mountain walks:**

We have enjoyed some delightful walks this summer, organised by the Green Mountains Walking Group, members of the Durham and Newcastle groups, with an open invitation to monks. Rev. Master Haryo has joined in on occasion and appreciated seeing some of our beautiful countryside in the company of some of our local lay sangha. Walking is a very nice way to be together and we always end up at a teashop or café for tea and cake refreshment.

— *Rev. Alina*

### **Dharmazuflucht Schwarzwald**

— *Gutach (Black Forest) – Germany* —

We had the great pleasure of having several monks visit us over the summer and treasured their time with us. In early summer Rev. Master Mokugen, the Abbess of Great Ocean Dharma Refuge in Wales and Rev. Master Fuden's Ordination-sister, came for three

weeks (photo below), followed by Rev. Master Leandra, the acting Abbess of Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey, who stayed with us for two weeks.





In July Rev. Master Haryo, the Head of our Order, visited us for a week. It was very good to have his kind presence in our temple. We were able to have a variety of helpful talks with him, and on the last day of his stay he gave a Dharma-talk for us and a few congregation members who came for the meditation Sunday. He spent many hours setting up our new computer as well as fixing door locks and window hinges and improving other practical things in the house. On his way back to Throssel Hole, unfortunately his flight was cancelled because of a strong storm, and he was stranded the whole night in Amsterdam airport. We very much hope that he will come again soon!



*Rev. Master Haryo with Rev. Master Fuden and Rev. Clementia in the Meditation Hall*

Shortly before Rev. Master Haryo arrived, we were given a newly born kitten by our forest farmer neighbour. Given that the kitty's Mom was a half-wild cat and had already passed on the importance of caution towards humans to her, she was very shy

and not very approachable when she first came to us. When Rev. Master Haryo arrived though, the kitten (“Micia”: kitten in Italian) had already become more accustomed to us and spent every day a little time on his lap.

In early August, lay minister Paul Taylor from Lancaster in England came to visit us, as he has been doing every year around that time. We always much enjoy having him here. We also had visits from other old-time congregation members such as Ursula Heini from Basel in Switzerland as well as Barbara and Stefan Lang and Peter Haller from Munich.

We tend to keep the months of July and August free of formal retreats, so that we can get the many practical jobs on the property done during the summer months. During that time, our guests tend to come on an individual basis. Not being well known in this region yet, so far we only had very few new people come to the temple. We are glad in that we have a very good relationship with our closest neighbour, the forest farmer at the end of our small valley.

We would like to reiterate our invitation to both monks and lay trainees to come and spend some time in our temple and train alongside us, which is always enriching for us.

Here are two more photos of the temple:



*The one below shows the pond in front of the property*



— *Rev. Master Fuden*

## Sitting Buddha Hermitage

— *Wirksworth, Derbyshire– UK—*

Since Sitting Buddha Hermitage opened to retreat guests in April this year a number of people have come to stay for individual silent retreat in the caravan or to make their own day retreat in the Kanzeon shrine. These facilities for quiet retreat are the main offerings of the Hermitage.

I have also had plenty of people popping round to see the place and have a cup of tea with me—if you are in the area or are going to be passing through please do contact me if you'd like to come and say hello and have a look around.

Rev. Master Haryo visited for a day in June. I was very happy to see him and show him around for the first time. It was great to receive this beautiful new Kanzeon scroll the day before, which I hung in pride of place in the main room. Thanks Sarah and Debbie in Edinburgh for helping me to get it.



*The main room with the new scroll in place*

One Saturday at the end of June, I went to the Regional Sangha Day hosted by the Leeds SRM Group at All Hallows Church in Leeds. We were about 30 people, including 6 monks, and the day was very successful in strengthening our connections as a Sangha.

The following day, Sunday, I attended a local event, Hidden Gardens and Courtyards of Wircsworth. About 25 private houses in the town centre opened their gardens to the public. Many people were on the streets, walking from garden to garden, greeting friends and neighbours—a delightful way to get to know the town and the local community.

*—Rev. Alicia*

# Great Ocean Dharma Refuge

— *Pembrokeshire, Wales—UK—*

In Memoriam Hilary Wilson: 5th January 1933- 24th July 2014.



Many of the wider Sangha would have known Hilary Wilson who lived in South Wales. He was a congregation member for many years at Throssel Hole, and in recent years also at Great Ocean Dharma Refuge. Hilary passed away on the 24th July 2014 after a long illness during which he showed a bright spirit and great fortitude. We remember Hilary with fondness and respect. His sons and daughter had arranged a moving family tribute at his cremation service. Rev. Caitlin accompanied by Eric Jones, led a short period of meditation during the service, requested by the family in recognition of how important and helpful the Dharma and Buddhist practice had been to Hilary.

In addition the family had requested the Buddhist funeral ceremonies for Hilary, and due to practical considerations some of these were held simply at Great Ocean Dharma Refuge. Rev. Caitlin was celebrant for a small private funeral ceremony held with close family at a Swansea chapel of rest. The following day,

the subsequent part of the Buddhist funeral ceremony—which includes the receiving of the Precepts—was held for Hilary at Great Ocean by Rev. Master Mokugen with the kind help of Rev. Jishin who was visiting from Reading Buddhist Priory. This was timed to precede the cremation service arranged by the family at Swansea. We extend our deepest sympathy to all his family and friends, and in particular to his children Mark, Sian and David. Hilary's lively presence will be missed.

In June, Rev. Master Mokugen was able to visit Rev. Master Fuden and Rev. Clementia in the Dharmazuflucht Schwarzwald. It was a pleasure to visit the new temple and benefit from some valued time of retreat and precious time with Sangha friends. Their warm welcome was much appreciated.

In July, we were very pleased to have Reverend Master Haryo visiting us for a week during his travel time around Britain. His wise, patient presence was much appreciated, as well as all the help and advice he offered during his stay.

This spring and summer, it has been a pleasure to welcome both lay and monk guests for periods of retreat as well as for short visits. Our small local group continues to join us for a half day retreat on Wednesday mornings. We extend our gratitude to all our supporters, and to all our visitors and retreatants for their help and contribution to the temple. You are very welcome to write or phone regarding visits or retreat opportunities.

— *Rev. Master Mokugen and Rev. Caitlin*

## Norwich Zen Buddhist Priory

— *Norwich, England – UK* —

Norwich Zen Buddhist Priory has been establishing itself in the months since it opened its doors. We have been adapting the schedule according to what seems to be needed. The Basic



Buddhism Evenings on Tuesdays (geared towards people who are not familiar with our practice) have proved quite popular and so a second one is now being offered each week on Friday evenings.

### **Monastic visitors**

It was a great pleasure to welcome Rev. Master Haryo, the head of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, to the Priory for the first time in early July. During his visit, the Sangha had the opportunity to meet with him, both informally, at a pot-luck lunch, and more formally, at a Dharma Evening, when we greatly appreciated his Dharma talk, which took as its starting point the role of a priory in lay training. Outside of his scheduled engagements, Rev. Master Haryo found time to fix various door handles and doors around the Priory and to offer advice on our internet connection. Rev. Master Haryo has an open invitation to return to the Priory whenever it works for him and we hope that it will not be too long before he can visit again.



We have also enjoyed welcoming two Throssel monks to the Priory when they were visiting their families in Norwich. Rev.



Chandra stayed here for a night at the end of April and joined us for a gardening morning, while in July, Rev. Gareth was able to come along to the pot-luck lunch that was held for Rev. Master Haryo.

### **Main altar**

The main altar in the Priory's meditation room has been 'work in progress' for a while and this work took a significant step forward when the Buddha statue was provided with a new backdrop, with a simple but striking design, of a shining gold circle on a tall banner of natural calico. Many thanks to Julia Clark for designing and making this back-drop, as well as a new altar cloth of cream calico. Combined with other changes to the items on the altar, the whole effect has been to draw everything together and make the altar lighter and more uplifting.



*The main altar with the new backdrop*

## Thanks

Many thanks to those people who have increased their standing orders or taken out new standing orders to the Priory. This regular income each month is extremely helpful to us in meeting our ongoing expenses (especially the rent of the property) and is greatly appreciated.

In addition, I would like to express my gratitude for the many ways, besides financial, that the Sangha support the Priory and me as Prior. I have been very appreciative recently of how people are offering help that is appropriate for them and how these varied contributions come together to form one multi-faceted offering that encompasses so much of the work that is needed to keep the Priory functioning.

— *Rev. Leoma*

## The Place of Peace Dharma House

— *Aberystwyth, Wales – UK* —

Our website, [www.placeofpeacewales.org](http://www.placeofpeacewales.org) has been rewritten and brought up to date. New CDs from the Dharma Reflections series have been added and are available on a donations basis. There is also a new section called News and Announcements.

We enjoyed a short but most welcome visit from Reverend Master Haryo and thank him for the effort he made in coming to see us.

There is often not a great deal of news to report about daily life in this small contemplative temple. The steady, day by day, step by step, unfolding of the life of faith flows on as the interior journey continues. Laity come and go as feels right for them. Seeing someone quietly do the work of training that enables awareness to deepen so that changes can be made and a life reclaimed may not be news but it calls forth gratitude. We owe so much to those who have gone before us and who not only kept the great Buddhist way alive but passed it on to our generation.

— *Rev. Master Myōhō*

## Portobello Buddhist Priory

— *Edinburgh, Scotland – UK* —

We like most others this year, have enjoyed a fine warm Summer here in Edinburgh. Scotland gets busy what with tourism, the Edinburgh festival and this year, the commonwealth games. We have had a fair amount of international visitors, just calling in to see what we're about before moving on to the beach, although one or two who are staying longer seem to have made a connection with us.

We had a welcomed visit from Rev. Master Haryo, who had time between teas and dharma sessions to fix the priory computer. We also enjoyed visiting the local car boot sale and flea market. His trip was finished off with a sangha gathering and buffet meal.

Our annual summer Scottish sangha retreat was well attended, the theme was 'being awake here and now'. The weather was fine and a river walk gave the opportunity to practice the mindful theme amidst nature. Gratitude to Bob McGraw again for the use of his home.

A trip and retreat weekend to Harris is planned for September and we look forward to the company of Rev. Finnan again, who kindly led the retreat last time on the mainland.

— *Rev. Master Favian*

## Reading Buddhist Priory

— *Reading, England – UK* —

During the past months at the Priory we continued to hold our usual group meetings and activities. Of special mention are two annual weekend retreats held at locations outside of the Priory. It is good to revive oneself and retreat with sangha at a location infrequently visited. The "Stroud retreat", as we call it, takes place

at the Monastery of Our Lady and St. Bernard, near Stroud in the west of England. We were joined by Rev. Master Saidō and sangha from Telford and Birmingham and fully booked the space at 19 people. It was a memorable and enjoyable time for all and we have booked again for next year.

A second retreat took place at The Peter Rendel Wholistic Centre (Hourne Farm), East Sussex. This was our 10th visit to this unique and upbeat venue. The venue offered unsurpassable surroundings and weather and a conducive place for meditation. We were a small group of six and followed a relaxed schedule. The schedule and the balmy weather were in agreement!

We all appreciated a visit by Rev. Master Haryo who visited us for six days at the beginning of July as part of his trip to the temples and priories in England. He was able to join the evening groups, and on Sunday we had a well-attended Get-Together with new members and old friends alike. We had a Welcoming Ceremony for him and the new Prior, Rev. Jishin, and then Rev. Master Haryo gave a broadly based talk. It included what brings us to train, and how Christian contemplative prayer ends up in a similar place to the deeper mind of zazen. (Hence Rev. Master Jiyu's choice of the name: Order of Buddhist Contemplatives.) A big thank you to him from all of us.

In Gratitude to sangha friends who have offered money, food and household items, and help around the Priory during the six months I have been at the Priory. It is a pleasure to be part of the life here.

Here are summertime shots of the meditation hall and back garden. The spacious shrine situated at the bottom of the garden amongst several trees is popular in the daytime at the moment.



*Priory meditation hall*



*Retreat Hut at the bottom of the garden*

— Rev. Jishin

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at Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey.*

*Order of Buddhist  
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## Further Information

This Journal is published quarterly by the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, which was founded by the late Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett. The Order is dedicated to following the tradition of Serene Reflection Meditation (Chinese: *T'sao-Tung Ch'an*; Japanese: *Sōtō Zen*) and includes both men and women monastics and lay ministers, all of whom are licensed by the Order. The main offices of the OBC are at Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey in England and Shasta Abbey in the US. These monasteries and several of the other priories and temples of the Order offer monastic training for women and men, whilst all temples offer instruction and retreats for lay trainees. Priests and those in training for the priesthood follow the celibate monastic path, while lay members of the Order follow the way of training of the householder. The Order also has a growing number of priories and affiliated meditation groups. The OBC is an international religious organization, incorporated with non-profit status in California, USA. The Ship and Three Drums image on the front cover of the Journal is registered in the United States as the logo of the OBC.

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 Text Format (RTF) or WORD files emailed to us at: [journal@throssel.org.uk](mailto:journal@throssel.org.uk).

The views expressed in these pages are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the Order as a whole.

We thank you for your interest in, and support of, the Journal and the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives.

*The Journal of the OBC is administered through the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives Activities Trust (reg. No 1105634 in the UK), and the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, a non-profit corporation, in the USA*

*Information on the OBC generally* is available on the website: [www.obcon.org](http://www.obcon.org)

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