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Snow covered Mt. Shasta, January 2015

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Snow covered statue in the grounds of Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey, January 2015

Editors Introduction

All the articles in this spring journal address aspects of Buddhist practice with respect to environmental issues**.** In the media we can hear and read varied statistics and predictions about the current state and future of the planet we live on. This is a vast and complicated issue which it seems is going to have an effect on us all in some form—whether large or small, and in what timescale is as yet unclear. Different experts and commentators present different scenarios.

How should we respond to these issues and deal with the possible complex emotions and uncertainty which may arise in response?

What can or should we as individuals do on a personal level?

Is it all right if we choose not to engage with the issue, as it can seem there is little or nothing a single individual can do to effect change on a global scale, and just get on with living with care for our immediate surroundings?

What can the teachings and practice of our tradition offer to help us with it all?

The articles here are personal responses to such questions. They do not represent an 'Order view' on the environment. We are glad to be able to pass them on, and hope they are of help and interest.

—Rev. Alina

Conserve, Preserve, Respect & Revere:

Rev. Master Jiyu's Teachings on Care for the Environment as an Expression of Buddhist Practice

From the monks of Shasta Abbey, compiled by Rev. Master Oswin Hollenbeck

—Mt. Shasta, California–USA—

This is an extract from a compilation of writings by monks of Shasta Abbey, writing about how the community has responded to environmental issues and climate change, based on the teachings of Rev. Master Jiyu, Founder of our Order.

AS PEOPLE WHO MEDITATE, OUR INSTINCT IS THAT environmental principles are part and parcel of the life of Buddhist practice. They are simply an aspect of how we live as Buddhists and express what we aspire to as an awakened way of life in harmony with all things. Great Master Keizan emphasizes this principle in the opening verse and chapter of the *Denkōroku*:

> Upon seeing the morning star, Gautama became Shakyamuni Buddha when He was, is and will be awakened to His TRUE SELF and said, says and will say, "I was, am and will be enlightened, together with the whole of the great earth and all its sentient beings, simultaneously.[1]

There is no fundamental separation between ourselves and others, and this vibrant recognition is a vital aspect of training and enlightenment, bringing joy, contentment, peace, and gratitude.

*

Rev. Master Jiyu gave us a constant example, instruction, and direction for 'how' we approach this that arose naturally out of, or led to, the 'why'. Our current practices arise out of the intimate, intense, 'hot-house' community life with her as our teacher. I will refer to Shasta Abbey, as it is the first monastery founded by Rev. Master Jiyu (in 1970) and a temple of our Order with which I am familiar. I spent 15 years of training with Rev. Master Jiyu as abbess from the mid-1980s until her death in 1996. I know that a similar process unfolded at other temples of our Order—I lived at one for 14 years—as her disciples and grand-disciples likewise established those places following their Founders' teaching carefully. So when I write 'we', I'm referring to the Shasta Abbey monastic community, and that community as it evolved over time, past and present.

*

Rev. Master Jiyu showed us how to relate to the whole spectrum of life: plants, animals, the rest of the natural world, the physical fabric of our monastery and its land, each other, and other people. She taught us to conserve resources, preserve our natural environment, to take nothing for granted, and to respect all life—and inanimate life, too. She grounded her approach in the spirit of Sōtō Zen's 'attention to detail' developed by Dōgen in his teachings on every-

minute meditation and strict attention to the ‘pure rules’ in his sequestered mountainous monastic setting. This keen mindfulness and respect morph into reverence, expressed by Keizan as ‘making a ceremony of everyday life.’ In titling one of her series of public lectures Rev. Master Jiyu expressed this teaching as ‘Sanctifying the Mundane’.[2]

We conserved our resources stringently—and still do. For heat we used whatever scrap wood we could find for woodstoves. Every summer when I was a novice, a small crew of monks would go up on Mount Shasta every day to harvest dead trees for cutting up later into firewood.

Cutting firewood

One year we had off-cuts from a pencil factory and had less tree felling of our own to do. The larger pieces we used

to construct outdoor benches and picnic tables. In addition to gathering branches on the monastery grounds, we sought kindling in a similar manner.

Preparing to chip

Nowadays we still cut some dead trees on the mountain and many local friends identify and offer dead trees for felling and use. Over time we gradually upgraded our woodstoves in the smaller houses and installed high efficiency gasification boilers (they burn the gas produced from burning wood) for our largest buildings, the residence halls for monks and lay guests. Even with solar panels for hot water and heating for these buildings and the kitchen, and a diversification of fuels—propane, kerosene, oil, and electric—we still use approximately 35 cords of wood each winter! [A cord is around 85 cubic feet]

We were and are conservative with electric power as well. A central focus of the training of novice monks is to learn what as a human being do we actually need? Dōgen gives a similar teaching in Rules for the Trainees Hall, quoting a Chinese master about ‘our being together in the same boat because of good deeds done in the past’[3] Whatever resources we have in our ‘alms bowl’ today depends on past karma, and our individual and collective choices of today influence our circumstances in the future. The fruit of training, eventually full Buddhahood, depends on gathering the ‘two collections of merit and virtue,’ so instinctively we do not want to squander the merit of today. Merit is precious to come by, and we have no guarantee as to its future provision. And, equally important, the bountiful merit we enjoy today is not only not ‘ours’ to ‘possess’ and use selfishly, it provides the means which enable us to help others—the compassionate essence of the Bodhisattva vow.

Other examples include constructing the kitchen’s bakery table from the wooden lane of a bowling alley, and buying costume jewelry in thrift shops to decorate the Buddha Hall’s main statues of Bodhisattvas, traditionally ornamented with all the finery and jewelry of Indian royalty. Rev. Master Jiyu taught the monks to look at everything with the eye of Buddha—can we see its Buddha nature? What use can be made of this so that it does not go to waste unappreciated?

One of our hermitages is powered completely off-the-grid. Like most people of few and modest means, we pass on hand-me-down clothing—vestments, robes, and other

monastic clothing. In sewing our Kesas, (meditation vestments) we assemble them from many small pieces of fabric in a patchwork pattern, copying the Kesas made from ‘waste cloth’ of the first Buddhist monks.

Robe fabric converted to a quilt

And we keep the spirit of the explanation offered by Ananda, the Buddha’s chief attendant, on how the monks would re-use a gift of 500 robes in successively smaller pieces.[4] With us, worn-out robes become quilts and hand-woven rugs and mats, used towels become washcloths and bathmats, sheets and T-shirts become cleaning cloths, and finally whatever’s left is shredded for use as a filling in cat and dog beds.

Mat made of robe material

Other used clothing is given to thrift shops for sale, or to homeless people in the area.

*

On the monastery grounds we have planted numerous fruit trees and for many years had a large organic vegetable garden. We used manure from our goats in the past, or nowadays, from local friends' animals as fertilizer, and mulched heavily to retain moisture in our dry climate's air. Care for all food is the hallmark of the kitchen, endeavoring to waste nothing. What is not edible or not eaten goes back into the compost. Regarding food preparation, Rev. Master Jiyu eschewed food fads and emphasized the use of simple, whole ingredients. At the same time we make complete use of donated food, regardless of its 'quality', and many a meal

relies on donations of unsaleable produce or ‘seconds’ from a local wholesale produce distributor.

We continue to give great care to flowers, trees, and other plants, both native and introduced. As we constructed the large buildings on the property, we transplanted trees when they were on a building site, and when they needed to be felled, the wood was turned into lumber or firewood. We constructed the cloister in such a way that we left as many trees as possible: the notches out of the roofs for trees too close to go around are still evident, and many of the trees are still living.

The cloister built around a tree to conserve it

We continue to use grass and woodchips as ground covers to minimize the dusty semi-desert environment at Shasta. We are also consulting local professionals about xeriscaping (landscape design incorporating water conservation), and greywater and water catchment systems.

At our two hermitages, we manage the forests to optimize use and preservation.

*

Rev. Master Jiyu once said in a public lecture that recycling was the greatest sign of a spiritual revival in the U.S. she had ever seen, because it taught to waste nothing and to make use of everything: everything is Buddha Nature; It permeates all. She also used recycling to teach the Buddhist principle of rebirth—whatever remains is not lost but returns in a new form, whether material, plant, animal, or human. Whatever cannot be reused is recycled, and with the help of our lay friends we regularly recycle paper, plastic, metal, glass, cardboard, Tetra Pak—anything that nearby cities' recycling centers will accept.

The monastery itself was fashioned by purchasing a motel at a reduced price. Part of it had been condemned to make room for Interstate 5, then under construction. (Sometimes we complain about the traffic noise, but I try to remind myself that the freeway's existence made the monastery possible.) By linking the small cabins with a cloister and constructing the larger buildings we needed, a monastery was formed—not all at once, of course, but over the course of forty years. And it's not finished: repair and maintenance are now the extern sacristy's daily fare. We constructed the cloister from used lumber that the community was offered in exchange for tearing down dilapidated houses in the local area. Some of that lumber is still visible in the oldest stretches of cloister. Many people, lay and monastic may remember straightening nails from that lumber for further use. In building our recent Guest

Office we incorporated lumber from trees cut down to make room for it, old bricks for the steps, varied leftover tiles donated by many people, and installed refurbished solar panels on the roof.

The Guest Office solar roof panels

In this excerpt on benevolence from the introductory collection of her lectures *The Roar of the Tigress, Volume 1,* Rev. Master Jiyu expresses in her own words many of the principles outlined here:

> If you think about it, very few people realize that benevolence is a law of the universe. We never think about air—be grateful for it—until somebody has stuck too much pollution in it; then we complain about the pollution. We don't give thanks for the fact that the air is there anyway. These are the reasons that you bow to your seat and you bow to the wall before and after meditation. If it wasn't for the carpet and the floor, you would have no place to sit; if it wasn't for

the wall, you would have no place where to rest your eyes quietly while you meditate. It is not a benevolent act to look at the carpet and say it's dirty, or to look at the wall and say it's spotty… Benevolence is the opposite of this: creating wise ways to help beings. In some respects, cleaning the carpet is a wise way to help beings. But at a later date, one must realize that it doesn't matter whether the carpet is cleaned at all. It's just a place to sit; it is, of itself, benevolent.

Benevolence is perhaps one of the most difficult of these four wisdoms—charity, tenderness, benevolence and sympathy—to understand, for everything in nature is at all times helping beings, yet, man is usually unaware of the fact. The trees are helping us, the flowers help us, not just by their beauty and their shade, but by what they do to the air. Our children and our animals are helping us. What are we doing in return? The trees have given us wood upon which to sit. We've just taken them; we haven't thought that the tree lost its life to give it.

…Benevolence is obvious in every single thing, even in things that humans have made—like the road out there, for example. The sun bakes it, the cars go up and down on it, the drunks and the dogs do various things on it, we walk on it, and it does the very best it can of being a road. Sometimes the strain is so great that it cracks, and then we have to be benevolent to it and mend it. Everything is doing the very best it can at all times to help us find the Unborn, and that is what makes it a law of the universe. So keep that well

> in mind. The road that you travel is one of the finest Bodhisattvas you've got: it is just being itself, the very finest road. Don't swear about its potholes; get out and mend them. If all you see of the road is its potholes, you will never see its Bodhisattvahood, and you will not understand this law of the universe.[5]

*

In her description of the benevolence of the road mentioned in the excerpt above, one monk pointed to another quality that can be cultivated in response to climate change: all-acceptance. In all-acceptance—'all' is a pretty encompassing word—we can view everything with the still, yet kaleidoscopic mind of meditation. This perspective leads directly to contentment and gratitude (and vice versa). It is in the calming of the passions of greed and hatred that we can find true peace. Rev. Master Jiyu taught us that 'all-acceptance is key to the gateless gate' of Zen—nirvana, Buddha nature, or 'That Which Is'. She spoke of the necessity of curbing inordinate desire and its mate, violence, in *The Wild White Goose*, her diary of training in Japan:

> Our present civilisation is founded on greed, on killing and plundering. I believe that we need to establish a different type of civilization run along the lines that the Buddha laid down based on his doctrine: a doctrine which teaches that greed, killing and plundering are wrong. One day there will be a civilisation under the protection of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. My duty is to train myself and, when

> the opportunity arises to establish that civilisation, to do everything I can. [6]

While she was constantly showing us where we could see more clearly and do better, she never lost sight—or let us lose sight—of 'the Important Thing', or 'the Great Matter'. All activities in our practice support that effort. In pointing in this last teaching to the root cause of many of our civilization's present day problems, she continues by highlighting the personal responsibility for transformation that needs to underlie and accompany social change:

> Just train myself and, in being ready, exhibit the world of the Buddhas in my own lifestyle that others may want to copy. The kingdom of the Buddhas can only be established by people like us. So we're the ones that have to do the training in order to bring about the civilisation of the Buddhas. We must change ourselves if we would change the world for we are the world[7]

*

The offering of these teachings arose out of our community's concern regarding the human contribution to climate change. Without minimizing the value of other approaches or measures, I have tried to show how the monks' community at Shasta Abbey learned from her many of the environmental practices that continue to naturally flow from our meditation practice. They are not add-ons, or peripheral to our training, and they are not based in idealism or on fear. One of the monastery's lay congregation who

recently moved back to the area mentioned how much he appreciated the community being at ease in responding to contemporary issues without an emotional attachment to 'saving the world.' This comment underscores the importance of responding to any of the 'eight worldly winds' or 'distractions'—gain and loss, fame and disgrace, praise and blame, elation and sorrow—from a place of strength, stability and stillness, all of which arise naturally as a result of regular meditation practice.

These sorts of details arise where meditation turns into the mindfulness of daily life, and they're inexorably linked to the Precepts, compassion, gratitude, and all-acceptance. Most, if not all, of the practices described here are activities that we as Buddhists, and especially as meditators, would want to be doing anyway, to the extent that we can. Recognizing our connection with others also brings joy—we do these things out of gratitude for the opportunity to train. Beyond right and wrong they are simply 'good' to do. The current possibility of climate change only makes the stakes higher and the human contribution more critical. Not paying attention and not responding in wise and compassionate ways multiply the karmic consequences for all concerned. And our fundamental compass, for small acts or grand ones, is our practice of Serene Reflection Meditation.

Thank you, Rev. Master Jiyu.

* * *

See appendix on page 61 for details of environmentally sustainable practices in Shasta Kitchen, as at 2012.

Notes

1. Zen Master Keizan Jokin, *The Denkōroku: The Record of the Transmission of the Light*,. trans. Rev. Hubert Nearman, (Mount Shasta, California: Shasta Abbey Press, 2nd ed. 2001) p. 1.
2. The series of talks are available to listen to here; http://www.shastaabbey.org/teachings-RMjiyu.html
3. Great Master Dōgen, paraphrase of 'The fact that we are in this boat is due entirely to our good deeds in past lives' from *Rules for the Trainees Hall* in *The Monastic Office,* trans. Rev. Hubert Nearman (Shasta Abbey Press 1993) p.99.
4. The successive sequence Ananda gave was robes, smaller robes, cover-sheets for pillows & cushions, floor sheets (carpets), foot towels, cleaning cloths, and finally, shredded and added to plaster for walls. This story is found in three places in the Pali canon. For origins and analysis see http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/37.14-How-robes-are-recycled.-piya.pdf
5. Rev. Master Jiyu Kennett, *Roar of the Tigress, Vol. 1* (Shasta Abbey Press, 2000) p. 172.
6. Rev. Master Jiyu Kennett, *The Wild White Goose,* (Shasta Abbey Press 2nd Ed. 2002) pp. 216-217.
7. Rev. Master Jiyu Kennett, *The Wild White Goose,* (Shasta Abbey Press 2nd Ed. 2002) p. 217.

Some Personal Reflections

Rev. Master Oswin Hollenbeck
—Mt. Shasta, California–USA—

I FOUND COMPILING REV. MASTER JIYU'S. TEACHINGS ON environmental concerns to be a helpful response to questions raised in various Buddhism and ecology books and by our own lay congregation. One question is, 'What can I do?' I hope some of these specific practices may prove useful in your own life and inspire you to create additional ones. Another question is 'How?' and here is the power and value of community, which for us, of course, is Sangha. Working with others, and simply knowing that others are making the same effort, help counter despair and discouragement and give a sense of stability, hope, and purpose.

In exploring ways to respond, one monk commented that she was interested in an interfaith group's response to these concerns because she felt that people learning to work together is, and will continue to be, essential for any lasting or effective change. She was greatly inspired by a documentary film called 'Renewal'[1] which showcased the responses of various religious groups in the United States to environmental change, especially by a fundamentalist group in the South protesting mountain top mining. The film underlines the need to reach across what sometimes seem like unspoken boundaries in order to effect the common good.

People associated with our Order are very fortunate that we have had such a wise Founder and many excellent disciples to teach us the Buddha's way. In one sense, we are very far along in our response to climate change. But there is more, probably much more, to do. Climate change is a crisis that is unlikely to diminish. In fact, with the growing world population and the spread of materialistic values, the lives of future generations will probably find the issues of climate change a given, rather than a temporary crisis, simply a part of living on this planet of ours we call Earth.

The greatest gifts we as Buddhists can give are the practice of meditation, the Precepts, and all the good qualities that flow therefrom. Through mindfulness we have the opportunity to make our intentions as pure and selfless as we can, for it is our intentions that determine the karmic result. A great idea ill-conceived or implemented without concern for all aspects of a situation, or without regard for everyone's feelings and concerns is not likely to bear good fruit.

We can also avoid attachment to ideas and ideals, no matter how noble they sound. We will do what we can, our very best, knowing that it will never be enough. This is part of the great grief, *kokoro-konashiku* that Rev. Master Jiyu writes about in *The Wild White Goose*. [2] We can trust the laws of the universe, especially that each of us will reap what we sow, and that without fail, no matter how long it takes, good prevails. We can rest at peace at the end of a day or a life or a world, knowing that we truly did our best.

Notes

1. 'Renewal' is available from Interfaith Power and Light's website at http://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/resources/films/
2. Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett, *The Wild White Goose*, (Shasta Abbey Press, 2nd Edition, 2002) p.286.

Considering the Unseen Octopus:

Practising With All Beings

Sarah Whitehouse
—Edinburgh–Scotland—

A WHILE BACK I TURNED ON THE RADIO AND CAUGHT PART OF AN interview with a marine biologist. Talking about the way we humans affect marine habitats, she described how she had initially assumed a new species of giant octopus she'd seen during a recent deep sea expedition was a plastic bag; our rubbish is already such a common sight at the bottom of the sea. I was fascinated to hear about the hidden world she described, one still vastly uncharted, but upset to realise we humans are having a negative impact on it already, even though we've never been there. Apparently deep sea surveys by remote vehicle often show that our litter has beaten us to depths we don't yet have the technology to reach in person. And a recent study to record the amount of rubbish entering the sea from the Thames helps to make the link between this deep sea littering and our lives here. The plastic bag I throw away in my city flat may well find its way, via a system of waterways, into the murky world of some unknown, deep-living creature—and will cause harm there.

In comparison to other stories of environmental destruction, this case of mistaken octopus identity is small

fry. Doing a bit of reading for this article, I discovered that an estimated 300,000 people already die each year as a direct result of climate change, that we're not making the necessary reductions in our fossil fuel use, and that many species including our own are under threat as a result . So why do I get so upset about some individual octopus tangling in my Tesco carrier bag? And what does this have to do with our practice?

I came across the following quote from Dōgen's Bussho (Buddha-nature), a chapter in the *Shōbōgenzō*:

> The grass, trees and the forest are also transient. Thus they are no other than Buddha-nature. People and things, body and mind are transient. Thus they are Buddha-nature. The land, mountains and rivers are transient. Therefore they are Buddha-nature.[1]

What I find helpful about this quote is that, in a single breath, it links the transience of all things with their Buddha-nature. Dōgen isn't saying that things are eternal; nor is he saying that things, being transient, don't matter. And he doesn't make any separation between the Buddha-nature of a mountain or a tree, and the Buddha-nature of us. We're not above nature, nor separate from it. Trees and mountains matter in their transience, and so do we. Similarly, Rev. Master Haryo uses a wave as a metaphor for existence, saying that everything, including us, is a part of its movement. There are no fixed points anywhere. Mountains, trees, people, cities, thoughts, dreams, ghosts, and octopuses

—we're all tumbling together, shifting, coalescing and breaking apart. Drowning.

If everything is transient, then what is nature conservation? It can't be about trying to keep everything the same, trying to freeze time, because that won't work. Neither is it about thinking that, change being inevitable, we might as well give up.

I feel overwhelmed by the scale of the environmental destruction we face. It's not something that I, as an individual, can solve. Seeing the way we're blindly rushing ahead into such a scary future makes me want to close my eyes and not look. Yet this kind of denial just adds to the problem. In fact, perhaps this lack of attention really is the problem. According to our practice, people don't ever mean to do harm and, when they do, it's out of a lack of clarity, a lack of attention to the reality of things. We do harm because our world view is skewed by fear and desire.

We talk about this stuff all the time and we know it. But, for me, there's something about considering a particular octopus, a creature very different from me—one whom I will never meet. It helps me see that, even though I can't fix climate change, there are things I can do that would make a difference to some unknown creature somewhere. It helps me turn towards the reality of the situation we find ourselves in—a reality that includes all of existence—without becoming overwhelmed.

When it comes down to the nitty-gritty of this, though, it's not easy. In the back of my mind as I write is the 250-mile round trip I take each week in my grizzly old gas-guzzling car. I justify this to myself in various ways, mostly

by deciding that the job I travel for makes a positive difference. But does the difference I make counteract the negative environmental effects? That's a sum I don't know how to do.

I also find myself wanting to blame corporations and governmental bodies. They're the ones with the power, I tell myself; they're the ones who need to change their ways. What difference do my own choices make in comparison? And yet a corporation or government isn't really an all-powerful entity. It's made up of individual people who may well feel as powerless as me. To make the necessary changes, we all need to be involved. Bigger systems do need to change, but all we can ever do as individuals is what's in front of us.

I came across a poem recently that challenged me to think about what form my own involvement should take. This poem, *Lifestyle Choice* by environmental activist Danny Chivers asks, 'what if the abolitionists, instead of fighting slavery/ Just stayed at home and put a bit less sugar in their tea?'[2] Boycotting sugar must have sent an important message to the plantation owners who used slave labour. But the poem suggests that this probably wouldn't have been enough on its own to bring slavery to an end. Similarly today, though our everyday choices are vital, being an ethical consumer probably isn't enough on its own to halt the negative effects of climate change.

So what else can we do? I realised that a lot of the other things the abolitionists did could be grouped under the heading of 'communication' and I think the same is true when it comes to climate change. Because it's easy to get

caught up in our own lives and forget about the broader context—even to be in denial—it seems to me that it's important we keep communicating, so that we keep this issue in constant view. This might be anything from sharing ideas with friends and family, to political lobbying, to making a poem or a painting. Even using a cotton shopping bag or buying energy saving light bulbs could be seen as a helpful communication that may have repercussions beyond the obvious.

Thinking about all this makes me want to give my life a kind of spring clean, looking at my ordinary daily decisions with a wider context in mind. To focus on the effects that my actions have on a particular octopus (or bat, or tree) helps me see this as more than an abstract question.

It feels almost miraculous in the midst of all the tumble and confusion that we sometimes, somehow, find a way to attend to each other—to offer care and respect. And not just to our closest people, but to the unseen octopus with whom we are also in relationship. It seems to me there's a kind of tenderness that comes from recognising we're all in it together. Wild creatures I neither know nor understand, creatures in all senses dark to me, but particular, singular, and unique—as I am—are touched by my actions. It's not about trying to do more than we can do. It's about being guided by this tenderness—to octopuses and others—doing what is ours to do and trusting this will be enough.

Dōgen says that all things are transient and, in their transience, have Buddha-nature. We can't make anything permanent; neither can we turn away from its impermanence. Everything changes. When I recognise this,

I become tenderly attentive to how things are here and now. Everything matters. Recognising this, I am compelled to pay attention to the wider context—to the larger ocean in which we swim. These two kinds of attention—to the transience of things and to their mattering—together call forth our response in a given situation. When this response is a communication with others, it can ignite their own attentiveness—just as communication from others buoys us up when we are flagging. Between us we can keep focused on what we have to do.

Notes

1. Great Master Dōgen's *Bussho* (Buddha-nature), *Shōbōgenzō*: from http://buddhanetz.org/texte/Sōtōshu.htm
2. Chivers, D. *The No-Nonsense Guide to Climate Change: The Science, the Solutions, the Way Forward*. (Oxford: New Internationalist. 2010) p.124.

Can We Make the World a Better Place?

Rev. Master Seikai Luebke
—Pine Mountain Buddhist Priory, Ventura County, CA–USA—

MY REASON FOR POSING THIS QUESTION IS BECAUSE IT IS ONE OF those existential questions which lurks in the background of the mind, and influences our thoughts and behaviors. Many people, especially the young, want to make the world a better place by helping to reduce social injustice, hunger, poverty, environmental degradation, and supporting the many other causes to which a person can belong. I am not so much hoping to give a final, authoritative answer as wanting to explore the question and its many ramifications.

Also lurking in the background is an assumption that most Buddhists, or you, the reader, genuinely would like to see the world be made better, at least in some achievable ways. But first, let us question that basic assumption. Does the world need improving, or is it just fine the way it is? This is actually not the easiest question to answer. I have read several accounts of Buddhist practitioners—whether monk or lay person makes no difference—who have had deep experiences of seeing the world anew, and seeing it as essentially perfect. Not a thing out of place! And so, if that is a view of reality that one might arrive at in Buddhist practice, does that mean that all the effort we expend in trying to make the world better is all a futile effort? If the

world is already perfect as it is, why go to any trouble to try to make it better? Or could it mean that there are two very different ways of viewing the world which might seem to be mutually exclusive, but in reality are not?

I've had numerous experiences of seeing the world as fine just as it is. The Scripture of Great Wisdom, which we recite every morning, says the following:

> O Sariputra, form is only pure; pure is all form—there is, then, nothing more than this, for what is form is pure, and what is pure is form; the same is also true of all sensation, perception, mental activity and consciousness.[1]

I've always taken this teaching of the Buddha to heart and endeavored to see the world through this vision, a view which is without any discrimination or judgment. It is a beautiful vision, one which sees into the true essence of everything, including oneself. The only problem is that one cannot remain indefinitely seeing things this way, or at the very least, seeing things this way without it being accompanied by what is called discerning wisdom. Because out of the basic purity (or emptiness) being spoken of in the scripture, there emerges the complexity of the world, and causality. Because there is also causality, we experience pain, suffering, unhappiness and all the other human experiences which motivate one to find solutions, to find ways to bring suffering to an end—or to make the world a better place.

So going back to the question of whether the world needs improvement or whether it is just fine the way it is, I have had to conclude that both are true simultaneously. And it is necessary to have the flexibility of mind to move back and forth from one view to the other, sometimes turning on a dime, so to speak. And of course there are many things about the world which we know we cannot hope to change one iota, and therefore we need to learn a deep acceptance of things as they are, which, in and of itself, is a profound religious practice. Deep acceptance, however, is not apathy or resignation about the way things are; rather it is more like a foundation from which one can step off into doing things to improve the human condition, or the condition of the world. Because acceptance is the foundation, we can approach life without too much in the way of idealism and high expectations, which always seem to turn around and bite us in the behind before very long.

Before we can go any further in deciding whether or not we are able to make the world a better place, I think we need to ask the question, can I make myself a better person? This, too, is one of those existential questions which has two sides to it. It has, on the one side, the view which arises out of sincere religious practice, that I, a human being endowed with physical form, five senses and the capacity for perception, rational thinking and consciousness, am just fine the way I am. I am void, unstained and pure. On a very deep level fundamental to being alive, I am complete and need no improvement. Having the kind of personality which is prone to viewing myself as inadequate, however, I personally have to keep coming back to this pure vision of myself, again and

again. It is pretty much necessary in order to maintain sanity, a modicum of self-esteem, and a positive outlook on life.

Then again, all of us have flaws, and few people would argue that they are perfect and have no room for improvement. I know I can make myself a better person because I have done so. I expect that most people can, except perhaps for the most proud, confused and embittered human beings. But making myself a better person has been a project, as it is for everyone who tries, because I'm complicated and have deeply embedded views of the way things are and of myself. That has never stopped me from making as full an effort as I possibly can to improve myself. The essence of the vow to make oneself a better person is never to give up; I know that so long as I make the best effort I can make, things continue to get better. My teacher, and her teacher before her, both stressed that just continuing to put one foot in front of the other and not giving up is the essence of practice.

So, it follows that if we, flawed human beings, can improve ourselves even a little bit, and recognize that such improvement is a worthwhile endeavor, perhaps we can change the world as well. Is this too big a leap to make? One aspect of this question is the recognition that it is extraordinarily hard to change anyone else besides oneself. Probably everyone tries to change someone else at some point in their lives: husbands their wives or vice versa, teachers their students, parents their children. As adults, we usually come to the conclusion that trying to directly change another person is a lost cause. People are, by and large, stubborn, and only change anything about themselves if they

decide they really want to do so—and even then it's a tough job.

It's a beautiful thing when a person succeeds in changing some difficult aspect of their behavior or personality. As a monk, I've seen it done many times. By virtue of making vows to live by a high ethical standard and practicing wholeheartedly, people succeed in tackling and changing really deep-rooted and often painful things within themselves. It takes persistence, devotion to practice, a positive attitude, never giving up, and above all a willingness to change. As I mentioned, I have made a lot of positive changes in myself over the course of time, and would not still be wearing monk's robes if it weren't the case. If enough people did the same, would it change the whole world?

As a young man, I wanted to help change the world. The 1960s was a decade of sudden, increased awareness of the damage that humankind was inflicting on the natural world. Rachel Carson's very influential book, *Silent Spring*[2] about the effects the pesticide DDT was having on birds and other animals, set in motion the environmental movement as we know it. The first Earth Day was held in 1970, 44 years ago this April. I was turning 14. That first Earth Day was a big deal in my junior high school. I wanted to be part of that movement, but could never seem to engage with any group of people; I never felt at home anywhere until I entered monastic life in my early twenties. So, on that level of being, I gave up hope of changing the world in any measurable way, and chose a path which, in theory anyway, helps to change it in ways which are invisible and intangible. Buddhist monks constantly offer the merit of their practice to all

beings, which we have faith makes the world a better place—and people often confirm that, in their lives anyway, such is the case.

Meanwhile, since 1970, the population of our planet has increased from 3.7 billion to 7.2 billion, an increase of 95%. This means that all of the environmental problems attendant to human overpopulation have, on the whole, only gotten worse. In 1970, global warming and climate change was something which a few people had predicted would happen, but wasn't really at that point measurable. But now, with twice as many people, we can measure it and know that it is a reality that all life on our planet will have to live with for as long as we can imagine into the future. On one level, this appears to be a pretty grim situation.

As I am writing this article, I have chanced upon an article (*It's the End of the World As We Know It…And He Feels Fine* in the New York Times)[3] concerning a British man named Paul Kingsnorth, who has been very active and influential in the environmental movement for over two decades. Kingsnorth has come to the conclusion that, at this point, there is nothing we can do to stop the inevitable breakdown of the earth's biological systems, and that mass extinctions and total disruption of human civilization is unavoidable. The article includes this passage:

> Instead of trying to "save the earth," Kingsnorth says, people should start talking about what is actually possible. Kingsnorth has admitted to an ex-activist's cynicism about politics as well as to a worrying ambivalence about whether he even wants

> civilization, as it now operates, to prevail. But he insists that he isn't opposed to political action, mass or otherwise, and that his indignations about environmental decline and industrial capitalism are, if anything, stronger than ever. Still, much of his recent writing has been devoted to fulminating against how environmentalism, in its crisis phase, draws adherents. Movements like Bill McKibben's 350.org, for instance, might engage people, Kingsnorth told me, but they have no chance of stopping climate change. "I just wish there was a way to be more honest about that," he went on, "because actually what McKibben's doing, and what all these movements are doing, is selling people a false premise. They're saying, 'If we take these actions, we will be able to achieve this goal.' And if you can't, and you know that, then you're lying to people. And those people . . . they're going to feel despair."[3]

Kingsnorth's approach intrigues me because it is a straightforward attempt to discard magical thinking concerning the environmental crisis we are entering, and simply accept catastrophe as inevitable. Whether or not catastrophe is, in fact, inevitable or can be ameliorated to some extent as it grows worse is, in a way, a separate question. Meanwhile, it is today's thinking that we are concerned with. Even if catastrophe is inevitable, does that mean that we should despair about the whole matter and give up trying to do anything to make the world a better place? I see it as running parallel to the Buddhist concept of

dukkha—suffering or unsatisfactoriness—which we acknowledge as a fact of human existence which we cannot make go away on the one hand, but on the other, something about which we can do plenty to reduce, and about which we can successfully find and apply solutions.

The First Noble Truth of Buddhism is simply the acceptance of suffering. Acceptance, as I mentioned earlier, opens the door to doing something about what is wrong in our lives. So can we in theory apply the same principle to accepting the collective suffering of the world, including environmental degradation? I don't know how to answer this question, in part because at the time the Buddha lived, around 600 BCE, the population of the earth is estimated to have been around 400 million people, there was not an environmental crisis, and so he was addressing human problems on an individual basis, i.e. what any one person can do to reduce their own suffering, It may just be that now, with the population of the earth in excess of seven billion, the collective karma of just that sheer number wipes out all individual attempts to bring the crisis under control. Still, does that mean we should despair and give up trying?

I personally don't think so. Despair, in and of itself, is an unsatisfactory state of mind. Being in despair does definitely communicate something to others around us, and does not make anything better. So, I draw a distinction between putting aside magical thinking and accepting hard-to-accept facts, or hard-to-accept truths, and despairing that there isn't a thing we can do to make the world a better place. In doing so, I might run the risk of being naively optimistic, but I'm happy with that.

Several years ago we at Pine Mountain Temple spent a considerable sum of money to have photovoltaic solar panels mounted on the roof of our workshop, which generate quite a bit of electricity. The following year we added six more panels, making a total of 30, which offsets about 75% of the total amount of power we use in the temple. Since its installation, our system has generated 58,000 kilowatt hours of electricity, which would otherwise have been generated by burning some sort of fossil fuel, putting 98,475 lbs. of carbon into the atmosphere. On a global scale this is meaningless, and a cynic might say "why bother?" But I'm glad we installed solar, and have felt good about it from the start; it was an investment in the future of the temple and the future of the earth. The above-mentioned article continues:

> Whatever the merits of this diagnosis ("Look, I'm no Pollyanna," McKibben says. "I wrote the original book about the climate for a general audience, and it carried the cheerful title *The End of Nature*"), it has proved influential. The author and activist Naomi Klein, who has known Kingsnorth for many years, says Dark Mountain[4] has given people a forum in which to be honest about their sense of dread and loss. "Faced with ecological collapse, which is not a foregone result, but obviously a possible one, there has to be a space in which we can grieve," Klein told me. "And then we can actually change."[3]

Kingsnorth would agree with the need for grief but not with the idea that it must lead to change—at least not the

kind of change that mainstream environmental groups pursue. “What do you do,” he asked, “when you accept that all of these changes are coming, things that you value are going to be lost, things that make you unhappy are going to happen, things that you wanted to achieve you can’t achieve, but you still have to live with it, and there’s still beauty, and there’s still meaning, and there are still things you can do to make the world less bad? And that’s not a series of questions that have any answers other than people’s personal answers to them. Selfishly it’s just a process I’m going through.” He laughed. “It’s extremely narcissistic of me. Rather than just having a personal crisis, I’ve said: ‘Hey! Come share my crisis with me!’ ”[3]

We are of course venturing into the whole psychological side of how environmental crisis affects human beings, whether we can deny it is a problem, or accept it and strive for a solution, or despair that it is inevitable, or accept it and just do what you can, however small and insignificant the act might be. I believe that we are all affected by the state of the whole earth, and that we cannot pretend that we are not at all affected, however subconsciously those effects might manifest. This is to say that, with respect to Buddhist teaching, I don’t think it is a question that we can avoid any longer. Just because the Buddha himself didn’t talk about it—in his time it wasn’t a reality—doesn’t mean that, today, as Buddhists, we should avoid the whole matter.

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, who worked with people facing death and wrote extensively on the subject, noted that people

pass through five stages in the process of accepting the inevitability of death: a) denial; b) anger; c) bargaining; d) depression; e) acceptance.[5] We can look around and easily see that there are climate change deniers digging their heels into the earth, fighting the whole notion. We can see people who are angry about the state of the world, demanding that someone—usually governments—must take action. There is plenty of bargaining going on, such as the exchange in carbon credits, which is one way of putting off the real solution of not burning fossil fuels anymore, period, so that we do not continue to increase the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. There are those who express depression, such as Paul Kingsnorth, and others who have labored mightily to encourage solutions and decided that it is largely a lost cause. And finally there is the stage of acceptance.

Eventually, we will have to arrive at a frame of mind in which we can accept that although humankind has dramatically altered the earth's biosphere, and this process is most likely irreversible, still, we should try to do what we can to make it better. There are of course, different realms in which one can operate in order to achieve this: there is the intimate, personal level of spirituality, in which every one of us can make a positive impact on the world, however minute and unmeasurable it might be, just by engaging in practice and working on ourselves; there is the external, impersonal, macro-scale level in which none of us can reasonably expect to make any impact, given the world's current human population of 7.2 billion. We can join or support causes which seek to diminish hunger, social injustice and environmental degradation in the world, and those are all

worthy causes, but whether it will be enough to stave off a calamitous future for humankind owing to overpopulation and climate change remains to be seen.

Regardless of whether we can actually accomplish anything to make the world a better place, there remains our own interior attitude and relationship with what is going on in the world, which is what the five stages of accepting the inevitability of old age, decay and death address. ("Old age, decay and death" is a Buddhist turn of phrase, which dovetails nicely with this process.) Denial is what we engage in when we just aren't ready to face the hard reality of something difficult. We do it all the time when confronted with some unexpected turn of events or things not working out as we had hoped: we deny the reality of what has happened and we fight it. In fighting it, naturally we put ourselves in an angry state of mind and being. Anger is the predominant characteristic of the human realm, along with our capacity for love, sympathy and empathy. Because we can mentally project into the past and the future, we desire that things be better than they are now, and from desire there comes the chronic frustration of things being not as we want them to be. Then we get angry.

The world right now is a study in this human phenomenon on an all-inclusive scale. As a species, we desire so much, we want and need so much luxury, so much material wealth and comfort, so much of everything—and having it all only blinds us to the hard reality that the world cannot support a high standard of living for 7 billion people. It is already stretched too thin. So right now we have one foot in the denial stage and one foot in the anger stage of

coming to grips with it. As a species, we have too many conflicting factions, and far too much collective anger to actually work in harmony towards solutions to the problems of humankind.

Still, there are those who claim that real progress is being made in the world. I imagine it is a matter of how you measure these things, interpret the data, and then arrive at a conclusion, but one school of thought holds that slowly but surely we are improving the overall quality of life in the world, and that widespread conflict is on the decline worldwide. I would like to believe that this is true. With the advent of super-sophisticated electronic gadgetry, it is now possible to be aware of and read about things that happen anywhere in the world within a few hours. This greatly expanded availability of information might make it appear that things are really going to hell in a hand basket, but it might just as easily be that this is only an illusion, created by the onslaught of information about the world in general.

Part of the difficulty in assessing whether or not the state of the world is improving, is that there are so many different currents of human activity going on at once, just like the world's oceans. There are warm and cold currents, prevailing currents and intermittent currents; there are phenomena like El Nino[6] which occurs every so often and the reasons for that are not really understood. Parts of the world that have, in the past, seen a lot of violence and upheaval do quiet down, and vice versa. Buddhism recognizes that there is constant change—anicca—and that is simply a fact of existence.

My teacher, Rev Master Jiyu-Kennett, taught that there is also a law of the universe which is to the effect that without fail, evil is vanquished and good prevails. On the face of it, this can seem like an overly simplistic aphorism. Very often it seems that, in a great many situations, evil in fact triumphs. To be honest, I have often contemplated this saying and really questioned its validity. But I have come to the following conclusion: given enough time, it is probably true. That is to say that, whatever happens in the world, or whatever happens to any individual, however tragic it might appear initially, given enough time, good will come of it because that it is nature of the universe.

So, to extrapolate on the idea that good ultimately prevails in the world regardless of circumstances, there are still going to be calamities such as typhoons, hurricanes and disastrous earthquakes, tornadoes and famine. These things happen regardless of human activity, and it is also probably true that we are making weather events like hurricanes, droughts and deluges bigger and more frequent; we cannot hope to make sense of it unless we take a very long-sighted view of things. The longer our range of vision, the further we can step back from the immediacy of what is happening at the moment, the easier it is to see that the laws of the universe simply keep operating indefinitely, that there is constant change, and that good can come forth from anything which happens given enough time.

Looking with far-sighted vision helps us to develop acceptance of the way things are right now. Moving through our list of the five stages culminating in acceptance, we deny, we fight and become angry, we bargain, we try to buy

our way to peace and security, we try to insulate ourselves from the constant change inherent in everything, but all of it, given enough time, fails. The reality is that all our attempts to change the way the universe operates fail, just as the reality is that good can and does come forth from everything which happens, given enough time.

Depression is a normal human response to loss, and what we face today is the loss of nature, of humankind living in balance with nature. Things have drifted so far out of balance that now a great many people who are of a sensitive nature feel a visceral sort of unease about the world, which can manifest as diagnosable depression. Or it might be more subtle than that, but no less real to the person who feels it. As conditions in the world deteriorate, depression will most likely become pandemic—virtually everyone will suffer some form of it. But we also have the capacity to move beyond it into acceptance.

It is also a fact of human existence that the older one becomes, the harder it is to whip up enthusiasm for a cause, no matter how noble or righteous; we tend to leave it to the young to do so. I'm told that the thinking of young people today tends toward a dark outlook of the future, that there isn't much anything anyone can do to stave off some sort of apocalyptic wave of change sweeping over the world, even if it happens in slow motion. Of course, they may be right—few people can see into the future. But all of us can still make conscious choices about how we think about the future, and our overall attitude of mind in the present, which is what matters most. A further paragraph in *It's The End of the World As We Know It, And He Feels Fine*:

> Sitting in the hut, the air stale and the light almost non-existent, I thought of something Hine told me earlier. "People think that abandoning belief in progress, abandoning the belief that if we try hard enough we can fix this mess, is a nihilistic position," Hine said. "They think we're saying: 'Screw it. Nothing matters.' But in fact all we're saying is: 'Let's not pretend we're not feeling despair. Let's sit with it for a while. Let's be honest with ourselves and with each other. And then as our eyes adjust to the darkness, what do we start to notice?'[3]

This strikes me as actually very consistent with a Zen attitude. If we feel depression or despair about the state of the world, OK, fine, allow yourself to experience that, but then, rather than indulge in it any further, just stop and look at it. Where does it come from? Where is it likely to lead? Is there any merit in despair or would I be better off making an honest attempt to let go of it? If I am not going to feel despair about the world, what would be a more appropriate, positive thing to be feeling?

All that we customarily talk about within the context of Buddhist and Zen teaching, when held side-by-side with the larger context of whether life as we know it can and will continue for much longer, takes on a slightly altered significance. Can Buddhism expand to include a much broader contextual basis, i.e. the state of the earth in the 21st century? In the event of cataclysmic events which might come to pass in the future, will Buddhism serve as a metaphorical life raft for people, enabling them to endure

hardship better than they would otherwise?

Whether Buddhism does, indeed, broaden out from the realm of religion to include being part of a much broader movement, a movement to radically alter the path humankind is currently on so that we do not self-destruct, is a question to be answered in the future. But I think that many of the things which Buddhism teaches are essential for such a movement to gain widespread acceptance and momentum. To reach across ethnic, religious, social and national boundaries, such a movement would have to be very inclusive and broad-minded. And I think it would have to not be too idealistic; that is to say that, from the start, a realistic attitude would be necessary, one which accepts that things will probably get much worse before they can get better.

I don't think Paul Kingsnorth's experiment in despair mentioned above is necessarily a narcissistic exercise, as he suggests. I would view such questioning as part of a much larger process which individuals enter into and for which they must find their own solutions, and then on a larger scale yet, a process which all of humankind desperately needs to be engaged in if it is going to survive. Collectively, we have arrived at a place where a serious questioning process needs to be entered into by everyone, given that the stakes are as high as they are. But this would require moving beyond the anger, bargaining and, ultimately, the grief, depression and despair that so many people feel.

If in the long run it turns out that the current doom and gloom scenario with respect to the net impact of seven billion people on the earth is completely overblown, and we do, in fact, come up with a whole bunch of workable

solutions which stave off disaster, then the process of talking about all of its ramifications will have been a worthwhile exercise. If it turns out that a gloom and doom scenario does indeed come to pass, then we will be asking ourselves why we didn't take the whole thing more seriously while we still had the opportunity to do so.

Meanwhile, what we can do involves a combination of internal and external endeavors. I have found that the practice of accepting things as they are is one of the most powerful ways of cultivating an overall state of happiness and well-being for myself. Acceptance means that all possible outcomes to a situation are OK. It requires putting down our deeply held views and opinions about things, an act of letting go. Whatever happens will be in accord with the laws of the universe, including cause and effect—the law of karma. Maybe there will be a calamitous future for everyone on earth: so be it. But, having accepted that things may indeed turn out this way, we are free to act in ways which are beneficial to other living beings.

Personally, I can't not do all the small things I do to make the world a better place: recycling, composting, gardening, picking up garbage and, above all, teaching the Dharma. It no longer matters to me whether I have any discernible impact, although I've been told at various times that I have a positive impact on people. One of the little bits of home grown wisdom from my youth that I have remembered is "wherever you go, leave that place just a little better than when you arrived." That's what I try to do.

If being an activist in the environmental movement is your way of taking action, there is nothing about that which

is inherently in conflict with Buddhist teaching. If remaining in the background and quietly supporting various causes, as I do, is your way, then more power to you. We should not fool ourselves, however, by thinking that not doing anything has no consequences whatsoever. All courses of action, including total inaction, have an effect. In other words, there is really no such thing as pure neutrality in this matter; we have passed beyond that point years ago.

In summary, I have a number of conclusions I have arrived at, as follows:

• Being alive, we cannot pretend that we are not part of the problem or the solution. Just being alive partakes of both, and so it is incumbent upon everyone to take some kind of action.

• In order to fully arrive at a place in which we can actually do things in our lives which have a positive effect for all living beings, we first need to cultivate a deep level of acceptance of the way things are and then proceed from there.

• The practice of meditation is probably the most powerful tool for affecting change, both internally for oneself, and externally for all other beings on this earth.

• As the Buddha taught, greed and desire for too much, followed by frustration and anger at not getting what we want, followed by bitterness, apathy, despair and all the other delusive states of mind, are what actually lie at the root of humankind's collective ills on all levels.

• We have freedom to choose how to respond, being either part of the problem or part of the solution. It will never

be completely black and white, but we can always make the effort to do our best.

• Wisdom is arrived at through trial and error, making mistakes and learning from them. On the largest scale, that of humankind, that is exactly the process we are engaged in.

If the Buddha were alive today, I can imagine he would have a lot to say about the environmental crisis we face on this planet. Even in his time, he advocated having a minimal impact on the environment, and a number of rules were created for monks in that regard. To do the least harm possible and to practice compassion for all living things are the basis of Buddhist thinking. To extricate ourselves from our current quagmire would require having these principles practiced not just by a few, but on a universal scale. It remains to be seen if humanity can move significantly in this direction soon enough to prevent calamitous events from occurring. Meanwhile, every individual who puts these basic principles into practice in their life, I believe, helps the whole world.

Notes

1. Narada Thera, *The Buddha and His Teachings,* 4th Ed., (Buddhist Missionary Society Publication 1988) p. 100, *The Second Discourse, Anattalakkhana Sutta*. The Mahayana Scripture of Great Wisdom is almost certainly based on this discourse of the Buddha; 'Regarding the five aggregates, or skhandas, it says: 'In like manner feelings (vedana), perceptions (sanna), mental states (sankhara), and consciousness (vinnana) are soulless.''
2. Carson, Rachel, *Silent Spring* (Houghton Mifflin, 1962).
3. New York Times article *It's The End of the World As We Know It, And He Feels Fine* Full article, 17 April 2014, can be found at: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/20/magazine/its-the-end-of-the-world-as-we-know-it-and-he-feels-fine.html?_r=0

4. Dark Mountain website http://www.paulkingsnorth.net/dm
5. Kubler-Ross, Elizabeth, *On Death and Dying,* First paperback Ed., (Macmillan Publishing Co. New York, 1970) Chapter III to V, pp. 38–112.
6. Wikipedia defines El Niño as 'the warm phase of the El Niño Southern Oscillation (commonly called ENSO) and is associated with a band of warm ocean water that develops in the central and east-central equatorial Pacific…El Niño is accompanied by high air pressure in the western Pacific and low air pressure in the eastern Pacific… causes global changes of both temperatures and rainfall.'

What is Engaged Buddhism?
Training With Climate Change and Environmental Destruction

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"I wish it need not have happened in my time," said Frodo. "So do I," said Gandalf, "and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us" J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring.* [1]

PERHAPS A FEW DISCLAIMERS ARE IN ORDER BEFORE I BEGIN. This article comes from the experience of one Buddhist trainee, one who sees her life to be inextricably interwoven in a web of interconnection with each and every other part of existence. I believe that climate change is real, that it is the greatest collective challenge facing humanity, and I cannot help but grieve not only for my own children's future, but for all living beings who are currently and will in the future suffer from its escalating consequences. So, in allowing myself to process this grim reality, I admit that I have found myself sometimes feeling small, afraid and powerless in the darkness, like Frodo in the mines of Moria [the lost ancient underground kingdom of the Dwarves, from *The Lord of the Rings*] and I imagine I'm not alone in that.

The Lord of the Rings is perhaps the quintessential myth of our age, and for Buddhist training, it carries quite a bit of

teaching. I see in Frodo the heart of the bodhisattva that can awaken in each and every being as we accept things as they are and take up the work that comes to us. By doing so, one embodies the "ever so many hands and eyes" of Kanzeon.[2] According to both Dōgen and Rev. Master Jiyu, this is the training of a bodhisattva. In, *The Roar of the Tigress II*, she says,

> No matter how deep the darkness, when we are motivated by Great Compassion, as we grope in that darkness—as we hunt in it—it is as if our hands have eyes to find what is needed. Kanzeon is looking for a way in which to bring rest and peace to all beings and, at heart, so are we all.[3]

What is it, then, in the context of climate crisis and environmental destruction, that will bring this rest and peace to all beings? What is good to do? It is very easy, at this point, to become caught up in views of what is right and wrong, of anger and blame, but this will only keep us trapped in the same cycle of creating karma and suffering. It may, however, be helpful to mention a few organisations out there who are addressing these issues in direct and powerful ways: 38degrees, 350.org, End Ecocide, Permaculture, Transition, Joanna Macy's, 'The Work that Reconnects', The Dark Mountain Project, just to name a few that I know well. There are also lifestyle choices that people can make which will reduce our carbon footprint and our impact on the planet. We can drive less (or not at all) and instead bike, walk or take public transport, we can install solar panels, better insulate our homes, invest in renewable energy, buy local and

organic food to reduce 'food miles', plant a nectar flower garden for bees, use less electricity, fly less, buy an electric car…

Against the gears of a global industrial economy driven by fossil fuels, there is a cry to change before it's too late, which many have taken to heart. But we've inherited a culture in which nearly every aspect of our lives is dependent on fossil fuels, making this a very difficult addiction to break. And there is a chorus of growing evidence that we have waited too long.

In an article in *The Guardian* from March 2008[4], James Lovelock—an independent scientist who has been dispensing very accurate predictions for the last 40 years—says that global warming is past the tipping point and catastrophe is unstoppable, and he tells us: "Enjoy life while you can: in 20 years global warming will hit the fan." In his opinion, "Carbon offsetting is a joke," and "green lifestyle amounts to little more than ostentatious gestures." While it seems to me likely to be true that we are past the tipping point (and he is not the only scientist saying this), his conclusions lack much compassion or vision. In contrast, *Ecobuddhism* interviewed systems theorist and engaged Buddhist activist, Joanna Macy, in an article titled, *It Looks Bleak. So What, It Looks Bleak*, and here is what she had to say about the fact that it probably is too late:

> These are what the Buddha would call "views". They are based on a lot of scientific evidence, so I take them very seriously. But what it comes down to is that we are here now. So the choice is how to live

> now. With the little time left, we could wake up more. We could allow this whole experience of the planet, which is intrinsically rewarding, to manifest through our heart-minds—so that the planet may see itself, so that life may see itself. And we can bless it in some way. So there is some source of blessing on us, even as we die. I think of a Korean monk who said "Sunsets are beautiful too, not just sunrises." We can do it beautifully. If we are going to go out, then we can do it with some nobility, generosity and beauty, so we do not fall into shock and fear.[5]

I hear the echo of Gandalf's words in hers—"what to do with the time that is given us." Lovelock's advice to, essentially, "simply enjoy this fleeting world", whilst doing nothing to examine ourselves and how we have created these circumstances, nor to begin to act more mindfully and compassionately, does not strike me as an adequate approach for a Buddhist. People of faith all over the world have started coming together and expressing the moral challenge that climate change presents. Pope Francis has been outspoken on the issue. In December of 2014, he addressed the UN Convention on Climate Change, saying, "there is a clear, definitive and ineluctable, ethical imperative to act." The establishment of an international climate change treaty is a grave ethical and moral responsibility." In 2009 Bikkhu Bodhi, together with David Loy and John Stanley, authored *A Buddhist Declaration on Climate Change*, which was signed by thousands. The Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh (who were among the signees) have spoken clearly and

powerfully of the dire need to act. In an essay called, *Falling In Love With the Earth*, Hanh expresses eloquently:

> All civilisations are impermanent and must come to an end one day. But if we continue on our current course, there's no doubt that our civilisation will be destroyed sooner than we think. The Earth may need millions of years to heal, to retrieve her balance and restore her beauty. She will be able to recover, but we humans and many other species will disappear, until the Earth can generate conditions to bring us forth again in new forms. Once we can accept the impermanence of our civilization with peace, we will be liberated from our fear. Only then will we have the strength, awakening and love we need to bring us together. Cherishing our precious Earth—falling in love with the Earth—is not an obligation. It is a matter of personal and collective happiness and survival.[6]

Before I ever knew about Buddhism, I loved this Earth. She was my ground and my joy, my love, my friend, my first 'religion'. I grew up, the barefoot country kid in Tennessee, spending my days riding my pony, playing in the creek beside my house, searching for crawdads, salamanders, minnows, tadpoles, snakes, butterflies and lightning bugs. It is probably no surprise, then, that by the time I reached university I was a fully-fledged environmentalist, which led into broader social activism. But at a certain point, I grew weary of the emotional toll it was taking, feeling I was being

ground in the gears of a system that didn't care, didn't want to change, or was outright nasty in its defensiveness. Being dubbed, 'the spokesperson for the fringe element', by a co-worker was sweet but somehow invalidating. In my mid-twenties, the pull to explore life on a more spiritual level became irresistible, so I put down my protest banners and embarked on a journey that would lead me to Mt. Shasta, CA, and eventually to Shasta Abbey and Buddhism.

When I first came to Shasta Abbey, I was going through a most dark and painful time in my life. I began to meditate regularly, attend talks and ceremonies, and started to understand the cause of suffering, and I embraced meditation and the precepts as the most powerful means to affect change. At a certain point, as my training matured over the years and climate change hit my radar in a way that was impossible to ignore, an urgent but very natural impulse to integrate these threads of my life—the activist and the meditator—began to arise. I began to enquire about 'engaged Buddhism', which Thich Nhat Hanh's school practices and promotes.

I know that Rev. Master Jiyu made it clear that ours is not an explicitly socially engaged Buddhist order, and in *The Roar of the Tigress* Volume I she advocates all-acceptance and education as the best approach for addressing the injustices of the world. Yes, charging out to affect change while filled with intense emotionality and idealism will inevitably create its own wave of karmic consequence. On the other hand, a tendency to overly privatise our practice can lead to seeking what Joanna Macy has referred to as 'premature equanimity'. And inactivity has its own karmic

consequence, too. As someone whose youth was spent in social and political activism, I confess that I used to chafe at the OBC's stance regarding social engagement. In the same breath, I want to express deep gratitude for the teaching and encouragement to continually turn within and study my own mind. For now I'm finding that yet another false separation and false duality falls away. True Buddhist training is always engaged. For me it has to do with always coming back to the inquiry: What is this? Who is sitting? Experiencing the dissolving of the perceived boundaries of where 'I' end and the world or 'environment' begins, informs a deeper way of seeing and living.

In Genjō Koan, Dōgen says:

> To study the Buddha Way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be verified (or enlightened) by all things. To be verified by all things is to let the body and mind of the self and the body and mind of others drop off. There is a trace of realization that cannot be grasped. We endlessly express the ungraspable trace of realization.[7]

So, one wakes up AS the world, in no way separate. This is true of you, of me, of the Buddha, of Kanzeon. Rev Master Jiyu in *Roar of the Tigress II* says:

> Furthermore, it is important to be aware that Kanzeon's being is not limited to just hands and eyes.

> Kanzeon's being is the whole of Her body, the whole of your body, and, indeed, the whole of the universe.[8]

This is interdependence in the deepest sense. This is true intimacy. It is the universe that the Avatamsaka Sutra describes, "a universe which is nothing but the complete mutual cooperation of the entities which make it up."[9]

So, how do I take up the work that has come to me? I believe the times in which we live, dark though they may be, can truly be seen as an opportunity to know this universal intimacy. Is karma Kanzeon's gift, showing the consequences of living as if we were separate? I find myself brought back around to the essential question of, "what is this" again and again. In his little gem of a book, *Teachings of the Insentient*, John Daido Loori says that, "if you realize the earth, and are intimate with the ten thousand things, then there is no way that we could live our lives in the old way."[10]

There is no script for living in the new way. It comes from the heart of being and it's much bigger than carbon offsetting. There is hearing, seeing and living from our whole mind and body, working together, knowing that what happens to one happens to all.

Notes

1. Tolkein, J.R.R., *The Fellowship of the Ring*, (Houghton Mifflin, first edition 1954), p.50. Note: The quote in the book takes place in a different setting. It was Peter Jackson's adaptation to film which placed it in Moria, which gave the lines more visual potency.
2. Rev. Master Jiyu Kennett, *Roar of the Tigress II*, (Shasta Abbey Press, 1st Ed. 2005) p.196.
3. Rev. Master Jiyu Kennett, *Roar of the Tigress II*, (Shasta Abbey Press, 1st Ed. 2005) p. 199.

4. The full article can be read here; http://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2008/mar/01/scienceofclimatechange.climatechange

5. Ecobuddhism article, *It Looks Bleak. So What, It Looks Bleak,* (from online site: www.ecobuddhism.org/wisdom/interviews/jmacy)

6. Thich Nhat Hahn, *Falling In Love With the Earth*, (UN Climate Change Newsroom, 14 July, 2014. http://newsroom.unfccc.int/unfccc-newsroom/falling-in-love-with-the-earth/

7. Great Master Dōgen, *Genjo Koan, from* Okumura, Shohaku, *Realizing Genjokoan: The Keys to Dogen's Shobogenzo*, (Wisdom Publications, 2010), p.75

8. Rev. Master Jiyu Kennett, *Roar of the Tigress II*, (Shasta Abbey Press, 1st Ed. 2005) p. 193.

9. Cook, Francis, Hua-*Yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra,* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), p.13.

10. Loori, John Daido, *Teachings of the Insentient*, (Dharma Communications Press, first edition 1999), p.28.

Appendix:

Shasta Abbey Kitchen

Environmentally Sustainable Practices

Rev. Master Andō Mueller, Chief Cook
—Mt. Shasta, California–USA —

This was originally written in 2012 for someone who came to the Abbey to interview the community on environmentally sustainable practices in the monastery.

A VITAL ASPECT OF BUDDHISM, AND IN PARTICULAR, TRAINING in the Serene Reflection Meditation tradition, is the practice of respect and kindness towards the food we prepare and eat, to all beings—animals very much included, and to all the things and elements we use in our daily lives. Thus we begin to deeply appreciate the Buddha Nature inherent in all beings (including ourselves) and in all things. Another vital aspect of our training is the practice of gratitude—for the food offered from our donors, to all that goes into growing and preparing the food, for the nourishment received that allows

us to train together and, we trust, to be of benefit to the world. When we practice thus sincerely and thoughtfully we find that we grow into greater harmony with all beings and support environmentally friendly practices. The following are some of the ways we support sustainability in our monastery kitchen—as best we can:

Not wasting food and drink; eating and drinking everything we take at meals, tea, and snacks.

Being careful to use all our leftover food, and when necessary composting small amounts of leftovers that have become inedible.

We are vegetarian and do not eat any animal flesh, out of compassion for and respect for animals living on this earth, in the sky, and in the sea; and also assisting in the reduction of harmful gases to our atmosphere produced by the massive farming of animals for meat consumption.

Maintaining an active composting system for our gardens, benefiting not only the plants but many small creatures that feed there.

Using all the food our donors bring, and on the rare occasions when we cannot do so, we offer extra food to others in need, such as the local senior citizens nutrition center and food banks, sometimes to individuals in need.

Leftover drinking water is saved and used (as much as is practically possible) for washing produce or making the next day's coffee; small amounts of leftover coffee is used to clear drains; leftover tea, veggie stock, produce washing water, etc. is poured onto our kitchen garden in the drier months of the year.

We offer, weekly, a bucket of our vegetable and fruit waste, peels, etc. to a local chicken farmer from whom we purchase free-range eggs; the chicken farmer offers us chicken manure on occasion for our compost.

We accept manure and straw from the cleaning out of a neighbor's horse stable for our compost and fruit trees.

As much as is affordable we support local organic farmers by buying their produce, either directly from them or through a local produce company that promotes a good deal of organic food; we accept and process for our meals ripe, discounted organic produce offered by this company, which is not only more affordable for us, but prevents it going to waste; we also accept some conventional produce donations they offer, from time to time, that might otherwise go to waste (and it's also part of our religious practice to make the best use of everything that is offered and to only purchase food within our means, especially since everything we have comes from donors).

We do our best to not overuse electricity, regulating lights, heating equipment, etc. to just what is needed.

We heat our kitchen and dining hall with a wood stove —with wood that our monks have gathered or that has been donated, using for kindling: old newspapers, unuseable waxed boxes, and sticks gathered in tidying up our grounds.

The kitchen water supply is heated by solar energy in the summer months and by a wood boiler during the cooler months.

We do our best to use environmentally friendly products in our cleaning: in washing dishes, sinks, shelving, walls, floors, etc.; we minimize the use of bleach to just

sanitizing personal dishes enough to prevent the spread of colds and flu viruses within the community; when we find a more environmentally safe product for any cleaning purpose we invest in that—again as much as practically possible.

We wash and recycle all plastic bags and containers, reusing ones where possible; we take recyclables to our local town, nearby cities, and some of our lay members assist in taking our recyclable tetra pack containers to more distant recycling centers.

We recycle our old dish-drying towels and either convert them into counter wipe-up cloths or give to our extern sacristans for maintenance/painting, etc. clean-up.

We offer kitchen items we cannot use to others, often to our local humane society or other thrift stores that benefit various charities.

With the help of a few congregation members we are growing a small organic vegetable garden and are saving seeds from these to promote healthier, sustainable food growing in our local community; the vegetables from this garden are shared with the monastic community and those who work in it.*

Our kitchen is a vital part of our monastic community and all who live and train here, monks and lay trainees, assist in taking care of it, in particular helping with kitchen clean-up, thus also pooling our human resources.

**We have had to give up our vegetable garden since 2013 due to drought conditions in California and the need to conserve water.*

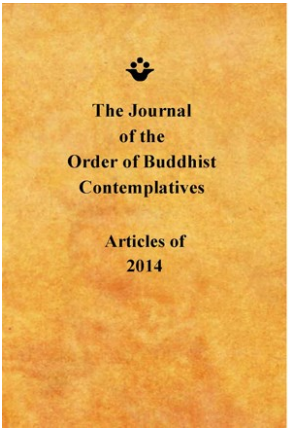
Journal news

The new Annual book

Most of you will know that the journal switched to this digital format in Spring 2014, after many years as a printed publication. Some of our subscribers told us that they missed the paper form of the journal, for reading articles especially.

In response, we have this month launched a new book, which contains all the articles from the four digital issues of 2014. This is now available from Lulu, a print on demand publishing company.

If there is sufficient interest, we may produce a book every year.



Available here

Cost £8 ($10.81)

The Americas

Shasta Abbey

—Mt. Shasta, California–USA—

After three dry years, autumn and early winter brought record rainfalls and covered the mountain with a blanket of pure white snow.

Mount Shasta covered in snow, Jan 2015

Retreats and Celebrations: On the fourth Thursday in November we celebrated the Festival of Thanksgiving. This is an occasion to express our gratitude for the food, clothing, medicine and shelter provided through the generosity of donors, and especially for the great gift of the Three Treasures. Thirteen lay

sangha members joined Rev. Master Jishō for a feast in the Vimalakirti Hall.

Following closely on the heels of Thanksgiving, the monastic community settled into the stillness of the winter monastic retreat, culminating in the Abbess's Dharma Ceremony and the Festival of the Buddha's Enlightenment on December 8, the traditional date for honoring Shakyamuni Buddha's Great Awakening. We were pleased to welcome several members of the lay sangha who joined us for the Enlightenment Day ceremony.

Lay residents, local congregation and friends filled the Buddha Hall on December 14 for the Ceremony of Offering and Gratitude. During this joyous ceremony, lay trainees standing in rows in the center of the hall pass offerings from hand to hand to Rev. Master Meian, who blesses them and hands them to two lay trainees who place them on the altar.

We were delighted to welcome more than two dozen lay residents and guests for the December 24 Festival of the Eve of the Buddha's Enlightenment. Monks and lay trainees read selections from Sir Edwin Arnold's poem, *The Light of Asia* and sang invocations written and adapted by Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett and other monks. The ceremony was followed by a festive tea with holiday treats, and a chance to meet and talk with each other in a relaxed setting.

About a dozen retreatants joined us from December 27, 2014 through January 2 2015, for the New Year's Celebratory Retreat. New Year's Eve began with a potluck supper, followed by the Vigil for the Festival of Maitreya Bodhisattva, meditation and the New Year's Ceremony. After this ceremony, monks and laity braved the cold to ring the temple bell 108 times, each trainee reflecting on an aspect of practice they aspire to cultivate during the coming year.

New Lay Ministers. Eloise Larson, Kirk Yarnell and Susan Place received lay ministry vestments and certificates following the Festival of the Avatamsaka Sutra on December 21. We offer

our heartfelt congratulations to Eloise, Susan and Kirk and look forward to continuing to practice with them. Also in December, Rev. Master Meian announced that Rev. Margaret Clyde will be the Shasta Abbey Lay Ministry Liaison, to assist local and visiting lay ministers with practical aspects of the lay ministry at the Abbey.

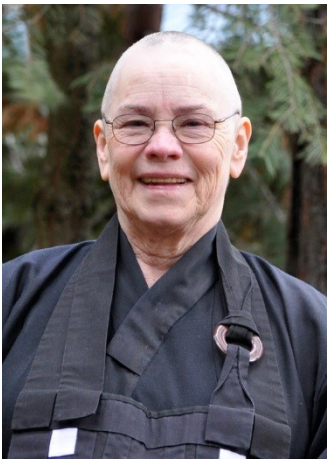
Eloise, Susan and Kirk

Memorial Ceremonies: Rev. Master Jishō Perry celebrated a memorial ceremony on December 27 in honor of his brother, John Michael Perry, who died in November. Along with many monks and lay friends, John's former wife, Beth, and their daughter Annie attended the ceremony and shared family photographs and memories during a meal offered by Rev. Master Jishō.

Rev. Master Haryo Young was the Celebrant for a memorial for Rev. Alexis Barringer on January 17. Rev. Alexis

was ordained by Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett in 1981 and received Dharma Transmission from her in 1985. He was a monk of the Order until 2000, when he returned to lay life. As Rev. Master Haryo mentioned in his dedication, Rev. Alexis showed in his life the gentle kindness which is a true mark of wisdom. In 2011 Rev. Alexis returned to monastic life at the North Cascades Buddhist Priory, a former temple of the Order, and was living there at the time of his death in a car accident on January 5. Rev. Master Mugō White and Rev. Margaret traveled to the North Cascades temple to attend the memorial held there.

New Head Novice and Postulant: Rev. Dilys Cromack entered the meditation hall as Head Novice on the first day of the Spring Training Term, February 1st. As part of the ceremony, she took her seat after formally asking Rev. Master Meian for teaching and guidance. Rev. Veronica Snedaker is the Head Novice's Advisor, and Rev. Allard Kieres is Head Novice's Assistant. Kathe Waterbury of Sonora, California entered the community as a postulant on February 3. We offer our congratulations and best wishes to them all.



Rev. Dilys on the left and Kathe on the right

Monastic Office Changes: Rev. Vivian Grunenfelder stepped into the office of Prior in November. Rev. Master Kōdō

Kay is now the Infirmarian. Rev. Masters Jisho Perry and Andō Mueller are the Guestmasters, and Rev. Master Astor Douglas has moved into the office of Sacristan. Rev. Master Shikō Rom is now the Editor of Shasta Abbey Press. Rev. Master Daishin Yalon is the Chief Cook for the month of February.

Zady: Rev. Master Mugō, whose visit we enjoyed during the fall and winter, accompanied Rev. Master Astor to a retreat at the Bear River Meditation Group over the weekend of November 14-16. Returning home, they had stopped for gas in a small valley town when they spotted a dog near the I-5 freeway, obviously distressed. A kindly passer-by helped them coax the dog—a lovely black female German Shepherd—into their car.

Zady at Shasta

After many phone calls, the monks brought the dog to Suzanne Kane of our lay sangha, who rescues and cares for dogs and cats in need. Suzanne arranged for a foster home; however, the resident canines there weren't happy. After a check-up and search for an owner, Rev. Masters Daishin and Mugo brought the dog to Shasta Abbey where she was given the name Zady and placed in the loving care of Rev. Enya and Rev. Master Daishin,

who are working hard with her care and training. It appears that Zady, who had given birth to many puppies and may have been used for breeding, never received much socialization. We are grateful to Suzanne and to all those in the lay sangha who have offered supplies and cat-free play spaces for Zady. As one of our lay residents pointed out, it's good to have a dog at Shasta Abbey again.

—Rev. Margaret

Berkeley Buddhist Priory

—Berkeley, California—USA—

Much of the exterior of the Priory received a very much needed painting this January. The lower walls of the Priory are stucco that did not need doing, but all the wood siding and trim did. These were mostly very high places and the building looks much better with the fresh paint.

One of the original members of our Berkeley Sangha, Larry Donovan, died at the age of 87 on December 20. Larry was one of the original members of the Berkeley Sangha. The Sangha meditated at his house in 1973, before they found the property in Oakland that became the Berkeley Buddhist Priory. Larry's health had been deteriorating for the past few years and he had a heart attack a few weeks before his passing. He stayed alert and was very bright and positive and provided a very good example of willingness and faith. Larry was very ecumenical and both made good use of both his Catholic faith and his Buddhist faith as he approached death. A few of the Priory Sangha went to his cremation on January 2, and we held a brief service at the crematorium and then meditated while the body was cremated. On January 10, we held a large memorial for Larry at the Priory and it was good to have so many of his family and friends at the Priory to offer him merit and to share their memories of him.

The Priory has held a number of other memorials during the past few months: On October 26, we held one for Mary Gray's sister, Beckie Crawford, who had died one year ago. Sally Schmidt's parents, Harold Schmidt and Bertha Hamilton, had a memorial at the Priory on January 16. On January 18, we had another for Jennifer Chinlund's son, Ketan who had died six years before when he was only 22 years old. Helmut Schatz had a memorial for his wife Linda on February 1 and Rose Tomiko a memorial for her parents, Rose Tokiko Eya and Shigeaki Edward Eya on February 7.

—Rev. Master Kinrei

Lions Gate Buddhist Priory

—Lytton, British Columbia–Canada—

We had a lovely late fall on the mountain. Winter arrived in late November with our first snowfall. (see photo)

It was cold through November-December and unseasonably warm since then, and as of this writing, all of our

snow is gone. We are very grateful to our neighbour Rainer, who regularly cleared snow from the driveway.

The first spring flowers emerging on Dragon Flower Mountain unseasonally early this year

At the end of October Rev. Master Kōten began a research and writing project and will be away for several months.

The first week of December we held a successful monastic retreat at Bodhidharma Hall, where we have created a meditation hall in the loft for the winter.

On December 7, Rev. Master Aurelian, on behalf of Rev. Master Kōten, presented Rev. Valeria with her Parish Priest certificate. This is a recognition and certification of her ability to perform the functions of a parish priest, which include various responsibilities in ceremonial and in daily life. We congratulate Rev. Valeria.

Rev. Master Kōten's father, Lindsay George Benson, (1929–2014) passed away peacefully on December 13, 2014 in Newfoundland. We offer our condolences.

We spent a quiet Christmas season, with warm and friendly gatherings and particularly delicious food, both here and at friends' and neighbours' houses. We were all under the weather during the New Year and did not hold a ceremony this year.

The monthly multi-faith gatherings continue in Lytton, which we attend and enjoy very much. Baha'is, Buddhists, Christians and others gather together and harmoniously exchange prayers and blessings. Often there is drumming and chanting from local First Nation (indigenous) people. On January 18, we attended the World Religions Day at the Parish Hall in Lytton. This is a day of celebration organized by the Baha'i community.

We have been involved with a number of projects over the winter including land reclamation (done by the Ministry of Forests), improving the access road with added gravel, winterizing the cabins, minor improvements around Bodhidharma Hall, and installing new deep-cycle batteries for our off-grid electric system.

—Rev. Master Aurelian and Rev. Valeria

Portland Buddhist Priory

—Portland, Oregon–USA—

The winter in Portland has been quite mild this year with much rain, though also many sunny days and temperatures on the warm side. A number of the early blooming plants are already in full display, especially the Daphne which has a wondrous aroma and reminds me of incense burning in the meditation hall.

The winter darkness has issued in the declining months and days of the priory dog, Doshin. He is almost 15 years old and has been disabled for over six years and is not able to move on his own any longer. There are a number of lay sangha who come and help out with his care and make offerings of homeopathy, energy work, and supplies that are needed for a dog that can no longer

walk and cannot go outside to relieve himself. I am deeply touched how our practice of generosity springs forth so spontaneously in these times of living through birth and death with one of our animal friends. Here in the early months of the New Year we have been given the opportunity to sit in silence with this dignified dog, offering our practice for his benefit. In due time he too will join all the beings in this universe who arise and pass away as the Life of Buddha unfolds.

The Priory is delighted in once again to be offering a Family day for lay sangha and their children: each month there is a Sunday dedicated to offering the Dharma to these families. It is good for us all to see children participating in the Priory life again. At the moment we have four youngsters between the ages of 1 year and coming on to 6 years. They arrive with their parents and begin to do walking meditation with those of us who are already here. This is followed by a short guided meditation, moving into a dharma story and discussion. There is usually a creative activity, and a snack where we all have the opportunity to recite the Five Thoughts before we eat together. To end our time, we all come into the ceremony hall to sing a closing verse as we stand in a circle holding hands:

I am a link in Buddha's Golden Chain,
this chain of love that stretches round the world.
It's up to me to keep my link both bright and strong.
May I think only good thoughts, may I say only good.
May I do only good deeds for all I meet each day.
May all people everywhere become links in this chain.

In addition to the traditional holiday ceremonies, the Priory's holiday season offered an Open House on Thanksgiving Day and December 25 to those who wished to stop for a snack and cup of tea between visiting family and friends. On the day itself we celebrated Shakyamuni Buddha's Enlightenment, with the festivities including some of the children who are coming to our newly-formed Dharma School/Family Day. There was much joy

in the music and color in the decorations to brighten this dark time of the year, which acknowledges the waking of the wisdom and compassion within all of us. On December 24 through the 26, we had the company of Rev. Oriana, a fellow Prior from Eugene, Oregon. We had our holiday meal together on December 24, prepared by a long-time practitioner, Trevor Fenwick. We ended the old year with a New Year's Eve ceremony, followed by ringing the New Year bell, making a wish for our training in the coming year. The tea and other goodies were an offering to bring our last day of the year ceremony to an end.

—Rev. Master Meikō

Vancouver Island Zen Sangha

—Victoria, British Columbia–Canada—

The Vancouver Island Zen Sangha has continued to support Rev. Master Meiten as she continues rehabilitation after her fall and subsequent surgery. She remains in a rehabilitation hospital here in Victoria, BC and makes significant progress.

Sadly, Rev. Master Meiten is retiring from teaching and ministry to the local sangha, but will continue to teach informally and provide spiritual counsel as she is able. We offer her our boundless gratitude.

We are also most grateful to have the continued support of monastic visits, most recently from Rev. Master Meidō of Wallowa Buddhist Temple, Joseph, OR, and next week and for several weeks to come, Rev. Master Mugō. Their presence and wise reassurance during this time of uncertainty have been of great support to Rev. Master Meiten and indeed our whole sangha."

—Frank Bowie

Wallowa Buddhist Temple

—Joseph, Oregon–USA—

After a flurry of decorating and moving furniture in late November 2014, we welcomed our very first guests into the temple's newly completed Retreat Guest House. What an honor and joy it was for the Sangha here that these first guests turned out to be Rev. Master Haryo and Rev. Master Mugō, who came for a three-day visit. During the Sunday morning retreat that weekend, the visiting monks spoke to the local congregation and then Rev. Master Haryo performed a joyous ribbon-cutting ceremony celebrating the opening of the Retreat Guest House. Shortly after the monks' departure, Cate Lewis from the Mt. Shasta area arrived for a ten-day individual retreat, becoming the first lay retreat guest to stay in the new accommodations. It was a treat to have her here training with us.

Considerable finish work remains, such as installing proper window coverings, shelving, entry mats, landscaping, and some railings for decks and stairs. In early February, our contractor completed a roof overhang and decking project needed to connect the new guest facilities to the main temple building. Rev. Clairissa and three of the congregation gathered recently for a work-day morning to haul away rubble from an old concrete sidewalk broken up for the project. Following their exertions, all enjoyed coffee and cookies together in the unseasonably warm fresh mountain air.

In early January Rev. Master Meidō attended the monastic funeral of Rev. Alexis, a monk formerly of our Order, who died in an automobile accident. Rev. Alexis and Rev. Meidō entered monastic life about the same time and trained together for many years at Shasta Abbey. A two-day break in winter storms allowed her to travel to Portland where she caught a ride with Rev. Masters Mugō and Meikō and Rev. Margaret to the funeral at North Cascades Buddhist Priory. It meant a lot to Rev. Meidō to be able

to join others in expressing deep gratitude for Rev. Alexis' life of training through all these years.

In late January Rev. Master Meidō traveled to Victoria, B.C., for her annual visit with Rev. Master Meiten and the Vancouver Island Zen Sangha. During this year's visit, Rev. Master Meiten was in a rehabilitation hospital recovering from a broken hip. Rev. Meidō was grateful to be able to spend precious time with her there each day, and to meet some of the many folks who came to visit and take refuge with Rev. Master Meiten. When not at the hospital, Rev. Meidō had the joy of meeting individually with a number of Sangha members and taking part in the Sangha's twice weekly gatherings.

En route to Victoria, Rev. Meidō visited Supriti Bharma in Vancouver, B.C., and got to see the large, beautiful space created through a renovation project Supriti recently completed for the Bridge and Enrich Lives Society (a non-profit organization Supriti and others formed to provide a place in downtown Vancouver where varied groups can offer programs and services enriching to the community). Rev. Meidō offers her thanks to all those who made this trip to Canada possible and for the many kindnesses extended to her while she was there.

Here at our little mountain temple, the winter weather has been alternating between extremes. After dipping down into arctic temperatures early in December, it then grew mild enough for a concrete pour for porch deck footings later in the month. The return of snow was followed at times by just enough warmth during the day and freezing temperatures at night to ice up the driveway, creating a daunting challenge for two-wheel-drive vehicles. High winds split off two large treetops, one falling over the driveway, which Rev. Clairissa and a neighbor chain-sawed up into firewood. The other treetop is still lodged firmly some forty feet up in one of our giant Ponderosas and yet to be removed. Now all the snow and ice have melted, a rare event mid-winter. We are fortunate not to have had worse damage.

Meanwhile, like a heartbeat, the congregation has continued to join in the life of the temple whatever the weather—attending services, bringing offerings, and individually taking refuge. During the holiday season, many new people stopped by to meet the monks and tour the temple buildings and grounds, some considering making future retreat arrangements. In late January two lamas in the Tibetan Shengpa Kagyu lineage happened to be visiting the area, learned of the temple, and came by for a delightful visit.

One of the temple's main purposes is to offer a place where both congregation and monks of our wider Sangha can come for individual retreats. Those interested in arranging such a retreat in our new guest house are welcome to call or write for more information.

—Rev. Master Meidō and Rev. Clairissa

Europe

Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey

—Northumberland, England–UK—

New Year Retreat: Our New Year retreat began on December 27, with people coming to join us whenever they were able. Rev. Wilfrid led the retreat which culminated in the New Year festival on the night of 31 December. Rev. Master Leandra was Celebrant for this quiet and moving way to end the year and to celebrate the start of the year to come.

Monastic news Rev. Master Daishin came to stay with us for a couple of weeks over the festive period. It was a joy to have him with us—and to have his presence as Celebrant for our annual festival celebration of Rev. Master Jiyu's birthday on New

Year's morning. He gave a talk afterwards which is now available on the Throssel website: http://www.throssel.org.uk/dharmatalks/lookingoverthehorizon

Rev. Caitlin came from Great Ocean Dharma Refuge for a visit at the end of February and settled into community life with us. It's good to have her with us again.

Winter at Throssel:

Like many of you, we had a heavy fall of snow in in late January which, combined with strong winds, drifted and this brought us out in our warm clothing some mornings to clear our drive and pathways. This scene below shows a rather beautiful 'sand dune style' snowdrift on the lane up to Myrtle Bank.

January Retreat: For our Winter Sangha Retreat, the community switched to a flexible schedule, allowing monks to follow quiet practice in whatever form seems called for. We gave the kitchen monks a break from cooking this month, and the community was divided into four teams, who between them, planned and prepared meals for each of the four weeks.

We were very grateful to four experienced lay trainees, David, Jan, Julia and Karan, who helped to make the month quiet and harmonious, providing a consistent presence of support and offerings of help in the kitchen, and organising their own schedule. We also enjoyed some meals prepared by them as a group. The time was much appreciated by us all.

Karan and Jan in the kitchen during January

Buddha's Parinirvana Festival and Retreat: . Master Olwen led the February Intensive Meditation Retreat, with the Buddha's Death Festival (Parinirvana) celebrated on the Saturday evening. The ceremony starts with the hall in semi-darkness and gradually all the candles are extinguished except the one remaining (unseen in the hall) in the Founder's Shrine, from which. the celebrant re-light all the candles. It is a beautiful and moving ceremony.

The altar for the Parirvana Festival

Group visits: Most of the seniors are 'group monks' for one or more of the meditation groups around the country and visit on a regular basis to keep contact with and support our lay sangha. Visits also allow newcomers the opportunity to meet monks in their own local setting. This 'outreach' is a priority and a good means of keeping two-way contact. In February, five senior monks visited groups, running retreats and joining in group evenings in: Hexham, the North Lakes, Durham, Sheffield and Lancaster.

Throssel Friends: A small group of lay trainees, local and further afield have offered to explore starting a 'Friends of Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey' lay sangha support group. We are deeply grateful for this open-handed offer and look forward to seeing what may evolve from this. If anyone is interested, please contact Ashley on awenzen@gmail.com

Green Mountains Walking Group: The latest Green Mountains walk in February was in the Weardale Valley, local to the

monastery. This took a group of us on a circular route, following the river and then over some high ground with delightful views and unexpectedly mild and sunny weather. We came across some striking landscapes of former mining activity which had been a thriving industry in the past. We ended with a welcome tea and cake stop at the Chatterbox Café in St John's Chapel nearby.

—Rev. Alina

Dharmazuflucht Schwarzwald

— Gutach (Black Forest) – Germany —

Over the winter, we have had a visit from Rev. Caitlin, Rev. Master Mokugen's disciple from Great Ocean Dharma Refuge, for three months. We really appreciated her bright presence and her willing and energetic help with a whole variety of practical jobs.

With Rev. Caitlin in winter

On Jan. 21, we celebrated her 10th Ordination Anniversary. Our warmest good wishes go to Rev. Caitlin for her future training in her monk's life!

Having now been here in Gutach for more than a year, it felt good to introduce ourselves more thoroughly to the local population, as this is important and expected when you live in a rural community such as this one here in Germany. As a first step, we invited the mayor of Gutach to visit us, who in turn invited us to come to a meeting of all the local dignitaries, to introduce ourselves and tell them about what the purpose and function of our temple is. We found it moving to witness how welcoming everyone was towards us. We also had a get-together with the local pastors, who were also very open. Later on, a journalist from one of the major regional newspapers came to visit us and wrote a sympathetic article on us.

Over the last while, we had a variety of new guests come to the temple, as well as members from our usual congregation. We also had a visit from Bhante Nyanabodhi, the successor of Ayya Khema and abbot of the Metta Vihara in Bavaria.

With Bhante Nyanabodhi

We have known him for a long time, and he has been very kind to us over the years. He had given us the Buddha statue, which is now on our main altar.

In winter, we travelled to Stuttgart to give a public talk and hold our annual retreat at the Buddha-Haus city centre, and for our New Year retreat, the temple was full.

Around the turn of the year, we had heavy snowfalls in our region, and later on there were very strong winds in parts of the Black Forest. During such a heavy storm, an adult fir tree on the stretch of forest right opposite the temple fell onto the road in front of our house. Following this very fortunate close miss, the forest farmer who owns that particular stretch of woods promised us to take down the remaining trees that are still standing there.

The temple standing in deep snow

As always, we would like to cordially invite both monks and lay trainees to come and spend time in our temple and train alongside us.

—Rev. Master Fuden

Great Ocean Dharma Refuge

—Pembrokeshire, Wales–UK—

Reverend Caitlin returned from the Dharmazuflucht Schwarzwald in Germany at the end of January. She had spent three invaluable months there, training with Reverend Master Fuden and Reverend Clementia. We offer them our gratitude for that precious opportunity. It is wonderful to report that Reverend Caitlin's health continues to be good and that she can continue to travel and benefit from the company of the wider Sangha.

On a joyous occasion here at Great Ocean on February 6 Reverend Caitlin received certification of being a Teacher, receiving her purple Kesa from Rev. Master Mokugen. We congratulate Rev. Caitlin and wish her every success!

On the 15 of January we held a simple heartfelt memorial for Rev. Master Alexis Barringer, remembering our Dharma brother with fond gratitude.

Alongside the usual life of the Temple at Great Ocean, we have also been caring for our dear dog Dewi who is in the twilight weeks of his life. We know many have a soft spot for him! Although frail and disabled, he shows inspirational patient acceptance and an appreciation for the limited life he has. Thank you for the help and encouragement we have received with Dewi in many different ways. Rev. Master Willard has spent three months at Great Ocean, being of great help at this heartfelt time, and Gill James has been a knowledgeable and generous-hearted support. Whether visible in people or animals, the Four Sights always offer much opportunity and teaching.

The rain and wild winds of last winter thankfully have not been repeated to the same extent this year and signs of an optimistic Spring are emerging. For retreat and training opportunities at Great Ocean, we welcome you as always to phone or write. We thank you for your kindness and support of the Temple, and wish you well.

—Rev. Master Mokugen

The Place of Peace Dharma House

—Aberystwyth, Wales–UK—

In December we celebrated The Buddha's Enlightenment and Rev. Master Myōhō offered a talk on the Earth Witness posture. This is when the Shakyamuni reached down and touched the ground with his right hand, affirming his vow to let nothing distract him from his purpose. A short article, taken from this talk, is in the Dharma Articles section of our website www.placeofpeacewales.org. From time to time other written offerings will be posted for those who may be interested in reading them.

Over the festive season Rev. Master Myōhō was invited to spend an afternoon with friends of the temple; mince pies, a beautifully decorated tree and mulled fruit punch were enjoyed by all.

For the first time in years we held our New Year Ceremony without a precentor and managed very well. One of the local Sangha, who had never taken an active part in a Ceremony, served the juice with dignity. It is rewarding to celebrate these events with the people we train with throughout the year. Each ceremony speaks directly to those who are present and calls forth valuable insights. Afterwards we spent time relaxing and appreciating each other's company. Over the festive period we received gifts of bulbs for the garden, office supplies, toiletries and food, as well as financial offerings, all being much appreciated. Thank you to everyone who sent their good wishes and donations to help us along the way and to those who continue to offer regular support.

The sound of gently running water, from our fish tank, has always been a feature in the common room. In December, Aqua, the last of our old fish, who was over ten, died. A couple of weeks after his funeral two new little fish friends, Ebb and Flow, moved into the tank. It is lovely to have vibrant young life in our midst as we step into another year

—Rev. Master Myōhō

Portobello Buddhist Priory

—Edinburgh, Scotland–UK—

With the light returning, Winter already seems in retreat, despite the wind and chills. We had our usual highlight at the turn of the year: celebrating New Year's Eve, always a combination of committed Sangha practice and a social get together. The Prior had visited Throssel over Christmas and again in January, so the Priory continued running its schedule in his absence. Particular thanks to the core group for making this happen.

The Prior will start visiting the Scottish groups this February, who have continued to come together to practice over the Winter too.

We will be planning our early Summer Sangha retreat soon and a walking weekend is already planned for May.

—Rev. Master Favian

Reading Buddhist Priory

—Reading, England–UK —

The priory continues to be well supported, including a number of newcomers who are exploring what is offered here. Thank you to everyone who has contributed in these last months to the life of the Priory, including doing maintenance work, gardening and offering abundant festive food in December, which was eaten up on our New Year Retreat. A special *thank you* to Mark Hardstaff for his continuing generosity in donating and installing a new computer hard drive.

Recent activities have been supplemented with exploring a couple of new ventures; we held a series of four reflections on Buddhist doctrine at the Priory, open to the public and advertised through our website. A small number attended all four sessions

and their feedback since is an encouragement to do something similar again.

It seemed good for several reasons to occasionally invite a Throssel monk to spend some days at the Priory and meet our group members. Rev. Wilfrid Powell came for a weekend in November and his teaching and presence were much appreciated. We hope he will be able to join us again in March.

We held a weekend retreat towards the end of last year at Alton Abbey, a Benedictine monastery in Hampshire, which went very well. The Abbey monks are used to us now and familiar with what we do. The weather was exceptionally conducive to some walking meditation on the grounds.

Several of the Serene Reflection Meditation Groups within the south of England have connections with Reading Priory and were visited for the first time by the new Prior, Rev. Jishin:. The Isle of Wight, Bath and Cirencester. Some members from the London group came to the Priory for a Saturday day retreat. We also had an afternoon visit from a newly forming group in Weybridge, Surrey.

In October, It was delightful to be able to offer a Buddhist Wedding Ceremony for a couple, one of whom had been sitting with the Brighton group. The wedding was held in Worthing, a small seaside town on the south coast of England. They were married first in a Civic Ceremony, followed by a shortened version of our ceremony.

To cap it all, so to speak, the Priory building had a little face-lift just before Christmas in the form of uPVC fascia and soffits. The shiny white plastic has revealed the need to paint the front porch this New Year.

—Rev. Jishin

Sitting Buddha Hermitage

—Wirksworth, Derbyshire–UK—

By the time you read this, Sitting Buddha Hermitage will have moved 3 miles down the road to Cromford. The tenancy of the property in Wirksworth came to an end sooner than expected, but fortunately a new property was found within a week. The new place is a converted barn, tucked behind a row of houses, so relatively peaceful.

There is no space for the caravan so the plan is to sell it, but one of the attractions of the new property is that it has an annexe containing a bedroom with its own bathroom, which should make quiet quarters for anyone wishing to come on retreat.

Cromford is a village with a lot of history, as it was here in 1771 that Richard Arkwright built the first cotton mill to use water-powered frames. A large part of the village was built to house the mill workers, and Cromford is now part of the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage site. Attractive footpaths and trails have been developed along the canal and former railway lines so I shall have plenty of good walks right on the doorstep.

Whilst I shall miss the wildlife around the lake, I feel this is the beginning of a new chapter for the Hermitage. During the year at Wirksworth I have concentrated almost entirely on the offering of facilities for individual residential and day retreats. The time now seems right to start offering introductory classes in meditation and Buddhism and regular meditation evenings and see what develops from there.

To coincide with the move I have re-launched Sitting Buddha Hermitage website. You can subscribe to the Blog (see sidebar on the website) to receive weekly email updates on life at the Hermitage, or subscribe to the monthly email Newsletter (or both!)

Moving date is March 10. Phone number remains the same: 01629 821813, as does the email address: alicia@fieldofmerit.org. If you are in the area and would like to pop by for a visit you would be very welcome.

—Rev. Alicia

Sōtō Zen Riga

—Riga–Latvia—

With great joy I received approval from Rev. Master Haryo of my wish to live and offer the Dharma in the city of my birth, Riga, Latvia. Riga is old and beautiful and has an artsy international flavor. I am working hard to expand my Latvian language skills which have diminished with many years of non-use in the USA. Latvia is still recovering from 50 years of Soviet occupation, but there is a strong interest in spiritual practice, as this was forbidden during the occupation.

I visited in July to look for a place and orient myself to what I might need. My cousin housed me and helped me find an affordable, safe space right in the center of the city. My second floor apartment serves as a both a small temple and my residence. In September, I moved in full time and began acculturating and

assembling temple and household goods. I am grateful for the kindness that has been shown to me here.

Rev. Bridin at a Buddhist conference in Latvia, and the meditation hall at the new temple.

On January 15, I opened the doors for temple use. Meditation instruction is offered twice a month, and morning sittings four mornings a week. A monthly one-day meditation retreat (9:00 am to 5:00 pm) will be added starting in March. This may seem very small, but I am happy to say that 11 people have already received instruction, and several are attending morning sittings.

Right now I am sitting still, listening, and feeling my way, that I may be useful here.

—Rev. Bridin

Turning Wheel Buddhist Temple

— East Midlands–UK —

On December 1, the temple moved in to a rented three bedroom semi-detached property in the southern part of Leicester.

Front view of the Priory

On Saturday December 13, we had an Opening and Dedication Day, with 19 of us for the ceremony, including a good number of people from both Leicester and Nottingham, plus one from Chesterfield. Rev. Master Saidō from Telford Buddhist Priory and Rev. Alicia from Sitting Buddha Hermitage also made the journey to the temple to help us celebrate this joyful occasion.

Opening Day gathering

The property has a large through-lounge which makes a very good meditation hall, and we are using the front room upstairs as a common room. We also have a small garden that has a lawn area and some flower beds, with block paving paths. The temple is in an area of quiet residential streets, but is also quite close to the ring road, and just a few miles from Junction 21 of the M1 motorway. We are also right on the No. 44 bus route that comes direct from the railway station, which is very handy for those coming from Nottingham or further afield.

We have started having regular events at the temple, including group evenings, day retreats and a daily schedule of meditation and ceremonies. You are very welcome to come along to any of these, and you can find details on the Events page of the website, www.turningwheel.org.uk. And if you are passing through the Midlands whilst travelling to or from Throssel, why not drop in for a cup of tea and say hello?

—Rev. Aiden

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For details of meditation groups in the US and Canada, please contact your nearest priory, or the Guestmaster at Shasta Abbey

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. The main offices of the OBC are at Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey in England and Shasta Abbey in the US.

As Buddhism grows in the West, we wish to share the Buddha's Teaching through our Journal; we 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.

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

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