

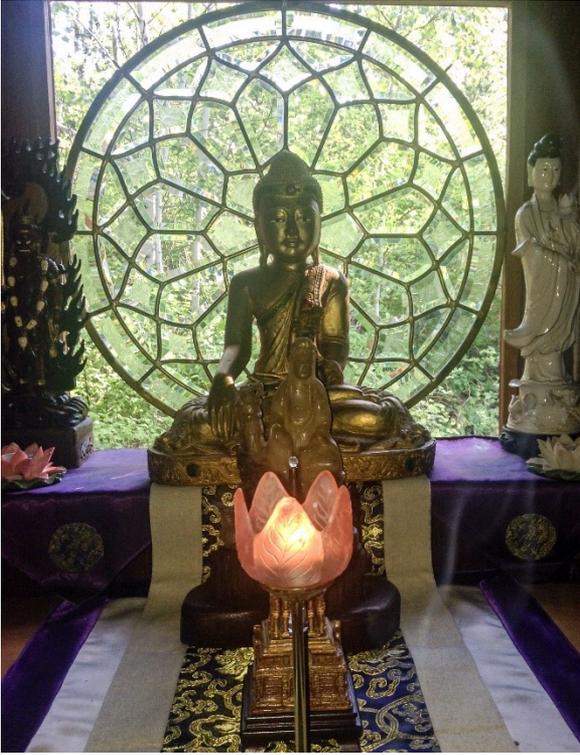


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Altar in the Meditation Hall at Lions Gate Buddhist Priory

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CONTENTS

<u>The Buddha Calling Buddha</u>	
<i>Rev. Master Kinrei Bassis</i>	5
<u>Enhancing our Lives</u>	
<i>Rev. Master Meiten McGuire</i>	12
<u>Cherry Blossom</u>	
<i>Julie Sheard</i>	16
<u>Our True Home</u>	
<i>Rev. Master Scholastica Hicks</i>	20
<u>Working Meditation</u>	
<i>Steve Roberts</i>	31
<u>Buddhism Is Not Self-Improvement</u>	
<i>Rev. Leon Kackman</i>	35
<u>Kings Day</u>	
<i>Tibbe de Raat</i>	46
<u>News of the Order - Europe</u>	49
<u>News - America</u>	
<u>Temples of the Order</u>	79
<u>Further information</u>	82



This year's Wesak Altar at the Wallowa Buddhist Temple. The baby Buddha was offered to Rev. Master Meidō years ago by Rev. Master Kinrei, when this temple was first being established.

The Buddha calling Buddha

Rev. Master Kinrei Bassis

—Berkeley Buddhist Priory, CA–USA—

This is an edited version of a Dharma talk given by Rev. Master Kinrei at the Priory in May 2000, published in the Berkeley Priory Newsletters of June–July 2004 and March–May 2016

We seek Buddhism when we recognize that there is something seriously wrong with the direction we have taken in our search for satisfaction and happiness. Buddhism points us to deep truths that resonate in our hearts. We are drawn to Buddhism by a deep longing for something real and meaningful.

An image of spiritual life that Reverend Master Jiyu-Kennett often used is that most of us are like a fish caught on a hook. The Buddha is trying to reel us in; the hook holding us is our deep spiritual longing. We spend most of our time struggling, not wanting to be reeled in, not wanting to let go of all the things which we are desperately holding. While we often know that spiritual training will take us in the right direction, we say to ourselves, “But I need to do this,” or “I must have that.”

When we reflect on our lives, we see that we have been putting a tremendous amount of energy in fighting what the Dharma is asking us to do: to let go and open our hearts; to

embrace and accept everything that unfolds in both in our lives and the life of the world.

The anonymous author of the medieval Christian classic, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, describes a form of prayer that also aptly describes the essence of Buddhist meditation:

...When you first begin, you will find only darkness, as it were a cloud of unknowing. You do not know what it means except that in your will you feel a simple steadfast intention reaching out towards God. Do what you will and this darkness and this cloud remains between you and God. By 'darkness' I mean a 'lack of knowing'—just as anything you do not know or may have forgotten may be said to be 'dark' to you, for you cannot see it with your inward eye . So if you are to stand and not fall, never give up your firm intention: beat away at this cloud of unknowing between you and God with that sharp dart of longing love.¹

This deepest form of prayer is really the same as the deepest form of meditation. It is the simple willingness to be still and allow the longing in our hearts go out without defining or understanding where it is going. This is faith. Our minds cannot see or fully understand the goal of our spiritual life. Meditation is the willingness to let go and learn to trust so that we may enter into this seeming darkness. In the passage from *The Cloud of Unknowing*, the writer is expressing the idea that our minds cannot grasp God, cannot even begin to say what God is, yet our hearts are reaching out. A Buddhist way of saying this is that our small minds

and intellects cannot even begin to fully grasp or understand the boundless life of Buddha.

In Buddhism, the real ground of reality is the Dharmakaya, the pure body of the Buddha, the Absolute, the One. While this immeasurable reality will always transcend the ability of our minds to comprehend it, there will always be the longing in our hearts to find this real place and to let go of everything else. We need to let go of our opinions of who we think we are, and of all our opinions of what our mind grasps as the Buddha or enlightenment. We need to turn away from our burning desires and instead seek stillness and peace and put our effort into growing this indescribable longing.

But our lack of faith makes us struggle. We say, “Yes, but...” Buddhist training is the process of gradually softening our habitual resistance. The Dharma keeps telling us to open our hearts and let go, but we keep qualifying this letting go, looking for loopholes in the Dharma and searching for attachments we believe will not cause problems. Yet anything we grasp will help to turn our hearts away from this one, true longing.

We often don't recognize that faith in the Dharma means fully accepting ourselves. The most difficult aspect of faith is seeing that we are the Buddha, that all of our delusions are still the Buddha, and that all of our sufferings are the life of Buddha. Our faults and suffering and the world's faults and suffering are not impure; they are simply

telling us that we and others are turning away from the light of Buddha. We enfold ourselves in darkness as we focus our hearts on shallow desires and empty fears. When we don't accept ourselves, our shame, our pride, and our often hard and critical mind, we are simply increasing the waves of difficult karma.

Think carefully about how this lack of acceptance fills our lives. In anger, the whole world reflects our anger; in guilt, the whole world reflects our guilt. These delusions reinforce themselves. While we search to make our lives clean and whole, looking everywhere for what will work, we often fail to recognize that the greatest treasure is already living in our hearts. It takes faith to let go and realize the unimportance of both our pride and our inadequacies and to turn our hearts toward entering this Cloud of Unknowing. There is no way by effort of will by which we can simply say, "I'm not going to struggle any more" or "I'm not going to have any more attachments." All we can do is be willing to see what we are grasping, what is stopping this fundamental longing from blazing up in our hearts. By recognizing these things, we can begin to open up and let go of our demands. It doesn't necessarily mean that we no longer have to face these desires; rather we no longer try so desperately to grasp them. In *The Cloud of Unknowing*, the author says,

...Therefore, if I am able to give a vital and wholehearted attention to this spiritual activity within my soul, I then can view my eating and drinking, my sleep and

my conversation and so on with comparative indifference. I would rather acquire a right discretion in these matters by such indifference, than by giving them my close attention.”

2

Faith allows our hearts to be open and to see what is actually moving through us. It takes deep faith to have such an open heart because this awareness often hurts. It is sometimes painful to see what we are doing, to see the wounds that we have in our heart, and to see all the suffering our mistakes have caused others. It can be painful to see the suffering that is flowing throughout the world, filling so many beings. Only with deep commitment and acting on our faith, can we open our hearts and embrace this sea of pain while trusting that the pain is not the real problem. Faith means to trust that the Dharma is true, that all this pain and suffering is not fundamental. The suffering will be washed away when we are willing to open our hearts and let the waters of compassion flow through us so that we can see that light and purity is enfolding everything.

A key to cultivating faith is not letting ourselves indulge in doubt. We should view doubt like any other emotion, such as anger, worry, desire or fear. Without cultivating doubt, or grasping it, simply recognize that it is only a wave of thoughts and feeling sweeping through us. In the same way that there is no reason to be angry, there is no reason to doubt. There is no reason to doubt the Buddha, there is no reason to doubt the Dharma, and there is no reason to doubt the Sangha. Just as there is no reason to doubt ourself or to doubt others.

To allow this spiritual longing to grow, we need to learn to trust that the unfolding of all karma is not a fundamental problem. The fact that there is suffering, the fact that there exists beginningless greed, hate and delusion, is not a reason to doubt. The faith is not that there will not be any suffering; rather that under all of the suffering is the compassion of the Unborn. Nothing is ever fundamentally hurt; all hurt is simply waves of feeling sweeping through our bodies and minds. If you do not cling to them, nothing is really being hurt. Suffering is a Dharma lesson that is pointing us to the Truth. To see karma, to see cause and effect, is not a reason to doubt.

If we wish to see what is real, we need to have faith in the Dharma and work at accepting whatever life is offering us. This allows our hearts and minds to be peaceful, and then we will find something much deeper calling us.

Meditation is a way to learn to hear and respond to the call and the longing that is flowing out of the stillness in our hearts. There is a love that keeps looking the wrong way, mistakenly trying to grasp whatever seems to help us be happy. Then there is deeper, unshakable love that is the ground of Buddhism, a love that demands nothing and is open and embraces everything. This love is calling us and this love is our true heart, the Bodhicitta, the boundless heart of Buddha. The depth of this love is unfathomable, and it will wash away all the barriers we face. What we need to do is to be still, whether we are sitting on a cushion or going about our daily lives, and allow this deep and inexpressible

longing to grow in our hearts. This longing is the Buddha calling the Buddha, and it will open our hearts and free us from the seeming darkness of our passions and confusion.

Notes

- [1.](#) *The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works*, trans. Clifton Wolters, (Penguin Books, 1978) pp.61-62.
- [2.](#) *The Cloud of Unknowing*, p. 110.

Enhancing Our Lives

Rev. Master Meiten McGuire

—Vancouver Island, BC—Canada—

First published as a chapter in ‘Reflections on the Path, Zen Training in Everyday Life’ 2008. [Minor edit to journal style]

Not long before his death, the Buddha taught his followers: “Be an island unto yourself; be your own refuge.” In this teaching, the Buddha invites us to take charge of our lives and not to depend on anyone else to do our spiritual work for us. It isn’t surprising that at the end of his 45-year ministry, this was what he told his community of monks, because, as the Buddha so often taught, the very nature of the human condition predisposes us to look outside ourselves for the solution to our *dis-ease* and longing.

This is worth reflecting upon because, until we truly let this teaching penetrate, until we understand that the answer to the deepest longing of our heart for fulfilment and security will never be satisfied by external things, we will be held back on the exacting and exciting inner journey. As a Lakota chief put it: “The longest walk you can ever take in this life is the sacred journey from the head to the heart.” “Head” here refers to all our accumulated knowledge that helps us function in daily living. In the *Scripture of Great Wisdom*, we find this line, “And, going on beyond this human mind,

he is Nirvana.” We must go beyond the head if we are to come to Nirvana, the end of suffering—the “heart” referred to in the quotation above, and the heart of the Buddha’s teachings too.

If we can remember that the Truth that frees us lies within, then we are well on our way through the ‘thick and thin’ of living a spiritual life. Experiencing this truth of the heart enhances every moment of our lives by bringing to bear on each moment our spiritual understanding, our choiceless awareness. In this way it is possible to transform our daily lives. Obviously, it’s a discipline and a half, requiring courage, commitment, energy, faith, patience, and willingness.

Gradually, when we find that we truly have embarked upon this journey of the heart, we discover that moment-to-moment conditioning no longer drags us down. The practice takes hold and increasingly becomes our guide over both the ‘good’ and the ‘not good’ times—‘good’ meaning comfortable, ‘not good’ uncomfortable or threatening in some way to the ‘me’ that I take myself to be. This understanding is truly a miracle, and has to be experienced for oneself. As the Buddha taught, “Do not believe anything because I say it to you. Make it true for yourselves.” We learn this through practicing, not simply by thinking about the teaching. The cliché ‘practice makes perfect’ aptly applies here. That we can touch the perfect is the gift we give ourselves when we train wholeheartedly. Again, this is something no one else can do for us. As the Buddha said,

“You yourself must make the effort; Buddhas can only point the way.”

Thus Right Effort, the sixth factor of the Noble Eightfold Path, is all-important to the Buddha’s Middle Way—his prescription to help us bring the purity of awareness into every corner of our lives. Awareness is another term for meditation, mindfulness, concentrated focus, right attention, heedfulness, carefulness. As Dōgen writes in *Rules for Meditation*, “the means of training are thousandfold but pure meditation must be done.” He is saying that we must make the right effort to break through the shackles of the conditioned mind by seeing them for what they are, something we can do only by means of the mindfulness the Buddha spent forty-five years teaching. The shackles are three, according to Buddhism: greed, hate, and delusion. We really can’t free ourselves from suffering until we see how it arises from conditions that trigger these deep-seated habitual reactions. So the Buddha said that his teaching, the Buddhadharma, was simply to see the way things are. We don’t want to do this as long as we are blinded by our attachments to beliefs hidden from our view-attachments that form the very premise on which this life is built. Our wonderful practice allows us to chip away at that which obscures our being in touch with the truth of who we are, the great truth of oneness in which everything is embraced.

This truth can only be experienced, not taught, because words and ideas are for the convenience of living this life.

This is not to say that words are not useful. They are. But our mistake is to let the rationality of words and ideas take over every aspect of life. We burden ourselves trying to understand that which goes beyond what the heart just knows—the Unborn that is beyond language and ideas.

Our training allows us to move with greater ease from the worldly known, the place where little self functions conditionally and often blindly, to the unknown center that always supports us, protects us, and quietly embraces both our pain and our pleasure. It is the beyond that beckons us to the other shore, the Third Noble Truth, the end of suffering that is Nirvana. As we continue on this journey to the heart, we come to see how our own choices and subsequent actions in the midst of daily life enhance the quality not only of our own lives, but of those around us. In this way, the gift of doing our own training becomes the great gift we offer to others.

Cherry Blossom

Julie Sheard

—*St. Salvadour, France*—

I have recently moved to an idyllic house in France and although the winter has been very cold, the spring has come like a fanfare. My garden is full of blossom on the many fruit trees and the woodlands around are bursting with vibrant green. I keep pinching myself to see if I am dreaming. I run a little *Chambre d’hote* and am working on setting up my smallholding on permacultural lines. Although there are enough difficulties here to keep me firmly in the human realm, the taste of what is, to me, some kind of heaven realm is an ever present possibility and my gratitude for my situation keeps on bubbling up—sitting on the grass in my field with baby goats around me and on my lap and my beautiful greyhound nearby, is as good as Samsara can get, as far as I can imagine.

At the same time, I have internet, and the endless streams of human agony, warfare, injustice, political lies, environmental destruction etc, on and on as it goes, has me wondering, “What am I doing here?” I find myself wanting to put forth my opinion, to wave a flag for this or that cause against the injustice of it all. I want to take up my verbal army and smash the evil doers, as I see them, and yet what good am I doing? Yes I can “like” this post and that and

“shed tears” over the tragedies, but my unease grows and I feel the physical pain of frustration and impotence.

Eventually I ask myself if it is even possible to feel gratitude when one is aware of the horrors? Is it morally possible to sit in blissful gratitude surrounded by good things when so many are suffering? What is this feeling of gratitude? Why am I even here on this earth? What is it I really want? To answer that I have to admit that I love this world, that’s why I am here and I want to give my love to it. I don’t want people to spoil it. So there you have the koan: gratitude and righteous flag waving; happiness and suffering.

I certainly want to be surrounded by beauty, I want to enjoy the good things in my life but the enjoyment *comes as gratitude*, not the heady joy of the summer holiday. If I sit looking out of the window, I see beautiful trees and hear birdsong but it doesn’t make me feel better about myself, it just comes as wonder that I am here. Rising from this is the desire to share that which is communicated to me in all the shapes and life forms around me. There is an overwhelming desire to give out the gratitude I feel. It is as if love is pouring into me, and not to be able to share it is in fact painful. This love is to be shared, to be placed where there is hatred and suffering. There is a frustration, a sense of isolation from those in great suffering and just how has my flag-waving helped? It may have, I sign petitions, perhaps they do some good but it’s not enough, it feels like a tiny drop of ineffectual heaving, and moving only a millionth of a

millimetre. So I go outside and look at the cherry blossom, it is astonishingly beautiful and it has a wonderful scent but as the petals are falling, I know that there are also wars taking place; shouldn't I be there, in the thick of it all, doing something really helpful?

In the evening I take myself to my meditation bench and sit; I offer this problem. After a while, through the clatter of thoughts comes, "Do not drink the wine of delusion". I let it sit there in the stillness and silence. What relevance does that Precept have, to my problem? "What is the wine of delusion that I am drinking?" I let the thought go. And then the *Scripture of Great Wisdom* moves; it's always moving of course... "going on, going on, always going on..." but in this instance, I have just noticed it. It seems like the earth shakes as it moves—a deep, deep rumble. It's not the words that strike me, funnily enough it is something deeper and it is something deep inside me that knows it.

All things are empty (or pure if you like). It's not that they are not there, it's just that things are tied to space and time. Great Wisdom is not. Which means...that when we are **in** Great Wisdom we can access anything, anywhere, and touch it with our love. How vital it is to exchange merit totally, leaving nothing for ourselves. We can give our love endlessly in the meditation. This is REAL power but it is not mine. I am just a tube through which it flows, the great unstoppable flow of love is always there. Truly compassionate action is meditation *for all beings*. It's not just a phrase of speech, it is the meaning of my existence.

And the wine of delusion? What is that then? It is getting all caught up in the horror and the politics and the suffering, and believing there is nothing effectual that I can do, but if I do not know that everything is empty/pure and therefore *always accessible*, then I am drinking the wine of great delusion. If everything is accessible then there are no obstacles and I can give endlessly. This is operating outside of time and space, it is operating at a deep and fundamental level where there is no separation,... “no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind...”

While the bombs drop, while the forests are destroyed, while the water is poisoned, we sit in meditation offering all our merit, keeping nothing for ourselves, allowing the endless flow of love and compassion into the world. We are no longer hindered by the wine of delusion. Space and time dissolve and only the sitting remains—the perfect and totally effectual expression of compassion.

Don't worry if you feel you can only do one tiny good thing in one small corner of the cosmos. Just be a Buddha body in that one place.¹

And yes, I can treasure the beauty in my life because it does not linger, and treasuring every moment is being beyond time and space.

Notes

1. Thich Nhat Hanh Foundation facebook:
[Quote from Thich Nhat Hahn](#)

Our True Home

Rev. Master Scholastica Hicks

—*Shasta Abbey, CA–USA*—

From a Dharma talk given after the Festival of Avalokiteshvara at Shasta Abbey, February 2016.

Today is our Festival of Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva and when we look around the hall, we find ourselves surrounded by all these lovely images of this Bodhisattva and encompassed by inspiring music and invocations. So I'd like to talk a bit about what it can mean to each of us to *be* a bodhisattva. One definition of bodhisattva is 'one who seeks awakening' another is 'an ordinary person who takes up a course in his or her life that moves in the direction of Buddha' ...an enlightened being.

So when we look around the hall and see all these images of Avalokiteshvara, we can think to ourselves, "I could never be like that" or our heart can open and we can say "what a wonderful symbol of encouragement, something that I can aspire to, something that will teach me how to act in my daily life." Because that's what training is all about, it's about our daily life, and how we put our Buddhist practice into practice.

I can remember as a beginning lay Buddhist, having read about Buddhism for many years and finally coming to the Abbey, one of the things that intrigued me the most was the teaching that you could convert greed, anger and delusion (even way back then I was well aware that I had a wonderfully enormous amount of all three) into compassion, love and wisdom and I thought “wonderful, it’s like converting your currency—you just decide to do it, and then it’s done”. And that was about thirty years ago and I’m still working on it, so don’t be put off if you go home and it doesn’t happen overnight.

So how do we convert greed, anger and delusion into compassion, love and wisdom? How do we allow compassion, love and wisdom to be part of our daily lives—something that we wake up and go to bed with? Now, since this happens to be February 14th, let me say that the love we’re talking about is not the Valentine’s Day kind of love. It’s more than a bouquet of flowers and a box of chocolates, although those are very nice. It’s the ‘more than’ that I’d like to discuss.

A few days ago I heard a song by Josh Ritter called *Homecoming* and I thought “what does coming home mean?” I had also recently read a book by Thich Nhat Hanh, titled *Going Home: Jesus and Buddha as Brothers...* it’s an illuminating book if you have a chance to read it. I thought there *is* some place that is *home* for us. And that brought up the question of what *is* our ‘true home?’

I remembered that when I first came to the Abbey, way back in the eighties, there was a brief moment while I was sweeping the cloister pavement when I looked out onto the central garden and felt ‘at home.’ It was a remarkable feeling which has stayed with me ever since. And at the time, I had a wonderful home, a loving husband and teenage son, a challenging and satisfying job, but there was something that I knew needed to be there which wasn’t there. And I wonder if that ‘something missing’ mightn’t be the same reason that you came here today ... a looking within for your true home.

When we were singing the Festival invocations this morning, we sang a very moving hymn that Reverend Master Kōten wrote—one of the verses is:

To You we turn, You are the Way, the Goal,
The journey and its end.
Regarder of the cries, Oh guide our hearts
To Peace, our Reaching Home.¹

It seems obvious to me that home, our true heart, is our practice of compassion, love and wisdom. The question for me is how do we get there? Well, we know our true home is our Buddha nature, our true home is the heart of practice. I think that there are many ways we could follow. What helps me is to think of this as “what understanding can I develop that will help me find my own true home?” The three ‘understandings’ that came up for me were: impermanence, all acceptance, and letting go.

Impermanence: living with uncertainty, i.e. not being in control, and that can be very scary.

All acceptance: on Reverend Master's stupa is engraved *All acceptance is the key to the gateless gate*. All acceptance means this is the way it is for the moment, this is the way it is right now, right here.

Letting go: Letting go of wanting, letting go of our attachments; and this is the difficult part coming up — letting go of the 'me', 'my,' 'mine'. Letting go of "this is good, this is bad," "I want this, I don't want that." Simply letting it all rest, and letting go of it.

How do we look at impermanence, acceptance and letting go, with an eye toward making these understandings part of my blood and bones? What do we need to get started, right here, right now?

I think that one of the things we need to get started is at least a little understanding of karma, a willingness to look very deeply at the messy bits of ourselves that we would rather ignore. I think that most of us are fairly self-judgemental and tend not to say "I'm a generous, kind person." We more likely tend to see what we do and judge ourselves as "a bad person, an angry person." But all such thoughts are the result of karma and we can begin to recognize that in simply sitting still, understanding karma is understanding impermanence. It is being willing to live with uncertainty, knowing that all conditioned things arise, abide, and pass away.

During January, I started reading a book that one of our congregation members in Eugene sent me; the title is *Inside the Grass Hut: Living Shitou's Classic Zen Poem*. The author is Ben Connelly, an ordained priest at the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center. I'll read a few of his reflections for you.

On the very first page we find a saying by the Buddha, "Everything that comes to be must pass away; make your peace with this, and all will be well."² Suffering, i.e. dissatisfaction, irritation, not being happy — whatever you choose to call it — suffering arises from trying to turn away from impermanence. And liberation arises from facing it fully.

It's interesting to me to see that the habits that I had of turning away from suffering in my lay life didn't work when I came to the Abbey, but being a very creative individual I could still find other ways to distract myself; because there's always a lot of work to be done in the monastery, one of them was "well, I'll just work a little more." So wherever you are, whatever situation you find yourself in, don't belittle your capacity for distraction and not facing suffering, for not facing the messy bits. Instead of looking at impermanence, one of the things that we may do is to surround ourselves with objects of permanence; a new car, new clothes, a new house, a new relationship.

I'm always amused when I come across an advertisement for diamonds, because the headline reads

‘diamonds are forever,’ implying that the relationships diamonds are intended to celebrate will last forever...and in all probability that’s not the case.

So, how do we make peace with impermanence? Because that is what we need to do. One of the ways that Ben Connelly talks about in his book is to look at all things as equal. This is the first line of Shitou’s poem *Song of the Grass-Roof Hermitage*; “I built a grass hut where there’s nothing of value.”³ Nothing of value. All things are equal, and there’s nothing of real value, except the value we give to it. Connelly reflects on this and says: “A mind where all things are equal is a mind at peace.”⁴ When we value something, there’s always comparison; there’s always something we want, and something we don’t want.

Think about it, if someone criticises you, what’s your response? If someone compliments you, what is your response? Are the responses the same? Chances are they are not. Chances are one will make you gloomy or angry, and the other will make you buoyant and pleased. And there’s no harm in that, as long as we don’t hang on to that particular feeling, and as long as we recognize there’s value in both of those things and it’s the same value.

So I started reflecting on “What are the things I put value in?” I put value in being able to do things, but you know, as I get older, I can’t quite do all the things I used to do. At first this was very disconcerting. But now I think “oh, isn’t that wonderful? I’m not able to do this anymore, I’ll

just have to let someone else do that” When someone else says “may I help you?” I’ll have to say “yes, thank you” instead of “oh no, I can do that myself.” When we talk about giving up attachments, letting go of the self and recognizing impermanence, acknowledging that all things are equal will bring us a good deal of peace of mind.

We all exist in a grass hut. The grass hut that Shitou refers to in this classic Zen poem, is metaphorically speaking, our body. Grass hut, thatched roof, how long is it going to last? We all know that this body is not my own; it’s subject to death, old age, disease; sometimes disease comes first, sometimes old age comes first. But we know that death is the last part. So why am I so attached to this body? Why am I so attached to my mind? Because we think our body and mind is our true self, but our true self is *neither* our body nor our mind.

I find that being willing to practice all-acceptance is crucial for my ability to change, my willingness to experience the discomfort of change. Because the status quo (even if we don’t like it) is generally easy; and change is hard. But it gets easier when we know that we can actually let go of our habits of body, speech and mind and when we have faith and trust in the Buddha’s teaching, in the Buddha nature of all beings, which means ourselves.

So, how do we practice all-acceptance? One way is to recognize that ‘all is one, and all is different.’ When I look at the world, with all the greed, hatred and delusion, all the

killings, and torture, all the refugees, all the people that have no bedding, food, water, medical care, I think what a different world it would be if we all truly believed and practiced that ‘all is one and all is different..’ Imagine the world as it *could* be. Well, we can’t change the world, at least not overnight, but we can change our own self and this is where we start, just going on our way and saying “I have started to change myself.” Don’t wait until you get home. Regardless of whether you’ve come for the retreat or you live nearby, just start right now, sitting here in this chair, in this very moment; “I’m going to change, and I’m going to practice compassion, love and wisdom in my daily life.”

One of the things that has been helpful for me in looking at all-acceptance is having some understanding of the volitional nature of karma. In *Buddhism from Within*, Reverend Master Daizui MacPhillamy talks about the nature of karma:

The name given to the link between people’s actions and how they feel is karma. It’s not fate or destiny, it’s not a mysterious force which controls a person and about which nothing can be done. The exact opposite is true. Karma is a natural consequence of what we do and therefore it can be changed by simply doing things differently.⁵

I emphasize the word ‘simply’, because actually it is a very simple concept, although not so easy to do, *and* it can be done...by you and me, by all of us.

Letting go of wanting things to be different. One of the ways that we let go of our habitual patterns' that make us unhappy, and other people unhappy; that cause us harm and cause other people harm, is by letting go of wanting things to be different. There's not a problem with wanting to be a better person; there's not a problem with wanting to keep the Precepts or to understand the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. The problem comes when we develop an ideal in our mind of how I'm going to be now that I'm a Buddhist, now that I'm keeping the Precepts. And of course that ideal generally only lasts about thirty seconds and then we either give it up or go into despair.

So think about letting go as letting go of our attachments, letting go of our desire for enlightenment; I'm sure that there must be at least one of you who came for our introductory retreat who may have thought "Introductory retreat, weekend at a Zen Buddhist Monastery, Friday through Sunday, I'll be enlightened by Monday morning!" But I have to tell you, it's not going to work that way. As Reverend Master Daizui says in *Buddhism from Within*, enlightenment is not a state, or an experience—it's an entire way of *being*. Enlightenment is our everyday practice of meditation and the Precepts. Is it possible that all I have to do is get my self out of the way and enlightenment will happen? Yes! That's what it is, letting go of self; stepping aside and letting the practice happen. Letting go into *not knowing*, because we're so accustomed in our world to knowing everything. Nowadays, whatever we want to know, we can look up instantly on the internet, but enlightenment

doesn't work that way—you can look up enlightenment on the internet—but it's not going to make any difference in your daily life. In our daily life we have to practice mindfulness, we have to practice meditation, we have to start learning to keep the Precepts.

There is a sentence that came up for me that I would like to share with you before we close (I'm sorry that I'm not remembering where I read it): *May we all learn the joy of all acceptance, and the freedom of impermanence.* I had never thought of connecting joy with all acceptance, and freedom with impermanence, and then I thought maybe I have it backwards, maybe it's learning the freedom of all acceptance and the joy of impermanence. I like it both ways.

So I'm going to end with a question for you to take with you. This surfaced while I was reading *Inside the Grass Hut*. It's a teaching of Great Master Dōgen: "Here is the place, here the Way unfolds."⁶ Our opportunity for practice is right here, in this very place, and right now, in this very moment. This is the Way of the Buddhas; this is the Buddha nature manifesting itself. Our 'true home' is here, and the time is now, so the question I would pose to you, that you might ask yourself, as I ask myself from time to time: if not here, where? And if not now, when?

We take refuge in the Buddha,
We take refuge in the Dharma,
We take refuge in the Sangha.

Notes

- [1.](#) Benson, Rev. Master Kōten. *You Weep in All the Sorrows of the World*. Invocation from the Shasta Abbey Choir booklet (unpublished.)
- [2.](#) Connelly, Ben. *Inside the Grass Hut: Living Shitou's Classic Zen Poem*, (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2014) p.13.
- [3.](#) *Inside the Grass Hut*, p.11.
- [4.](#) *Inside the Grass Hut*, p. 21.
- [5.](#) MacPhillamy, Rev. Master Daizui. *Buddhism From Within*, (Mt. Shasta, CA: Shasta Abbey Press, 2003.) p. 89.
- [6.](#) *Inside the Grass Hut*, p. 70.

Working Meditation

Steve Roberts

—Otterburn, Northumberland—UK—

This is a lightly edited transcript of talk given on the February 2017 Introductory Retreat at Throssel.

The next thing on the retreat schedule is working meditation, and I've been asked to give you a talk as an introduction to this, why we do it, why it's important, how to do it. You'll be given a job by a monk and there's quite a range of work: you might be helping in the kitchen, working outside in the grounds, you could be helping a monk fix something. You'll be shown what to do, and your job will be quite simple, so you can just let yourself relax into the task and be present. You're really being offered the opportunity to engage in a fairly normal sort of task but with a mind of meditation.

So how does that fit into our practice? Well, zazen is the foundation of our practice, but we don't do it to achieve some special state of mind, or even to get better at it in some way. Instead the purpose of a regular zazen practice is to develop an increasing familiarity with what the mind of meditation feels like. What it feels like to be still, to be present. The more you're familiar with that mind, the more

it becomes ingrained in you, it becomes the baseline of your life, something you instinctively keep coming back to.

This mind of zazen isn't a created state of mind. It's more the letting go of all created states of mind and resting in a natural place. You get to realise and feel that living from that place is the best you can do. It's a refuge in times of stress or difficulty, helping you to be the 'iron man', facing and doing whatever needs to be done. In more normal times it helps you to open up, to engage more fully, honestly and compassionately with whatever life presents you with.

So the purpose of zazen is to help you to live a life of meditation, and retreats here are set up to help you know how that feels, and what that means. If I could generalise what meditation is, it's being present, being wholeheartedly and fully engaged in this present moment. Whatever this present moment is, whatever the activity of this present moment is.

On retreat here we have a range of meditation activities. We do sitting meditation, zazen, which is meditating within the activity of doing absolutely nothing! So it's an extreme, that's why it's so useful. When our minds drift to doing anything, we're not doing nothing anymore, so it's sort of obvious, and we bring ourselves back to doing nothing, just sitting.

Then we do walking meditation. We just walk. This is very useful to help us to realise how the mind of meditation can be brought to a simple physical activity. Being present,

just doing what we're doing right now and nothing else. Wholeheartedly engaged.

Then we have working meditation; we're given a job that we can 'just do'.

We can also meditate within activities that require thought. Meditation in action isn't just about simple physical activities. The key to meditating with mental activity is to notice when your mind becomes scattered or distracted. Then you can bring yourself back to the present, to just thinking, just figuring out this complicated problem in front of me. Letting go of the distraction.

We can also meditate with busyness and needing to multitask. Again becoming distracted or scattered is a clue that you need to bring yourself back to the task at hand. When you are so busy that it's not possible to focus on one thing, when everything is happening at once and all you can do is the thing in front of your face and keep going, there can still be a groundedness, an utter practicality rooted in present moment awareness, needing no techniques, only enough familiarity with zazen.

With practice we can bring that meditative mind to anything we do in our lives, to our jobs, our relationships, our interactions with other people, and let that experience of being present, that increase in awareness, change us, change how we act, change who we are. We can let something deeper than the conditioned mind express itself through our

speech and actions. We can bring ourselves closer to what brought us here. We can let ourselves connect with what calls us to this practice.

So if I can give you some practical pointers for the working meditation session: firstly just relax into it, be present, pay attention. Focus on what you're doing AND what's going on around you. This is much more about being present than a narrow concentration on what you're doing. Try not to become distracted into conversation with the people around you, but it is fine to ask questions or ask for help if you need it. Don't worry about how much you get done, or whether you complete the job, that's always secondary to the chance to bring the mind of meditation to the task at hand. And lastly just do the best that you can, because that's what this life of meditation is about.

Buddhism Is Not Self-Improvement

Rev. Leon Kackman

—Portland Buddhist Priory, Oregon—USA—

This article first appeared in the Winter 2004 edition of the Journal

Most of us come to Buddhist practice with some idea or hope of finding a better way of living than that which we currently have, know or experience. Some of us are completely dissatisfied with the state of our lives and long for something more substantial to live for. And some of us come with a wish for the meaning or purpose that living a spiritual life gives. Buddhism, as a religious system, addresses these wishes in a way that is unique; it leads to a place that may, ultimately, be the same as that of other religious traditions, but it goes there in a way that is different from the others.

This difference hinges on the doctrine of non-self, *anatta*. As a doctrine, *anatta* simply means that, within us or outside of us, there can be found no thing that can precisely be called a self that abides unchanging, independent of its surroundings. Although you could say there are beings and things that are unique, and that appear to have a certain degree of independence, all are part of an immense ever-changing flow.

But what does *anatta* mean in practice, and how does it fit with the practice of such things as the Precepts and the perfection of characteristics like patience and loving-kindness? Who does the practicing and perfecting? What is perfected? And why is it important to consider this perfecting to be something other than self-improvement?

To begin, I want to say that there are two ideas that I regard as working hypotheses in the process of training in general. I refer to them as such because I, and possibly you, have not necessarily proved them to be true. I find them useful because they provide a place to step off into faith which in turn enables us to be transformed by the practice. The first hypothesis is that believing in a separate independent self is the source of much suffering and a great contributor to our sense of unease and mental disquiet. When I talk about suffering here, I am thinking of feelings of alienation, loneliness, inadequacy and separation in their various forms and degrees and the mental and emotional suffering that can accompany these feelings.

So, as a working assumption, let us say that there is a cause of the disquiet or unease that we feel, and this cause arises within our own minds, and is related to believing that we are separate entities. For me, it is critically important to remember that Buddhist teaching is telling me that the suffering I feel has its causes in my own body and mind, rather than in external circumstances and conditions. And it is only in my own body and mind that I can do something about the suffering that I experience.

And for working hypothesis number two, I am going to suggest that there is a state of things as they are that we are a part of. It is a kind of flowing impermanence that exists without dependence on the interpretations, speculations and conditioned perceptions of the mind. Although this state may not be free from pain and difficulty, it is serene and quiet and free from mental suffering. This state of things ‘as they truly are’ is deeper than our normal view of ourselves as somehow semi-solid personalities with various definable characteristics that are more or less permanent and separate from all the other semi-solid personalities around us. It is also critically important to have faith that we can come to experience this deeper state.

In meditation we are taught to sit still externally and internally by allowing whatever arises in the mind and body to come, abide for as long as it will and then to pass without grasping after it or pushing it away. This practice of just sitting still gives us the ability to see what is actually happening in our minds and bodies with deepening clarity. It is not uncommon for someone to sit down in meditation for the first time and remark on how busy their mind becomes. This is the effect of starting to see clearly what our mind is in the habit of doing in its day to day, moment by moment, functioning. We can see more clearly because we are not doing anything but being; we are putting ourselves directly in harmony with the state of things as they are. This is why the practice of sitting meditation is the foundation of our Buddhist practice.

Now, “being in harmony with what is” sounds kind of nice and good, and sort of fuzzy, but it may also have the effect of bringing our suffering more into focus; it highlights those areas of our life where we are doing things that create disharmony. This clarity can be rather painful in fact, and I suspect that it results in many people becoming disillusioned with practice and quitting. This is unfortunate since it is at this point that we are given the opportunity to go more deeply into practice by letting go of some aspect of the accretion we call the self. By engaging in meditation at a time of difficulty, we begin to see that these elements can be let go of; they can, with loving-kindness, be allowed to return in peace, to the Immaculacy of Emptiness. Happily, this letting go process is what tends toward an increasingly peaceful heart.

So we sit and become clearer about our internal life and in the process we come to recognize for ourselves that suffering does exist. It is like a thread that runs through much of our life and is at the center of much of our mind’s dynamic, and often chaotic, activity. Much of what we do in our minds is aimed at getting what we want, or getting rid of what we don’t want, or convincing ourselves that things and circumstances are other than they are, in order to deal with that pesky suffering that is always popping its head up throughout our lives. It may sound a bit odd for me to say that we come to see that suffering actually does exist, because isn’t it obvious? Yes, it is obvious, but even after many years of meditating, I am still surprised when I come into direct contact with suffering. Perhaps what I mean by

“recognizing suffering” is feeling it directly and seeing that it is suffering, rather than a conceptual abstraction or some hazy part of experience not clearly made out. I think we can all think of situations in which we or others were suffering but could, or would, not recognize at the time. After seeing more clearly the state of our life or mind, we may then ask the question, “What can I do about this situation?”

This is a critical turning point and leads to the question, “What result do I want from my actions?” You know, do I want to have material comfort, become a nicer person, look better physically or spiritually, become smarter, be reborn into a heaven realm, become a ‘helpful person’, learn karate? These are some of the things that we could work toward as a response to the suffering that arises in the course of our lives.

I do not wish to mock these things; in fact, in the Pali Canon there are many examples of situations in which the Buddha explains to people how to create the merit to be reborn into heavenly realms, or how to secure future spiritual well-being. However, one of the insights offered within serene reflection meditation is insight into the nature and depth of impermanence. For me, this insight (perhaps conditioned by the experience of trying various of the approaches listed above) that my life and its surroundings are disturbingly, even at times frighteningly, impermanent has pointed me towards the longing and the wish for a long-term and complete solution to the suffering I find in my life. For me then there is a need, or wish, to do this practice

deeply and completely and this leads me to question the merit of self-improvement.

It is tempting to think that if the self were nicer in some way, things would be a lot better, so the self-improvement approach to suffering is to try to perfect the self. To become a more loving person, a more learned person, a wiser and more steadfast person are all most excellent aspirations and certainly all these characteristics were encouraged by the Buddha. But there is a small limitation to this approach. The Buddha also taught that the self does not exist. So, in the long run, if we do things with the aim of affirming or improving our self-image or sense of self, we are only going to deepen our suffering, even though we might generate short-term benefits.

A practical example of the shortcomings of this approach is found in my habitual response to my own internal suffering—a deeply painful sense of inadequacy or incompleteness. I automatically find myself attempting to become very good at what I undertake to do, or to become very knowledgeable about the things I am involved in. This all seems noble and helpful, since it can be of use to myself and others, but my experience has been that it doesn't really address the suffering of inadequacy. It seems, instead, that the more I pursue or grasp after the external characteristics of adequacy, the more my suffering increases. Interestingly, while I have had a sense that this is so — that my suffering increases when I grasp after competence — the habit is so deeply entrenched that I have not really been able to see how

it happens or how it works when I do this. It has taken a fair bit of time and patient effort to begin to unravel the matter. This response to inadequacy is not the usual one of “Oh me, I’m a worm anyway, a bungler and a boob, so I might as well not do anything.” I suppose that in worldly terms it does result in getting more done more effectively, but again it has not resulted in a satisfactory resolution of my own deep suffering and seems only to increase it.

So, then, you might say, “If we do not have to work on being a better person, I guess it is just a free-for-all and we can do what we like, yippee.” Well, not quite. There is still cause and effect, and doing harm will still increase suffering. “Well then,” you might say, “I guess it is the pit of despair since there seems to be nothing we can do.” Well, no, not that either. The Buddha did say that in addition to the existence of suffering there is also a cause of suffering, an ending to suffering and a way to bring that ending about. By beginning to seek for something deeper in our lives we are moving toward the ending of suffering. Not only are we doing something on a practical level to help ourselves, but the impulse to look more deeply at our lives is an impulse of the Buddha Mind within us, and it is the complete realization of this Buddha Mind that the Buddha taught was the ending of suffering.

So, then, remembering that our first working hypothesis is that much of suffering is caused by believing in a separate self, we may ask, “What can I do about this sense of self; this self that is always getting hurt and upset and enraged. This

sense of self that is suffering?” And “What can I do that will, in the long run actually lead to peace of heart and harmony with what is?” It is also important to remember that our second working hypothesis is that there is something beyond my present experience that is free from suffering and is worth finding.

Happily, our Buddhist religion is much bigger than just the principles of suffering and not-self. There are many practices that we can study and put into action in our lives. What is of importance to me today is to examine how these practices can be put into use in a selfless way, in a way that helps to bring about an awareness of how I grasp after my own elusive and illusory sense of self.

What I have found to be of particular help is the deliberate consideration of how I want to dedicate the merit of my actions. In other words, clarifying how I want to direct my intention. When I was just beginning my practice I was very impressed with the Bodhisattva ideal of training myself to benefit all beings. I had a heartfelt wish to commit myself to training as a Bodhisattva, to realizing Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings. Now, after some time of training and learning more about how immense the prospect of training is, I remind myself of my earlier determination and enthusiasm to train for the benefit of all beings, my earlier dedication of my intention to train as a bodhisattva. And this helps me to go on in training even when I wonder if it wouldn't be easier to do something else.

Dedicating the merit of my training for the benefit of all beings also helps me to clarify what I am doing when, say, I find myself in the process of self-aggrandizement at others' expense; I can remind myself to look a little more deeply and let go of that self, and remember that letting go of self and realizing Buddhahood are part and parcel of the same thing.

The next thing I find helpful in letting go of the self is training and practicing with others, taking refuge in the Sangha. The kind of refuge taking I am thinking of here is the day-to-day interaction with others committed to the Way, in contrast to going to a teacher and asking for spiritual guidance (which can also be of great benefit). The Buddhist Sangha is interesting in that it is a group of often widely diverse people brought together for the common purpose of practicing Buddhism. It seems that it is not uncommon for this practice to be our only, or one of only a few, shared characteristics and consequently many of the people we might encounter practicing the Dharma we might not have encountered otherwise.

By simply rubbing shoulders with those who are practicing the Way, I have come to see many aspects of my own selfishness that I would not have seen otherwise. This is often not terribly dramatic; it is just that interactions with those who are attempting to be still and keep the Precepts, but doing so in ways that I might not have thought of, throw my actions and mind into relief; they set up a sort of positive dissonance that can help me to see my own actions more clearly. While taking refuge in this way is not dramatic, it

can be painful and very challenging. This is not necessarily because of anyone's deliberate action; it is simply the result of people of integrity, with different perspectives, doing their best to act in accord with the Dharma.

Another practice I find helpful is to be aware when there is hurt in my own body and mind (which happens much more frequently than I like to admit), and to sit as still as I can and ask, sometimes quite firmly, "Where is the hurt? Where does it really come from? Where is the inadequacy in my own heart?" and to simply offer loving-kindness to that hurt or that inadequacy and let it go.

The project of unwinding the knot of the self is a very big one and the simple practice of patience is needed. When I first started I was told that Buddhist practice, if done thoroughly and deeply, would be the most difficult thing I, or anyone, could do. I think I did not really pay much attention to this teaching and while I do not regret or belittle my attempts to practice, I have barely scratched the surface. Being patient in bearing the difficulty of practice and the other difficulties of life has become a valuable tool for me, and is like the resoluteness that a stone exhibits when being chipped away at by hammer and chisel to be made into a statue.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I find the diligent practice of meditation to be helpful. I am particularly thinking of meditation practiced as moment by moment renunciation. I once asked one of the masters of our monastic

family how I should practice renunciation and he said, “As it falls from your hand, let it go.” This means that in my everyday life I cultivate bringing myself back to stillness, back to what I am doing at the present time, and letting go of whatever is going on in my mind.

In the end, then, the issue of self-improvement becomes more a question of how we go about, or what we intend for, our training than what we do in practice. It is still excellent and absolutely necessary to practice the Precepts and the Paramitas¹ and the various good qualities extolled by the Buddhas and the Ancestors, but it is important to remember that the purpose of these things is to help us let go of the self. I try to see my motive for training as the motive of my own heart: the wish to find the Buddha Mind in order to benefit all beings. I try to involve myself with the Sangha as much as I can. You might think that it is pretty easy to do this as a monk but we humans, in whatever form we find ourselves, can develop many subtle ways of avoiding being with people, even in the midst of them. I have made it my intention to look to the hurt in my own mind and to see where I can do something about my own suffering. And I have tried to cultivate resolute patience and the willingness to “as it falls from the hand, let it go.”

Notes

- ¹ The six Paramitas are giving, keeping the Precepts, patience, vigour, meditation and wisdom.

Kings Day in Amsterdam

Tibbe de Raat

—*Amsterdam–Netherlands*—

It was somewhere towards the end of the afternoon of Kings Day¹. We were in Amsterdam selling old clothes on the street market to get some extra money for our plan of traveling the world. We had sold some clothes but not too many so then started giving the left-overs away. The boy next to us had a more successful little business. He had a wire loop game where you followed an iron wire with a little loop on the end of a rod. You were supposed to follow the wire all the way to the end, without the loop touching the wire. He made bets with adults passing by that for one euro they could not do it. And they couldn't. Many tried and failed.

The afternoon came to an end. We had already drunk two beers from our profit when our little neighbour challenged me. I was in for the bet, but didn't really care much about the outcome. I was more charmed by the way the little boy managed his business than I cared for winning or the money. So I dug up a euro and kneeled down in front of the apparatus. I asked if I could try it first. "No" the little boy said in a very serious and resolute way. So I took a breath and started following the ring along the iron wire. Suddenly everything faded and was very sharp at the same

time. I noticed an ambulance passing by in the distance. Time stood still. There was nothing but my hand moving very slowly, making miniscule movements. My thinking had fallen away and gave room for a deep focus. Without really noticing, I finished the little game. I blinked and looked into the eyes of the disappointed little boy. With that my surroundings came back to my senses as if returning from the bottom of a pool to the surface of the water. I told the little boy to keep the euro, but he insisted on paying me my bet. I walked back to my remaining pile of clothes, feeling the silence slowly fading.

This was my first moment of intense focus where time seemed absent, surprisingly enough not while sitting on a cushion during a silent retreat, but in the middle of noisy Amsterdam on a people-packed Kings Day.

It felt like the experience came to me, instead of me coming to that point of focus. Another way of putting it into words would be that it was the 'me' with all its expectations and stories that temporarily fell away. There was no active movement that made the falling away of the 'me': I experienced a silence which was already there.

This lack of striving or not trying to get somewhere is what I took from this experience. I try to cultivate this attitude during my meditation and I notice that this creates a certain ease in my practice which I find very helpful.

Notes

1. Kings Day is a national holiday where the birthday of the king is celebrated by various festive activities including street markets.

NEWS OF THE ORDER

Europe

Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey

—Northumberland, England—UK—

Monastic news: On March 24th, Rev. Daigen Weir received Dharma Transmission from Rev. Master Daishin and is now wearing a mokuran Kesa. The ceremonies of Transmission in part signify a rededication of a monk's life to the way of the Precepts. It is a cause for great joy and we offer our congratulations to Rev. Daigen.

On the first morning of the monks' summer sesshin, postulants Tara Bailey and Shooie Lucas were ordained as novice monks. Rev. Master Daishin gave them the names Rev. Kōjō (which means Bright Rising) and Rev. Kanshin (Patient Dragon) respectively. We congratulate both new monks and wish them well as they begin their novitiate.



Rev. Kōjō and Rev. Kanshin

Rev. Caitlin returned to her home temple, Great Ocean Dharma Refuge, on 21st April after a 2 year stay with us. She was cook for the latter part of this time and did an excellent job in this and the other roles she took on. We and the guests who worked with her in the kitchen appreciated her bright presence. She also visited and supported the Hexham Group. All our good wishes go with her on her return to Wales and we hope we may have a visit from her again sometime.

Jukai: Thirteen people received lay ordination at The Ten Precepts retreat this spring; we offer our congratulations to Veronica, Cath, Holly, Nicola, Linda, Rosalie, Jill, Beccy, Charlie, Renato, James, Graeme and Alan. An additional seven people, who had taken lay ordination in previous years, joined the retreat, further looking into the meaning of the Precepts and walking the Buddha's Way. Their practical assistance during the week was invaluable too.



Jukai Group 2017

Wesak: Our Wesak celebration takes place within our annual Friends and Family Weekend, over Saturday and Sunday. This year several families with a total of a dozen children aged 1 - 13 years came and enjoyed the open weekend with the resident

community. On Saturday there were games and activities, including frisbee golf in the grounds, help with food preparation in the kitchen and helping make concrete to lay a foundation for the new gate at the lower end of the garden.

A new and very popular event this year was a shadow puppet workshop, which involved making black cardboard puppets to display against a back-lit screen. Two of the children created excellent stories, which they read out while the action was projected onto the screen. Towards the end of the day it was just about warm enough for us to enjoy a barbecue outside on the lawn.



Barbecue outside the kitchen

After this, a group of children and parents played the Training and Enlightenment board game in the evening with Rev. Master Hugh's help. This game was devised by Rev. Master Jiyu and involves taking turns in throwing a dice and moving a counter through various areas on the board which represent situations we can find ourselves encountering in daily life. It is at the same time good fun and rich in teaching.



Playing the Training and Enlightenment game

Many more people came along for the Wesak ceremony on Sunday, for which Rev. Master Daishin was celebrant. The Dharma talk afterwards was given by Rev. Master Willard, who spoke about the symbolism of ladling water over the Baby Buddha statue which is the at heart of this festival. Afterwards we all enjoyed a feast together.

Death of our cat, Smudge: The elder of our two cats, Smudge, became ill with kidney failure in April; a treatment to flush out his kidneys revived him only briefly and he died on 10th June after a gradual decline. He was remarkably quiet and still throughout and continued to respond to us, even when he was very weak. He died quietly just before morning meditation, so we were able to dedicate this to him. He was 16. We held a funeral and burial for him the next day. From being a playful kitten, to a feisty adult, he became an increasingly affectionate and gentle presence; we will all miss him.

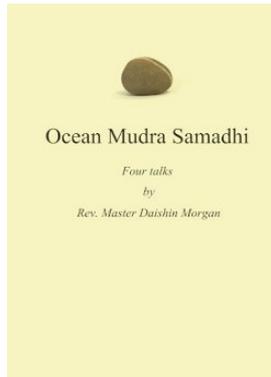


Smudge

Lay Ministry Retreat: In March, we welcomed Rev. Masters Saidō and Mugo and a group of ten mostly long-standing lay ministers to the annual lay ministry retreat which this year ran from Thursday to Sunday.

New Throssel Booklet: This 24-page booklet features transcriptions of a series of lectures given by Rev. Master Daishin at last year's August sesshin at Throssel. The collection is called *Ocean Mudra Samādhi: Four Talks*. The teaching is based on a chapter from Great Master Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* called *Kaiin Zammai*.

It is being offered in the spirit of dana. This means you are welcome to give a donation of a sum of your choosing (for your information the printing cost is approx. £1.50 and the postage 56p.)



The bookshop website is here:

<http://throssel.org.uk/category/bookshop/>

Courtyard Project: The finishing touches to the refurbishment of the courtyard have been put in place with two sets of railings installed at the site of the steps to the abbot's house (see photo below) and another set, by the steps which lead up to the toolshed.



Sangha Walk: The Green Mountains Walking Group has had a bit of a lull in its activities over the past year but we took advantage of the bank holiday weekend after the Jukai retreat, travelling to the north-western Lake District for a very enjoyable day's walking. Four Throssel monks plus Boz (Rev. Master Daishin's dog) joined the group of lay trainees on a six mile walk, taking in two summits over 400m. The weather became increasingly sunny through the day such that we were able to enjoy tea and cakes after the walk in the garden of a lay trainee who lives in the area.



Garden Project progress: Our public garden here was established many years ago with leylandii on two sides. Recently the hedge had become so large, it was increasingly difficult to manage and trim safely. After some discussion a decision was made to contract a local gardener to cut down the hedges, and the resulting waste was either chipped or given to our neighbours as firewood. This already had the favourable effect of opening up the garden, making it more visible and inviting.

Then a long-standing friend of the community who is a local farmer (and skilled digger and tractor driver) helped by pulling up the leylandii stumps and levelling the ground. He subsequently began transporting the stones from elsewhere on our

property, moving them in place ready for the wall builder, another local person who has also done work for us in the past.



Temporary fencing with stones ready for the wall.

—Rev. Alina

De Dharmatoevlucht

—Apeldoorn—The Netherlands—

Lay ordination: On Sunday the 19th of March we had a day retreat which was dedicated to the Precepts, with a Renewal of Vows ceremony in the morning and a Lay Ordination ceremony for Adelheid Smit from Rotterdam in the afternoon. Adelheid has already been practising with us for many years and she was very pleased to take this step in her commitment to Buddhist practice. We wish her all the best in her continuing training.



Lay Ordination of Adelheid

Wesak: On Sunday the 7th of May we celebrated Wesak for the last time in the building in which the temple is presently located. At the end of the ceremony we all rang the temple bell to joyously start a new Buddhist year of practice. We all hope that next year we will be able to celebrate Wesak in the old fire station building, if we are successful in acquiring it. Around 15 lay trainees joined the festivities in the temple.



Groups gather for Wesak

—Rev. Baldwin

Dharmazuflucht Schwarzwald

—*Gutach (Black Forest) – Germany*—

We had our weeklong spring retreat in early May. Rev. Master Mugo arrived a few days before the Sesshin and stayed for ten days. We very much enjoyed having her here. We hope that she will be able to spend time with us on a regular basis over the coming years.



Lay Ministers Andreas Körner and Susan Sting also participated in the retreat, and towards the end of it, we had the Lay Ordination for Sylvia Lindenmaier, who has been coming to the temple ever since Rev. Master Fuden came to Germany.



Lay ordination



Putting on the wagesa

On the last day of the retreat, we celebrated the Buddha's birth. After the retreat, Lay Minister Susan stayed on for another week and did wonders for our garden!

At the end of March, we had the pleasure of welcoming Rev. Bridin from Latvia, who had come for a short visit to Germany. After showing her our temple, we went for a walk in the forest above us and showed her the surrounding area.

Towards the end of May, we scheduled an open-house event at the request of the local community. Members of local organisations will come for an afternoon and get a sense of our temple, and of what we do here. In March, we had a school-class with their teacher and a pastor come for part of a morning, to receive an introduction to our practice. The pastor, who teaches comparative religion at different schools in our area, has been bringing small groups of students and pupils to the temple on a regular basis.

In early June Katrin, the sister of Rev. Mildred (who died in 2004) will be coming to visit us together with Ursula, an old-time congregation member from Basel in Switzerland. Katrin has supported our temple ever since it first started and it is very good to be able to keep the contact alive with Rev. Mildred's family. In the late nineties, when our activities in the German-speaking part of Europe first started up, Rev. Mildred was very instrumental in helping to set up a Dharma-place in Germany.

We continue to hold regular group-retreats, and on most Sundays there is a meditation morning scheduled. We had a variety of new guests from our area come to the temple, either for an introduction or for a retreat. As always, we are very pleased to have guests who are familiar with our practice come on private retreats.

—*Rev. Master Fuden*

Great Ocean Dharma Refuge

—Pembrokeshire, Wales—UK—

This spring it has been a joy to welcome back Reverend Caitlin to Great Ocean after a period of training at Throssel Hole—in time for the flowering of bluebells locally and in abundance in the woods that surround us here. We thank Reverend Master Daishin and the community for their kindness and teaching and for offering Rev. Caitlin this important opportunity. The community there benefitted from Rev. Caitlin's bright enthusiastic contribution and latterly from her work as the monastery cook.



The life of the temple at Great Ocean has continued with the flow of the comings and goings of both lay and monastic guests and retreatants; and the seasonal cycles bring joy and remind us of impermanence, renewal, and the jewel of training in the Dharma which we hold in our hand and heart.

Many of you know that our beloved dog Dewi died in December after seventeen years of being a good friend and guardian to all. Dewi came from an animal shelter in mid Wales at the same time as the founding of Great Ocean and his passing

is a land mark. Endings are also new beginnings and highlight the thread of the Eternal Truth which weaves through all. Dewi is greatly missed and as always I extend grateful thanks to everyone who helped support his care.



After various long standing responsibilities and duties of care, I will be taking periods of time this year to rest and retreat and resolve some health and energy difficulties. I also look forward to being able to travel again and visit with fellow monastics and lay Sangha in the coming months.

We will continue to welcome lay trainees to residential and day retreats, and the local Sangha meets here for a half day retreat each Wednesday. For retreat and training opportunities at Great Ocean we welcome you as always to phone or write myself or Rev. Caitlin. We thank you for your continuing kindness and support of the Temple, and wish you well.

—Rev. Master Mokugen

The Place of Peace Dharma House

—Aberystwyth, Wales—UK—

We celebrated Wesak in the midst of a retreat for those who have a long term, close connection, with The Place of Peace. The commitment and sincerity of those who had travelled many miles to be here was a gift to the temple, and we were all grateful for the opportunity to train together.

One of those retreatants was Moira Pagan, who was visiting from Australia. Last year we asked if anyone would like to sew a funeral kesa for our sacristy, and Moira, who is an expert seamstress, very kindly responded. We thank Moira for the care, and quality of execution, not to mention the many hours of work, that went into the kesa, which she has donated, making it a precious offering.

Gratitude is also offered to Gordon and Ceri Jones who continue to offer steadfast support in so many areas. Having such reliable people, who can be called upon at short notice to help out where needed, is invaluable.

Steve Roberts has, once again, stepped in to help with computer matters. His expertise, patient manner and willingness to give his time, are also appreciated.

Catherine Artindale's help with our book keeping and end of year accounts continues to be invaluable.

Thank you to everyone who continues to support the life of faith in this small temple.



Rev. Master Myōhō with Rosie Pemberton at Wesak

—Rev. Master Myōhō

Sōtō Zen Riga

—Riga–Latvia—

This spring we continued with morning meditation on weekdays, a meditation and Dharma class on Wednesday evenings, and a full day retreat once a month. This schedule seems to work best for all concerned.

Spring is slow in coming to Latvia. We are seeing more sun and less rain but temperatures still require a warm jacket and a hat. The temple was very pleased to be able to purchase a used Toyota Prius with low mileage. The car has made getting around much easier and is greatly appreciated. Parking has been an issue but a space in the locked courtyard outside the apartment building is available most of the time. The car provides expanded opportunities for exploring the Latvian countryside and travel to neighbouring countries in Europe.

A visit to Dharmazuflucht Schwarzwald Priory in Gutach, Germany was a pleasure.



*Rev. Bridin, holding Lilly, with Rev. Clementia outside
Dharmazuflucht*

The priory is in a very beautiful natural setting and a great place to walk in the woods with monks. Lilly dog and I appreciated the very warm welcome and good companionship.

—*Rev. Bridin*

Turning Wheel Buddhist Temple

—*East Midlands—UK—*

Towards a long-term home for the temple: We mentioned in the last issue of the journal that we have been looking for a property to purchase to give the temple a long-term home.

We have now found a property that would suit us very well that is about half a mile from our present location. It is a 1950s three-bedroom detached house, and it has the main features that we are looking for, including a meditation room that isn't on a party wall, a downstairs toilet, and another reception room or larger kitchen. It is also close to a bus route from the railway station.

We have set up a Building Fund to help raise money towards the purchase, and the temple website now has a Building Fund page (www.turningwheel.org.uk/building-fund/), which has more details about the property, including several photos.

With our current level of income we should just about be able to manage the mortgage repayments on this property, but we don't yet have enough for the deposit. We have been offered some long-term personal loans which get us about half way towards it, but at the moment we still have a bit further to go to reach the amount that we would need.

We would welcome any support in reaching this target, and there are details of several different ways to help on the Building Fund webpage. Any support you feel able to give to help us establish a more suitable long-term home for the temple would be greatly appreciated.

Spring Retreat Day in Nottingham: On Saturday the 1st of April we had a Day Retreat at the Tiger Boe Centre in the middle of Nottingham. We had a good turnout, with a dozen people there in both the morning and the afternoon.



Nottingham Day Retreat

The large main room at Tiger Boe works very well as a meditation hall, and we had plenty of room for everyone. It is a difficult space to take a photo of, though, and the picture above is put together from three different photos. Even so, there are still three people who were missed out!

It was very nice to be able to spend the day sitting together, and the next day retreat in Nottingham will be on Saturday the 28th of October.

Visit to Sitting Buddha Hermitage: On the following Saturday, April the 8th, Sangha members from Leicester and Nottingham visited Rev. Alicia's temple, Sitting Buddha Hermitage in Cromford, Derbyshire. Nine of us travelled up from the temple, with one coming from Nottingham as well.



Visit to Sitting Buddha Hermitage

We were very lucky with the weather, as it was the warmest day of the year up to that point, with the temperature reaching a balmy 20°C in the afternoon. In the morning we had tea together and did some sitting, and then had a bring-and-share lunch. In the afternoon we went for a walk to Arkwright's mill and along the canal and back.

We had been planning to finish the day off with tea and cake in the café at a well-known Cromford bookshop. However, the warm weather meant that the town was packed with visitors, and the bookshop café was so busy that instead we went back to the Hermitage for a nice cup of tea.

It was lovely to visit Rev. Alicia at the Hermitage, and we hope to do so again before too long.

Wesak celebration: We weren't quite so lucky with the weather for our Wesak festival on the 6th of May, as a dull and windy day meant that we weren't able to use the garden this year. It didn't stop us in our Wesak celebrations, however, and it was nice that local Sangha members from Leicester and Nottingham

were joined by several people from further away, including from Rugby and from Boston, Lincolnshire.



Wesak Celebration at Turning Wheel

—Rev. Aiden

Wolk-en-Water Hermitage

—Langelille—The Netherlands—

Over the last few months we had a few Sunday meditation days for regulars and also Saturday meditation mornings for people from the region.

Rev. Master Mugo came for a visit around the 1st of May, for which occasion we saw several lay ministers and other trainees visit the temple.

Nanette brought us the new bowing seat she made for the meditation hall and a new fence was built in the garden (see photo). Step by step the temple finds its place here.



The new fence, with Channa, Rev. Master Hakuun's dog, in the foreground

The April retreat in Frehel, Bretagne, had to be cancelled due to a non-functioning airplane. As the plane could not take off, Rev. Master Hakuun was brought back to the terminal. Unfortunately it was the beginning of mid-term vacations and Air France did not have another flight to offer. However, a small group still joined Mo and Peter Henderson at Labyrinth. Rev. Master Hakuun gave lectures and questions and answers to them via Facetime instead. The next retreat there will be the last weekend in October.

There are a few places left for the international retreats in Langelille from 7-14 of July and 7-13 August. Please apply via <mailto:contact@wolkenwater.nl>.

—Rev. Master Hakuun

The Americas

Shasta Abbey

—Mt. Shasta, California—USA—

Monastic Ceremonies: The spring training term began on February 2nd, which was also the first anniversary of Rev. Master Hubert Nearman’s death. We observed the occasion with a memorial ceremony for Rev. Master Hubert after Morning Service. Later in the morning, Rev. Trahearn Platt entered the meditation hall as Head Novice, with Rev. Vera Giordano as his assistant and Rev. Allard Kieres as his advisor. We offer our congratulations and best wishes to these monks as they deepen their monastic training.



Rev Master Meian with Rev. Trahearn

The annual spring meditation retreat for the monastic community took place from April 18-24. Rev. Trahearn offered tea and presented teaching on a fundamental doctrine in the meditation hall on April 23. Later that day at the Head Novice’s Dharma Ceremony, he successfully answered questions on his chosen verse, “When your own mind seeks for something outside

and separate from yourself you are missing the point,” from *The Litany of Bodhidharma*. We offer congratulations and best wishes to Rev. Trahearn as he continues his monastic training.

We observed the Buddha’s Parinirvana during the month of February, with two ceremonial readings of *The Scripture of the Buddha’s Last Teachings* in addition to the February 19 Festival of the Buddha’s Parinirvana.

Rev. Master Oswin Hollenbeck transmitted the Dharma to his disciple, Rev. Allard Kieres, in the ceremonies of Transmission on the snowy night of April 6, 2017. We wish both Rev. Master Oswin and Rev. Allard congratulations on this significant step in training.



Rev. Master Oswin and Rev. Allard with Rev. Master Jiyu’s Stupa

Jukai: We celebrated a joyous Keeping of the Ten Precepts Retreat (Jukai) from March 19-26. Although most of the week was chilly and damp, the weather cooperated by letting up on the rain

and providing a little sun on the morning of the Ketchimyaku ceremony, which takes place outdoors. Thirteen people became the Buddha's disciples by taking the Precepts: Kenneth James Brock, MaryJill Midge Firenzi, Jan Gillespie, Donald Fred Hart, Cléa Sá Holdridge, Beverly Maxine Hurley, Todd Edward Jones, Mark Douglas Kline, Patrick Douglas Knight, Susan Annette Lenviel, Justin Paul Philbrook, Susana Ramirez, Lisa Ann Serpa and Jeri M Shattuck. As usual, several people returned to renew their past commitment to the Precepts. Retreatants expressed gratitude for this opportunity to dedicate and re-dedicate themselves to living the life of Buddha.



Jukai 2017 at Shasta Abbey

Memorial Ceremonies: On February 4, 2017, Rev. Helen Cummings was celebrant, Rev. Dilys Cromack was precentor and Rosemary Dyke was chaplain for a funeral for Sally Bergraaf as well as for a memorial for Greta the cat at Joanne Keifer's home in Yreka.

Rev. Master Andō Mueller was celebrant for a memorial for her father, Klaus Mueller, on March 30, the 49th day after his death in early February. On April 5, Rev. Amanda Robertson was

celebrant for a memorial for her nephew, Brian Pease, who died in March.

Travels and Visits: Rev. Master Haryo departed in early May to attend the Induction ceremony for Rev. Leon Kackman as Prior of the Portland Buddhist Priory and to visit temples and meditation groups of the Order. Rev. Masters Meian Elbert and Serena Seidner and Rev. Vivian Grunenfelder also traveled to Portland for Rev. Leon's Induction, where Rev. Master Meian offered a Dharma talk on Wholeheartedness.

We were glad to welcome Rev. Jisen Coghlan of Boise Idaho, who joined us for the spring monastic retreat and stayed on for several days afterward. We also enjoyed a few days' visit from Ven. Vien Trung An and Ven. Vien Trung Tinh, nuns from Duc Vien Temple in San Jose, California who have been studying at Dharma Realm Buddhist University.

Rev. Master Astor Douglas gave an April retreat for the Bear River Meditation Group, which included a 'wildflower walk' along the American River. The walk was both educational and recreational, as it included a group member who is knowledgeable in the natural history of the area.

Rev. Enya Sapp accepted an invitation to address Marty Zottola's World Religions class at Rogue Community College in southern Oregon, where students showed interest in learning about what moves people to choose the monastic life.

—*Rev. Margaret*

Lions Gate Buddhist Priory

—*Lytton, British Columbia–Canada—*

We had a long, cold winter this year with about four feet of snow. We were grateful for all the firewood on hand and for the wood stoves to keep us warm. Spring was late in arriving, but the snow has now disappeared, wildflowers and songbirds have returned, and the warmer days are here.

Monthly meditation meetings in Vancouver have resumed, thanks to Supriti Bharma's generous offering of the use of her house. We hope to be able to send a monk from the Priory to attend each time. Please contact us for more information on the address, dates, and times of these meetings.

We vacated the mobile home on the farm below our property at the end of April, as the owner needs it. We are grateful to Amandah for making this space available to us at a reasonable rent.

In May, the Chinese History Museum in Lytton had its official opening. This is a private initiative of Megan Fandrich, a long-time resident of the town who became interested in the history of the Chinese people in Lytton many years ago when she learned that a plot of land owned by her and her husband was the site of the old "Joss House" (temple), which was built around 1881 and stood on the land until 1928. The temple was unique, in that it housed an image of Kwan Yin. A 150-yr-old statue of Kwan Yin was donated to the museum. Rev. Master Kōten and the Priory community, along with a few individuals, held a private eye-opening ceremony in early May for the statue, asking Kwan Yin to sit still and help all beings. Then on May 13 the official opening ceremonies took place, with speeches by dignitaries and a Lion Dance.

From May 14–May 20, we offered our week-long Wesak Retreat, the first of several retreats of the season. Four guests attended, and with the five current residents of the Priory, we had a good retreat. The weather cooperated, with warm, sunny spring days. This retreat ended with a Wesak Ceremony on May 21 at Prajnatarā Hall, our "log cabin zendo", and a festive al-fresco meal at Bodhidharma Hall. During the retreat, Rev. Master Kōten offered a series of Dharma Talks each morning on the meaning of Wesak; these can be found on our website at <http://www.lionsgatebuddhistpriory.ca/Dharma%20Talks.htm>



*Lions Gate Wesak
(photo by Sherron Soo)*



Lions Gate Wesak Altar

Rev. Master Aurelian visited Portland Buddhist Priory in May to represent Lions Gate at the Installation Ceremony of Rev. Leon as Prior. It was really good to be there and to affirm our

support for Rev. Leon. Many thanks to him for inviting us, and to everyone who made us feel welcome. We wish him all the best in the future.

—Rev. Master Aurelian

Wallowa Buddhist Temple

—Joseph, Oregon—USA—

Spring has brought lively weather ranging from freezing cold to warm, windy to still, rainy to sunny, and even some spring snows which soon melt away after touching the ground. After a record snowfall this winter, the valley and foothills of the snow-capped mountains are a lush green, and wild torrents of water melting off the peaks are pouring down the temple creek bed. Thanks in large part to various work projects the last couple of years to clear an irrigation channel and create a new walking trail along the bank, the creek section of the temple grounds is looking particularly lovely as the vegetation buds out, providing several spots for quiet contemplation by the rushing waters. We are grateful to the many friends who helped with this work.



Four deer at rest outside the meditation hall, Wallowa Buddhist Temple grounds

Retreat Guests: We were pleased to have Marie Mitchell from Mt. Shasta, California, join us for a week-long retreat in late March, which gave us a chance to reconnect with this Sangha friend, whom we both know from many years training together at Shasta Abbey. A mother and her 20-year-old daughter traveled from Victoria, British Columbia, to spend five days with us in late April/early May, and shared stories, photos, and news of their teacher Rev. Master Meiten, who is a dear Dharma sister of Rev. Meidō. In mid-May, we welcomed a new guest from Yakima, Washington, who learned about the temple through friends in Walla Walla, Washington, who had themselves come for individual retreats.

Sangha Member Has Moved: Helmut Schatz, who moved here to the Wallawas last spring renting a place on a horse ranch in Lostine, Oregon, recently decided to settle in the relatively nearby urban center of Walla Walla. Both the monks and congregation benefitted greatly from having this lay minister of the Order and good friend of the temple training together with us this past year. We are glad that he is still close enough to the area that we will continue to see him regularly.

Wesak: On the first Sunday of May, the joyous Buddhist festival ceremony of Wesak was celebrated and the temple bell rung to welcome in the Buddhist New Year 2561 B.E. We shared a delicious vegetarian potluck lunch afterwards which included a special Wesak cake baked by Erin Donovan. That afternoon, during the open house portion of the day, neighbors and friends of the temple dropped by the temple to join in the festivities.



This year's Wesak Altar at the Wallowa Buddhist Temple

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

—Rev. Master Meidō and Rev. Clairissa

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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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