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Segaki Altar at Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey 2014

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Editor: Rev. Alina Burgess

Assistant Editor: Rev. Master Scholastica Hicks

Proofreading help: Veronica Adamson, Sally Brown,
Pete Corbett, Jayson Lavergne.

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Kuan Yin and Hungry Ghosts

<https://neonobservatory.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/hungry-ghosts-and-kuan-yin.jpg>

Feeding Hungry Ghosts with the Bodhisattva Mind

Rev. Master Oswin Hollenbeck MOBC

—*Shasta Abbey, CA–USA*—

Generosity, compassion, love, and merit—all aspects of the Bodhisattva Mind-Heart—are the distinctive attributes, or seals, of the Feeding of the Hungry Ghosts Ceremony (Segaki)¹. They are the qualities cultivated by those on the Bodhisattva path of compassion, those who train for the welfare and liberation of all beings. These facets are ‘seals’ in the sense that their presence or tone verifies that the performance of the ceremony is authentic, ‘the real thing.’ Without them, the ceremony becomes an empty form or cultural relic.

I want to explore here the many ways these qualities are expressed in the ceremony: first, the spirit of this offering; next, their appearance in the preparations; and then some aspects compassion or love in the festival itself. I am describing the ceremony as it is performed in a large monastery; the same ceremony is done in smaller temples on a more modest scale with many of the activities performed by lay members. Regardless of size, the sincerity and merit of the offering are the same.

The spirit of offering—generosity

Segaki is our Order's most elaborate transfer of merit ceremony. Merit is the goodness created by wholesome acts, which can then be shared with others. This ceremony is intended for those who have recently died, especially in tragic circumstances, as well as for other unfortunate beings. In our tradition Segaki is a festival ceremony, one that is held annually to honor a Buddha, Bodhisattva, or Ancestor, similar to a service on a saint's feast day in other religious traditions. It requires especial music, altar items, preparation, organization, and processions. All of this, everything we do and say and think as we prepare and perform the ceremony, is a specific act of merit. As will be explored below, everything has both literal and figurative meanings: a ceremony works on many levels.

Unless ceremonies are funerals or memorials, Sōtō Zen ceremonies usually end with an offering of their merit wider and wider to all beings. The Segaki ceremony ends with “so that its merit may fill the universe.” This expansive offering arises out of our compassionate concern for all beings and is characteristic of the Mahayana, or Great Vehicle, branch of Buddhism. Such an offering is an expression of the last of the Ten Great Vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, “I vow to dedicate myself unstintingly to the enlightenment of the universe” or “I vow to dedicate the merit of my training to all sentient beings.”²

Generous offerings form the substance of the Feeding the Hungry Ghosts ceremony, and this spirit permeates all its components. First let's look at offerings in general, which will apply to Segaki, too. Offerings on an altar have specific symbolism and represent much more than what we might physically offer. All the items constitute the expression of Samantabhadra's Third Great Vow: "I vow to make abundant offerings." In making this vow, the *Avatamsaka Scripture's* pilgrim-trainee Sudhana describes in detail how incredibly large these gifts are. He vows to give vast amounts of the finest incense, flowers, lamps & candles, unguents, clothing, banners, parasols, etc., that one can imagine—all the luxuries available only to royalty and the wealthiest inhabitants of ancient India. Our seemingly small offerings represent this immense measure.

The magnitude of the offering is also shown by the altar itself. In a ceremony or Buddha hall it is customary to have the main altar designed and constructed to resemble Mount Sumeru, the cosmic mountain or pillar that penetrates the universe. We can ascend it by steps halfway and then we have to take a leap of faith to continue: the path goes straight up, and then upside down. Essentially, in faith and trust we offer the entirety of our life, practice, and merit—the universe—to the Three Treasures. More on the Segaki altar later.

Finally, delicious cake and fine tea are placed on the main altar in a 'Great Monk's Offertory,' an elaborate sequence of movements at the beginning of a ceremony. It

requires the participation of a number of monks who pass the offerings to the celebrant for her blessing and then place them on the altar. The cake symbolizes the ‘food of the Dharma,’ what gives us spiritual nourishment, and should be something that everyone (in the region) would consider a treat. The exquisite tea represents the ‘water of the Spirit,’ sometimes called the ‘divine nectar’ or ‘sweet dew.’ This is the peace of mind and heart flowing through all things which fully satisfies the thirst of desire and its consequent suffering when we practice. The ‘great monk’ is the Buddha, and we serve the cake and tea to Him in beautiful cups and saucers reserved for this purpose, often on elaborate stands.



Preparation and welcome

Looking at the planning and preparation for Segaki reveals how extensively the spirit of compassion, or love, permeates the ceremony. This preparation is itself an offering and is considered part of the ceremony: the festival begins when we begin to plan for it. For Segaki we ‘pull out all the stops’ to make the grandest offering we can. One can see extensive endeavors in many areas—spiritual, practical, and liturgical. If we include all the efforts over the centuries to maintain, preserve, and pass on these traditions, the merit of the offering becomes even more difficult to estimate, like ‘the many grains of sands in the River Ganges’.

For Feeding the Hungry Ghosts, we set up or re-locate the large front altar designed for offerings which in a big hall is usually located in front of the Mount Sumeru altar. The Segaki altar may be as simple as a table or especially built for this purpose and used only on these occasions. In addition to all the usual festival offerings described above, we fill the altar with a tremendous variety of food “from the fields, the mountains, and the sea,” i.e. everything vegetarian in every possible shape, color, texture, and taste. These items include fresh, cooked, and dried foods, along with a host of beverages—something for everyone—but all items have to be readily consumable—no wrappers, packages, canned goods, or bottled drinks. Added occasionally are mountains of fresh fruit and, in the autumn, harvest vegetables such as pumpkins and squash.

Anticipating this ceremony the monastery kitchen the week before saves the best leftovers from the temples’ meals, and lay trainees bring extra dishes, often with a specific person in mind. The day before the ceremony a large crew of trainees gathers in the kitchen to prepare the offerings. Over the years the temple collects a varied array of small dishes for this purpose. All of this food is prepared with great love, care, and respect. Rev. Master Jiyu once remarked after a Segaki ceremony that she could sense all the love that had gone into the preparation of the food offerings.

As in the daily meals at a temple, there’s more than just food being offered. In his writings, Great Master Dōgen

instructs the temple's Chief Cook on the importance of cooking meals for the community with a gentle heart and imbuing them with spiritual nourishment, love. Indeed, all the food on the altar represents the Dharma, that which we wish our guests, human and non-human, internal and external, to freely receive and readily ingest.

In a large monastery, the chief musician or precentor schedules rehearsals for the community, and especially for the senior officers, who practice circumambulations and movements unique to this ceremony.



Segaki altar at Shasta Abbey

Some of the scriptures, such as *The Sweet Gate Scripture and Mantras*, are specific to Segaki and require lengthy practice to chant them accurately in translated Sanskrit³ and in harmony and time with others. The monks

who play the musical ‘kwatz’ in the ceremony employ instruments rarely used.



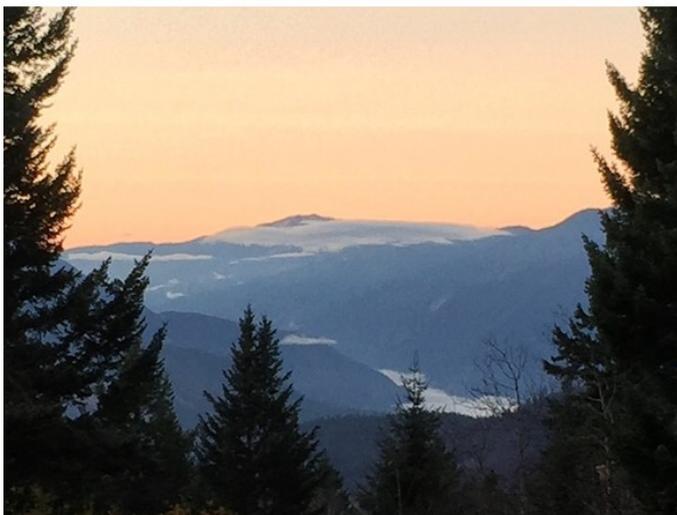
Lay Friends preparing for the musical kwatz at Eugene Priory

The sacristy, responsible for ceremonial in the temple, collects the names of the dead to be read during the ceremony, makes paper memorial tablets for the Segaki bonfire which often follows the main ceremony in the evening, and cleans and decorates the graves in the cemetery. The sacristans also prepare the ceremonial space, which for Feeding the Hungry Ghosts usually means turning a large hall’s arrangement completely around by setting up the special Segaki altar at the opposite end of the hall. Some Segaki altars are constructed to hold large wooden memorial tablets (tobas) inscribed with the names of the deceased;

sometimes smaller temples prepare paper memorial tablets (ihais) to be used on the altar itself. Directly behind and above the altar hang long red banners calligraphed with the names of the ‘Buddhas of the Dead.’ And there are many other small details which keep the sacristans moving briskly in the days and hours preceding the ceremony.

Then there are the preparations by other monks in the monastery. The guest office in particular has many duties preparing for a large number of lay guests, and the guests’ efforts to attend are also part of the merit creation and offering. The kitchen is always a beehive of activity before the ceremony with both monks and lay trainees flowing smoothly together to send the food to the ceremony hall, prepare tea and meals, and make a head start on clean-up.

Since compassion or love is a dominant tone of Segaki, we go to great lengths to make the ghosts feel welcome. It’s said that ghosts cannot come near any statue of a Buddha or Bodhisattva, which is why at Shasta Abbey the hungry ghost’s altar is placed opposite the main altar and substitutes as the central focus of the ceremony. Some temples conduct the ceremony in another large hall, an outdoor building, or a front porch; one temple has a beautiful mountain top Segaki altar; and it is traditional also to have the ceremony near a river, ocean, or other body of water. Free and complete access is the intention.



Segaki Lookout, where Lions Gate Buddhist Priory do their Feeding of the Hungry Ghosts ceremony each Fall



*Hungry Ghosts altar outside Dharmazufucht
Rev. Master Fuden and Rev. Clementia with guest monk,
Rev. Master Rokuzan of Columbia Zen Buddhist Priory*

When the ceremony is held indoors, we sometimes open the windows and doors and remove the window screens so that the ghosts encounter no obstruction to entering.

Some of these practices may be more familiar to those in Asia where Buddhist customs remain strong. However, our observing them helps us keep in mind the great effort we need to make in fulfilling the universal vow in our own heart to help everyone we can; thus we wish to remove any obstacles or hindrances to the free offering and receiving of the Dharma.

The musical ‘kwatz’ played at the ceremony’s start is a special invitation to get the deceased’s attention and welcome them to the ceremony. One of our temples includes the blowing of a conch, symbolizing the Voice of the Eternal, which traditionally was used to assemble monks. An abbot of a Chinese temple in Portland, Oregon, would have his congregation drive out of the city in all directions an hour before the ceremony and then return to the temple inviting the dead all along the way. At our temples where we have cemeteries, a senior priest will often ‘open the graves’ before the ceremony, again to invite and welcome the dead.

These ancient and profound customs require that we look beyond representations or enactments and see the spiritual intent behind them. What’s vital is the welcome that we create in our hearts. As with all ceremonies, we do them because it is good for us to do so. It is our minds and hearts that we want to open wide.

Expressions of compassion in the ceremony

Many other ancient customs founded in compassion are incorporated into the Segaki ceremony. One is to include a set of hands on the altar for ghosts who have no hands (and in different colors, since some ghosts may see different colors of the spectrum); special dishes for those with huge mouths who can only slurp; and Chinese paper ‘hell money’ for the dead to pay their fines in hell.



Segaki Altar at The Place of Peace Dharma House

Particularly in Chinese Buddhism, hell is portrayed as a vast bureaucracy ruled over by Yama, King of the Dead, who judges beings' good and evil acts and fines them accordingly.

Other elements come into play as well. First, the Segaki liturgy is composed primarily of scriptures related to compassion: The *Scripture of Avalokiteshwara (Kanzeon) Bodhisattva*, *The Litany of the Great Compassionate One*, and invocations or hymns dedicated to the Bodhisattva of Compassion. Second, instead of a Buddha on the altar, we mount a tall memorial tablet that reads “In Memory of All the Dead.” All the dead are welcome. Third, instead of reflecting the Buddha on the main altar as she usually does, the celebrant reflects the Dharma in its ‘purest’ form, i.e. without any form, human or otherwise, represented by the large memorial tablet.

For the ceremony itself the monks wear their formal robes reserved for ceremonies outside the daily office. The celebrant in particular is dressed in elaborate beautiful robes representing the attractive beauty of “the Buddha doing His practice.” She may wear a Bodhisattva lotus crown that invokes the wisdom and power of the Buddhas in all directions. This is represented by depictions on the crown’s ‘petals’ of the Five Wisdom Buddhas, who are invoked or called upon in the mantras.

Segaki is one of the few Sōtō Zen ceremonies in which the celebrant uses mudras (hand gestures), more common in Japanese Tantric or Tibetan Vajrayana traditions. These mudras represent the invitation to the ghosts and they give a bodily expression to the mental and verbal instructions of the celebrant. Listen to the loving compassion in the instructions for the celebrant from our liturgy:

Go to hungry ghost altar; offer incense, then asperge altar; make the Drawing Mudra and describe three clockwise circles in the air, at eye level, so as to create a mouth for the ghosts in the immaculacy of emptiness; say softly “Open!” once with each circle...; holding one of the cakes or breads from the main dish, cense it and dedicate it, then make the Receive Mudra with a compassionate heart; when making the Receive Mudra, long compassionately for the dead to be fed whilst saying softly “Receive!” with each of the three makings of the mudra;...put the bun or bread back on the dish and, whilst visualizing it in the hand, make the Forcing Mudra three times; each time say softly “Eat!...”⁴

The use of asperges (sprinkling with blessed water) is a common way in many religious traditions to represent the purification of a sacred space. Similarly, at the beginning of a Segaki ceremony the celebrant goes to the altar and asperges in all directions “to reassure the ghosts that they, and all the food upon the altar and ‘read’ in the hall, are immaculate.” This reassurance helps counter the guilty, gloomy, despairing, dejected, and filthy attributes commonly ascribed to hungry ghosts. She also thinks of the asperging as offering drink to the ghosts. This cool and clear offering quenches the thirst of the fiery-mouthed hungry ghosts (they are often portrayed with burning mouths) and shows them the Water of the Sprit—meditation which brings liberation—the seeing clearly of delusion and the inspiration, resolve, and strength to let it go.

The celebrant finishes this ceremonial segment by offering incense, thinking of the fragrance as ‘the smell of the lotus blossoms’ which will entice the ghosts to give up their delusions. Delusions are often portrayed as defilements or pollutions, and in Segaki paintings, hungry ghosts are often shown attracted to faeces and other bodily secretions. The burning incense offers as an alternative something beautiful and sweet to smell and to be drawn toward. We use greed positively, as Rev. Master Jiyu often said. When the celebrant returns to the bowing seat and sits down, the senior officers in the front rows go up in pairs to the altar while the community recites the remainder of the mantras. The senior monks asperge the altar and offer incense making the same wish as the celebrant, again, because the ghosts are said to need much reassurance when on or near the altar. As with incense smoke and fragrance, the Dharma knows no barrier—it suffuses all places.



The Feeding of the Hungry Ghosts ceremony shows us how to extend our love and compassion to all beings, and especially those in less fortunate situations. By making generous offerings of our time, energy, thoughts, and tangible gifts, we assure them of our sincere love for their well-being. Just as all the parts of the universe come together to create the totality of Existence-Time-Flow, so all of these intentions and efforts combine to constitute the greatest offering of love, merit, and Dharma we can make for the benefit of all beings.

Notes

1. For convenience sake, I usually refer to this festival ceremony as ‘Segaki,’ which is the Japanese word literally meaning ‘feeding hungry ghosts.’ Some of the material in this article comes from our Order of Buddhist Contemplatives liturgy. See Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett, comp. *The Liturgy of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives for the Laity*, 2nd ed. (Mount Shasta, California: Shasta Abbey Press, 1990) pp. 158-175.
2. The Ten Great Vows of Samantabhadra may be found in Chapter 39 of the *Avatamsaka (Flower Garland) Scripture*.
3. Although monks of our Order have made translations of *The Sweet Gate Scripture and Mantras*, it has seemed good to retain and chant them in their transliterated Sanskrit form. (In contrast, we have translated into English other transliterated mantras or dharanis such as *The Litany of the Great Compassionate One* and *The Shurangama Litany*.) Transliteration means that the ‘words’ are the Japanese pronunciation of how the Chinese ‘recorded’ in their pictorial language the sounds of the original Sanskrit words.
4. Jiyu-Kennett, *Liturgy*, p. 165.

For Rev. Master Jiyu’s description and teaching on the Feeding the Hungry Ghosts ceremony, see her Roar of the Tigress, Vol. 1, (Shasta Abbey Press, 2000) pp. 250-256.

I also wish to express my gratitude to Rev. Master Myōhō Harris for helpful feedback and to Dixie Feiner for proofreading.

Recipients of Our Segaki Offerings

Rev. Master Oswin Hollenbeck MOBC

—*Shasta Abbey, CA–USA*—

For whom is the Segaki ceremony intended? To whom do we offer all the merit we create? There seem to be at least several groups: deceased relatives and friends, especially recent and tragic deaths; unfortunate beings in various non-material states of existence; and our own karmic inheritance.¹

The source of the ceremony is described in scriptures such as the *Ullambana Sutra* in which Shakyamuni Buddha instructs Moggallana to gather the sangha together to offer food and recite scriptures in order to help free Moggallana's mother from the realm of the hungry ghosts (*pretas*) where she had been reborn.² (In subsequent centuries the ceremony incorporated various Tantric elements from later Indian scriptures.³) It is clear from early scriptures in the Pali canon that the Buddha taught gratitude, respect, care, and responsibility for parents. Archaeological evidence in the form of inscriptions at Indian stupas and cave sanctuaries reveal donors dedicating the merit of these monuments and monasteries to their parents, so this deep reverence and respect for parents was continued in later generations of Indian Buddhists.⁴

However, there is also no doubt that as Buddhism adapted to Chinese culture, Confucian values of filial piety and ancestor worship came to constitute a more prominent focus in the Segaki ceremony. In India the ceremony focused on offerings to beings in the hungry ghost realm, such as Moggallana's mother. In China where continual offerings to ancestors were the norm in memorials, the recipients came to include all of one's deceased relatives and particularly those who had no descendants, i.e. no one to feed them, thus 'hungry' ghosts. Over time the ceremony evolved to include all of everyone's deceased ancestors and then, in keeping with the teaching on universal charity emphasized in the festival, all sentient beings in the six realms of existence.⁵ Our contemporary Sōtō Zen ceremony from Japan retains this focus, as does contemporary Chinese Buddhist liturgy: the offerings in the daily Chinese 'Meng Mountain Offering Ceremony' are made repeatedly to "all Buddhists, all sentient beings, and all solitary spirits [hungry ghosts]."⁶

As we now in turn adapt Buddhism to Western culture, this emphasis on ancestors from East Asian Buddhism seems to be falling away. While many contemporary western Buddhists might request a funeral or memorial for a family member, few seem moved to extend these services over a long period of time or to insure that their whole family tree going back many generations is provided with offerings. Thus the present practice in our Order is similar to contemporary Chinese and Japanese ceremonies in that the merit is focused on "All the Dead," as the large memorial tablet dominating the hungry ghost altar reads.

Particularly included are people who have recently died: family, relatives, and friends as well as others. In some temples, the names of the deceased from the past year's transfer of merit requests are customarily included in the list of names which is read during the ceremony.



Feeding the Hungry Ghosts altar at Eugene with tablet remembering tsunami victims (2011)

In some temples, paper memorial tablets with specific person's names are placed on the altar itself. Especially included in the ceremony's offerings are those who have died in tragic or unfortunate circumstances, especially suicides or victims of violence.

We extend our offerings of love to all beings who have died in states of confusion or despair who may have not

known the embrace of the Cosmic Buddha's great compassion at the time of death. These people (and animals) are likely to be in particular need of merit and the Buddha's teaching; they are 'hungry'.



Eugene Priory member reading names of the deceased during the ceremony

My experience is that it is good to trust one's meditation rather than a set belief or custom as for whom it is good to include as recipients of the ceremony's merit—and for how long such offerings are needed. When I came to the monastery 30 years ago, I had friends who had died tragically from AIDS, murder, and suicide and who I would routinely include in the Segaki list. After a while, with each one at different times, I got the sense that they were OK and that I didn't need to include them any longer. I have found

the same to hold true with my relatives who have died in subsequent years. Relying on meditation and our intuitive sense of what is ‘good’ is, I feel, one of the strongest elements of our meditation practice.

A second group customarily included nowadays continues to be those in the preta realm, the ‘world of the hungry ghosts,’ one of the six realms of existence into which beings are reborn. This state is characterized by insatiable greed, loneliness, and unhappiness. We all know this state from time to time. We want something but can’t be satisfied. The hungry ghosts illustrate this condition by being depicted as starving with huge swollen bellies and tiny, needle-like throats through which they can swallow very little nourishment. What food is placed in their mouths turns to fire and burns fiercely. We attract such beings to the ceremony through the wonderful food offerings on the altar, asperging, and incense. When they show up, we lovingly and generously offer them the Dharma, the teachings chanted in the scriptures—that which can truly satiate desire.

A related group of beings might also include beings suffering in other non-material states of existence, in particular the hell realms of intense suffering, rebirth in which is usually caused by violent acts of hatred and harm to others. But it can also include beings in celestial realms, some of whom are described in the offertory as “the evil and wicked in heaven.” Even a terribly evil person can be reborn temporarily in a heavenly realm due to good deeds performed in this life or a past one. Consider the kindness

sometimes shown by hardened criminals to their companion animals. All beings in hell or heaven are offered ‘money,’ merit, to enable them to pay off their karmic ‘debts’ and be reborn in a more favourable state. This practice demonstrates our wish to transfer merit both to the recently deceased and to others circling endlessly through the realms of birth and death.

There may be additional non-material beings whom the hungry ghost ceremony may benefit: disembodied ‘spirits’ in transit in the intermediate state (*bardo*) between death and the next rebirth, or wandering karma attached to some place or event. Although the existence of non-material beings may go against our contemporary scientific and cultural views, it can be helpful to keep an open mind and heart to that possibility. As in theater where the audience is implicitly asked to ‘willingly suspend disbelief,’ so in ceremonies, and especially Segaki, one needs to have an open mind if one wants to understand and appreciate what’s going on.

In Buddhist practice we are not required to ascribe to specific beliefs and doctrines, but we are asked to trust the experience of those further along the Way than we; and to have enough faith/trust/confidence in the teachings to consider the possibility of their truth, seeds from which certainty can grow. A kernel of light is necessary for any further enlightenment to develop. Perhaps consider the weight Rev. Master Jiyu often gave to the quotation from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, “There are more things in this world, Horatio, than are even dreamed of in your philosophy.”

Even if we can't accept all or any of the above possible recipients of our merit, a final group remains: those 'beings' that make up our own individual karmic stream. This could include, for example, the child we were who began crushing insects or killing birds for sport, and who went on to later perpetrate acts of hard-hearted violence against fellow human beings. We may have committed small acts of greed or confusion in this or previous existences which started the wheel of karmic habit turning. These are the inclinations or tendencies which manifest in our present experience as wantings, cravings, graspings, and aversions that end in frustration, disappointment, shame, or addiction. Each of us is the result of our past actions, the accumulated fruit of both wise and unskillful acts of body, speech, and mind. And so at Segaki we reflect on our own past, offer forgiveness and love to anyone or anything we may have harmed, and offer ourselves any Dharma teaching that may be pertinent.

Rev. Master Jiyu often emphasized that the Bodhisattva vow for contemplative practice was the resolve to 'save' all the 'beings' in our own karmic stream. Compassion is essential in practice, but it needs to be coupled with wisdom, which develops from meditation. Once in translating with her Master in Japan, Kohō Zenji, contrary to her suggestion of "other and self" for a passage, he said it needed to read "self and other." We always need to be working on ourselves, which embraces and is not separate from assisting others.

The Feeding of the Hungry Ghosts festival ceremony is a reminder that we all need to ingest and take to heart the truth of the Dharma in order to bring an end to the dissatisfaction of life, what the Buddha called *dukkha*. The festival can be viewed as an enactment of the Four Noble Truths: suffering exists; suffering is caused by desire; and desire is relinquished through practicing the Eightfold Path which leads to Nirvana. And that Path is infused with compassion.

Like all ceremonies, we ‘turn the Light within’ and see what teaching is being pointed to for our own practice. One is that through letting go of our attachments and aversions, we diminish and eventually dissolve dissatisfaction, craving and longing and their attendant suffering. A second is the necessity of opening our heart to all beings. With the Bodhisattva mind we offer merit—acts of love and kindness with a generous heart. The act of offering is itself liberating. Through offering the merit of our practice to those in need, especially those in less fortunate states, we give our whole heart to enable the universe to realize its True Nature.

We pray that the merit [of this ceremonial and scripture recitation] may be turned to the good of all animate things in the endless world and to the spirits that are lacking in wealth in the nether worlds and to the evil and wicked in heaven. We pray that everything may realize the Truth and be

released from all bad karma; make the hidden
and apparent free and complete the Right and
True Wisdom.

Segaki Offertory⁷

Notes

1. For the sake of convenience, any conventional reference in this article to a ‘being’ or ‘beings’ should be understood in a Buddhist context, i.e. with a recognition of anicca (all things are in flux) and anatta (there is no separate soul or self). It would be more accurate, yet terribly clumsy, to write each time “a karmic stream which last manifested as such-and-such a person, a ghost, a celestial being, etc.” See Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett, “The Five Laws of the Universe,” especially Laws 1, 2, & 3, and endnote 2 in *An Introduction to the Tradition of Serene Reflection Meditation*, 5th ed. rev. (Mount Shasta, California: Shasta Abbey Press, 2000) pp. 25-31. <https://www.shastaabbey.org/pdf/IntroSRM13.pdf>
2. *Yü-lan-p'en-ching* (Chinese) or *Urabon-gyō* (Japanese), translated into Chinese by Dharmakshema, active 266-313 C.E. From *Rite of Alms-Giving for Hungry Ghosts*,” in Shohei Ichimura, trans. & ed., *Zen Master Keizan's Monastic Regulations (Keizan Shingi)*, (Woodinville, WA: North American Institute of Zen and Buddhist Studies, 1994) p. 305.
3. Charles Orzech, *Saving the Burning-Mouth Hungry Ghost*, in *Religions of China in Practice*, Donald S. Lopez, Jr., ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) pp. 278-283.
4. Gregory Schopen, *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996).
5. Stephen F. Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994) p.220. The history of the ‘ghost festival’ in China presented here is drawn primarily from this work.
6. See Sōtōshu Shumocho (Administrative Headquarters of Sōtō Zen Buddhism), *Standard Observances of the Sōtō Zen School* (Tokyo: Sōtōshu Shumocho, 2010); *The Buddhist Liturgy*, 2nd ed. (Bronx, New York: Sutra Translation Committee of the United States and Canada, 1993); and *Sagely City of 10,000 Buddhas Daily Recitation*

Book (Burlingame, California: Buddhist Text Translation Society, 2002).

7. See Jiyu-Kennett, *Liturgy of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives for the Laity*, 2nd ed. (Shasta Abbey Press, 1990) pp. 72-73.

I wish to express my gratitude to Rev. Master Myōhō Harris for helpful feedback and to Dixie Feiner for proofreading.

REFLECTIONS ON THE SEGAKI BANNERS

Rev. Master Myōhō Harris MOBC

—*The Place of Peace Dharma House, Aberystwyth—Wales*—

There are 11, long narrow red cloth banners, that are hung in a straight line, behind and above, the Segaki, (also known as The Feeding of the Hungry Ghosts) Altar. The names on the banners are written vertically, in black. Small bells, with a gentle sound, are attached to their lower corners. What follows are reflections upon the meaning of these banners, combined with some information gathered over the years.

The banners each have a name written on them, and are as follows:

1. TANREI Became Buddha
2. ENICHI Became Buddha
3. BOKKUSHU Became Buddha
4. BOKKUGYO Became Buddha
5. BISHAMON Became Buddha
6. ZOJO Became Buddha
7. JIKOKU Became Buddha
8. KOMOKU Became Buddha
9. SHAKYAMUNI Became Buddha
10. MAKAKASHYO Became Buddha
11. KEIDO CHISAN Became Buddha

and here at The Place of Peace

12. HOUN JIYU Became Buddha ¹

Before a ceremony I like to sit and reflect upon the altar, which has been set up for the service, and see what comes into my mind. What is the teaching that the altar offers me that day? On this occasion it was the banners that caught my attention, and the word ‘Became’, in particular, which stood out. Buddhism will often add one or two simple words that open up a breadth of meaning to a line of teaching. The banners could have read just Tanrei Buddha, Zojo Buddha, etc. but the addition of the word ‘Became’ touched my heart with its implication and compassion.

The Segaki altar is specifically for that which feels lost and is in a state of much confusion, doubt and fear, often grasping after things, but never satisfied. That morning, sympathy and understanding seemed to flow from the banners. Above all, I felt they offered a prediction of Buddhahood. They gave forth the certainty that no matter how lost or confused you may be, you can do something about it, you can change. Without words, their quiet presence conveyed, ‘have no doubt, others have turned their hearts around, so can you’. Ask for help and it *will* come.

In the same way that Lord Jizo shows the wish fulfilling jewel that awakens and calls forth our longing to train, to be all that we can be, so these banners bring hope to a world of darkness by showing, in detail, through their meaning, how the work of conversion and transformation (freeing oneself

from suffering) can be done, and has been done, and will continue to be done. They don't just guard the altar, they reassure and they give detailed teaching on how not to be a hungry ghost. I felt grateful to be able to see them.

Whilst the ceremony was underway, I stood before the altar, looking up at those banners, and, in meditation, 'saw' how the red hanging cord, which threaded through them, seemed to pulse with life. It flowed through each hanging, filling them with the Blood of the Buddhas, the flow of meditation, the essence of all life. And then I intuitively sensed how that cord, that 'bloodline', encircled the altar, flowing through me too, then back up towards the banners, so it made a circle with them suspended behind the altar and myself, standing in front. This was how the banners protected the altar. Each banner has its own meaning and that, combined with the living presence of the celebrant (the presence of training by a flesh and blood being, here and now, in this earthly realm), completes the circle of both protection and reassurance.

Each banner is red because all that exists has the same essence, and each shows an aspect of that essence. The revealing of it, in this clear and beneficent way, is a gift, and a reassurance, to that which feels lost. The banners both teach how to convert doubt and fear, and confirm that the doing of this was, is and always will be possible. Within that circle is the altar, with its open offering of food, of Dharma, of opportunity. If a hungry ghost (one who is lost in confusion) can only sneak up from behind and grab at food, or slurp at a drink—if you want to take some away with you,

or eat only one type of food, whatever calls to you, come forth, don't hesitate. If there is a step you can take, then take it. There is complete acceptance and lack of condemnation here. The banners convey that there is always a way forward, offerings have been made for you, and you are invited into this pure place, this circle, (in other words, to begin training) so you can find what you need. It (the next step) waits for you to receive it; it is safe to come forth.

Reflecting upon this after the ceremony, I saw how it is the same as what happens when one person sits down to meditate. We often say to allow what wants to arise to do so, and offer, or sit with it, by placing it upon the altar, in this case meaning the hara—our internal sitting place—which is in the lower abdomen. If you follow the practice and 'let thoughts come and let thoughts go' then the mind will not become entangled with what arises. It won't brace itself against fear or grab at a pleasant sensation, all will be allowed to smoothly pass through the conscious mind, down into the hara, where anything that is still unresolved naturally comes to rest within a place of safety and insight. No matter how painful, or hard to accept, our thoughts and feelings may be, there is safety within the pure place of the hara, because the flow of the bloodline (meditation) encircles that too, enfolding the distressed issue, enabling it to settle, and us to settle with it, so that we can be in harmony, rather than in conflict, with what arises. What is needed can then come forth from this inner 'meeting'. And it will. The feeling or issue may fade away or if there is a lesson we need to learn, then the specific insight is carried up the spine on the circular

flow of breath, into our conscious mind, where it can teach us by making clear what our next step should be. So much is made possible by our allowing this unfolding and revealing of the more troubled issues, or blind spots, that we carry within us, and our willingness to look deeply at all that has gone into making us the person we are.

Standing before the altar at the ceremony, I saw that nothing else was needed. The completeness of the ceremony, the flowing of the red line, the pure elixir, was enough. People have put much care and time into creating an altar that is both beautiful and abundant with offerings of all kinds of vegetarian food. Much ceremonial has been made. We have offered our own training, our faith, our certain knowing that there is nothing that cannot be trained with, looked at and freed from confusion. There is nothing that does not have the purity of that bloodline at its root. We stand still and let the fruits of faith, of training, speak for itself. We let the life of Buddha reveal itself through the ceremony, and through the banners, as it wishes to, knowing that that is enough.

During our ceremonies I often have a sense that the life of the ceremony fans out far and wide, way beyond the walls of our little meditation hall. Something is happening that is beyond my understanding (and which I do not need to understand), it leaves me feeling small and grateful and clean. The scriptures say that the Dharma lacks for nothing yet needs something. These ceremonies have people who gladly set them up, rehearse the sequence and take care to

celebrate the occasion with stillness, devotion and dignity, and, most importantly of all, with a pure heart. This all enables the ceremony to teach in whatever way is right on that day, for those who are present. We all serve (rather than ‘do’) the ceremony, we all make a pure and selfless offering through that service, so that our speech and actions seamlessly meld into one whole, into the completeness of the ceremony. From this comes gratitude, which gives birth to trust and humility. Sometimes I walk up to the altar and tremble, having no idea what dedication (for the incense offering) I will make, knowing only that I give myself and trust that what is needed will come from that. I wait for the ceremony to give me words, and, if none come, then I keep it simple, bow and offer the incense.

These ceremonies teach us a great deal about selflessness. If we do not ‘serve the ceremony’ then our ability to receive the teaching of the day will be hindered by the folly of mistaking what our role is.

On this occasion I ‘felt’ such a profound stillness emanate from the banners that nothing I could say would ever match it. ‘It’ was revealing itself for the benefit of all beings, both in that room and beyond; we are so fortunate to have these ceremonies.

The Banners:

The 1st, 2nd and 3rd banners are the means by which karmic confusion and mental fabrication are resolved. The 4th offers a confirmation of the certainty that no matter how lost a being may be, they can change. The 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th

banners of the Guardian Kings show aspects of protection (more on that later) and how fear and doubt can be faced and all obstacles are overcome. The 9th, 10th and 11th banners show how the Transmission of the Truth, made possible by the making real for oneself of all that the previous 8 banners represent, has been passed from person to person down to the present day. They show how the help we need is always there, within the practice.

Now I would like to look in detail at each banner. What follows is not meant to be a definitive explanation, it is just what arose for me at the time.

These first 3 banners are telling us how to be helped by the practice. They show what it is that we entrust ourselves to and make clear what ‘the important thing’, the Refuge, the source of the Dharma, and the purpose of training is.

1. TANREI Became Buddha

which means The Pure Elixir

This banner makes clear where the first step lies. Meditate. Reflect within, come to know the Water of the Spirit, the living flowing life blood of the great mystery. The bringer of truth that awakens the mind, making clear what is real and what is mental fabrication, or the murkiness of doubt. Its pure acceptance will never condemn, hate, or seek avoidance. This banner says you can turn to meditation (the Pure Elixir), rely upon it, listen to it, ask to be taught by it, because it is the medicine that opens our eyes, dissolving

blocks in the mind that fear what the Truth reveals. This banner brings the incoming flow of meditation, the great Refuge of Buddha. Everything else comes from, and takes us deeper into this, which is why it is the first banner. If you know the Pure Elixir then you will never be a ‘hungry ghost’, if you don’t, then you will always be searching for something.

2. ENICHI Became Buddha

The Perfect from the First

We are all perfect from the first. Something happened that a being could not cope with; mental confusion produced feelings that resulted in more confusion. Beneath the tangle of lifetimes of unhelpful choices, that purity shines eternally, untouched by the darkness of misguided perceptions and the painful consequences they produce. When we stop, settle and look within, our gaze rests upon that purity, even before we are consciously aware that it exists. Whilst we still flounder in feelings and the folly of trying to work everything out in our heads, that purity calls to us through the flowing of the pure elixir. This banner conveys that, just as a shoot grows through darkness towards an as yet unseen light, so you too can train. Faith is never blind, it just seems so. Every little change, every adjustment towards being in harmony with that ‘perfect from the first’ brings us joy and gratitude. This banner shines like an eternal light in darkness, reminding us of our inherent nature. The ‘Became Buddha’ says, don’t live in sorrow and restless searching when you can be blessed by knowing what it is you are, by

the pure heart that lies at the root of even your darkest thoughts. This banner is a flag of Truth.

3. BOKKUSHU Became Buddha

The Silent Guardian

The pure elixir reveals the perfect from the first, our true essence; what we are. Within the knowing, the experiencing of this, rises up the silent guardian, which, for myself, has two aspects. The first is our great wish to be as It (the pure elixir) is, and to keep Its precepts. This ‘guardian’ connects us with our purpose, giving that which is lost true direction.

This is a mystical path and some things can be known, but not logically explained. Many times I have intuitively felt tender, ‘unseen eyes’ upon me, and have known that I was not alone. The compassion of this second aspect brings gratitude, and an inner quietness which strengthens faith, which in turn protects us from getting entangled in intellectual pondering or mental busyness.

This banner conveys to the ghosts that help will come; like a beacon in darkness the silent guardian will give direction and the companionship of a true spiritual friend, as you walk that long dark road.

4. BOKKUGYO Became Buddha

He, She, It, That Has Turned Around

The statement ‘Became Buddha’ is not a hope or a wish, but a fact. It is what comes to those ordinary beings

who entrust themselves to this great practice. The words convey that, no matter how hard it may be, how great an effort it takes, or how much of a mess you are in now, you can do it. The step forward, the step you can take, is right here, waiting for you, and with even that first step, you have begun the transformation of turning your life around, of becoming Buddha.

When our confusion (karma) is seen to the core, and we allow that insight to change us, we see that everything works for our good. Rev. Ryokan said how all things find their place (return unto the Source) within the darkness of the meditation hall (the hara). When they do, our own resolved karma/suffering becomes as a silent guardian, and we see the beauty, and the pure heart, of something within ourselves that we once turned away from, judged or feared looking at. In fact we are touched by its breadth of teaching, as what were once our weaknesses, our blind spots, reveal insights that become our strength.

The next banners are the Four Guardian Kings of the North, South East and West:

There are some characteristics that they all have in common:

The guardian kings guard the Dharma by offering protection against making mistakes in Buddhism, such as breaking the Precepts. Each stands firm upon the rock of the Refuge and each has special attributes showing how to face and resolve seeming obstacles in training.

They have the appearance, and courage, of warriors on the battle field, reassuring us that this courage will come to

us when we need it, enabling us to overcome fear of the Truth, the fear of looking within or the doubt that we can do this training.

Their wide open fierce looking eyes, are unflinching, unclouded by doubt, seeing to the core, the root of the matter. They can see beyond ‘self’, beyond the conditioned mind.

Together they serve the Refuge and do the training that causes faith to deepen. So the ‘guardian’ is really the wisdom of true insight, which gives clear direction. Each king emphasises a different aspect of training, together they have one collective message: take refuge, rely upon the refuge, and follow the practice, this is our greatest protection, it leads to freedom from fear and enables the pure elixir to flow freely.

All of this is offered to the hungry ghosts at this ceremony.

5. BISHAMON Became Buddha

King of the North and of Winter, also known as Vaisravana. The Renowned One, who is all knowing and who hears everything.

In his right hand he holds a monk’s staff, the staff of wisdom, of endless training, which represents the three great refuges of Buddha Dharma and Sangha. This is the source of his wealth and insight, the wealth of Dharma, the power of Truth. When this staff is raised high (through the unhindered

flowing of the pure elixir, and the unshakable faith this brings) it breaks open the doors of hell (entrapment in the workings of our own mind) by revealing the truth, by awakening the clear seeing mind wherein ‘the obstacles (of self-created mistaken views) dissolve’².

In his left hand is a Stupa, containing the relics of the Buddha, in this case the eternal essence of the teaching. When personality and individual appearance have fallen away, what is left? We have ‘It’ within us, we will always have ‘It’ within us. This banner invites the ghosts to awaken to this and, through that awakening, free themselves from aimless wandering and the distress of constantly looking in the wrong direction.

The staff and stupa together can dissolve all obstacles. This assures hungry ghosts that, as they already have what they need within them, it is safe to begin the great work of conversion.

6. ZOJO Became Buddha

King of the South and of Spring, also known as Virudhaka, The Mighty One who converts fear and who causes his own virtues, and those of others, to increase.

His right hand holds a sword to cut through delusion and the endless fog of mental entanglements. ‘Thou hast a weapon within thy hand, hail’ says the scripture.³ That weapon is the clear sighted vision of the inward looking gaze, the light that separates the murky (delusion) from the

pure (truth). Use this weapon, boldly and fearlessly, it will protect you from going astray and from being controlled by fear.

In the left hand Zojo holds a Dorge (thunderbolt). This shows how the conversion of grasping, fear and hate is made possible. We receive through the left hand and this banner says, allow yourself to receive; receive the offering upon this altar, receive your karma, digest it, (learn its lesson), train with it, let your body become a vessel of changing for the good.

It is said that the only thing that can hold us back in training is fear. Turning away, resisting looking within (because of fear that we will not be able to cope with what we find), and laziness (resulting from self-doubt, a product of doubting the meditation). Together, the sword and the dorge show how to overcome fear and doubt.

7. JIKOKU Became Buddha

King of the East and of Summer, also known as Dhritarastra, Protector of the Land who maintains the kingdom of the law (Dharma).

His right hand holds the jewel of enlightenment, showing it for all to see. There are a number of elements in the Segaki ceremony that attract the ghosts' attention, and this is one of them. Light reflects off the jewel, causing the restless mind to be focused and called to train.

This is protection from wasting time by chasing after things that do not matter or restlessly searching and wandering.

The left hand holds an arrow, pointing inwards, towards his heart, representing insight that penetrates straight to the heart of what needs to be understood. The jewel awakens the longing, the wish, to know the pure elixir; the arrow is held by a hand that is at ease—contemplative ease—as an act of compassion, showing the willingness to train, to penetrate to the heart of the matter, instead of being caught in circles of misperception and entanglements.

8. KOMOKU Became Buddha

The King of the West and of Autumn, also known as Virupaksa With the Broad Eye that sees all and keeps a record of our karma.

The right hand holds a Pen and the left hand a Scroll, on which karma, the consequences of our actions, are recorded. He holds these out, showing them. This gesture says that all you have ever done is known, you yourself are known to the core, and there is nothing to fear, nothing that cannot be faced and resolved.

His eyes are wide open and fearless. He sees the whole picture, and it is the seeing fully that reveals the truth. Also implied here is that sometimes a being does not want to train because they fear the consequences of their actions. His presence says look, because everything is already seen and known, and nothing is held against you. If there are difficult

or painful consequences, then, no matter how hard they may be, acceptance will convert karma into personal teaching that will be liberating.

Therefore he guards against false ideas of what 'protection' (of oneself) is. When a mistake has been made, some may wish to deny it, or hide it, in the hope others won't know what was done, mistakenly thinking that in doing so, they are protecting themselves. Hungry ghosts fear looking at and being responsible for their actions. Komoku's gift to them is to look with that broader eye and have an open and honest manner, because that honesty is a noble act, an act of becoming Buddha.

The Ancestral Line:

The following three banners (or four, for those who include Rev. Master Jiyu), represent the ancestral line in our human world. They show how beings have found that pure elixir, that perfect from the first and have turned their hearts (lives) around, then passed the practice, the means of doing so, on to others, teaching by their own example. The truth has been realised, is being realised and will continue to be realised, by flesh and blood beings. This reassures the ghosts that the meaning, and teaching, of the banners is not just theory, not just words on pieces of cloth.

9. SHAKYAMUNI Became Buddha

The historical Buddha

The banners preceding this show aspects of Buddha Nature, of universal truths waiting to help us. With this banner we enter the human world of everyday practice through which those truths, which are inherent in all, can be, and have been, realised.

His life story is our example; we celebrate birth (human potential), leaving home (renouncing the world that we have known), enlightenment (what one did, all can do) death (don't waste time). No matter whether a hungry ghost has form, or is formless, their own existence contains the teaching that, when understood, will free them from their 'lostness'. When someone trains deeply, the benefit of that training has no limit, and fans out beyond our knowing. I had a sense that this was the meaning of this banner, which makes a profound offering; a 'call' to all that is spiritually lost.

10. MAKAKASHYO Became Buddha

A disciple of Shakyamuni

The transmission of our practice, from Shakyamuni to his disciples, shows that Shakyamuni was not a god, nor was he someone who just got lucky, it reassures the ghosts that others can do what he did. Makakashyo will, like Shakyamuni, pass on the 'how' of training to any who wish to follow the practice and undertake the work of training. It makes clear that liberation from confusion comes about by the choices we make, and is available to all.

11. KEIDO CHISAN Became Buddha

Reverend Keidō Chisan Kōhō Zenji, born in 1879, Abbot of Sojiji Temple in Yokohama, who invited Reverend Master Jiyu-Kennett to train with him in Japan, as his disciple, and then bring the Buddhist teaching to us in the west.

This banner links the lineage, the flowing of the Blood of the Buddhas, from the distant past to my own Master, who opened temples in England and the USA.

12. HOUN JIYU Became Buddha

Founder of our Order and my Master

Reverend Master Jiyu is either the Master, or Grand-Master, of all in our Order.

Because of her, this ceremony has come to us, enabling the banners to hang here, at The Place of Peace, and in temples throughout the Order. Wherever they may be, there is an opening to a different way of life.

For myself, her special attribute was her deep trust in meditation. This banner's message is that it is not only safe to trust the refuge, it is enough.

Down through the ages the great Buddhist way has been passed from one being to another. The banners show that pure elixir is always flowing and the way forward is constantly available for all beings, in all seasons, in all directions, in all worlds, known and unknown. There is a reason why someone has become a hungry ghost, these

banners show the certainty that no one, no ‘thing’ is fixed in any state forever, and that the reason for their confusion can be seen, understood and, through that understanding, offer them teaching that leads to freedom from discontent.

Receiving is the beginning of becoming Buddha. If you can come forth and receive even one word of Dharma, it can change your life. It can make a chink in that dense wall of confusion and darkness, it is as a shaft of light that penetrates deep down into the darkness and awakens the most precious thing we will ever have, the ability to reflect within. It calls the gaze to return unto its source, to that flowing red line, that eternal truth. Gradually, like the coming of dawn, a knowing arises, another step is taken on the path of always becoming Buddha. The message of these great banners continues to flow out, in silent splendour, long after the ceremony is over and the cloth hangings have been packed away for another year.

Notes

1. In our Liturgy Book the last banner is the 11th as shown here, for Keidō Chisan, who was Reverend Master Jiyu’s deceased Master, and therefore the Founder of both Shasta Abbey and Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey. The deceased Master of the monk who opens a temple is regarded as the Founder of that temple. When The Place of Peace was opened, Reverend Master Jiyu-Kennett, who is my Master, had already died, and so we have an extra banner with her name on it. If Reverend Master Jiyu had been alive when The Place of Peace opened, then Keidō Chisan, who is my Master’s Master, would be our Founder, and final banner.
- 2 *The Scripture of Great Wisdom, The Liturgy of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives for the Laity*, 2nd ed. (Mount Shasta, California: Shasta Abbey Press, 1990) pp. 73-74. Also can be found in *Scriptures and Ceremonies* booklet at temples of our Order.

3. *The Litany of The Great Compassionate One, The Liturgy of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives for the Laity*, pp. 78-79. And the *Scriptures and Ceremonies* booklet.

Hungry Ghosts

Rev. Master Jishō Perry MOBC

— Shasta Abbey, CA–USA —

In both the Mahayana and Theravada traditions, the very old ceremonies of Ulambana (S) Segaki (J) or ‘Feeding the Hungry Ghosts’, take place in Autumn and Spring—the seasons of change, of days moving between darkness and light. They are an outpouring of food and Dharma to express the Sangha’s deepest wish: that all who long for peace and Truth will quickly let go of their suffering and accept the help which is available to us, at all times and in all situations.

One of the Six Worlds is the world of the hungry ghosts. It is depicted in Buddhist literature as one of the worlds into which one can be reborn after death; more important for us is to see that it represents an attitude of mind that while we persist in it, warps our ability to grow and progress in training. The hungry ghost is pictured as a being with a small neck and a large distended belly: he is not willing to swallow the teaching, although he hungers for it; he represents a form of spiritual malnutrition.

As human beings, we are very susceptible to believing that “If I have understood an idea with my brain, that is all I need to know about it”. Buddhism cannot be learned in this manner. Training is Enlightenment. The more we practice, not just in quantity or time, but in quality of commitment and

depth of practice, the more we make ourselves open to go in deeper in training. Should we attempt to understand the Buddhist teachings only with our minds, we delude ourselves into thinking that “I have understood”, when, in fact, what one has **understood** and what one **does** may be very different things. What we understand is what we do. This is expressed by the Buddha as putting the Dharma into practice. One cannot understand the Dharma until one is making it true for one’s self.

The unbelievers were allowed to depart before the Buddha would lecture: the Dharma recognizes that some people can be taught and others cannot. This does not mean that some are better than others: everyone shares in the Buddha Mind, everyone has Buddha Nature. But not everyone can hear the Truth. Even those who can hear cannot always hear. Those who one day could not be taught can have a profound change of heart and behavior and be able to practice and therefore understand the teaching on another day. There are others who may study the teaching and then not actually make the effort necessary to manifest it in their actions. This is the attitude of the hungry ghosts. They have not actually heard the teachings.

I am sometimes quite shocked by my own behavior. Knowing as much as I do about the best attitudes and actions for Buddhist training, I sometimes see myself being less than fully truthful, or being disrespectful, critical, uncooperative with my teacher or fellow members of the Sangha, and any number of other problems. Behavior is variable. All of us

break the Precepts from time to time. When it does happen, we should be profoundly disturbed by the Truth. The danger comes when we are callous or uncaring, or believe that we are doing fine when, in fact, we are not keeping the Precepts. This is the mind of the hungry ghost. The hungry ghost is one who cannot be taught, at least at the moment. Although he hungers for the Dharma, he is not willing to change himself.

The hungry ghost purchases books on the teachings, but does not seek out a teacher or make any real commitment to do the practice. He may read about meditation and think how nice it would be to do it or even fantasize that he is meditating by thinking about it. He may have actually undertaken a meditation practice and believe that he is making very real efforts in religious practice but is, at the same time, avoiding the very thing he needs to do most. The delusions of self-deception have endless variations. The delusions of self are subtle, and they are mirrored in the many ways we avoid not only seeing what we need to do but in then evading the attitudes and actions necessary to effect real changes in our life. We must each see for ourselves what we need to do to bring our practice more in harmony with the Buddhist teachings. In spite of what our delusive selves would have us believe, these changes are generally not big or dramatic, but usually start with small efforts to restrain our greed, limit anger, or do just a little more to keep the Precepts. Perhaps all we really need to do is stop criticizing and change our attitude. Notice places where we could be kind or patient, make the effort.

I have seen several people who believed that they were disabled and needed to convince some governmental agency of this so they could receive disability payments. In convincing someone of the disability, they bought the delusion that they were, indeed, inadequate. They were so bound by the limitations, which were, indeed, real, that they eventually believed in their own worthlessness and acted this out in other ways. On the other hand, I've seen others who suffered from very major disabilities and whose attitude was quite different. I met one woman who was paralyzed from the neck down but who managed to get a PhD degree and become an administrator in a state agency in Sacramento. I've seen others who were equally disabled and who worked to the best of their abilities within the limitations they had. All of us have some physical limitations. In accepting our limitations but not being bound by them, we can know real freedom. The hungry ghost is still 'bound' by his limitations and believes and acts on his inadequacies.

The hungry ghost is one who buys the delusion of self. This delusion may present itself in the form of one who breaks the Precepts believing that no bad karma can accrue to him if he does not admit that he made a mistake. In recent history we have witnessed this in national politics on a regular basis. Each of us does this from time to time, believing that "If I admit I made a mistake, then I am saying am a bad and unworthy person". In admitting a mistake however, we can learn not to repeat it. On the other hand, if we do not admit our mistakes, we are **compelled** to repeat them. The hungry ghost does not admit mistakes, or if he

does, he does so with negative resignation: “I blew it, and I will never be able to do otherwise”.

The hungry ghost can manifest as one who is very caught up in his problems. In fact he may spend so much energy on ‘the problem’ that there is no room in his life for ‘the solution’. We all know someone who spends countless hours telling everyone about his troubles, but who never does anything to make the situation better. In fact, should the situation improve, this person will find other problems as compelling as the old ones and cling to them with equal tenacity, while complaining bitterly about his predicament. No amount of teaching, no amount of therapy, no amount of ‘help’ will indeed effect any real change.

An alcoholic or drug addict is like this, indulging in his habit in order to prove that he cannot change. Only when the person himself is motivated to change himself will he be able to find real help. The suffering produced in the wake of this indulgence can have a very compassionate result when the person finally realizes that he truly wants to change. The hungry ghost can find a million delusions to avoid making these changes, any one of which is a form of self-addiction.

The hungry ghost wallows in despair and inadequacy. There are times when we are depressed and we suffer from the delusion that “There is nothing I can do to improve the situation”. Sometimes this delusion says, “I should not even try to go on; the situation is hopeless”. The situation may not be changeable, but our **attitude** can be. In not acting on the

despair, we can make some real changes within ourselves and positively affect 'the situation'. The delusion of despair is that we cannot change either our mental state or the situation. We may not be able to make the depressed feeling disappear immediately, there may be some physical or chemical imbalance that needs correcting, but some people can learn to get on with some level of functioning in spite of the depression, or at least make every attempt not to wallow in the delusion of helplessness. In changing our attitude, in looking for real solutions in continued training and not buying the delusion of helplessness, some of us may find that we can function with these feelings and they are not an obstacle but an opportunity. I'm not suggesting that people who suffer from depression are in any way truly inadequate. They are in fact bodhisattvas who have taken on the great burden of converting the karma of depression. Karma is created by action. The results are feelings. Letting our feelings pass through without acting on them or repressing them is how the karma is purified.

The hungry ghost believes that he can break the Precepts with impunity simply because he does not recognize his actions as harmful. He will complain bitterly when any bad karma accrues to him. He believes that he can be dishonest, he can cause harm, he can say things that are not true, he can break the law, he can take things that are not his, tell others that they too can break the Precepts with impunity, covet things, put others down, act on his pride, speak against others, be mean or stingy in giving, act on anger and defame the Three Treasures, and so he does. While

pretending to be a Buddhist, he will have the water of the Dharma turn to fire as he drinks. The Precepts are not rules of moral judgment. They are an explanation of how to put the teaching into practice, how to behave like a Buddha, how meditation is manifested. A hungry ghost may believe that he can meditate but does not have to keep the Precepts.

The hungry ghost flees from fear. The delusion of fear is that “There is something separate or apart from me which is capable of harming me. It has hurt me in the past and will do so again in the future.” This is the attitude of ‘the helpless victim’. In running away from our fear, it pursues us. If a cat runs from a dog, the cat is vulnerable. If the cat turns and faces the dog, the dog is vulnerable. I remember a story on the evening news of a lady with a persistent nightmare. Every night she would wake up screaming just before some horrible thing that was pursuing her was about to catch her. One night, in the midst of the dream, just before the horrible thing was about to get her, she turned around to face it saying, “Do whatever you are going to do, but get it over with”, and, of course, it went away and did not bother her again. This is how the hungry ghost is converted.

“The koan of daily life is will; words are its key”¹. The teaching contains the key, but the effort necessary to use the key is entirely up to us. I remember a perceptive and loving wife remarking in good humour that her husband was happy to buy the tools, but he wouldn’t use them. This is the dilemma of the hungry ghost. He can be converted only when he is **willing** to give up his addiction to inadequacy,

only when he is **willing** to use the tools. Only when he is **willing**. The right use of will in Buddhism is the will of willingness not the will of will-power, “The law of cause and effect is not answerable to my personal will for, without fail, evil is vanquished and good prevails”². Each of us has a hungry ghost inside. It needs converting. The pivot point is where we can see that something needs to be done, and we are willing to do **whatever** it takes to do it. This is *Sange*, the act of confession and contrition, atonement. Until then the situation is likely to get worse. We cannot escape the consequences of our less-than-enlightened actions, but by accepting them positively and seeing what kind of mistakes we made, we can better see what kind of mistakes we are likely to make again in the future. We can be armed with this knowledge and make the firm resolve to do better than in the past. This is training.

The hungry ghost can either be lazy or overactive, but it resists taking an honest look at itself and resists, even more strongly, making the gentle, persistent efforts necessary to limit its greeds, angers and delusions. The teaching must be swallowed, i.e., put into practice. If we tend to lie, we must be more honest. If we are critical of others, we must learn acceptance and patience. If we are greedy for the tools of training, we must learn to use them. We will not get it perfectly right the first time, or even after the one-thousandth time, but the unending practice is infinite perfection. This perfection is the perfection of wisdom: “Going on, going on, always going on, always becoming Buddha”³

I remember a lecture my teacher gave about limiting our greeds by simply doing a **little bit less**. If we overeat and have four snacks a day in addition to our meals, then we should cut them down to three. If we are attached to books and read twenty a month, then we should cut them down to nineteen or eighteen. If there is any habit or addiction that we need to curb, do a little bit less. This is a gentle and persistent effort, an ongoing effort of eternal vigilance, I can say “no” to my greeds. I do not need to indulge my anger. The more one acts in this way the stronger one’s will for the Eternal becomes. Behind the greed is the True Wish, the desire for the Eternal. Behind the anger is frustrated love. These things are not ‘bad’ simply misdirected. Although one will get the consequence for all one’s misdirected actions in the past, one can learn from them. “Contrition makes it easier to bear by bringing freedom and immaculacy”.⁴

The focus of our actions needs to shift from ‘the problem’ to ‘the solution’. If, in the past, we have clung to ‘the problem’ as an excuse not to take the actions necessary to change ourselves, we must now find the ways in which we can start changing our attitude, our actions and eventually our perception of the situation. Only then will we discover, as the Buddha did, that the Universe, as well as everything in it, is, was and always will be enlightened. Until we harmonize body and mind and put ourselves in harmony with that enlightenment, we will know no peace. We will only hunger for the Dharma while refusing to ‘swallow’ the teaching. I remember a young monk loudly ranting at length

about something she did not like, the other monk quietly listened and then said: “Is there another way of saying that?” There are other ways of thinking, of acting, of speaking, of perceiving. The hungry ghost does not need to be killed, abused, bludgeoned or mutilated. He needs to be put on a spiritually healthy diet. He can gently swallow small bits of the Dharma.

Perhaps concentrating on one of the Precepts at a time he can see each day where he can do a bit better. He can find a way to volunteer his time in selfless activities; working at the Priory or Abbey is a good way to do this. Simply being willing to work for the good of others, can have a profound effect. He can find ways to loosen the tension of his desires, to turn and look at his fears, not to act out his angers on others or himself and not buy the delusion of despair that “I am helpless”. We can shift our concern from being entirely self-absorbed to gradually being concerned with the welfare of others. He can gently and gradually learn to exercise spiritual training eventually learning to find real strength in willingness.

One prisoner phrased it as “having the power to let things go” We can find ways to be of service to others. In making these efforts, we may find that the obstacles to the direct experience of oneness with the Eternal dissolve. If the understanding is real, it shows us how to deepen our efforts and continue in our training for the benefit of all sentient beings. There is real joy here even when there is deep suffering in our life.

Notes

1. Great Master Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō, Uji (The Theory of Time)* in Rev. Master P. T. N. H. Jiyu-Kennctt, *Zen is Eternal Life*, 3rd Ed., (Mt. Shasta, CA: Shasta Abbey Press, 1999) p.171.
2. Great Master Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō, Shushogi —What is Truly Meant by Training and Enlightenment*, *Zen is Eternal Life*, p 156.
3. *The Scripture of Great Wisdom*, Rev. Master P. T. N. H. Jiyu-Kennctt, *The Liturgy of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives for the Laity*, (Mt. Shasta, California: Shasta Abbey Press, 1987), p 73.
4. Great Master Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō, Shushogi* in *Zen is Eternal Life*, p 156.

This article originally appeared in the Journal of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives (Vol 2, Nos. 1-4, 1987, and also Vol. 3/4, 1999), and is reprinted here with gratitude and a few changes.

Dealing with Addictions

Neil Dunbar

—*Sheffield, England-UK*—

*This article first appeared in the Spring 2010 issue of this
Journal*

I have usually tried to understand other people's suffering with depressions and addictions, without really understanding my own suffering. Perhaps I was hoping, by trying to understand the suffering of others, that I would be able to understand my own better. I think that was also part of the problem—not realising that my own and other people's suffering were interconnected.

A friend I've known for some time has alcohol addiction problems. He is very concerned about the world's suffering and has strongly held views about the cause of this, and how to change things for the better. The trouble is, he does not know how to deal with his own suffering. Whenever I go around, his flat will be in a mess, so I will try and tidy up. He will usually be on his computer, involved against some recent episode of exploitation, greed, or cruelty. He will often go to great lengths explaining this to me. His own grief and pain will sometimes emerge; but he will quickly try and bury these feelings and thoughts.

Trying to understand my friend's addictions does help shed some light on my own attachments and addictions. I can see how I have similar traits to my friend in trying to keep this uncomfortable stuff away. I often keep myself busy or distracted with work or leisure activities to avoid looking at the painful emotions, hoping they will go away. In this way I try to keep the discomfort blurred or out-of-focus. I think we all have our own particular way of 'drowning our sorrows.'

Recently, my friend, after a long wait of about 9 months, got onto a detox programme, which involved going into hospital for two weeks. He had really been looking forward to this. He does accept that he needs help and really does want to be free of this drinking addiction, because he knows it's killing him.

Whilst he is in hospital a couple of us decide to really tidy up and clean his flat, hoping that by coming home to a nice clean, tidy flat, this will encourage him to make a fresh start. He seems to do OK in hospital with the medication to pacify the craving, and the counselling from the staff. On the last morning at the centre, one of the staff upsets him, so on his way home he buys some alcohol!

After getting my hopes up that my friend really will do it this time, these are quickly dashed. There is disappointment, frustration, anger and sadness. I really do want to help, but in the end, I feel helpless.

Acceptance is a difficult word for most people—myself included—to understand. I tend to relate this to resignation, apathy or self-satisfaction. I have come to understand, over time, that there has to be complete acceptance of ourselves first, before any fundamental change can happen. I can only do something about my own greed, anger and delusion. I can't change other people's. There is also the fact that “the universe is not answerable to my own personal will.” My friend has to deal with the underlying pain, loneliness and fear which drives the craving for alcohol, the attempt to block out this pain. In the same way I have to always be willing to look at any pain and discomfort within myself, to take the time to be still. Running away, or keeping busy to avoid these things does not work. It just makes things worse.

Whatever our addictions or attachments might be, we have to find a deeper refuge. Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche writes in his book *Training the Mind and Cultivating Loving-Kindness*,

We have already everything we need...the heavy duty fearing we're bad and hoping that we are good, the identities that we so dearly cling to, the rage, the jealousy and the addictions of all kinds—never touch our basic wealth. They are like clouds that temporarily block out the sun. But all our warmth and brilliance are right here. This is who we really are.¹

I still think it is always good to try and help others, to ask in any situation “What is good to do?” and to try not to

have any expectations. I don't always get this right—motivated by doing things to please others or not upset them. There is a tendency to think when things backfire “What’s the point?” There may appear to be no changes, but we don’t really know.

Dōgen Zenji writes in *Shushogi* in the section *Awakening to the Mind of a Bodhisattva*:

If one can identify oneself with that which is not oneself, one can understand the true meaning of sympathy... sympathy does not distinguish between oneself and others. There are times when the self is infinite and times when this is true of others: sympathy is as the sea in that it never refuses water from whatsoever source it may come; all waters may gather and form only one sea.²

Notes

1. Trungpa, Chogyam. *Training the Mind and Cultivating Loving-Kindness*, (Boston : Shambala, 1993) chapter: *No escape, no problem*.
2. *Shushogi* in Jiyu-Kennett, Rev. Master. *Zen is Eternal Life*, 4th Ed. (Mt Shasta, CA: Shasta Abbey Press, 1999) p. 100.

We were sorry to hear from Neil that in the time since this article was first published, his friend has died from problems related to his alcohol addiction.

Conditions Change, Completeness Doesn't

Rev. Master Daishin MOBC

—Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey—UK—

This is a transcription of a talk given at the week-long Segaki Retreat at Throssel in 2007. It appeared in the Autumn 2008 issue of the Journal along with four other talks given at the same retreat.

Tomorrow we are celebrating the Ceremony of Feeding the Hungry Ghosts so I would like to link that with what we've been talking about over the last few days.

When conditions arise, no matter what the conditions are, they complete us. And then conditions change. Acceptance means that conditions change, completeness doesn't. So although we say that heat or cold completes us, it is not that we were incomplete before heat and cold came along. This is the activity of very complete, very deep acceptance. Whatever the condition that arises, whether that is our health, our birth or death, our freedom or repression, it is our completion. The conditions give rise to our expression. Expression means expression of the completeness. Conditions change, things happen and in their happening, we are completed.

That is not the end of the story. There is expression which arises out of completeness. This is the activity of

enlightenment. Put it another way, Kanzeon hears the cries of the world and has a thousand hands with which to respond. The arising of conditions is Kanzeon hearing. The conditions complete Kanzeon because without conditions there is no Kanzeon. But a Kanzeon without expression is an impossibility. Kanzeon does not simply hear, Kanzeon expresses. And in the expression the world of enlightenment emerges. We might say the world of enlightenment awakens. There is no gap between completion and expression.

In the traditional Buddhist view of the cosmos, hungry ghosts are beings who believe that water is fire. When they try to drink, their throats are burned because they believe the water is fire. This state of misery arises because they misunderstand conditions. When we cling onto things, when we are driven by fear and desire, we create a world, a world of experience. Fear gives rise to desire; desire gives rise to fear. A mutually re-enforcing circle. And within that circle, we think water is fire.

For example, I was talking yesterday about the meaning of surrender. When we fear to give ourselves completely, we think that water is fire, that the water of compassion will burn us. So when we speak of hungry ghosts, we are not necessarily thinking about a specific realm, but about how beings in any realm get caught in suffering. In all the realms that we know of, the dynamic of suffering is basically the same. In the classic representations in the wheel of life, the Buddha is shown as appearing in each of the six realms: the

heavens, the hells, the hungry ghosts, the animals, the devas, the warring deities.

The appearance of the Buddha to me is not the appearance of a mystical being so much as within the condition of the realm itself, there is the teaching. In other words, when it is hot, the heat completes us. When we can see the nature of heat, when we allow ourselves to see the nature of heat, we realize the presence of the Buddha. And heat, remember, is the condition of the moment. Whether we perceive it as heat or cold, life or death, here right now is the appearance of the Buddha. And this is real. This is living enlightenment right now. Not dependent on anything and yet each condition completes it. Each condition gives it the form that it has. And it is right and human that we seek to improve conditions. This is part of the work of Kanzeon. We can do that because we know that through the deep acceptance of conditions as they are, we will find the true expression. And giving expression is the appearance of the Buddha in this world.

And so in our ceremony we make an offering of the Dharma to the hungry ghosts. Those of you who have been to the ceremony before know there is the opportunity of remembering particular people who have died. We have paper ihais, paper memorial tablets like the ones in the Kanzeon shrine, and you can write the name of anyone you would like to be remembered on a paper and it will be placed on the altar at the Segaki ceremony. In doing so, you are making an offering of love, giving expression to the mind of

Kanzeon in response to conditions arising from their death. You are not saying that they are a hungry ghost. The ceremony is offered to all the dead. There is one all-inclusive memorial tablet in the centre of the altar that simply says, “In memory of all the dead”.

We have no need to look at others and see if they are hungry ghosts or not. We just do the best we can to make an offering of the Dharma. The way that used to be done originally was to provide a meal for the monks who would then dedicate the merit of their training to the dead. But seeing how all of us are training, all of us are dedicating our lives to train, therefore we can receive the food and in our conversion of that food, we give expression to the life of training and we offer that. Because when we allow conditions to be our completion, and give expression to that completion, the merit is endless.

When we wish all beings to find this same truth that we are exploring for ourselves, don't be concerned with whether you have found it or not. Seek to give expression to acceptance as conditions arise. And through your acceptance, there will emerge the expression and that expression will be very particular to you and the conditions. Because it will be the offering that you, and only you, can make. It is your training to uncover that expression, to give that expression and to dedicate the merit of that giving to all beings everywhere. And, of course, we remember especially those in deep states of suffering.

If we go back for a moment to this loose definition of hungry ghosts as being those who believe that water is fire, it really is a symbol of how difficult it is to hear the teaching when we are in suffering. We talk about the dangers of opinions. Of course we all have opinions, we must all work through opinions; we as human beings probably must have opinions in order to function. But it is very important to see how opinions or beliefs are structured. They very often arise from sources that are not rational. In fact, they arise from our fears and desires, they are how we desperately want the world to be, or they may be driven by what we fear the world to be. And so our desires and fears shape our view of the world and that world seems to us to be very substantial. And we get lost in our own world where, in fact, we are seeing water as fire.

The Dharma is present in that world, but our ability to hear is dependent upon our acceptance or, if you like, our surrender, our willingness to just utterly let go. It is that we move to the utter letting go rather than to correcting opinions, because there is no end to the argument over which is the right opinion or which is the wrong opinion. Of course there are those things that can be clearly seen to express the Dharma and there is the need to discuss the Dharma and clarify it for ourselves. But the reason why one person believes one thing and another person believes another usually is not a matter of rational opinion, but of something much deeper and more visceral. It is these deeper and more visceral understandings of the world that we have to tackle

and this we might say is analogous to the realm of the hungry ghost.

Although the Buddha appears in the realm of the hungry ghosts, the Buddha does not destroy the realm of the hungry ghosts. Metaphorically speaking, the Buddha does not kick down the doors and take the hungry ghosts off into a heaven. It is no good just changing one thing for another thing, because that heaven would very quickly turn into the same place the hungry ghosts have just come from. Each 'ghost' for themselves must come to see that suffering is not caused by conditions; suffering is caused by our particular response to conditions. We cannot control conditions, but we can choose to accept. In the depths of acceptance, we find the completeness, no matter the condition. So although we cannot guarantee conditions, we can find the truth, we can find the living expression of enlightenment now. Everyone sooner or later, we believe, will come to this and so in our ceremony we make the offering in the hope that all may hear and know that what seems to be this burning fire is really the water of the compassion of the Buddhas. We are not trapped unless we make it so.

Opening the Heart

Rev. Master Leandra Robertshaw MOBC

—Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey—UK—

A talk given at the week-long Segaki Retreat at Throssel in 2016

Segaki enables a tenderness for life to emerge and this talk is about opening our hearts. Segaki is a time when we can call to mind and honour all who have died, particularly those who have died in difficult circumstances—and they are many. When someone close to us dies, there is grief and a wishing to honour the dead. Grief reflects ourselves back to ourselves. We are grief and grief is us. We are aware not only of our own grief but of the grief all beings are heir to; there is a personal perspective and more than the personal perspective.

We can allow the heart to acknowledge how much pain there is in our world. Being still within this pain honours the anguish that all beings, including ourselves, experience in the midst of loving deeply. Do not avoid, do not fear the heart's breaking. Free the heart from our small lives. Cultivate a heart that cannot be distracted, even by death, from offering all things to every thing.

In not trying to impede the breaking of our hearts at the unimaginable pain and suffering of some deaths, we awaken

to the gift that death offers us. We are offered the opportunity to receive gratefully the reminder of our own death and the need to take life seriously and accept it joyfully. The mind may forget but the heart longs to go further. We learn to offer up our hearts to that which is disheartened and thus live life fully. Such wholehearted offering sharpens life and softens death. Then where can fear abide?

When there is life there is nothing at all apart from life,
When there is death there is nothing at all apart from death. ¹

This quote is from Great Master Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* chapter *Shōji*. We become confident that when death comes, we can give ourselves utterly to death.

We are made of life and death. Our bodies are full of life and death. If we are ready to explore the suffering heart, we are ready to explore life and death, dark and light; the pain and the joy that permeates life and death; the pain and the joy that permeates the human condition. This is what we are entrusted with.

Ask yourselves: Just how far am I willing to open my heart? If the answer is: I am totally willing, then you will find that in opening your heart to your own and to the world's suffering, you are also opening it to the world's great beauty. The way the heart grows is by cracking open and letting in the light. Universal compassion flows through the

cracks. It is not your compassion; yet you are involved. It is not that you are the doer of the heart's cracking open; your part is to get out of the way of this occurring. The arising of compassion simply is.

Compassion flies free, responding to need.

We are not the instigator of compassion but we are the recipients who find they feel more intensely, more deeply, without the self-protective shell that they have allowed conditions to construct. What is slashed through are the tightly woven threads of the cocoon we have spun, trying to protect our terrified ego-self. This encapsulated unreal self is confined in its misery and fear, cut off from the world, because of the fear of susceptibility to hurt. Our hearts know we truly are not the centre of everything; rather our hearts long to Do Good for Others; to be ethical and altruistic in a totally non-self centered way, not hoping for praise or approbation. As we emerge from our silken prisons, the real self stretches forward and merges with the world. We are present. Our focus sharpens. We acknowledge our intimacy with life and death.

Kanzeon broke into a thousand pieces and was remade; our hearts too can break into a thousand pieces and will be remade. It is not something we engineer; rather, our part is to have the deep faith and trust that allows the heart to be put together again, remade, without us trying to get in there with our pot of glue because we are appalled and frightened by the heart's shattering into a thousand pieces. We have dug

that deeply and found the courage to let go that completely that our hearts broke. We can now trust the universe to put our hearts together again so that we may continue on the bodhisattva path, exemplified by Kanzeon, of never turning away from the cries of the world, of allowing the cries of the world to constantly pierce our hearts.

Intuitively we sense that when a person dies there must be more to what it is to be a human being than a vanished event. Zazen is the process of discovering what the more is. The ache in our hearts of losing somebody we love is the essence of the heart beyond pleasure and pain. Don't deny the ache; don't pretend to be less affected than you are. Turn towards the grief. The heart cannot be destroyed by grief. Turning towards helps us embrace death (ours and other people's); embrace it with dignity and courage.

Explore the meaningful living connection to those who have died. A connection to something deep and vital between people that is not going to cease to exist. Because we have the same nature, the connection between us is very intimate, transcending all conjectured limits of time and space, self and other. When we open our hearts to each other, we sense the unchanging nature we hold in common. We come to where death is non-death, where birth is non-birth. This utterly satisfies the heart for we rest in the place, or perhaps better described as the non-place, where all hearts meet. This is the living presence of the heart of the universe. A timeless realm that is nowhere and no thing. It never changes, nor does it come into existence. It just IS: utterly

reliable, not conditioned by birth and death, totally simple and complete.

Segaki falls around the time of the autumn equinox; an auspicious time to commit ourselves more deeply to our spiritual lives. Autumn is a volatile and transitional season that proffers a glimpse into the inner workings of the universe so that we may follow its promptings. It is as if there is an opening, inviting us to step through to the illuminated landscape of the heart. We know that if we have the courage to take the step we will be leaving behind our restricting opinions and beliefs, symbolically severing our ties with our unresolved karma.

The Segaki sesshin draws attention to our hungry ghost aspects; that which holds us back from truly opening to the non-substantial liberated essence which is at the heart of the still essence of the great ocean of meditation. It is the displaying of one's Buddha Nature to the full. Stepping into the great ocean—making the gesture of the great ocean—emboldens us to invite those dark, terrified, wild parts of ourselves that obstruct us from living fully and dying fully, to be seen and transformed. We can allow ourselves to move gently towards what scares us, both in ourselves and in other beings. Instead of tightening up through aversion and fear, we can learn to stay with anguish and horror and thus find, in doing so, though our hearts may break, such breaking into a thousand pieces is not to be feared but to be grateful for and rejoiced in.

What can help us at this time of the autumn equinox is to tune into our planet's balance when day and night are of equal length, realising that we too are included in this balancing act because we are connected to all that surrounds us. Thus, we can be helped by this propitious space/time to find a balance within ourselves, allowing dualities to merge and interact. In the interweaving of the not-two, the dualities that we experience can be seen to be empty and not the warring entities we have conjectured in our minds. The deeper we go in meditation, the less definable we become.

What is this? Meditation sinks from the mind to the heart. We touch the love and compassion at the centre of the heart, the centre of What Is Good to Do.

We find our way in dealing with duality in our everyday lives where we are continually being asked to make decisions, choices and commitments in the context of dualities. What is required of us is that these dualities be informed and empowered by non-duality. Although our human life is finite and imperfect, we have the capacity to know—and the desire and obligation to fulfil—whatever possibilities exist at the interface of our fallibility and of our perfectibility. Time and again we enact What Is Good To Do in these situations. A clarity emerges that is deeper than anything the investigating mind can come up with. It is ungraspable, bright, mysterious and yet totally simple and ordinary everyday life. Do not doubt that the context of the everyday is profound. Bring it all back to the context of the everyday. Then there is a balancing and that balancing is

beyond our willing it or trying to make it happen. It is unhampered by the complications of the thinking, conjecturing mind.

The true essence of balancing is to be found when we come to realise that what we are doing in finding balance is weighing emptiness, for all things are empty—form is only empty. This is a real challenge because in spite of the stripping away of the self that allows us to dwell in the non-substantial liberated essence, we are required to move into the world and find balance in the concrete human situation.

“Emptiness is all form; there is nothing more than this.”²

This is extremely difficult for us, due to personal, economic, political and social conditions. We need to be awake to the beguiling and treacherous textures, not only of human nature, but also of institutions and ideologies.

Here born we clutch at things and then compound delusion later on by following ideals.³

Dōgen speaks of bottomless elusiveness in our capacity for self-deception and self-centeredness.

Tensions and conflicts between the fallibility and the perfectibility of human nature are the substance of all dualities. If we allow ourselves to drown in whatever the particular dualities are that our minds are currently

conjecturing, we harm ourselves and the world by setting ourselves apart, by trying to use one side of a particular issue as a hiding place from the other side.

The practice of being one with myriad things should be able to contain them; the practice should be all containing.

Nothing can be avoided; nothing can be left out. It is as radical as that. Difficult for us to agree to as we want things, situations, other people to fit in with our ideas of how things should be, of how the world should operate. The important question of birth and death and Dōgen's exhortation to understand it completely is about penetrating this kernel of dualism. It reminds us of the imperative for a critical self-understanding that will lead us to liberation. Freedom is to be found in the penetrating and casting off the whole being and the whole being penetrated and cast off.

This is the depth of letting go of body and mind, of body and mind cast off, that is called for. As long as I drag body and mind along with me, which is what I habitually do, body and mind cannot drop off.

Use the rest of this sesshin to consider your own particular hungry ghosts; that is to say the hungry, greedy, despairing, frightened aspects of yourself; use it to become familiar with whatever it is that seems to be obstructing you from living fully and dying fully. In letting go we find ourselves in the flow of the river of impermanence; we experience reality as it is; we transcend, even if at first it is

only momentarily, the imagined, terrifying landscapes of our minds and the conflicting conceptual categories we have projected on to them. We come to know the inherent, great potentiality that rests, resides within as we find true balance within ourselves. Then where are the warring entities apart from those our mind has created? They are but phantoms of the lurid imagination.

Notes

- [1.](#) A paraphrase of a quote from *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dōgen's Shōbōgenzō*, Ed. K. Tanahashi, (Boston and London: Shambala, 2012) Shōji, page 885, quote “In birth there is nothing but birth, in death, there is nothing but death.”
- [2.](#) A paraphrase of a quote from the *Scripture of Great Wisdom, Scriptures and Ceremonies for Meditation Groups*, booklet available at Temples and groups of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, page 7 “Pure is all form: there is then nothing more than this.”
- [3.](#) *Scriptures and Ceremonies booklet, Sandōkai, p. 9.*

Reflections on Grief and Gratitude

Terence Buie

—*Nelson, BC Canada*—

“For the world’s more full of weeping than you can understand.” W.B. Yeats

These notes are from retreats taken at my home in the mountains of British Columbia in the winter of 2009. I am very grateful for ongoing support and guidance from Reverend Master Meiten.

My challenge at this point in time is encountering the ocean of grief and sorrow. This sadness comes and goes in waves. At times the sorrow seems fathomless. This is not a linear process, and neither are these reflections.

The Buddha’s first noble truth refers to the reality of dissatisfaction, suffering brought about by not getting what one wants, or by getting what one doesn’t want. Its essence is the experience of unsatisfactoriness, and this may be experienced in the crucible of regret, sadness, and loss. It is revealing that the Buddha shown in the hell realm holds fire in his hand; at times I feel intense heat sitting in the midst of the waves of these emotions.

Sometimes there are thoughts and images associated, and sometimes just intense feelings...At times the feelings expand beyond my own experience: to children who never

knew their parents, to the mothers who have lost their children, to all who suffer in countless ways. Experiencing the ‘ocean of grief’ can seem overwhelming. I become aware of the child’s sense of powerlessness, feeling that he had no control over what happened around him, and how deeply this affected me. I understand how terribly alone I have felt for most of my life. This is the story, the drama that replays within and is a source of much personal sorrow.

“I should have done better” becomes a mantra, a hungry ghost with an insatiable appetite, and “if only...” takes the mind into the past and down into regret. Asking for help, offering all of these feelings back to the Eternal, gives solace and relief.

The sources of grief are many and diverse. There is the loss of loved ones; a profound sadness for love wanted but never received; a deep longing for connection and the experience of our collective disconnect from the natural world; sorrows that seem to have their roots in my ancestors and inheritance of their pain; named and unnamed shame, and the bitter taste of unworthiness.

Regret is such a strong attachment to the past, a form of delusion arguing against the ‘what is’ of life. Imperfection is to be found everywhere, if we look for it. Self-hatred is spiritual suicide, closing the door to love, kindness or gratitude. And regret is compounded by self-judgment. “If only” becomes “I made a mistake,” and then “I am stupid,” for having done this or not done that. Tears and memories,

the little boy who wanted to be loved, encouraged and appreciated. There are the tears of a five year-old separated from his father and brothers, and all the unexpressed feelings in the family.

Who is it that feels all these wounds and misery?

Regret can become a form of self-hatred, a vicious aspect of Mara, feeding on dissatisfaction and inadequacy. A voice from the past says, “You’ll never amount to anything.” Regret can also be positive, a powerful catalyst for change, encouraging a fresh start and compassionate awareness of the consequence of our actions.

And then suddenly, moments of presence, stillness and kindness, allowing space to witness this dance, knowing for a moment that all of this is Buddha.

Sometimes it feels as if sadness has been a companion for so long that I can’t imagine who ‘I’ would be without it. Until now, I’ve never really allowed the grief to surface in its fullness. There is the curse of perfectionism, struggling to prove myself against the unconscious saboteur, undermining efforts at self-acceptance. For the perfectionist, nothing is ever good enough. Can I let go of what I believe myself to be? Can I release this attachment to worthlessness? I see all the effort to prove my value in the face of that belief, believing that I can heal through my own efforts. This struggle can last for years. And I understand how obsession and self-hatred can lead to suicide.

Kindness to myself is so much more challenging than kindness to others, and yet I have strong faith there is light, a way beyond. Listening more deeply within, asking for help, and especially invoking gratitude and appreciation: these are all antidotes to regret.

There is healing in the silence beneath the judgment. I can do what is important right now, what it is ‘good to do’, instead of repeating old habits, one of which is grasping for order, another expression of the perfectionist. Moments of loving acceptance arise to embrace the sadness. Gratitude is the antidote to grief, self-compassion an antidote to self-hatred.

It is immensely helpful to read and hear dharma teachings during a retreat, to feel the support of the sangha, of one’s spiritual brothers, sisters and elders. Others’ experiences speak deeply to my own drama, although ‘just sitting’ is easier said than done. It is essential to move as well as sit. Yoga and walking are very helpful. When the weight of sadness lifts, there is lightness, peace and acceptance.

Reverend Master Meiten advises me:

Turn the compassion within. Pleasant and unpleasant, they come and go. Regret and remorse can illuminate something that needs to be examined. Look at the mistakes in order to learn. Use that awareness — meditative insight. Listen, learn, and let go...don’t hold on, don’t push away.

In the days after the retreat, other insights arise:

Be generous to myself as well as others...let the energy flow.

It is good to ask for help. I asked for help, and it came.

Have faith in the Eternal, and trust life. All that we need is right here.

Everything is a gift.

With bows of gratitude, I give thanks to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

USA and Canada

Shasta Abbey

—Mt. Shasta, California—USA—

Ceremonies: Brightly colored Buddhist flags and bright sunshine marked a joyous Wesak weekend this year. Many local friends, along with more than 20 retreat guests, participated in the ceremonies of the Wesak Vigil, Wesak Eve and the Festival of Wesak, an evening social tea, and a potluck picnic, which the weather permitted us to hold outdoors for the first time in several years. Rev. Master Daishin Yalon showed slides of his December 2015–January 2016 trip to the Buddhist holy sites in India. Rev. Master Andō Mueller offered a Dharma school class, discussing the life and enlightenment of the Buddha. The children also enjoyed decorating themselves with colorful washable ‘tattoos’ of Buddhist symbols as well as making origami and bookmarks.

On Saturday, June 10 we held a Great Compassion Vigil to which we invited the wider Mt. Shasta community. During this moving ceremony we joined our voices in chanting Scriptures including the *Invocation of Great Compassion*, dedicated to Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva, she who hears the cries of the world. We offered the merit of the ceremony for peace in all the world and for all beings to realize Great Compassion. Father Larry Holben from St. Barnabas Episcopal Church attended, along with several members of his congregation. Many other local people joined us as well, and afterwards we heard expressions of gratitude for this opportunity to express the wish for peace and compassion.

Retreats: We were happy to have thirty guests join us when Rev. Master Meian Elbert offered a weeklong meditation retreat on *Shōbōgenzō: The Everyday Practice of the Buddhas and Ancestors*, June 18-25. Monks and laity sat together in meditation for daily Dharma talks on how Great Master Dōgen points to the attitude of mind in which to train ourselves.

We offered a one-month Summer Program from July 14 through August 14. A dozen retreatants began with a weekend Introductory Retreat, then phased into a schedule of daily meditation and ceremonies, twice weekly Dharma talks, focused Dharma discussions, and working meditation such as cutting and stacking wood, food preparation, gardening, and temple maintenance. The Summer Program has included a four-day Continuing Practice Retreat on the theme of The Great Merit of Meditation, and will culminate in another Introductory Retreat. It encouraged us to see the aspiration that has brought people to our monastery to commit themselves for a full month to something unknown and to see the wholeheartedness of their training during this time.

Rev. Master Shikō offered a retreat to the Bear River Meditation Group on Saturday, June 10th, on the topic of Meditation: Let Go of the Past, Let Go of the Future. The day included periods of meditation, Short Morning Service, and a Dharma talk and discussion.

Rev. Helen also traveled to meet with the Bear River group and offer a retreat based on the musical legacy left to us by Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett.

Funeral: On June 12, Rev. Master Jishō was celebrant for the funeral of James Dorr. Jim had visited the Abbey over the December holidays. In March he took a trip to Mexico, where he died unexpectedly in his sleep. Jim was a member of the Santa Barbara Buddhist Priory when Rev. Master Jishō was Prior there, and their Dharma friendship continued through many years. Jim's son Kent and friend Dan Hall, another Priory member of the time, joined us for the ceremony and tea afterward.

Animal Funerals: Brandy, the orange-and-white long-haired cat, who appeared in the garden during severe cold and deep snow before monks rescued her long ago, died of cancer in the early hours of Wesak Day. She had been a loving companion to various monks, including most recently Rev. Margaret Clyde.

Rev. Margaret was the celebrant for Brandy's funeral at the Jizo Shrine, and she was buried in our animal cemetery. We were able to sit with birth and death almost simultaneously as Brandy's last days coincided in time with the arrival of our new kitten, Lotus.



Lotus

On May 4 Rev. Helen Cummings was celebrant for the funeral of Harry, one of Jo Ann Keifer's cats. She also blessed the graves of Jo Ann's cat Greta and horse Tennero.

Rev. Master Daishin offered a funeral blessing to Asia, Laurie Ottens's 21-year-old cat who died in late July. We offer condolences to Laurie and to all who mourn the loss of loved ones.

Visits: Venerable Thich Minh Hai, a male monk in the tradition of Thich Nat Hanh and doctoral student in Buddhist and Western psychology, stayed with us for about two weeks beginning on May 23. We enjoyed having him share in our daily practice and wish him well as he continues his monastic life and studies. We also enjoyed visiting with four female monks from Longguan Guan Yin temple in Corona, California, August 1-3.

A busload of Vietnamese lay Buddhists from San Francisco and San Jose arrived on August 5 for what has become an annual visit. During the space of two hours, our friends offered generous gifts of food and clothing to the monastic community; paid their respects with bowing and chanting; heard a Dharma talk by Rev. Master Meian and remarks from Rev. Master Haryo; joined us for dinner and visited the Buddhist supplies shop, where lay minister Laurie Ottens, assisted by lay residents and monks, served many of the fifty-five visitors. It touched our hearts, as always, to open our gate to devoted lay Buddhists from a culture in which Buddhism has been the traditional religion for centuries and to see how they put their deep faith into practice.

—Rev. Margaret

Eugene Buddhist Priory

—Eugene, OR—USA—

Ceremonies: Rev. Leon Kackman's Induction Ceremony.

The first Sunday in May, Rev. Vivian came up from Shasta Abbey to join me to go to Portland Priory to take part in Rev. Leon's formal induction as Prior. It was a lovely day with children and family present, and I had the opportunity to meet and visit with a handful of Rev. Leon's family. It was also enjoyable to see congregation members that I know from my time at Portland Priory in spring of 2012.

Lay Ordination. On Sunday, July 9th, Mick Wahal was given lay ordination at the Priory. Mick has been a regular participant at the Priory for over 2 years and we are pleased to support his commitment to Buddhist practice. Ernie Rimerman acted as precentor and Nancy Fletcher as chaplain. Following the ceremony, there was a Dharma talk on what it means to undertake Zen practice and many of our long-time sangha offered their thoughts on Buddhism in daily life. It was a lovely day, and we all appreciated the opportunity to renew our vows to live as

Buddhists, doing our best to refrain from harm and to show compassion to ourselves and others.



Mick's lay Ordination

Monastic Visitors: I was pleased to have some monastic visitors from Shasta Abbey this spring. Rev. Master Meikō arrived on April 30th and stayed for 4 nights so that we could visit and have some rest time together. She also passed through for the night on her way back to the Abbey a few weeks later. Rev. Vivian was here for the nights before and after Rev. Leon's induction in early May which gave us the opportunity to "walk and talk."

Rev. Master Haryo visited on May 11th for 4 nights. Conversation and relaxed time together were much appreciated, as well as all the "maintenance work" Rev. Haryo accomplished while he was here. He pretty much worked through the Priory's "A list" and much of our "B list," as well as repairing various additional things he noted while he was here that hadn't yet made it to any list! Particularly helpful was his look at our phone system and setting up the Priory's voice mail, and the troubleshooting he did on our outside lighting.

Sangha News:

Laura Dowsing English and her husband, Tygh, are moving to Kauai, Hawaii this July. They were both feeling a need for a change in their work and environment; Laura has a job in Kauai working with special needs children and Tygh is ready for a possible change in his profession. Laura was given lay ordination by Rev. Master Oswin Hollenbeck in 2012, and I performed their marriage ceremony two summers ago. We wish them both a peaceful and rewarding transition to their life in Hawaii.

Marilyn Kratt, a long-time lay Buddhist and active in Shasta Abbey retreats for decades, is now residing at Sheldon Park in Eugene. At 92 years of age, Marilyn was weakened by a fall in May and the following surgery, and requires the care of an assisted living facility. She has been a valued congregation member at the Priory for 5 years and will appreciate the thoughts and support of the sangha at this challenging time in her life.

—*Rev. Oriana*

Lions Gate Buddhist Priory

—*Lytton, British Columbia–Canada—*

We have had a very hot, dry summer this year, and many people have inquired as to our safety during this very active fire season in our province. At the time of this writing, early August, we are grateful to report that there are no active fires in our immediate area, although there has been a lot of smoke from many distant fires. There is a very large and serious wildfire in the Ashcroft/Cache Creek area about an hour's drive away. Many people have been evacuated, some of them to the Lytton area; and many have lost their homes. We are offering merit for all those who have been affected.

The coming of summer has allowed us to work on various outdoor projects. Andrew finished the new deck on the east side of Bodhidharma Hall, and John planted a vegetable garden, with

tomatoes, potatoes, beans, radishes, cucumbers, squash, peas, and herbs. This is the first vegetable garden we've planted up here.

We are offering a series of retreats this summer and fall. We welcomed one guest to our July long-weekend retreat: Reverend Kuya Minogue, a priest in the Sōtō Zen lineage from Creston BC.

In late May, Rev. Valeria went to Edmonton for ten days to visit the meditation group there. This was her first time visiting the group, and it went very well. She attended several meditation meetings and led a half-day retreat. Thank you to everyone who showed up, helped out, offered meals and accommodations, and made the visit a success. Then, in mid-June, Rev. Master Aurelian travelled to Kelowna, British Columbia, a mid-sized city near us, to lead a one-day retreat at the home of Peter Robinson, who helps to convene a small multi-faith meditation group there. There were about eight people in attendance who came from various meditation and faith traditions.

The annual general meeting of the Lions Gate Buddhist Priory Society, which is the legal non-profit society of the Priory, was held on June 9 this year. The financial statements were presented and accepted, a new board of directors was elected, and Rev. Master Aurelian presented the plans for our moving of a statue and the proposed building project.

The statue is very beautiful, of Kwan Yin (J: Kanzeon; Skt: Avalokiteshvara). It was offered to us by Venerable Thich Viê n Giac, the abbot of the Tu Viê n Chán Nguyen Buddhist Monastery in Langley (near Vancouver), after he came to visit here a few years ago with his community of male and female monks. The statue, which was carved in Vietnam, depicts Kwan Yin standing on a lotus pedestal and pouring out the waters of compassion. It is solid granite, weighing approximately 10 tons and standing about 14 ft high. We will place her on Fearlessness Peak, a high point on our land. She will look south down the valley into the village of Lytton and the Fraser Canyon beyond. Moving it here will be a big undertaking, and we are grateful to all who have contributed

funds towards it. A local contractor has just completed the construction of a concrete base, and a local road maintenance company has done extensive work on our mile-long driveway, which had become very degraded. The actual move date for the statue is scheduled for September 5, to be undertaken by an industrial moving company from Vancouver. It will require a large truck and cranes at either end.

The building project is a long-term project to construct a Buddha Hall and monastic and guest residences in Great Wisdom Park. We are working with Gerry Blonski, an architect from Surrey, who has produced sketches of a very beautiful set of buildings. We will let people know once we have firmer plans.

—*Rev. Master Aurelian*

Wallowa Buddhist Temple

—*Joseph, Oregon—USA—*

Dry summer weather has come even to our usually temperate mountain climate. A pleasant sunny July with gentle thunderstorms has transitioned into a hotter August with haze in the air from distant fires. We are grateful for our well manager system which makes it possible for us to keep the garden and other plantings green while the grass on the temple grounds and in neighboring fields turns golden.

Retreat Guests: For the better part of June, two lay ministers were with us from California, Mary Gray and Patti Brady, joining in the life of the temple. For our Sunday morning retreat on June 18th, Patti, Mary, and lay minister Helmut Schatz from Walla Walla, Washington, all three spoke of their individual experiences of training over the years and answered questions from the congregation. During July, we welcomed two Canadian guests from Victoria, one a woman who had heard of the temple from friends who had been here for a retreat, then a man who had met Rev. Master Meidō in Canada when she was visiting Rev. Master Meiten. In both July and August, Helmut Schatz spent a

few days of retreat time here, helping with various projects and offering transportation to and from airports.

Meditation Hall: We are in the midst of re-insulating and remodeling the meditation hall so that it can be more efficiently heated in winter, with improved electrical wiring for light and sound. In June, we moved the main altar from its place in the hall to a temporary home in the temple loft, where we continue to hold meditation and daily services with our retreat guests, and ceremonies as needed. Each Saturday we clean up building debris and tools in the main hall and set shoji screens against the open walls, so that we can welcome the congregation as usual on Sunday morning and Tuesday evening.

The grounds around the meditation hall are also being transformed. In order to ensure better drainage around the building, Rev. Clairissa is operating a large track-hoe loaned to us by our contractor to gently re-configure a portion of the hillside above the meditation hall. This will also create a good-sized circular area on the grounds just outside the hall, where outdoor ceremonies and services can be held.

We are grateful that throughout all this work retreat guests have continued to come and we have been able to offer all the services we usually do during the summer months, including welcoming the many visitors to our area who are surprised to discover a Buddhist temple here and ask to come for a tour and/or join in our practice.

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

Europe

Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey

—Northumberland, England—UK—

Retreats: We held the first of our four-day intensive meditation weekends at the end of May. This was led by Rev. Wilfrid who based his lectures on teachings from the *Denkōroku* by Great Master Keizan. The second, in mid-June, was led by Rev. Elinore whose theme was an exploration of zazen. Both were well attended, the long weekend with much meditation proving a popular option. Several members of Dragon Bell Temple drove up from Exeter in a minibus with Rev. Master Myfanwy, the Prior, for the June retreat. It was a pleasure to have her and the group at the monastery for a few days.

The first of our two summer sesshins took place in July. These are silent week-long intensive retreats with the emphasis on meditation, supported by teaching and teas and questions. The June retreat this year was led by Rev. Master Adelin, with the Dharma for the week centred around reflections upon a line from the *Sandokai*, “If from your experiences of the senses, basic Truth you do not know”

Rev. Master Daishin will lead the August sesshin this year supported Rev. Master Berwyn.

Festival Weekends: The festival weekends recently have been focussed on the Bodhissatvas Samantabhadra, and Manjusri, with the latest being a Memorial Festival for Great Master Keizan. Rev. Master Berywn, Rev. Master Olwen and Rev. Lambert led the weekend retreats, were celebrants for the ceremonies on the Sunday morning and gave Dharma talks. We have recently changed the schedule of these mornings; we now hold the festival ceremony first, followed by tea and chance to catch up, then there is a period of meditation before the Dharma talk, given either during a second meditation period, or after to monks and guests

assembled in the dining hall or common room. We continue to end with a social celebratory lunch. The new format seems to work well.

Regional Sangha Day: In June, Rev. Roland and Rev. Lambert attended the Regional Sangha Day in Leeds, an annual event for some years now. They joined Rev. Master Saido, Rev. Master Mugo, and Rev. Alicia, along with around twenty people from meditation groups in the region: Huddersfield, Lancaster, Leeds, Nottingham, Manchester and Sheffield. It was an enjoyable day of meditation, morning service, discussion groups, a walk and plenty of opportunity to talk together over lunch and tea.

Quaker Meeting: Four monks joined a group of local Quakers one evening in July for a Quaker Meeting, followed by discussion and tea together. Sitting together in the historic old Meeting House in Allendale, one Friend noted that for centuries the building has been a place for seeking ‘Truth and Love’. We continue to appreciate this reciprocal dialogue and our connection with local ‘Friends.’

Aerial Photography: We received a very kind offer recently from a local man who attended the funeral of his uncle at Throssel in 2012. Keith contacted us to ask if we would like some aerial photographs of the monastery and grounds. He came on two separate occasions to fly his drone which can capture very high quality film footage and still images from up to 500m height. We now have some excellent photos for use in future publications, and a selection of images is now [on our website](#). We plan to produce a short video soon, also for viewing on our website, showing the monastery buildings and our beautiful rural location. We extend our grateful thanks to Keith for his generosity and skilled piloting.

Below is a view of Myrtle Bank from the drone. Parts of the building were refurbished over time, with an extension added following a generous legacy. Myrtle Bank houses the monks’

library; a project room (mostly used for sewing); offices and monks' accommodation.



The courtyard: To complete our renovated courtyard, we had 6 upvc windows fitted under the monks' meditation hall and a new door to replace the old wooden double doors which had been the main entrance for 30 years. The courtyard is looking clean and smart; this photo was taken recently at the beginning of an afternoon work period.



New Water Filters: Technicians from a water supply engineering company came recently to install new ultraviolet filters which are now providing highly purified drinking water for the ceremony and meditation hall buildings as well as the abbot's house. The expense this work entailed will be recouped over time due to the consequent prolonged life of the pipes and fittings which supply those buildings' sinks.

End of an era: When we built the ceremony hall and monks' meditation hall a little over 30 years ago, a coal boiler was installed which has been heating these buildings all this time. A rota of monks have kept the boiler going, refilling it with coal and clearing out the ash twice a day. After research and consideration of options, we have made the decision to decommission the old boiler and have a gas one installed in September.

J&J Cunningham Coal Merchants in Hexham have been delivering coal to Throssel for all these years, father, then son. We wished to mark this occasion and expressed our thanks to John and Eric in an advert in the local newspaper and invited the family over for a cream tea in the common room where we presented them with two rose bushes and enjoyed talking over the years we have known each other.

—*Rev. Alina*

De Dharmatoevlucht

—*Apeldoorn–The Netherlands*—

Four-day retreat: From the 2nd till the 5th of June a four-day retreat was held in a retreat centre De Hurnse Gaper in the South of The Netherlands. Sixteen lay trainees and Rev. Master Hakuun joined this silent retreat. The schedule was relaxed to give everybody plenty of time to unwind, to read or go for little strolls in the beautiful surrounding area as the weather was pleasantly warm and sunny. One of the lay trainees offered a short Chi Kung class every day for those who were interested in relaxing the body.



Four day retreat

During the Saturday evening meditation we were treated to a performance by Joep Everts, a professional musician and choir conductor; he played various instruments including the Indian harmonium and the spacedrum which beautifully emphasised the stillness that is the background of all we experience.

The recording of the spacedrum can be listened to by clicking here: <https://www.dharmatoevlucht.nl/multimedia-archive/muzikale-meditatie-spacedrum/>



Joep with the spacedrum

New location: As our present rental contract terminates on the first of October, we have been looking for an alternative location for the temple. The soil remediation around the fire station has been postponed till the coming autumn which means that the building will now become available for sale in the spring of 2018 at the earliest. We are still hoping to acquire the building and convert it to a Buddhist temple and until that time we will have to stay in rented accommodation.

We are pleased that from September onwards we can rent a beautiful detached house which is situated close by our previous location for a period of six months, with a possibility of extending the rental contract for another six months if the house isn't sold. If we don't manage to buy the fire station we will have to see how to proceed from then on.



New rental house

—Rev. Baldwin

Norwich Zen Buddhist Priory

—Norwich—UK—

Lay ordination ceremony: On 11th June, in a lay ordination ceremony at the Priory, Jeremy Norman committed himself to live by the Precepts and formally became a Buddhist. This profound and joyous ceremony was attended by several Sangha members and it was an opportunity for us all to reaffirm our commitment to the Life of Buddha. We offer our congratulations to Jeremy on taking this important step and wish him well in his ongoing training.



Lay Ordination

Other recent events: The day retreat in Wymondham on 22nd April was well-attended by members of both the Norwich and Cambridge Sanghas. These retreats are an opportunity for us to get a sense of belonging to a wider Sangha and it is a joy to spend the day meditating and practising with others in this way. As always, the Fairland Church Centre, with its light and airy feel, was an ideal place for the retreat. The focus of the day was on perception and judgementalism. Thanks to those who helped with the organisation of the retreat, which enabled it to run very smoothly.

The celebration of Wesak, the Festival of the Birth of the Buddha, on the following weekend, was another joyful occasion. Several Sangha members came along to the ceremony and ladled water over the baby Buddha. Coffee and popcorn afterwards added to the festive feel of the morning.

It was a pleasure to have Rev. Master Mugo visit the Priory for a few days at the end of May. She joined us for an afternoon

retreat and a Renewing the Precepts Ceremony. Rev. Master Mugo, who is the lay ministry advisor for the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, was able to see most of the East Anglian lay ministers during her travels through the area. Back in the 1990s, when she was Prior at the Reading Priory, Rev. Master Mugo visited the Norwich meditation group and it was fitting that some of the Sangha members from that time were able to meet up with her again on this occasion.



Rev. Master Mugo's visit

Our Summer Party in Erpingham in early July was a very enjoyable event, as the rural North Norfolk setting, the pleasant weather and a tasty pot-luck lunch provided the opportunity for the Sangha (plus partners and dogs) to be together in a relaxed and informal way. Thank you to all who contributed to the success of the day.



Summer party

Thanks: To everyone who helps in various ways with Priory tasks, a big ‘thank you’, with particular gratitude for the following: making a funeral kesa; providing a place for me to have a week’s retreat; organising the changeover to our new bank account; doing the book-keeping and accounts; producing the Priory’s Wesak cards; cleaning and tidying the Priory and its garden; and looking after the Priory when I’m away.

—*Rev. Leoma*

The Place of Peace Dharma House

—*Aberystwyth, Wales-UK*—

Over the summer the life of faith has steadily continued in this small temple. As well as our regular meditation meetings and ceremonies we have welcomed guests from further afield, one coming from Yorkshire, for a longer private retreat.

Gratitude is offered to Ceri and Gordon Jones, who have helped Reverend Master Myoho with shopping and garden maintenance, whilst she continues to recover from a shoulder injury. Having such reliable help, offered so gladly, is a gift.

The new heat resistant blackout blinds that were fitted to the back bedroom windows have kept the upstairs cooler. The rear of the temple has full sun all day, so this addition has been appreciated.

At the time of writing, we are at the beginning of having the external paintwork refreshed. Sea breezes, delightful and welcome though they are, can be hard on these surfaces.

Thank you to all who offer continued support to the temple.

—*Rev. Master Myōhō*

Sitting Buddha Hermitage

—*Cromford, Derbyshire–UK—*

At the end of April I travelled up to Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey to attend Wesak—the Festival of the Buddha’s birth—and join the community for one of the annual monastic retreats. It’s a while since I have been on retreat with the Throssel community and I greatly appreciated the silence and the quiet companionship of my fellow monks as we sat together in the meditation hall each day.

On the last Saturday in May I visited the Leeds Serene Reflection Meditation Group for a one-day retreat, standing in for Rev. Master Roland who is the usual visiting monk for the Leeds group. I was back again four weeks later, in June, to attend the Regional Sangha Day along with Rev. Masters Saido, Mugo, and Roland and Rev. Lambert and around twenty people from meditation groups in the region—I spotted people from Huddersfield, Lancaster, Leeds, Nottingham, Manchester and Sheffield. The day included meditation, morning service, discussion groups, lunch, a walk, and plenty of tea and cake and opportunity to talk to friends old and new.

One Saturday in June I was invited to have a stall at a local holistic fair – thank you to Jaquita for joining me at the stall for

the day. It was an enjoyable day and we got to talk to local people about what is offered at the Hermitage.

My artist neighbours at [The Old Lock Up Gallery](#) next door have been using old roof tiles and a chalk pen to write signs so I decided to copy this simple idea and make one for the Hermitage. Here it is:



The charity's 18-year-old Nissan Micra passed its MOT again in May and my kind neighbour Ian recently fitted a replacement wing that I had acquired via eBay, the old one having become very rusty. So the car lives on.

I leave you with a photo of the Hermitage flying Buddhist flags for the *Celebrating Cromford* weekend in May.



—Rev. Alicia

Turning Wheel Buddhist Temple

—East Midlands—UK—

Update on the Building Fund: finding a long-term home for the temple: We have made some significant progress since launching the Building Fund in late May. In mid-June we received a generous grant from a grant-giving charity, and we have also received a number of other very kind donations to the Building Fund. We have had a mortgage approved, for up to £200,000, and together with the personal loans we have been offered, we would now be able to manage a purchase price of about £288,000. We expect that a suitable property in the area we are looking will cost between about £250,000 and £350,000.

In the meantime, the property that we had been interested in (mentioned in the last issue of the journal) is now “sold subject to contract”. The sale isn’t definite until contracts have been exchanged, but we don’t think that it would have been very good value for us anyway, at the price that was being asked, given the amount of work that was needed on it.

There have been a few other properties that look like they have potential, and hopefully there will be more coming on the market. We may just need to bide our time until the right opportunity comes along.

We would still be grateful for any further support for the Building Fund. The more resources that we have, the more likely we are to be able to afford a property that would work well as a temple, and also be in a location with good transport links, that Sangha members can get to easily. There are more details on the Building Fund page of the temple website: (www.turningwheel.org.uk/building-fund/).

If you feel able to offer any support to help us establish a more suitable long-term home for the temple, that would be greatly appreciated.

—Rev. Aiden

TEMPLES OF THE ORDER—USA / CANADA

Shasta Abbey

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

Berkeley Buddhist Priory

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

Columbia Zen Buddhist Priory

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

Eugene Buddhist Priory

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

Idaho Panhandle area and Sandpoint Meditation Group

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

Pine Mountain Buddhist Temple

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

Portland Buddhist Priory

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

Wallowa Buddhist Temple

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

CANADA

Lions Gate Buddhist Priory

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

Affiliated Meditation Groups

CA: Auburn, Chico, Fresno,
Morro Bay, Ventura, San Jose
ID: Sandpoint
MT: Whitefish

CANADA:

Edmonton, Alberta
Lytton BC
Vancouver BC

TEMPLES OF THE ORDER—EUROPE

UK

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

Dragon Bell Temple
Rev. Master Myfanwy McCorry
Mill Farm Cottage, East Week
South Zeal, Okehampton
EX20 2QB
Ph: 01647 231 682
dragonbelltemple@gmail.com
www.dragonbelltemple.org.uk

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

Norwich Zen Buddhist Priory
Rev. Leoma Hague
NORWICH,
Ph: 01603 457933
info@norwichzen.org.uk
www.norwichzen.org.uk

The Place of Peace Dharma House
Rev. Master Myōhō Harris
P. O. Box 207
ABERYSTWYTH
SY23 1WY
Ph: 01970 625402
www.placeofpeacewales.org

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

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

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

Sitting Buddha Hermitage
Rev. Alicia Rowe
CROMFORD
Derbyshire
Ph: 01629 821813.
alicia@fieldofmerit.org
www.sittingbuddhaermitage.fieldofmerit.org

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

Turning Wheel Buddhist Temple
Rev. Aiden Hall
51 Lamborne Road, Leicester
LE2 6HQ
Ph: 0116 210 3870
www.turningwheel.org.uk

Affiliated Meditation Groups
UK: Aberdeen, Aberfeldy,
Birmingham, Cambridge,
Carmarthen, Chichester,
Cirencester, Cornwall, Dundee,
Galloway, Hexham, Huddersfield,
Hull, Inverness, Jersey, Lancaster,
Leeds, Leicester, London, Matlock,
Milton Keynes, Newcastle-upon-
Tyne, North Lakes, Norwich,
Nottingham, Preston, Sheffield,
Teesside

GERMANY

Dharmazuflucht Schwarzwald

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

LATVIA

Sōtō Zen Riga

Rev. Bridin Rusins
Baznicas Street 13-29
RIGA LV1010
Latvia
Ph: 001215 666 5634
www.sotozenriga.lv
elgarusins@gmail.com

THE NETHERLANDS

De Dharmatoevlucht (Dharma Refuge)

Rev. Baldwin Schreurs
Kolibrïe 2
7331 ZA Apeldoorn
Ph: +31 55 542 0038
contact@dharmatoevlucht.nl
www.dharmatoevlucht.nl

Wolk-en-Water Hermitage

Rev. Master Hakuun Barnhard
Kerkeweg 81, 8484 KB Langelille
The Netherlands.
Ph. 0031 561 475 306
<https://www.wolkenwater.nl/en/>

Affiliated Meditation Groups:

The Netherlands:

Groningen, Utrecht.

For details of meditation groups in Europe, please contact your nearest priory, or the Guestmaster at Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey.

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

Further Information

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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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