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of the Order Worldwide*

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*The great bell at Shasta Abbey in the snow this winter*

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*Reading Buddhist Priory's refurbished Ceremony Hall*

## The Five Diamond Points:

### The First Point

Rev. Master Kōten Benson

—*Lions Gate Buddhist Priory, Lytton, BC—Canada—*

*This is a transcript of a Dharma Talk offered by Rev. Master Kōten to the Priory community. It is the second in a series on The Five Diamond Points That Penetrate To the Very Heart of the Matter. It has been lightly edited for reading purposes. Transcribed by Rev. Master Aurelian.*

Homage to the Buddha.

Homage to the Dharma.

Homage to the Sangha.

This is called “The five diamond points that penetrate to the very essence of the matter.”

The first one is the keeping of the pure and bright mind. This is sometimes called the first mind in the initial stages of training. But it is not, in all aspects, the same as at the beginning. Reverend Master Haryo, the present head of the Order, very much exemplifies this. When, at an Advisory Council meeting, if things get overclouded and confused by people being overwhelmed by the opinions and views which they are continually subjected to by the external world, it is as if he takes out a vajra that is kept polished and golden and bright, and reminds us what the essential matter is.

In the beginning, we look with great sincerity even though we do not always recognise it, and we go at the problem—the koan, as it were — with great determination and a certain amount of naivety, a certain amount of putting everything else aside in order to concentrate on the training and on finding the Truth.

It is easy, as one goes on throughout the years, to become discouraged or to become overwhelmed by the ideas and views and opinions of the world, which can cause one to feel tired, and to feel that the way is obscured. Dōgen says “It is very difficult to keep the initial humility to the very end. But,” he says, “it is absolutely essential to do so.” The merit of first mind is the most widest and completely fathomless. Even if Buddhas explain it fully, such explanation can never be enough.

The second diamond point is: when despair and discouragement accumulate, as it were, in our kidneys, the seat of the will; when they accumulate, when the ideas and opinions and views get in the way and we feel stodgy and unable to move, when we feel as if the water of the spirit is bunged-up inside of us, then it is necessary to grasp hold of the will and turn. It is necessary to raise the water of the spirit from the base of the spine up, as if one were grasping something and deliberately turning it. This is done through the positive use of the will; through deliberately — even when one does not feel like it, especially when one does not feel like it — turning the wheel, turning the will, turning the

effort; going past the place of obscurity and turning, grasping the will and turning the wheel.

The third diamond point is faith. Faith is not the belief in particular things. It is, rather, active willingness and the activity of continuing on. Faith flows. It is not about accepting particular ideas, views, or doctrines. It is about trusting the teaching of the Buddha and applying it to one's actual daily life, applying it to what is actually in front of oneself. By so practicing faith one is, as it were, holding up a light to be seen by others. This is very much the essence of the monastic life: to hold up the light through one's own training, which is the only way it can be held up; and thus, to benefit the world. This is the primary aspect of teaching, and if it is not present, then teaching through words will not be of any use. Truly practicing faith means to dig down deep inside of ourselves and really apply ourselves.

The fourth diamond point is the flexibility, resonance, flowing of meditation. Do not think that meditation is some state of mind. If you do so, you will be constantly pulling and pushing your mind in order to make it conform to some sort of deluded ideal. Meditation is the flow of the real, true, profound Buddha Nature. It exists. We can know it, and, thus know our real life, the life beyond the karma. The real life. To sit still, to sit down, to let be, to stop conjuring the mind, to stop conjuring the smoke of the ideas and opinions and views, and having to have it this way and not liking it that way. The disease of the mind, the feverish mind. The blessedness of meditation, the wondrous opportunity (which

many people do not have) to be able to take some time and just sit and just be: the power of this — when we meditate, we drink the water of the spirit; we absorb it into ourselves, we pour it over ourselves. There is nothing more wondrous than this.

The fifth diamond point is the knowledge of the Unborn, the knowledge, the experience of the Unborn living within oneself, the true life living within oneself, the true flame, the true light. This is not a theory. We are not doing an experiment. The Ancestors have continually practiced, exemplified, taught, explained, pointed to, shown this. It is not beyond our capabilities. The pillar exists within us. We just need to sit within it, abandoning all the unnecessary, abandoning all the wastes of time. If you can do this, you can live in this in the middle of joy and sorrow, in the middle of aches and pains, in the middle of bantering and silence. May you come to understand this. I pray that you may come to understand this.

Homage to all the Buddhas in all worlds.

Homage to all the Bodhisattvas in all worlds.

Homage to the *Scripture of Great Wisdom*.

*All six talks are available on the priory website*  
[http.com//www.lionsgatebuddhistpriory.ca/DharmaTalks.htm](http://www.lionsgatebuddhistpriory.ca/DharmaTalks.htm)

*Scroll down to August 2017*

*The full booklet is available on request from Lions Gate Buddhist Priory. Email: [lionsgatebuddhistpriory@gmail.com](mailto:lionsgatebuddhistpriory@gmail.com)*



## Gratitude

Rev. Master Kinrei Bassis

—Berkeley Buddhist Priory, Albany, CA–US—

*This article first appeared in the Berkeley Priory Newsletter, September–October 2018*

Cultivating gratitude is one of the best practices to help our spiritual life. Although we often are oblivious to this fact, everyone always has many reasons to be grateful. When we look with gratitude at what is unfolding in our lives, it helps to free ourselves from that human tendency to obsess about all that is going wrong and all the difficulties that seem to be causing us to suffer. Cultivating gratitude helps us to see beyond our selfish and self-absorbed point of view and helps us to open our hearts to a much deeper spiritual perspective.

The basic problem for our spiritual life is how are we dealing with all the unwanted conditions in our life, both our external difficulties such as problems in our relationships, our finances, our health, and then also all our unwanted internal emotional conditions, like feelings of depression, anxiety or fear. I have found that how we deal with all the unwanted aspects in our life is where we can see either our spiritual progress or lack of progress. The real sign of someone doing well spiritually, is how much they can

embrace their life with gratitude, and this is particularly true when one is being given the unwanted conditions of life, such as illness, mistreatment, misfortune and injustice.

The following poem by the 13th century Muslim mystical poet, Rumi, points out how we need to have an open and welcoming attitude to all of difficulties that life is giving us.

***The Guest House***

*This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.  
A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
as an unexpected visitor.  
Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still, treat each guest honorably.  
He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.  
The dark thought, the shame, the malice.  
meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.  
Be grateful for whatever comes.  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.*

Jellaludin Rumi (translation by Coleman Barks)

Everyone's life is full of unwanted guests. Someone is being unfair or unreasonable. We have unwanted feelings of anger or despair. Our body is filled with pain or health problems. These are all part of our life yet we did not seek or want them. And, there are karmic reasons for most of these unwanted guests visiting us. We can take all these guests as teachings and learn from them or we can expend our energy just battling with our karma, trying to prevent anything difficult from arising. Yet, since many of the conditions in our life are completely outside our control, what this means is that this is a normal and inevitable aspect of human life and that we will always be having many unwanted guests.

One of the positive aspects in dealing with people practicing Buddhism is that I often meet people who have had some very serious illness or some form of disaster in their life and yet, they sincerely express gratitude for the illness or disaster because it really helped them to look deeper at their life and let go of many of the aspects of their life that were causing them to suffer.

The practice of gratitude starts with being mindful of all that we are being given. When I eat, I want to remember to be grateful for the gift of the food. I have a warm bed and place to sleep. I have gratitude for all the people in my life who I care about and who care about me. I have gratitude that my body is mostly healthy and working well even if I am ill or having some physical problem and pain. Yet the really deep gratitude does not come from just having a life

that is giving us much of what we desire. The really deep gratitude comes from realizing that the spiritual path we have found is going to give us what we are really seeking. In Buddhism there is a teaching that “*The Dharma is medicine that can heal all suffering.*” And when we really take the Dharma to heart, we can be filled with gratitude because we can learn to recognize that all our suffering does not come from our difficult conditions but comes from not seeing and relating to the world and the unfolding of our life with “Right View”, the first step of the Eightfold Path.

Faith and trust are essential conditions for us to awaken our own grateful heart. We need to trust that no matter what is unfolding in our lives and no matter what is unfolding in the world, nothing is or can ever be fundamentally hurt or lost. Each difficulty is both a problem we will naturally wish to alleviate, and it will also be a gateway that points us to something in our life which we need to work at letting go of. I find when I have difficulties, it helps me immensely when I recognize that it is not just simply something that I do not want but it is also a teaching for me on what I need to do in order to find real freedom. When I am suffering, if I look really carefully at what is happening, I can see this suffering is not new and it has been happening throughout my life and, unless I deal with it, it will keep appearing in my life in various forms until I deal with it. For instance, I can suffer when I feel I criticized, particularly when it seems unjustified, and yet until I let go of clinging to opinions of others, I will always be living in a world in which I can be hurt by someone else’s opinion.

Learning to recognize impermanence helps us not to get lost in the seemingly hard reality of difficult conditions and instead to be able to recognize the ephemeral nature of everything we experience. When we stop grasping at all the conditions and see the dreamlike nature of whatever we experience, we can start finding real freedom and liberation because we can experience that nothing is solid which means, in turn, that nothing can ever truly bind us. The only thing ever binding us is our mind trying to grasp the ephemeral conditions. The following lines from the Diamond Sutra point how we should view the unfolding of our life and the world.

*Thus shall you think of all this fleeting world:  
A star at dawn, a bubble in a stream,  
A child's laugh,  
A flash of lightning in a summer cloud,  
A flickering lamp, a phantasm, and a dream.*

We are trying to awaken the faith that we already possess everything we truly need, the Buddha Heart. This truth is found and experienced by letting go of trying to grasp the flow of conditions in our life and trusting that the real Treasure we have always been seeking, we already possess. By being still and open and not demanding that the world gives us what we desire, we can find this place of liberation within our own heart. When we start readjusting our focus to do the difficult work of trying to let go of our mind's habitual patterns of obsessing on all our worldly conditions; obsessing on our work, our health, our relationships, we start

to create more space and freedom in our hearts and minds. We get in touch with a deep and profound gratitude for the fact that we have found that we are on a path that is taking us to our true spiritual home.

## Always Going On

Rev. Master Oswin Hollenbeck

—*Shasta Abbey, CA–USA*—

*This writing is adapted from a Dharma talk offered at an introductory retreat following the Festival of Avalokiteshwara, Bodhisattva of Great Compassion. “Our Founder” refers to Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett.*

This morning I wish to talk about “always going on.” For me this was among the most important teachings of our Order’s founder. It has been the ‘Mount Everest’ for my practice, although other people may have peaks they consider higher. The highest peak in the Himalayas depends upon where you are standing. I find this teaching everywhere in the monastery. It’s the very fabric of reality and it’s as real to me as the bread and tofu, the trees, and the cloister under our feet.

I gave an earlier version of this talk to the monastic community in Shasta Abbey’s meditation hall. As I said to monks then, I don’t think this teaching is specific to monastic life. However, it is essential. And I believe it is so for anyone dedicated to practicing the Buddha’s way. The examples I will give here are from monastic life because this is where I have spent most of my adult life. I’m sure any

sincere lay practitioner can offer parallels. My experience is that the issues and crises of monastic life are the same ones that challenged me before I became a monk, so I can confirm Great Master Dōgen’s teaching that “the koan arises naturally in daily life”!<sup>1</sup>

We’ll look at ways this point of Dharma is incorporated into our practice—both in scriptures and symbols; how I have personally found the teaching valuable; some thoughts about falling down, getting up, and changing course; and then some ways we can cultivate this teaching in daily life.

\*

The festival ceremony this morning focused on Compassion. Compassion is often paired with the other vital ingredient in Buddhist training, Wisdom. The phrase “always going on” comes from *The Scripture of Great Wisdom*, which is the scripture Zen meditators recite every morning. For monks, reciting this same scripture every day is a part of a monk’s ‘always going on’: we recite it even if it is a rest day or we’re ill or visiting family. It is considered the most important scripture in Zen meditation practice and it used in many other traditions, too.

Why is this Scripture so important? It’s because it is trying to point to that which is greater than us yet which defies definition. We use many words for It—the Unborn, the Eternal, the Cosmic Buddha, True Nature or Reality, That Which Is, etc. Meditation opens us up to viewing the



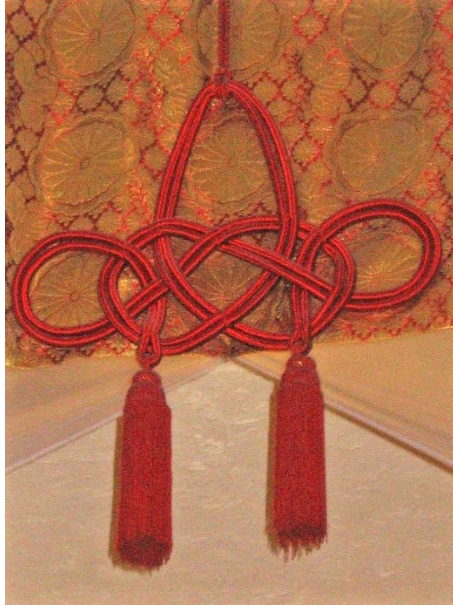
world with the eyes of wisdom, or *prajna*. The Scripture states what this ‘It’ is not. It’s not this, it’s not that: “no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind.” The scripture keeps taking everything away from us so we can’t conceptualize It, we can’t grab onto It with our mind. Then at the scripture’s end appears a *mantra*, a distillation of the Scripture which in itself can be used as a focus for meditation. This phrase states something positive about It; It’s not a thing (a noun), but a process (a verb): “Going, going, going on beyond and always going on beyond—always becoming Buddha. Hail!” Translating the Sanskrit word *gate* (Japanese *gyatei*) as ‘going’ has profound implications for the rest of our practice.

We use this particular translation of the mantra at the request of our Founder’s teacher in Japan. Kōho Zenji felt it was very important that we view *shunyata*, True Reality, often translated as ‘emptiness,’ in a positive way. While some translators render this phrase as “gone, gone, gone beyond”, we translate it as “going, going, going on beyond” because it points to continual practice, even beyond realization.<sup>2</sup> Dōgen, founder of Sōtō Zen in Japan, wrote discourses in his masterwork *Shōbōgenzō* on “ceaseless practice,” “living beyond Buddhahood,” and “existence, time, flow.”<sup>3</sup> We don’t stop. We never arrive. If we think we have arrived, we are in trouble. We wish to always go on, always becoming Buddha. Even though Avalokiteshwara herself is said to have realized Buddhahood in the far past, she continues to ‘do her training’ in the form of Great Compassion and to help beings.

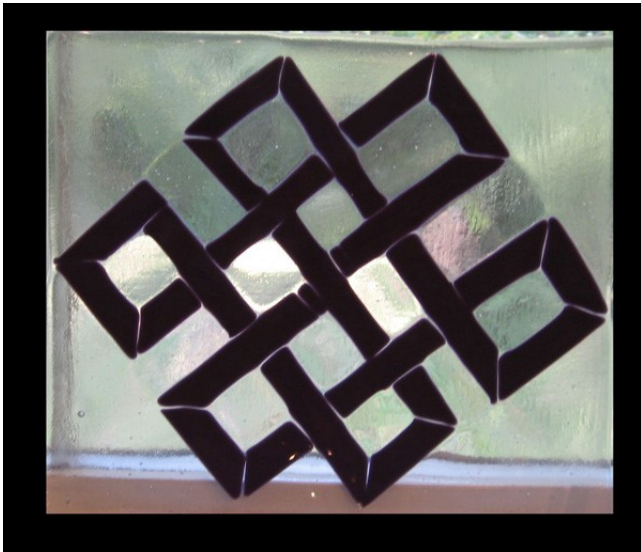
This ‘endless training’ is a concise expression of the bodhisattva vow, of helping innumerable beings, both within and outside ourselves, infinitely. You may wish to reflect on the many times in our liturgy we use the words “all,” “endless,” “infinite,” and so forth. This is the core meaning of ‘eternal’—without beginning and without end. There is That at the heart of all existence and life which moves. There is time, there is space, and then there is this other dimension which flows through all directions and dimensions. When we meditate, we ‘access’—we are one with—that Flow. At the deepest level of our being, whether we feel it or not, we know this true life. And it is alive, it moves, it flows.

✱

We use many symbols in Buddhist art and architecture to represent and remind us of this flow. One common symbol is the ‘knot of eternity’ which hangs up there on the proscenium arch above the main altar (see photo from Shasta Abbey below). It is usually depicted or drawn without the tassels hanging down; rather, the two ends tie in together so that the whole makes intersecting lines which don’t have an end or a beginning (see photo from Eugene Buddhist Priory). The line goes on, it continues to go on. It expresses the never-ending love of the Eternal, endless compassion. That’s why it is also called the ‘knot of eternal love’.



*Knot of Eternity at Shasta Abbey*



*At Eugene Priory*

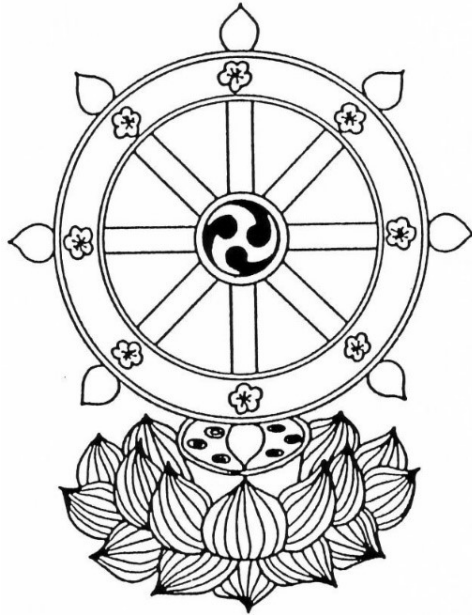
The knot of eternity is usually colored red, the color of blood. As long as blood is flowing—red—we are alive. This process of training isn't something that is ever accomplished, else it is dead. For this reason we use the red color to illustrate the Precepts, sometimes called the “Blood of the Buddhas.” They and It are a living force and presence. It is up to us to keep it alive, to keep it flowing. The color red in Buddhism is also a celebratory color. We are glad and grateful to be alive and to be able to practice the Buddha's way.

Another important symbol is the *manji*, which translates literally as “the [Chinese/Japanese] character for movement.” It's the swastika, a religious symbol adopted from Indian tradition and found in most civilizations throughout the world. Long before the rise of 20<sup>th</sup> century fascism with its misappropriation of the symbol, the manji appears in the artwork of many prehistoric cultures. Its use is so widespread that anthropologists theorize that there was a great comet revolving through the sky for nights on end that could be seen from anywhere on earth. If you look carefully at a swastika, you can see that it has four ‘arms’ or ‘spokes’, with the bent portion of each arm or spoke perhaps representing a track of comet dust trailing behind. It's thought that the image was taken up universally as a symbol for the movement of the spirit within the heart. In Buddhism the swastika usually turns toward the right, clockwise, to indicate that the heart is turning in the ‘right’ direction.

In our Order's temples we don't use the swastika much as a symbol because of its negative associations. However, you are likely to observe the four-spoked form in East Asian Buddhist art and temple architecture. In a Chinese Buddhist monastery in Taiwan I visited some years ago swastikas appeared everywhere with great profusion and joy: designs in shrubbery, of paving stones in parking lots, in stair and balcony railings, and as frequent architectural embellishment and ornamentation. (See photo from De-Lin-Nian-Fo Temple below.)



I found that their prominence helped create an effect that one is in the flow of Eternity. You may also sometimes see a three-spoked manji, called a *tomo*ei in Japanese; it is sometimes found at the center of a Dharma Wheel (see below).<sup>4</sup>



*Dharma Wheel (Dharmachakra) [Drawing by Rev. Master Mokugen]*

There are many other symbols for and illustrations of movement in our tradition, such as the monastic schedule, ceremonial forms, and other scriptures and writings. I will allow you to make your own discoveries. This emphasis on movement, process, flow is also embodied in a fundamental instruction of our seated meditation practice—we allow things to arise and we allow them to pass, we allow our mindstream to flow through without attachment or aversion.

Now I want to talk about how valuable this teaching has been to me personally, particularly when I got in a tight spot. My examples are from my term as head novice here at Shasta Abbey where I did my initial training. The head novice role is a monk's first big position of responsibility, and I was having a pretty rough time. I had a mysterious illness which defied diagnosis, and despite extra rest, special diet, and sage advice, I continued to be exhausted. I also experienced financial problems. In those days novice monks had to pay room and board as well medical and personal expenses, and my financial arrangements had collapsed. Buying even toothpaste became a major decision. So these circumstances—the heavy responsibility, my poor health, and financial strain—brought up an abundance of despair, worry, anxiety, and fear. What was the actual illness, what was an actual limitation, and what was my own feeling of inadequacy? I could not figure this out—and may never know. Karma was being worked out in a way that I probably did not recognize at the time. All I knew was that I had to go on.

By mid-term I reached a crisis and had to make a conscious decision about staying in the monastery and completing the term. When my check book balance showed barely enough money to pay the next month's rent, it took every ounce of strength and courage I had to write that check. I said to myself, "I'm going to stay, I'm going to continue," and I wrote it. Years later I looked at the returned check from the bank and could hardly read the scrawl that was my signature. After this crisis, I subsequently received

a medical diagnosis, appropriate medicine, and financial assistance, but the habit and determination developed in practice up to that point enabled me to say “Yes” at a critical moment.

A second example is from when I was an older novice and despairing of ever being transmitted. Transmission is a confirmation of one’s training by one’s master, an essential step for becoming a full monk certified to pass on the teaching of our tradition. The monks around me of a similar ordination age were being transmitted and I wasn’t. What arose in me was, “What’s wrong with me? Why isn’t this happening to me? What am I not doing?” We may all know how we start questioning ourselves when we see other people in a similar situation moving ‘ahead’ and we are not. And in truth, I had been distracting myself with too much reading and exploring of other kinds of Buddhism.

Finally, I just said “No, I’m going to stop this. This tradition has everything I need. It’s all here. It’s sufficient. This master is completely perfect for me. I don’t need someone or something else. I don’t care if I ever get transmitted. If I become the ‘eternal novice’, so be it. I’m going to stop looking outside myself. I’m going to stay here and do the practice wholeheartedly—this I can do—and make that full commitment to my teacher.” It was a private decision. I didn’t tell anyone.

Within about a week Rev. Master Jiyu comes around and says, “Would you like to be transmitted?” How did she



know? I feel she had an intuitive sense that I had made this commitment to the tradition and to her, the two things essential for Transmission. I had chosen entirely of my own volition to continue regardless, and consequently she offered me the opportunity to do so. The choice of that one instance had an inestimable effect on my life.

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Now, I don't want to give the impression that I'm some kind of super-trainee and endowed with superior determination. There have been times when I have not gone on, sometimes falling dramatically. And when we fall, we may need to hear what Rev. Master Jiyu told me once in sanzen when I was complaining about how difficult and dark my karma was: "Well, get weaving!" Otherwise, don't just complain, get out there and do something. There's a Japanese Zen saying, "Seven times down, eight times up." We grasp the will, arise, and continue.

And being human we will make 'mistakes'. So, how do we learn to distinguish skillful from unwise effort? I've found it's only through experience, going on with the practice, learning through such 'mistakes', and never giving up. We also have the wonderful resource and refuge of the Sangha, our seniors in training (those with more experience), the Third Refuge. However, we have to be ready and willing to hear and follow their direction or pointing, and it's still our individual choice, our responsibility.

Over the years I've come to see that these mistakes have simply been the process of life and practice, the playing out of my karma, and that nothing is wasted. This is the twisting and turning of the *ketchimyaku*—the Bloodline of the Precepts. So long as we keep our eye on 'the Buddha', as at the head of the *ketchimyaku* procession in the Jukai ceremony, we will arrive at the 'hall of the golden Buddha' and 'ascend the brilliant altar'. As many of our scriptures teach, our enlightenment is assured as soon as we set our feet on the path, but how long it takes is 'in our hands': we influence the future by the choices we make moment to moment.

It's helpful to keep in mind that we are talking here about a spiritual purpose in life. This determination needs to be oriented toward the 'important thing', the spiritual or religious life, and not necessarily in regard to our physical efforts or accomplishments. We need to be careful not to judge ourselves by external standards, so common in our materialistic society.

So I am not saying one should never change one's course in life. Quite to the contrary, one may need to. I can imagine many circumstances in the life of a lay person in which one may need to make a change. I am speaking here of continuing the life of meditation and Precepts. Regardless of our outer form, the inner work is the essential matter. For monks the form is an assist for the practice, and it provides an example of how it is done, but it is not the important thing. The heart's work is the same for all of us. We all do the same

meditation, use the same scriptures, and follow the same Dharma.

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So how do we maintain this ‘flow’, the heart’s work? How do we align our hearts and minds with true reality, harmonizing the ‘flow’ within and the ‘flow’ without? How do we always go on? Fundamentally, it requires continual turning toward what is good and maintaining that direction—listening to the Heart and holding our commitment to the Precepts as carefully as we can. Here are some more specific suggestions:

- First, by continuing the regular practice of mediation, no matter how short the time we can sit might be. When I first learned meditation, we were taught that meditation continued through the night. I didn’t understand this, but I took it on faith. It was only years later that I learned what was being referred to was the flow of *qi* (*ch’i*), the Water of the Spirit. This is why it can be worthwhile to meditate both morning and evening, at the opposite poles in a twenty-four hour period. Doing so keeps ‘the water’ flowing.

Now, I’m not someone who feels the flow very often in a physical way. Some people don’t; it’s not a spiritual lack, so I’ve been told. But I do know when I’m not in ‘the flow’. It’s as Rev. Master Jiyu said about being enlightened, “We never know when

we're enlightened, but we always know when we're not."

- The more or longer we practice, the more sensitive we become to meditation and keeping the precepts and the more we can sense when we are going in a good direction. Paying attention to the natural flow of the breath can help. And many decisions of daily life require simple respect, mindfulness, and common sense: stopping our car at a stop sign or recycling our waste. So long as we're not avoiding a responsibility to do something else, these are enlightened activities. And making such seemingly small 'enlightened' choices develops the habit and momentum so that when we come to a big crisis, it doesn't feel insurmountable.
- The Precepts are our great guardian of living in accord with the Flow. The discomfort, uneasiness, or pain we feel when we 'break' a precept alerts us to the possibility that we're not acting from meditation. When I began practice, I didn't live near a teacher and sangha and thus didn't learn about precepts. While meditation became a wonderful focus for my life, I sometimes easily confused what was 'good' to do with what felt good to do. Developing a sensitivity to the precepts helps us see this distinction. As Rev. Master Jiyu writes in her *Kyōjukaimon and Commentary*, "The Lord of the House [the Master Within] will never ask us to break the Precepts."<sup>5</sup>

- Trying to see the Buddha nature of other people and our surroundings can help us maintain equanimity and an open heart that naturally empathizes with others. It can assist in preserving the wish to cause no harm or hurt and to benefit beings. What flows within each of us also flows through all beings and things, through all of existence.
- Accepting circumstances we don't like is a great boost to living within the flow. Often things are not going to go exactly the way we plan. A friend connected with AA used to tell me, "If you want to hear God laugh, just tell him your plans." This humorous adage underscores the importance of being led by 'the flow' rather than living our lives from the place of self-interest or selfishness. True practice is more than an 'add-on'.
- Always going on is not brittle or inflexible. It does not stand apart from the context of compassion and the stillness and wisdom of letting go that arises from meditation. Otherwise practice can focus too much on 'I, me, and mine' and turn into a harsh asceticism of 'storming heaven'; a cold and careless pursuit of personal advantage, or a foolish ignorance (ignoring) of circumstances that results in misfortune.
- Trust/faith/confidence is necessary—in all Three Treasures. Although ultimately we have to generate our own steam, there is a huge, yet quiet source of help and support offered.

- Finally, in order to fulfill any aspiration, commitment is necessary. When a possible change arises, try to ground your decision in your practice of stillness rather than responding from the emotional feelings of desire and aversion (I like or I don't like) or ungrounded ideals (things should or should not be this way). In this way we continually convert our ignorance into wisdom.

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- ‘Always going on’ is a marvelous and wonderful teaching, a great aspiration, something we can do in every moment. Just as in meditation we bring our mind back to center when we notice ourselves drifting or distracted, so we can always bring our mind back to always going on. The genuine calling of everyone is to purify and live from the true heart. To ‘train’ or ‘practice’ is to turn the heart in the direction of compassion and wisdom, to persevere, to always go on, and to never give up.

#### *Notes*

1. *Genjō-Kōan: The Problem of Everyday Life*, Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett, trans. & comp., *Zen is Eternal Life*, 4th ed., (Mount Shasta, CA: Shasta Abbey Press, 1999) pp. 205-210. See “*Genjō-koan*” in glossary p. 313 <https://www.shastaabbey.org/pdf/bookZel.pdf>
2. Rev. Master Jiyu knew she was going to be roundly criticized because ‘going’ was not the conventional translation. She describes her dilemma and decision in Chapter 11, “Always Becoming Buddha,” in her *Roar of the Tigress*, Vol. 2 (Shasta Abbey Press, 2005) pp. 177-178. <https://www.shastaabbey.org/pdf/bookRoar2.pdf> According to

Kazuhaki Tanahashi, another well-known translator of Dōgen, the translation of gate as “going” rather than “gone” is not an inaccurate translation; rather, various traditions translate the mantra differently depending on their practice. (See his *The Heart Sutra: A Comprehensive Guide to the Classic of Mahayana Buddhism*, Boulder, Colorado: Shambhala Publications, 2014.)

3. See *Gyōji* (“On Ceaseless Practice”), *Shōbōgenzō*, Rev. Hubert Nearman, trans., (Shasta Abbey Press, 2007) pp. 374-434 <https://www.shastaabbey.org/pdf/shoboAll.pdf>; *Roar of the Tigress*, Vol. 2 (use link above); and “*Uji*,” *Zen is Eternal Life*, pp. 198-204 (use link above).
4. The U.S. Department of Transportation has adopted the tomoei as its symbol. Apparently someone recognized its value for representing the importance of keeping things moving!
5. Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett and Members of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, *Serene Reflection Meditation*, 8th ed. revised (Shasta Abbey Press, 2016) p. 61 <https://shastaabbey.org/pdf/SRM.pdf>

*Transcription and proofreading offered by Dixie Feiner.*

## Verses of Enlightenment

Rev. Master Scholastica Hicks

—*Shasta Abbey, CA–USA*—

*The unsurpassed, penetrating and perfect Truth  
Is seldom met with even in a hundred thousand myriad kalpas.  
Now we can see and hear it, we can remember and accept it;  
I vow to make the Buddha's Truth one with myself.*

Having just recited the lecture verse, my question for us this morning is: How do we think of the Buddha's Truth? "How can we make the Buddha's Truth one with ourselves?" I ask myself this from time to time. "I have made this vow. How do I make the Buddha's Truth one with myself?"

We can think of the Buddha's Truth as enlightenment. It is as simple as that. And when we come across the word enlightenment, what comes to mind? What comes to your mind? What comes to my mind is that if I wish to make the Buddha's Truth one with myself, then it stands to reason, doesn't it, that I need to make enlightenment one with myself.

Dōgen, in his early years, asked the question, "If we are already enlightened, then why do we practice?" And the answer he found, after many years, was that we practice because we are enlightened. And later on, in writing about actualizing enlightenment, he wrote "practice and



enlightenment are one.” Enlightenment isn’t something outside ourselves. It isn’t a one-time experience that we aim for and think that when we’ve accomplished our ‘goal’, we’ll say – “well thank goodness, now I can get on with my life.” That is not enlightenment. Enlightenment is every day practice. It’s realizing the Buddha Nature within, it’s realizing our compassionate heart; it’s realizing that we and all beings are enlightened. Even though chances are – we and they do not always act enlightened.

Reverend Master Jiyu talked about “knowing the Truth within yourself” and that is why we are all here, isn’t it? That is why I live here as a monk. That’s why you come here as a lay sangha, to have some quiet time to look at those things within yourself that perhaps the multiple distractions in your daily life prevent you from looking at. So, what does being enlightened mean for us in our daily practice? If enlightenment and practice are one, then we need to ask our self “what is my practice?” For many of us, it can come down to two very simple words, Precepts and Meditation; because the Precepts encompass all of our daily life, and our daily life encompasses all the Precepts. And meditation allows us the stillness, the non-distractedness to look at where in our life are we practicing the Precepts and where in our daily life are we not practicing the Precepts.

We can think of the Precepts as a circle; a circle that encompasses our life and that we are right in the middle of, whether we realize it or not – that ‘middle of the circle’ being the Buddha’s Truth. And it is up to us to find ways to take

the Buddha's Truth that surrounds us and open up that circle to include all beings – those we know, those we don't know, those we like, those we don't like, those of whom we cannot understand how they can commit such egregious acts – we offer them the Buddha's Truth. So how do we offer that? Well, we offer it by being the Precepts, we offer it by being the four noble truths, by being the four wisdoms. To 'study and understand' all this is not sufficient – we need to allow the self to dissolve so that we may "be" the Buddha's Truth.

So, if we are going to be the Precepts, if we are going to be the four wisdoms, what is it that we need to do? Well, it's pretty simple, really. For a start, we begin letting go of the self. Dropping off body and mind is the way that it is often referred to, quoting Dōgen's teaching. Letting go of everything. For my own self, I have found that is literally true. To let go of the self, for me, means to let go of everything.

Reverend Master Jiyu writes "When we recognize the purity of the Buddha Nature surrounding us, we begin to see things differently. And when we let go of the self, we begin to see things differently."

She says in *Roar of the Tigress Volume II*, "This shows the importance of humility. To drop off our body and mind. To drop off our self." She continues, "to know the truth within yourself from seeing IT, capital IT, within all things; that is enlightenment." To see the Buddha nature within all

things, to see the Buddha nature within ourselves, that is enlightenment.

And she further points out, in a paragraph from *Roar of the Tigress Volume I*:

And when you realize the true extent of this purity and stillness, you realize your position in the scheme of things and you know the awe-fullness of the Unborn. You “see” the world as if through an ever-changing kaleidoscope that can see the Buddha in everything. This is what is meant in the line in our Morning Service scriptures which says “The wooden figure sings and the stone maiden dances.” And the fence posts sing and dance; they all glorify the Eternal. To be able to see the Buddha nature in all things is to be able to see the spirit in all things (for it exists in all things), this is what is meant by enlightenment.<sup>1</sup>

One of the glimpses that I had very early on of enlightenment was the everyday life of Reverend Master Jiyu. She seemed, quite frankly, a very ordinary human being to me. I watched her sit still in the midst of all sorts of conditions. And I watched her and I learned from her. Granted, most of that learning has become clear to me only within the last few years and she passed on more than 20 years ago.

So, here are a few of the things that seem to me to be helpful in my own quest for letting go of the self, for dropping off body and mind, if that is not too pretentious a statement. So what can we do to help our self in this regard? How can we begin to let go? In no particular order, these are some things that I have found helpful:

*Non-complaining all-acceptance.* When something or someone in my own daily life strikes me as being askew with what I think should be happening, I have tended to say “Oh that is a difficult person” or “Oh, that’s a difficult situation.” Now this may seem pretty simplistic but what I have taught myself to do is to say, “Oh, that’s interesting” because when I use the word interesting, it brings up a different emotion and a different feeling for me than when I use the word difficult. The word ‘interesting’ for me has an ‘opening’ effect whereas the word ‘difficult’ is a sort of shutting down. Words have a power of their own; let us learn to pay attention to the words that we use to ourselves and to others. And I try to remember that non-complaining leads into all-acceptance. For me, all-acceptance is encapsulated in the one sentence “All is one and all is different”. And when I can remember that, I am able to make a little bit of progress in non-complaining and all-acceptance.

*Gratitude.* I think that of all our practices, trying to practice gratitude has had the most profound effect in my daily life. There is an inspiring book by the late Oliver Sacks titled “Gratitude.”<sup>2</sup> In it, he talks about keeping a gratitude journal. So now I make it a point when I write at night in my

diary or journal, to think of at least one thing that I can be grateful for and I write it down. Another gratitude reminder is that when I wake up in the morning, I put my hands in *gasshō* and say the three homages and I say “thank you”. I do the same when waking up at night, sometimes in pain or distress, and I find myself saying – “I have a bed to sleep in, thank you”; “I have a room of my own, thank you”; “I have a flush toilet and running water right next door to me”.

Because the more we read and the more we see and the more we hear of what is going on in the outside world, I think I can say that all of us lead a reasonably safe and comfortable life. There’s a lovely quote in *The Book of Joy*: It is not “happiness that make us grateful. It is gratefulness that makes us happy.”<sup>3</sup> And that has certainly been my own experience.

*Bowing.* I am sure you have heard the teaching, “as long as bowing lasts, Buddhism lasts.” And we bow every morning – some of us get down on the floor, some of us kneel, some of us stand-up – it doesn’t matter. What matters is our attitude of mind and our sense of offering our respect and gratitude to the teaching and to the situation that we are in.

*Verses of enlightenment.* A major reminder that has been very helpful to me, in looking at practicing enlightenment in my daily life, are the numerous short verses

that we have in our tradition. And I have come to think of these as ‘verses of enlightenment’.

*The lecture verse* that we recited together is a perfect example; if you said nothing else in the morning other than the closing sentence, “I vow to make the Buddha’s Truth one with myself,” and you repeated that throughout the day, think about how that might change your daily life.

Then there is our *Kesa verse* – “How great and wonderous are the clothes of enlightenment, formless yet embracing every treasure; I wish to unfold the Buddha’s teaching, that I may help all living things.” And please remember, a Kesa is not a requirement for this verse; it can be simply your affirmation of the Truth, and your offering to all beings.

When we do our *mealtime verse* – “We must think deeply of the ways and means by which this food has come; We must consider our merit when accepting it; We must protect ourselves from error by excluding greed from our mind; We will eat lest we become lean and die; We accept this food so that we may become enlightened.” What a wonderful reminder to be mindful and grateful.

We have a *tooth-brushing verse* – “I take the tooth brush that all living things may profit; May they understand the truth quickly and become naturally pure.” Whatever we do, however mundane it may be, we do for the benefit of all beings.

We have a *bathing verse* – “I have cleansed my body; I pray that I may cleanse my heart.” Our routine activities of daily living can become offerings of pure intention.

And of course, *the Bodhisattva verse*:

However innumerable beings may be, I vow to save them all,

However inexhaustible the passions may be, I vow to transform them all,

However limitless the Dharma may be, I vow to comprehend it completely,

However infinite the Buddha’s truth is, I vow to realize it.<sup>4</sup>

There are numerous ways that we can incorporate the practice of enlightenment into our daily life. So I would ask you this question, “how much effort do you wish to put into actualizing enlightenment in your daily life?” Because it is up to us isn’t it? It’s up to me in my life, it is up to you for your life, to each one of us individually to actualize enlightenment in our daily life because right now, this immediate moment is all we have. When we die, we are going to die alone, and that is regardless of how many people and things are surrounding us on our death bed. We don’t know when we are going to die, we don’t know where we are going to die, and we don’t know how we are going to die. All we know is that death is here already, and it just a matter of “when.” So yes, it seems to me that it behooves us to make a daily effort as if, indeed, our hair were on fire.

On the day my own teacher, Reverend Master Jiyu, died, she followed her regular morning schedule and in the afternoon, albeit a bit earlier than usual, she asked to be transferred by wheelchair from her den to the lounge. I received a call about 2 o'clock that afternoon asking me to come down to her house. I did so immediately and I found her unresponsive. Her heart rate was low, her breathing was shallow. I went into the study to call her physician, Dr. Jim Parker in Mount Shasta. While speaking with him, Reverend Master Daizui came in to say that she had passed. I thought later that she passed the way she lived, just leading her ordinary daily life. May we all be so blessed.

Shohako Okamura, remembering the death of his own master Kōshō Ushiyama Rōshi, writes “every day he tried to express his dharma slightly better than he did the day before.” And the day he died, at age 86, he wrote this poem; the title was *Just Bow*:

### Just Bow

Putting my right and left hands together as one, I just bow.  
Just bow to become one with Buddha and God.  
Just bow to become one with everything I encounter.  
Just bow to become one with all the myriad things.  
Just bow as life becomes life. <sup>5</sup>

I watched Reverend Master Jiyu bow to all the things that came to her. I watched her sit still; and I remember how amazed I was that whatever the uncomfortable circumstances in which she found herself, she never failed



to put her hands in gasshō and say “thank you.” May we all follow her example.

Homage to all the Buddhas in all worlds,  
Homage to all the Bodhisattvas in all worlds,  
Homage to the Scripture of Great Wisdom.

*With thanks to Jayson Lavergne for transcribing the talk with much care.*

#### Notes

1. Jiyu-Kennett, Rev. Master. *Roar of the Tigress* Volume I, (Mt Shasta, CA: Shasta Abbey Press, 2000) p.15.
2. Oliver Sacks, *Gratitude*, (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2015)
3. His Holiness The Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, *The Book of Joy*, (New York: Avery, 2016) pp. 242-243: the remainder of the quote, by Brother David Steindl-Rast, is “...Every moment is a gift. There is no certainty that you will have another moment, with all the opportunity that it contains. The gift within every gift is the opportunity it offers us. Most often it is the opportunity to enjoy it, but sometimes a difficult gift is given to us and that can be an opportunity to side up the challenge.”
4. Shohaku Okumura, *Realizing Genjōkoan; The Key to Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō* (Somerville, MA, Wisdom, 2010) p.154.
5. All of the daily verses I’ve quoted, including the Lecture Verse, can be found in the 1976 edition of Roshi Kennett’s *Zen is Eternal Life* (Emeryville, CA, Dharma Publishing) pp. 301-302. The verses are also often available in booklets used in temples of the Order.

## The Donkey in the Well

Rev. Gareth Milliken

—Reading Priory, Berks—UK—

*This was first posted on the Priory website on 14th December 2018*

One day a farmer's donkey fell into the well. It began crying out for help. The farmer tried all he could to work out how to retrieve the poor animal. He finally thought that as the animal was old, and the well needed covering up as it was dry, he would kill two birds with one stone. He went to get help from his neighbours and they all started shovelling in earth to bury the donkey and fill the well.

What happened next surprised everyone. As the earth was shovelled in and started to cover the beast, it calmly just shook the earth from its back and stepped on to the growing pile. As the farmers shovelled and the pile grew, the donkey kept shaking off the dirt and stood atop the mound of earth. Eventually of course the earth and therefore the resilient donkey rose to the top and easily stepped out of the well and trotted off.

There are two things here. First, unintentional consequences. The farmer wasn't exactly acting in the best interests of the donkey, the effects of which were only for

his benefit. To see the world from this fixed point, the point being a sense of a permanent self, he, and also we, end up acting from a mistaken point of view.

The other thing here is that although starting out, so to speak, from a false position, as the scene plays out we can adjust and learn. In other words, see what is happening and then shovel with the intention of releasing the donkey.

One of the joys of training is to see how quickly we can see where something has gone off. Normally when clashes happen or differences of opinion come up, we can carry these around and stew for a long time. A very long time. In practicing we come to a much quicker realisation of where we are and can shift and move to be in line sooner. The joy is in not carrying the suffering but knowing to, and knowing how, to put it down.

The other element of the story is to see that whatever life throws at us we can shake it off and rise above it. We can feel weighed down and covered over by our emotions and feelings. It can all seem too much so we fail to see that we are allowing outside conditions to drive us. The donkey was wise and saw that here was an opportunity. The intention behind the shovelling is immaterial to us turning our life around. The act of doing harm has an effect, but this doesn't have to drive us.

The story doesn't indicate at what point, if at all, the people saw what was happening and then joined in more

positively; let's hope that's the case. Even so, it still shows that one can work with those who are making life difficult and when doing so, the way appears.

The donkey's response was to see what it needed to do and not get bogged down in anxiety, or revengeful feelings. This shows us that the direct route is simpler and clearer. Compassion for the farmer, compassion for the situation and compassion for oneself.

When one finds oneself in a seemingly impossible position where there is no obvious way out and the world seems to be burying you alive, think of the donkey.

## News of the Order

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### Europe

#### Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey

—Northumberland, England—UK—

**Rev. Master Daishin's retirement as abbot:** This winter Rev. Master Daishin stepped down as abbot. He has been suffering with chronic fatigue syndrome for some years. In a public statement he said:

*My time as abbot has been deeply rewarding and I am very glad and grateful to have been able to do it. There is some hope of improvement in my condition and that seems more likely if I take this step now. I plan to remain living in the community at Throssel and also spending some time at our hermitage in Wales, very much as I have been for the last few years. Practice does not end and, as I am able, I hope to continue to offer what teaching I can. Letting go of my role as abbot may actually help enable that. I feel loved and appreciated, both within this community and beyond. I have learned, and am still learning, how the core of life embraces everything, but does not require anything.*

The community of monks and lay sangha alike express our deepest gratitude to Rev. Master Daishin for leading and teaching us during his thirty-six years as Abbot. The monastery has grown and evolved under his direction to become a training monastery for monks and for lay sangha, offering teaching and support to all who wish to train with us.



*Rev. Master Daishin*

***Election of new abbot:*** We were delighted to announce at the beginning of February that Rev. Master Leandra has been elected by the community as our new Abbot. We are indebted to her for her willingness to undertake this demanding role, and we wish her every success as she assumes responsibility and supports the continuing life of the monastery. She has appointed Rev. Master Berwyn as vice abbot.



*Rev. Master Leandra*

***Ceremonies of Induction of our new abbot:*** We celebrated the induction of our new abbot on 20th March. We were touched by the great response to our invitation; six monks from other temples, around 60 of our congregation and some of our neighbours came to join us for this joyful occasion. We all assembled at the bottom of the lane and followed Rev. Master Leandra as she processed up to enter the temple as abbot. She offered incense outside on the courtyard, as we all gathered around, and declared "*The gates of Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey stand open wide. Whilst I remain within this place, this gate shall never be closed to any living thing.*"



*Rev. Master Leandra offering incense at the gate*

A great drum roll sounded as she processed into the ceremony hall where she offered incense and expressed her gratitude to our Founder and guardians of the temple and asked

for their blessings. After the ceremony we all gathered in the dining hall for tea and chocolate cake and much conversation.

The next day, we held the traditional Abbot's Dharma ceremony. Again the drum announced Rev. Master Leandra's entry into the ceremony hall with a precentor and her chaplains. For this ceremony we remove the Buddha statue from the altar and the new abbot ascends to sit there as the Buddha of the temple. She offered incense, taking refuge in all the ancestors of our tradition, previous priests of the temple and her own master, Rev. Master Daishin, then answered a question from each of the monks in turn. She then talked about her life of training with Rev. Master Daishin and what she has learned from this. Thank you to everyone who came to witness these significant ceremonies and for the many warm wishes and congratulations Rev. Master Leandra has received.



*After the Abbot's Dharma ceremony*



**Abbatial Retreat Fund Appeal:** Rev. Master Daishin has gone to the hermitage in Wales for a while, having moved out of the abbot's house where Rev. Master Leandra has now taken up residence. This means we are looking for accommodation to provide for Rev. Master Daishin's and other monks' future needs; possibly an extension to our existing buildings. If you would like to help us raise funds for this expense, we would be most grateful for your support. Details of how to give are on our website here: <http://throssel.org.uk/abbatical-retreat-fund-appeal/>

**Other monastic news:** We welcomed a new postulant to the community on 7<sup>th</sup> February; Will Dee is originally from Sheffield and originally found us through Dragon Bell Temple in Devon. We offer Will our congratulations and wish him well as he continues his training with us.



*Will*

**Winter sangha retreat:** We were grateful to those who came and helped enable the community to have a less structured retreat time in January. A team of lay helpers organised a rota to cook meals and staff the kitchen and also assisted in cleaning other areas of the monastery. The community appreciated the support during our month of reflection, meditation and rest.

We were joined by Rev. Master Baldwin from Dharmatoevlucht and Rev. Master Aiden of Turning Wheel Buddhist Temple in Leicester who both came for a short stay during the month; it was a pleasure to have them with us.

**Festivals:** Our first Festival Sunday of the year was for the Buddha's Renunciation at the beginning of February. Rev. Vivian, visiting us from Shasta Abbey, was celebrant for the festival and gave a talk on the meaning of renunciation. This is now available on our website: <http://throssel.org.uk/dharma-talks/bowing-to-the-great-unborn-by-rev-vivian-gruenenfelder/>

The Festival of the Buddha's Death (Parinirvana) at the end of the month was part of an intensive meditation retreat run by Rev. Master Roland. This powerful ceremony is held in the evening, with the extinguishing of candles to reflect the death of the human being who was the Buddha. The celebrant then brings a flame from the Founder's shrine and relights all the candles on the altars, while the lights are also gradually put on to light up the hall; a clear and moving symbolism of the light of the Buddha's Truth which is never extinguished, even though we all experience the darkness of death.

At the beginning of March, we hold our annual festival to celebrate and give teaching on the life and teaching of Great Master Dōgen. Rev. Master Berwyn will be celebrant for this

ceremony in gratitude to the founder of Sōtō Zen in Japan and author of many of the key works in our tradition, notably the Shōbōgenzō.

—*Rev. Alina*

## Norwich Zen Buddhist Priory

—*Norwich-UK*—

**Recent events:** Our annual Cambridge day retreat on 22nd September was a much appreciated opportunity for the Cambridge and Norwich Sanghas to meet up and practise together. The Dharma talk and the theme for the day was the spaciousness of meditation. Thank you to the members of the Cambridge Group who organised the retreat and ensured it ran smoothly, as well as to those Norwich Sangha members who offered lifts to Cambridge on the day.

On 27th October, there was a well-attended Discussion Morning on training with physical health issues (including pain and ageing). People appreciated the opportunity to talk about difficulties that they had encountered and how they were working with them. We were also able to come up with some helpful suggestions for training in this area.

On 4th November, we celebrated the Priory's fifth anniversary, which included a festival ceremony for the founder of our order, Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett. After the ceremony, we watched some video clips of Rev. Master Jiyu, including footage of her at Throssel in 1972 and her ordination ceremony in Malaysia in 1962.



*Buddha's Enlightenment Festival*

We had a lovely celebration of the Festival of the Buddha's Enlightenment on 2nd December.

Besides it being an opportunity for the Sangha to meet together, we welcomed Rev. Master Olwen, who was visiting the Priory for a few days. She made a significant contribution to the discussion that followed the Dharma talk. Afterwards, we were all able to chat together over a bring-and-share lunch. It was a pleasure to have Rev. Master Olwen stay at the Priory and also to have her company as the two of us drove up together to Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey for the monks' retreat.

Our Christmas meal in mid-December at River Green Cafe in Trowse was well-attended (we even had a waiting list for the occasion). It was a lovely get-together, as we were able to enjoy each other's company in a relaxed setting with some delicious food.



*Christmas meal*

Between Christmas and New Year, the Priory had a brief but very pleasant visit from another monk, Rev. Master Baldwin, the Prior of De Dharmatoevlucht in Apeldoorn in the Netherlands. Along with Sandra Westhoff, a member of the Dutch congregation, he was passing through from the Harwich ferry to Throssel. As neither of them had been to Norwich before, I enjoyed showing them around some of the main sights of the city, including the cathedral.

**Thanks:** I am very grateful to those people who looked after the Priory while I was away in October and December and

especially for enabling the Basic Buddhism Evenings and Dharma Evenings to continue to happen in my absence.

There was a lot of work done during the autumn to tidy up and brighten up the garden. My thanks to everyone who helped with that, as well as to those who donated various plants, shrubs and small trees.

I am grateful too for the following: providing me with a place to have some retreat time in October; producing the Priory's Enlightenment cards; the loan of a bed and bedding for our Dutch visitors; and ongoing assistance with housework, computer and mobile phone queries, and work on the Priory's accounts.

—*Rev. Master Leoma*

## Reading Buddhist Priory

—*Reading, England-UK*—

***School visit:*** On two successive Friday mornings in January, Reverend Gareth visited Langtree School near Reading, to give assemblies on Buddhism to the Lower and Upper schools comprising 600 pupils. He gave a brief outline of Buddhist practice which not only included the Buddha's awakening but also the application of Buddhist practice to everyday life. The pupils experienced a short meditation sitting, and participated in a lively question and answer session. Rev. Gareth had previously visited the school last winter and looks forward to an on-going relationship with the school.

***Cubs Visit:*** On two evenings, the Priory hosted cubs aged between six and ten years old from the local Scout troop, as a way of helping them to earn their Faith badges. On each evening, a sangha member helped out with their spirited question and answer sessions and with general hospitality.

***BBC Radio Berkshire:*** Reverend Gareth is regularly interviewed on local radio, and speaks on aspects of Buddhism and practice on a Sunday morning inter faith programme. In January, he spoke on their topic of New Year Resolutions, and later in the month he was visited and interviewed by the station's roving reporter who went from venue to venue during the mornings broadcast. Each interviewee was given a written riddle to read out. This allowed the listeners to phone or text in to the station and guess the next place on the route. This proved quite high energy, and an entertaining and productive addition to daily routine.

***Festivals and Ceremonies:*** The Priory continues to conduct a regular programme of festivals and ceremonies.



*Kanzeon Festival altar*

The New Year festival was well attended with a number of participants staying over for a retreat in the lead up to the dramatic and moving ceremony of the fanning of the Scripture of Great Wisdom and the tolling of the bell ushering in the New Year. The evening concluded with the sharing of drinks, festive food, and conversation. In early February, the Renunciation Festival was held, followed by tea, a celebration cake, and discussion. The Parinirvana festival will follow at the end of the month, to be held as an evening candle lit ceremony.

***Retreats at the Priory:*** There has been a regular programme of day, half day, and longer weekend drop in retreats. The latter, begun in 2017, gives participants the option to drop in for sats, services and Dharma talks, or to stay over and experience a continuous retreat, ending with a convivial lunch. These retreats are proving popular, with attendees coming from outside the locality as well as from the local sangha.

***Retreats outside the Priory:*** There are three long weekend retreats per year. In the Spring, retreatants from the Reading and Telford Priors, led by Reverend Gareth and Reverend Master Saido, trained together at Brownhill, a peaceful and welcoming Bernadine Monastery in the Cotswolds. Summer and Autumn retreats, led by Reverend Gareth, were held at Alton Abbey, a beautiful nineteenth century Benedictine monastery. A deconsecrated chapel was made available for our use and we were thankful for its cool and contemplative atmosphere during an unusually hot and dry summer. On all retreats, thanks to the wonderful hospitality of the nuns and monks, we were able to enjoy time away in peaceful surroundings, for reflection, Dharma talks, and discussion.

***Group visits:*** Reverend Gareth visits a number of groups in the south of England as visiting monastic. He has recently taken over visiting the London and Milton Keynes groups, in addition to the Isle of Wight group. As part of strengthening ties between groups, lay members from the Priory have joined him where



possible, and members from the wider sangha have been invited to join retreats at the Priory.

***Refurbishments:*** The Meditation Hall has recently been redecorated with the help of lay sangha members. The walls were freshly painted, and thanks to a generous donation, a new carpet was laid, adding to a feeling of light, warmth and welcome.



***In Memoriam:*** Peter Lavin, a long standing member of the Reading sangha died recently, and a memorial service was held on Friday 25th February at the Priory.

—Gina Bovan

## News of the Order

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### Canada and USA

#### Shasta Abbey

—*Shasta Abbey, CA–USA*—

We're glad to report that winter has showed itself in full splendor. Starting the first week in February we've received at least a foot of snow, which is still on the ground mid-month.



**Winter Monastic Retreat:** We wish to express our gratitude for the support of our Winter Monastic Retreat, December 1-8, as well as for the closed period over the month of January. At these times the monastic community has an

opportunity for spiritual renewal and refreshment, which helps us in our practice and sharing of the Dharma throughout the year.

**Holidays:** Autumn and winter ceremonies included the Festival of Thanksgiving on November 22 and the Ceremony of Offering and Gratitude on December 16th. Rev. We celebrated the Buddha's Enlightenment in joyous fashion on December 24 with the Eve of the Festival of the Buddha's Enlightenment followed by a social tea. The Festival of the Buddha's Enlightenment took place on December 25. More than 20 guests joined us in celebrating the arrival of 2019 during the New Year's Celebratory Retreat. Retreatants have expressed gratitude for this retreat as an opportunity to reflect on the past year and welcome the new year in a contemplative way, and we're glad to be able to offer this.

**New Teacher of Buddhism:** Rev. Master Meian presented her disciple, Rev. Valora Midtdal, with purple vestments and a Teacher of Buddhism Certificate at evening tea on December 25. As is the custom for new senior monks here, Rev. Valora was the Celebrant for Morning Service on December 28, which was also the eighth anniversary of her Ordination. We congratulate Rev. Master Meian and Rev. Valora on this important occasion and wish them both the very best.

**Travels and Visits:** We were happy to welcome Rev. Master Haryo Young, Head of the Order, in mid-December after his visit to U.K. and other European temples. It is great to have him here as he offers spiritual support and wisdom, and he kindly fixes broken items – anything from computers to boilers.

We said farewell to Rev. Valeria Allison of Dragon Flower Mountain in December, with gratitude for her help and the example of her training. Rev. Master Aurelian of the same temple arrived in February for a couple of months' visit.

Rev. Master Oriana LaChance and Rev. Leon Kackman arrived for an all-too-brief visit of two days in February.

**Retreats:** Introductory Retreats continue to be well-attended. Rev. Master Haryo led a lively discussion with the February retreat guests, many of whom were young people, to get an idea of what they see our monastery as doing for them.



*Introductory Retreat guests sorting newspapers for burning*

**Friends of Shasta Abbey:** Laurie Ottens, Manager of the Shasta Abbey Buddhist Supplies Shop, worked hard on improvements to the shop during the month of January. The first project was to install and set up a new system for Point of Sale and Quick Books, to replace the old system which had failed. The Friends of Shasta Abbey are grateful to the help they received from JEDI, a local organization that aids small business development. The second project was a thorough cleaning and reorganization of the gift shop by Laurie, culminating in a fine clearance sale.



*Shop Manager Laurie Ottens*

We're also grateful to Steve Larson and Monte Bloomer for their work on repairing the heating system in the Sangha House.

**Animal News:** Rev. Master Ando, with the assistance of long-time congregation member Rosemary Dyke, blessed all the dogs and cats at the Siskiyou County Humane Society Shelter in Mt. Shasta in December. Each cat and dog received a special blessing with their name and the Three Homages. Rosemary made the dogs very happy by feeding them a generous supply of dog biscuits while they were being blessed.

Our dog Zady is recovering well from knee surgery, and she continues to enjoy walking with Rev. Enya.



*Zady*

Theodore, a handsome male tabby less than a year of age, turned up between the Kitchen and the Achalanatha House when the weather turned cold. We were able to catch him, and he's now warm, well-fed, and living with Rev. Master Shikō.

Rev. Master Oswin was the Celebrant at a recent memorial ceremony for Mocha Dog, the companion of Xuan Bieh Dao who requested the ceremony.

—*Rev Margaret*

## Columbia Zen Buddhist Priory

— *Columbia, SC–USA* —

It was a delight to have Rev. Master Haryo visit us for a week in December. His presence during our monthly workday, as well as our Sunday morning and Wednesday evening meetings gave our congregation the chance to experience a tangible and deeper connection to the OBC which, given our geographic isolation, can seem a little abstract at times. His kind responses to

the many questions were thought provoking, and deeply appreciated. Many in the congregation worked hard to make him feel welcome. He also busied himself around the Priory repairing and tweaking all manner of things. We will miss his presence, his teaching and his maintenance skills. We are grateful for his visit and help. If others who are connected with the OBC find themselves in our area, you are most welcome to visit.

On December 19th we held an interfaith memorial service for R. Henry Parrish, who had died on November 6th after a very long and debilitating illness. He was the father of Marianne Parrish Florian, one of our congregation. She brought a number of family and friends who seemed to appreciate our efforts. Some family drove hundreds of miles to attend.

We are also grateful for the continued workday and other support of our congregation, as well as all of the offerings we receive, including the regular fulfilling of our online alms bowl requests.

We continue to have our regular morning and evening meditation and services, emphasizing our Wednesday evening and Sunday morning services and festivals. We also have monthly Saturday morning work days and quarterly retreats. We are the only OBC temple on the East Coast of the US, and those within a “convenient” distance are most welcome to join us. For those with no previous contact with the OBC, we have orientations to our practice on most Fridays at 6 pm.

Please see the Orientation page on our web site.  
<https://columbiazen.org/coming-to-the-priory/orientation/>

## Lions Gate Buddhist Priory

—*Lytton, British Columbia–Canada*—

After a busy summer and autumn, we settled down to the peace and quiet of winter. We have been happy to welcome a number of visitors this winter from Victoria BC, Vancouver BC, Edmonton Alberta, and the local area. Some came for a day visit, and others stayed longer, Visitors are always welcome, whether you are coming “for tea” or an extended stay.

We continued with our calendar of ceremonies and retreats throughout the winter, Ceremonies included Founders Day, Remembrance Day, Buddha’s Enlightenment, a New Year’s Eve meditation vigil and ceremony, and Maitreya in early January. On Remembrance Day, November 11, we rang the temple bell 100 times at sundown, joining the local Lytton churches and many churches throughout the world who did this to mark the 100th anniversary of the ending of the First World War. We held two retreats in November, the last of our public retreats for the year, and a winter monastic retreat in early December, which ended with the Buddha’s Enlightenment ceremony.

On Sunday, October 7, Rev. Master Kōten gave the Buddha’s Precepts in the Ceremony of Lay Ordination to Panda Ruth Jerry. Panda lives in Thunder Bay, Ontario, and she was unable to travel the great distance to the Priory, so the ceremony was done over the internet via Skype. Computer monitors were placed so that both the Celebrant and the Ordinee could see each other. It was the first time we have done a lay ordination using this technology, and we discovered that it was a smooth and seamless process. Several of the local congregation were present, and Panda had some friends at her place as witnesses. As well, Rev. Helen, Prior of Redding Zen Buddhist Priory in California, and several of the Redding congregation witnessed the ceremony through Skype. Afterwards Rev. Master Kōten offered a short Dharma Talk on the meaning of the Precepts and how to keep them. Our



warmest congratulations go out to Panda, and we wish her success in her ongoing training as a Buddhist.

Rev. Master Kōten participated in two public talks with his friend, Lama Tsewang. The first one was held in Kelowna BC at the Yoga House, and the second one was in Vancouver at Bridge and Enrich. The talks were entitled “Old Friends: A Dialogue with the Zen and Tibetan Traditions of Buddhism.” Both talks were well-attended and well-received, with many excellent questions and discussion involving both monks and the audience. Our thanks to Peter Robinson in Kelowna and Supriti Bharna in Vancouver for their work in facilitating this.

In late October, Rev. Aurelian traveled to see the Edmonton Buddhist Meditation Group. He offered Dharma Talks at their regularly scheduled meditation meetings, led a retreat, and met with people for individual spiritual counselling. Thank you to everyone who helped make this visit a success.

In mid-December, we were very happy to welcome back Rev. Valeria who had been away at Shasta Abbey for six months. On December 30, Reverend Master Kōten presented her with her purple vestments, naming her as a Teacher of Buddhism within the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives. Many people attended this presentation, including friends from the local community who have come to know Rev. Valeria over the years. We offer her our sincere congratulations and best wishes on this next step in her training.

The construction crew from Skeetchestn First Nations Band arrived on October 27 to begin building Mandala Hall, our new building on Fearlessness Peak. Within a few days the concrete foundation had been poured. The posts, beams, walls, and roof went up after that. Basic construction was finished by early December. We had originally contracted with Skeetchestn to construct the building shell, but they have since offered to put up the outside siding. We will still need to finish the interior (walls and floors) and install a heating system and lights. The design of

the building is based on the traditional pit-houses that the First Nations people of the area built for winter dwelling. It is 12-sided, and 520 square feet in area, containing four windows and a skylight, and its design and lighting seems to give one a feeling of “lifting spirits” and spaciousness when entering. It looks right at home next to the large Kwan Yin statue on Fearlessness Peak.



Mandala Hall will be used for ceremonies, private retreats, meditation and accommodation for overnight guests, and we are hoping to use it as a prototype for future monastic buildings.

We have been busy with a number of small projects around the property this winter. Last year we had to cut down a number of small-to-medium sized maple and poplar trees, and we gathered

these up and brought them down to Bodhidharma Hall to cut up for firewood. We prepared the grape vines and other garden plants for winter, winterised Prajnatarā Hall (our meditation hall), gathered rocks and gravel to “pave” part of the access roads, and burned brush piles. Also, our lay resident John and visitor Devon built a very nice railing for the stairs leading to the outhouse at the end of the deck.

***New Publication:*** We recently published a booklet entitled “The Five Diamond Points.” This is a transcript of a series of Dharma Talks by the same name offered by Rev. Master Kōten in 2017. Rev. Master Kōten talks about “the five diamond points that penetrate to the heart of the matter;” namely, a soft and flexible mind, the use of the will to turn the wheel, faith, meditation, and experience and realisation of the Unborn. If you would like a copy of this book, please contact us and we will be happy to send you one.

—Rev. Master Aurelian

## Wallowa Buddhist Temple

—Joseph, Oregon – USA –

***Passing of the Temple Cat:*** On January 16th, Mama Cat Kiyoshi, our dear friend and the temple’s only remaining cat, died at the age of 16. Both monks spent precious time with her that day, witnessing the wonder of her opening to the dying process and gradually letting go. Her life of training continues to be an inspiration to all who benefited from her ever-deepening trust and the kind and wise regard she offered us by her presence. Revs. Meidō and Clairissa held her funeral on a snowy January 18th, followed by her burial in the temple’s animal cemetery next to the grave of her son, Peri. A kind neighbor had come the day before with a pick-axe and large blow torch to break through the frozen ground down to softer soil for her grave.



*Mama Cat Kiyoshi, who died on January 16, 2019*

(photo by Adele M. Buttolph)

***Ceremonies:*** On November 22nd, Rev. Clairissa offered an animal ordination and naming ceremony for Tucker, an abandoned six-week-old kitten who unexpectedly scampered out from under the temple's porch on an icy day. After a vet visit and several days of retreat at the temple (during which he was occasionally allowed out of his room by Mama Cat to explore) the exceedingly friendly Tucker went to live in a cozy home with two other welcoming cats and a kind person who fell in love with him instantly upon seeing his photo.



*Tucker, in Rev. Meidō's arms –so named for his voracious appetite and his endearing tendency to “tuck” himself into people's arms and hearts*

On New Year's Eve, sixteen of us joined together to silently and joyously welcome in the new year, with meditation followed by a formal ceremony in which Rev. Master Meidō revolved The Scripture of Great Wisdom. On New Year's Day, the temple hosted a lively Open House welcoming all in our congregation, neighborhood and community who wished to ring the temple bell and toast with sparkling apple juice in celebration of the incoming year.

On January 9th, Rev. Meidō was celebrant for a memorial service for the father of one of the congregation, who passed away at 85.

***Retreat Guests:*** Two local folks came, one in December and one in January, for individual retreats, both grateful for the opportunity this gave them to deepen their practice.

Many Visitors: Once again the annual closing of the temple in February to give the monks time for rest and retreat made January a particularly full month. Many congregation members and temple friends from the community arranged times to visit individually, before the temple closed.

**Tractor:** We are very grateful for the generous loan of a sturdy 25 horsepower Ford tractor, offered by local friends of the temple for us to use this winter to help in clearing snow and keeping the long, steep, icy driveway graveled. It is proving to be a real workhorse and a great help as the winter storms keep coming.



*The Ford 1700, on loan for the winter.*

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

—Rev. Master Meidō and Rev. Clairissa

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**MT:** Whitefish

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*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

This Journal is published quarterly by the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, which was founded by the late Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett. The Order is dedicated to following the tradition of Serene Reflection Meditation. The main offices of the OBC are at Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey in England and Shasta Abbey in the US.

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

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

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*Information on the OBC generally is available on the website: <http://obcon.org/>*

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