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Founders Shrine at Dharmazuflucht

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CONTENTS:

A Stand of Alders	5
<i>Rev. Wilfrid Powell</i>	
Do We Hear the Call?	34
<i>Rev. Elinore Agnew</i>	
The Way of Faith	44
<i>Rev. Master Kinrei Bassis</i>	
The Koan Appears Naturally	52
<i>Willie Grieve</i>	
A Meditation in a Time of Fracture	58
<i>Tom Kirwan</i>	
<u>OBC News</u>	60
<u>News: USA & Canada</u>	60
<u>News: Europe</u>	73
Temples of the Order	90
Further information	93



New statue at The Place of Peace Dharma House

A Stand of Alder Trees

Rev. Wilfrid Powell

—Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey—UK—

(I am grateful to the people who kindly read through earlier versions of this article, and for their very helpful suggestions.)

*“When all the living see, at kalpa’s end
The conflagration when it is burning,
Tranquil is this realm of mine,
Ever filled with heavenly beings,
Parks, and many palaces
With every kind of gem adorned,
Precious trees full of blossoms and fruits...
My Pure Land will never be destroyed,
Yet all view it as being burned up,
and grief and horror and distress
Fill them all like this.” The Lotus Sutra ¹*

“Are you alright?” At the end of July, a number of us were working outside on the necessary and long overdue thinning out of the spruce trees around the bottom car park. The weather was dry, very warm and with a slight breeze – perfect for the job. But we were slowing down because John using the saw and wearing thickly-padded protection

trousers, kept stopping. Thus the question. Waiting for it to be sorted out, I looked around, and noticed a stand of our mature alder trees. We'd planted dozens in our lower fields originally, as alders like having their roots in wet, boggy ground. But now they are struggling, many with very few leaves, some have died even, as our lower fields are slowly drying out. John replied to the effect that he was fine, but that he kept over-heating and it didn't feel safe to keep working. Although he was working in the shade and only wearing a thin linen shirt on his top, you could see the sweat literally running off him; I hadn't seen that before.

Even here in the far north of England, you can see the signs; something is going on. A few days later, we heard that week had been the end of the hottest month ever recorded in Britain, with the national temperature record broken.²

These two things reminded me of a report³ recently come my way which I had been meaning to look at, so I sat down to read it. Of the two Australian authors, one was previously a senior executive at Shell, and past chairman of the Australian Coal Association; and the foreword's author was an admiral, former chief of the Australian Defence Force, and currently a member of the Global Military Advisory Council on Climate Change. They had sifted through a lot of recent work on climate change. They quoted, "*Climate scientists may err on the side of 'least drama', whose causes may include adherence to the scientific norms of restraint, objectivity and scepticism, and may under predict or down-play future climate changes.*"^{3a} Borrowing

from another study for the Washington-based Centre for Strategic and International Studies, they quoted “*In 2007, security analysts warned that, in the two previous decades, scientific predictions in the climate-change arena had consistently under-estimated the severity of what actually transpired.*”⁴ The Australians went on to say that even if all countries *did* keep to the commitments they made in 2015⁵, and managed to keep global warming to under 3°C by 2100, this commitment ignores the growing relevance of the long-term carbon-cycle feedbacks in exacerbating warming⁶. They sketched out a scenario for 2050 based on the ‘severe’ end of possible developments (i.e. there are less severe scenarios too), and they quoted again: “*Climate change now represents a near-to-mid-term existential threat to human civilisation...in high-end [my emphasis] scenarios, the scale of destruction is beyond our capacity to model, with a high likelihood of human civilisation coming to an end.*”^{3b} This was based on CO² emissions peaking in 2030 and then falling, resulting in a rise in temperature of 2.4°C, but with the extra 0.6°C added by the feedbacks.

They did hold out some hope however: “*A short window of opportunity exists for an emergency, global mobilisation of resources. The global effort to address climate change should be akin to a wartime level of response. It is essential to build a zero-emissions industrial system very quickly.*”³

I picked up another article by way of cross-referencing and read, “*It’s appropriate to be scared.*”⁷ came the

respected voice closer to home of David King⁸, adding, “*We predicted temperatures would rise, but we didn’t foresee these sorts of extreme events [extreme heat-waves and hurricanes] we’re getting so soon.*” Elsewhere he made it crystal clear: “*This is the most serious challenge humanity has ever had to face up to. Time is no longer on our side. What we continue to do, what we do that is new, and what we plan to do over the next 10-12 years will determine the future of humanity for the next 10,000 years.*”⁹

This degree of seriousness may remind you of the experience of some other past Sōtō practitioners. There’s the first native Chinese Ancestor in our lineage Taiso Eka, the chief monastic heir of Bodhidharma, who in 577 AD, witnessed his country invaded wholesale, and, quite feasibly, was one of the many monks summoned to come to the main square of his own capital city, to listen to the conquering emperor, in person, read out the imperial edict that out-lawed Buddhism throughout the empire. Within a year, almost all temples and shrines had been levelled, all scriptures and records burned, and monastics either laicized, conscripted into labour/military service, or simply killed outright. It is likely that Eka, then aged ninety, fled for his life to the safety of the southern Chinese empire.

Then there is Dōgen, who brought Sōtō Zen from China to Japan. Born in 1200 AD, he found himself in a nation in which it was widely believed throughout all layers of Japanese society that since 1052 AD they had entered what was termed the ‘*Age Of Mappo*’.¹⁰ An unrelenting litany of

fires, earthquakes, epidemics, war, famines and murders only served to reinforce this belief. There was a very deep sense of the pointlessness and wretchedness of human existence that pervaded all layers of his society, along with the belief in the inability of anyone or any group of people to do anything about it. And Dōgen's response to all of that? None of this can stop you realizing what Shakyamuni Buddha realized. (Welcome to Zen.)

Coming closer to our own time; by June 1940, German domination of much of Europe was almost complete, with many of the foundations for the thousand-year Nazi Reich in place. Britain, then fighting on alone, was waiting for imminent invasion. Peggy Kennett¹¹ (who in later life became the Founder of our Order) was then sixteen when the new Prime Minister gave one of his most famous speeches: *“Upon this battle depends the survival of... civilization... our own British life, and the long continuity of our institutions ... The whole fury and might of the enemy must very soon be turned on us... if we fail, then the whole world.... including all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new Dark Age made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted science.”* The Battle of Britain began soon afterwards, followed by the Blitz. Peggy later wrote of this time, *“I am sixteen, the war rages, my father is dead, the bombs fall everywhere...”*¹² It's easy today to take the existence of the OBC for granted; however for Peggy *“...the sea is a dirty grey, railed in by barbed wire; someone grabs me and pushes me over the parapet of the promenade while a 'plane dives down and sprays it with*

machine-gun-fire – someone holds me close to the parapet – I do not know him – in all this horror, does love still exist?”^{12a} There may be some small comfort to know that we are not the first generation of Sōtō practitioners to have very serious reasons to wonder about the future.

In all of these situations, what happened was restricted to different degrees by the constraints of geography. At the same time, today there are well-respected voices who consider artificial intelligence posing a bigger threat to humans than global warming; there’s also the fact we have yet to fully solve the *koan* of weapons of mass destruction. Further, do you remember watching Gordon Brown talking in late 2008 as the fuller global extent and possible consequences of the unfolding banking crisis hit? The then Prime Minister looked frightened. Having said that, in our situation now, what is unprecedented is the number of apparently unconnected events occurring across all continents, at the current rate of one a week¹³, and the accumulating total of the effects. *“I have a sense of the numbing inevitability of it all,”*¹⁴ commented another respected climate scientist. Particularly disturbing increasing land and ocean temperatures, rising sea levels and extreme weather events are the known as the **predictable** side of climate change.

What then might the **unpredictable** side be? This comes from a Declaration¹⁵ published in November this year: *“Especially worrisome are potential irreversible climate tipping points...and nature’s reinforcing feedbacks”*^{6a}

(atmospheric, marine, and terrestrial) that could lead to a catastrophic 'hothouse Earth', well beyond the control of humans. All of the indicators in our paper are heading in the wrong direction and we are clear in advocating for global action against what we are calling a climate emergency."^{15a} With 10,997 more scientists from 152 more countries signing it than the first report above, this had reached the same conclusion. One London University researcher commented that the Australians' report added to the deep concerns expressed by security experts such as the Pentagon¹⁶ over climate change.

Unlike even warfare then, it looks like part of the consequences of what has been put into motion is already beyond our ability to control; *"With European heat-waves, we have realised that climate change is a total game-changer. It has increased the likelihood (of events) by an order of magnitude."*¹⁷ Certain gases in the atmosphere have a similar effect as glass in a greenhouse; sunlight can pass through them into the greenhouse, but the heat is blocked from escaping, in the Earth's case into space, and carbon dioxide (CO²) is one of them. But how did we get to this point? Here is the clue from an unexpected source. A very recently discovered entry in the Mining Congress Journal of America suggests that some working in the field were already aware of the likely consequences of the continued burning of fossil fuels and resultant release of CO² and could see that *"the temperature of the earth's atmosphere will increase and that vast changes in the climate of the earth will result. Such changes in temperature will cause the melting*

of the polar ice caps, which in turn, would result in the inundation of many coastal cities including New York and London.”¹⁸ And the date of that Journal? 1966.

Buddhism does not encourage false hope, seek to assuage fears, or propound wishful tales of optimism. It is sober, it is realistic and looks to see what can be done. Although there is the argument it would be better for all the other species if our particular one did permanently disappear from the stage, for the purposes of this article, I am going to set that thought aside. So, in terms of the opening quotation from *The Lotus Sutra*, as we see more and more ‘*precious trees*’ burning, do we just sit back and watch it happen? If your answer to that is no, what then could those “many kinds of gems” mentioned in the quotation be? I suggest they are a number of powerful tools a lot nearer to hand than we might realise.

Firstly, we keep sitting going, and we keep up our practise; there is something to learn from “*Keep calm and carry on.*” We keep breathing, we keep bringing ourselves right back to where we actually are, whatever is going on.

Second, we have a number of fingers which we can use again and again and again to turn off that un-needed light, put the computer on standby when it’s better to, turn the radiator down one setting etc. etc; “*All foolish seem and dull...*”¹⁹ That’s right, and they who practice this in this way are directly helping in the most powerful and immediate way possible; by just not using the energy in the first place.

Third, we have a wallet. If you have stocks or shares in holdings, or funds in banks any of whose investments are in companies whose activities are contributing to global warming, there are ways in which you can challenge that. There may already a shareholder action group that is applying pressure. If change is not forthcoming are you willing to dis-invest?²⁰ If you feel on your own with this, take heart; by the end of 2018, “...over 1,000 investment institutions with almost US\$8 trillion in assets under management had committed to divest from the world’s largest oil, coal and gas companies...”²¹ The investment consultant quoting this fact noted that the direction of travel on moving to a lower carbon world was clear, whilst also noting that the commitment to divest is not the same thing as actually having divested.²¹ On this point, the action by the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas in taking shareholder action on behalf of the 9,000 nuns it represents to try and force the world’s largest asset manager, Blackrock, to take action on climate change is a very recent example of the application of such pressure.²²

Fourth, we have our eyes; with which we can keep looking, to see, and to read. If something seems to make sense, we can try it out: smaller vehicle engines, looking for the energy ratings on all new electrical goods for example; can you afford to switch electricity providers to one that is supporting renewable forms of generation? In Buddhism we don’t leave it to others, but neither does it help to become obsessive about ...anything.

Fifth, our power of speech. Using language with care and within the Precepts, after thinking about it for ourselves – that’s a real contribution just in itself.

Sixth, we have a powerful mind with a keen intellect with which we can sift and analyse information. Part of this is being willing to use our own critical faculties.

Seventh, our scepticism. We’re well advised not to ignore evidence, even if it contradicts what we are thinking – even sure about; look at it carefully yourself – and also, who is behind it? Reports down-playing climate risks that are backed by a body with a vested interest in fossil fuels are one and more obvious side of it. The actions of *Extinction Rebellion* (‘ER’) on the other side have helped push awareness of the severity of the climate challenge close to the top of the political agenda in a short space of time, and ER deserve credit for that, but what was behind one of its founders saying to one audience “*we are not just sending out e-mails and asking for donations. We are going to force the governments to act. And if they don’t, we will bring them down and create a democracy fit for purpose...*”²³?

Eighth, we have our instincts. There’s no need to lose valuable time and precious energy – and upset yourself – by moving into blaming others too much, or finding fault with them. If others try to bait you by telling you, for example, there is no point in trying to do anything because of all the coal being burned in China, you simply do not have to pick

up the challenge, if you don't wish too, or are too tired. Why put yourself through it? We have much more choice as to what we do with our speech than we very often realise.

Ninth, we have the deep help from the regular study of our Precepts. The advice on not copying others from the Tenth, for example, can cover not repeating others' clever-sounding words of despair, or all-encompassing phrases, or undefeatable logic. In company, it probably does not help to keep to keep bringing **the** subject up, especially with a mind of worry or agitation, which can cause others to start avoiding you. If others do the former, you do not have an obligation to join in; you can just change the subject if you wish to, or move elsewhere. Or, however outraged you may feel, remembering that anger is an affliction, primarily to you, so trying not add on with thought, leaves you with the raw feeling, which though powerful and often disturbing, is easier to sit still within, and nearer to the heart of the matter, for you.

Tenth is minding our own business, which is important in practice. There are times to speak directly and plainly, but it doesn't help to keep pointing the finger at everyone else, or become an environmental 'vigilante', by implying or telling other people they should become vegans, for example. We need to take care not to be drawn into polarisation with others or just within our own minds; for like the other two Poles, it's a cold and inhospitable place to live.

Eleventh, we can draw inspiration and help from continuing to recite or read our scriptures. The *Sandokai*'s “*With the ideal comes the actual*”^{19a} just in itself, can steer you away from mountains of unnecessary suffering. Ideals can be very useful in pointing direction, but as we move forward, we need to keep a close eye on the emerging actual, rather than cementing into place the ideal. Doing the latter is what we call delusion, and is an immediate invitation to more suffering. And, there is ambiguity. It is not always somehow ‘wrong’ in and of itself for example, to use a plane to travel; yet the new, broadly accepted idea to tax more heavily those who fly more than twice a year shows the increasing direction of acceptability.

Twelfth, we have methods within our tradition, to help us remain grounded within very trying situations. They really help: we can recite the *Invocations of the Removal of Disasters*²⁴, *Invocation to Achalanatha*²⁵ and to *Mahakala*²⁵ any time, any place. We can offer the merit of the meditation period or the day's training to perhaps, all those working to solve this problem, or to all beings that are affected by it, or both. We can cultivate gratitude for what we do have, which includes having some time left; if we have ‘broken fences’ with others, we can try to mend them. Also how can you help the local temple, meditation group, monk? Nothing is perfect, and all of those are likely to become increasingly important points of refuge and stability as the pages of the calendar keep turning.

Thirteenth, there is the influence of our own actions which really do speak as loud as, or louder than words. Contrast seeing a sixteen year-old schoolgirl risking her own safety, by sailing in a yacht for two weeks across the Atlantic to the Climate Conference in New York, and then back again to the next conference in Spain, rather than using a plane, with the backlash following the A-listers and celebrities who reportedly arrived in 114 private jets and a flotilla of super-yachts, the latter burning 300 gallons of diesel per hour, in Sicily a little later, for the Google Camp Conference on Climate Change. And who were then chauffeured around the island in Maserati SUVs. If we are not seen to make sacrifices ourselves, how can we hope others might be willing to do so?

Fourteenth is the value of keeping a soft and flexible mind. Perspectives can sometimes change very swiftly. Nuclear fission, for example, was seen several decades ago by environmentalists as the *bête noir*, and some called for its immediate shut-down, replacing it foremost with coal-fired generation, whilst renewables were developed. Although certainly not problem-free, nuclear could now be one of the very few means we have to keep some highly energy-dependent and complex societies going, buying us extremely precious time to complete massive, wholesale transition to fossil-free. Even so, in 2017 new offshore wind power became cheaper than new nuclear power for the first time in Britain, and at one point in 2018, low-carbon energy was, for the first time, used to generate more than half of the

electricity used in our country. The proportion of electricity generated by renewables in Britain grew to 33% in 2018.

Fifteenth, we have a vote which we can use well in this context, every time there is any form of election. It isn't easy to get to the bottom of things, but we can do our best; are promises 'green-wash', or do you think those promising really mean it, and will carry them out? And how does this aspect fit in with the overall political choice you will have to make? Are you considering tactical voting? If so, it's probably worth doing your own brief research first on how the votes added up in your constituency the last few times, rather than take someone else's word for it.

Sixteenth, we have curiosity and an ability to dig deeper for the truth of matters. Let's take up that challenge thrown at you about the Chinese and their coal-burning. It is true the planned new coal-fired capacity in China is nearing three times the entire electrical generation capacity of Britain, yes; and that the former comes on top of the already very considerable coal-fired capacity already there, yes. *If* all that new capacity comes on stream, it will be very detrimental, yes. But, there is a struggle going on now within China between various layers of government about firstly, whether to actually build any, or how much of that new capacity, and secondly, how much to use it even if it is built. In addition the country is leading in developing coal-burning in a radically cleaner way. So that challenge to you is actually not as accurate as presented. Yes, overall, coal consumption is still increasing there for the time being, and there is a slow-

down in the rate of that growth.²⁶ The government of that country are not fools; in their efforts to reduce air pollution, China is set to play a major role in offshore wind's long-term growth. The technology is especially useful to them, as huge wind-farms can be built near the major population centres spread around the east and south of the country. So, if you experience perplexity around something like this, perhaps it is because there is a lot of complexity, and we are busy people with a lot of other things we are responsible for, and to do.

Seventeen is keeping some kind of eye on the evolving picture helping prevent us becoming out-dated, seeming even irrelevant, in conversation or debate. But I suggest there's no need to be drowned in the information. If you feel that you are 'going under' that's very likely a warning sign to you to stop. At the same time, some of what you find out can unexpectedly cheer you up. For example, there are solar farms being built, some already finished, on a vast scale in various countries, with the panels converting sunlight into electricity; the most recent one completed in China will power up to two million homes. Another example: trees absorb and store CO², there are tree-planting projects underway in various parts of the world on a staggering scale, with the current record held by India for 50 million trees in 2016; the Great Northern Forest project across lower northern England should see 50 million trees planted *in that area alone* by 2042. Further, the Hornsea off-shore wind farm under construction off the coast from Hull in Yorkshire will be the largest in the world, and could power up to 1.3

million homes when commissioned in 2022.²⁷ It is true that the gas SF6 most often used in the middle of each turbine is hugely detrimental to the warming-problem; but the problem is recognised, and alternatives are already being deployed.^{28,29} With human population increasing by over 200,000 every *day*, some uncomfortable choices about power-generation are going to have to be made.

Eighteenth is keeping our own wits about us, an example here being the choice to enter the realm of environmental action, were you to do so. There seemed an unusual initial leeway allowed to the ER protesters in London this April in the almost carnival-like atmosphere they created there with actions such as numbers of people blocking roads by doing exercises on their mats or placing trees in pots across roads. But as the more recent fortnight of protests got underway in October, the surrounding tone altered with the Met. Police issuing a city-wide ban on their actions. Although the ban was later successfully challenged in the High Court and the police found to have exceeded their powers, hundreds of people had meanwhile been arrested. One person present the whole fortnight told me of a number of protesters who were pretty unhappy about being put under pressure by some ER activists to become arrested, when they had never volunteered for it in the first place. If you do want to be arrested, have you thought through the consequences? Being photographed, finger-printed, your DNA taken, and then *“I spent 16 hours in a cell. You’re in this tiny metre-wide space, and you go slightly mad,”* said one young man.³⁰ After that a permanent police record. If you decide to carry

a placard, perhaps check it first – is there a *political* slogan on it that you don't wish to condone? The sense you are standing up for what is right can release untapped reserves within, which combined with the sense of being in the right often acts as a powerful intoxicant, which can cloud the subtleties of good judgement needed, especially with others around you similarly affected. From the point of practice it is very important to be aware of such feelings and thoughts and to be clear with yourself about the need to be still within them.

Nineteenth is dignity. There is a place for this for all of us, whatever happens. This is especially true if you move into the public arena.

Twentieth is keeping our sense of humour, which is important, and usually appreciated by others.

Twenty-first is acceptance. Having come this far, none of the above gives the right to succeed. This bit is rough. There are people, animals, places, values, things we care about very deeply. But even if all of us in our country did everything possible in our hands from this moment onwards, **if** that planned new coal-fired capacity in China, or a number of other countries, is activated and not burned in a radically cleaner way, the savings we had all made would be wiped out. There is virtually nothing you can do to affect that; **and** there are individuals, movements, and institutions doing their best to bring pressure to bear on those situations.

At the same time it is always *Here, Now* and *This. This* kettle with too much water, this choice to use our car when we could have taken a train, this shower lasting twenty minutes rather than five, etc.etc. There is much inspiration from Dōgen’s phrase “*shishi-funjin*”; which conveys the effort of someone more than up to the task in hand, but who nonetheless devotes themselves entirely to it.³¹ Everything we can do, and that is good for us to do, we do. In Zen, we clear up our own backyard first.

Twenty-second is hope based in realism. The authors of the Declaration^{15b} mentioned earlier said they were encouraged by a recent surge of concern over global warming, citing the student-led ‘*Fridays for Future*’, and ER, amongst other grass-root movements, and pointed out that the individual changes that ordinary people make in their day-to-day lives will have larger scale impacts. (Everything we can do, we do.) Such changes, they continued, would influence policy makers, business communities and governments to really start taking the much bigger steps that are needed, globally. There are many visible signs which give cause for some hope, and there seems no need to waste time and energy by trying to re-invent a wheel, by coming up with a ‘Buddhist’ response. The wheel is already invented and is rolling; probably better to work together with others to strengthen an existing spoke.

Although our monastery lies in the fairly quiet, rural county of Northumberland, even here, following requests from campaign groups, June this year saw our county

council declare a climate emergency, vowing to make the county carbon-neutral by 2030. Unveiling its plan this December, it proposed a further £3million spending for climate action including a hydro-electric station in Hexham, renewable heating schemes, significant tree-planting, and making trains and buses more attractive to use. It said it wanted to team up with world-leading expert and industry leaders to make a real difference.³² September saw the council of our nearest town, Hexham, agree unanimously to recognise there was a climate emergency and it outlined a 19-point plan to become carbon-neutral, also by 2030. An obvious shift in awareness is taking place, but to have any effect, it's just this kind of realistic planning and determined action which has to follow, and keep following. Otherwise we just have an admixture of pangs of concern, worry and conscience, in part reacting to a continually rolling news story.

Twenty-third is remembering everything is impermanent, including the causes of global warming. Despite the (slowing) increase in coal-burning in China and some other countries, globally, electricity production from coal is on track to fall by around 3% in 2019, which if confirmed at the end of the year would be the largest drop on record.³³ Based on current and projected policies the global capacity of offshore wind generation is set to increase fifteen-fold by 2040, and in Europe will soon be cheaper than natural-gas fired generation, with the cost of its installation falling by 40% over the next decade.³⁴ Britain has the three largest off-shore wind farms in the world, and 44% of all the

country's electricity was provided by wind on one day during the recent Storm Atiyah.³⁵ In China offshore wind energy looks set to become competitive with coal-fired energy by about 2030.^{34a}

Twenty-fourth is not to forget the deep value of a human life and to remember to make the most of the particular life, that is ours. This includes making sure there are regular breaks from being involved with, or thinking about matters such as these - especially on Xmas day.

Twenty-fifth is remembering that amidst all of this, there is good news, and it can often travel very fast. When this July the then British Prime Minister Theresa May enshrined into law the target of her country reaching net-zero carbon emissions by 2050,³⁶ it was a world-first. "*This is a historic commitment that will reverberate right around the world.*"³⁶ said one architect of the Paris climate agreement. Five months later, the EU endorsed a decision to pass a similar law for twenty-seven of its twenty-eight member countries to do the same,³⁷ and is making 1 trillion Euros available to help enable a full transition. In the US, three states and seven major cities have already committed to the same target. Although Britain is not currently on track to meet the target itself, the legalised aspiration now gives a better basis for challenging decisions which may work against meeting the target in this country.³⁸ An example here is the Dutch Supreme Court upholding a ruling on a case requiring its own government to slash greenhouse gas emissions by at least 25% of 1990 levels by the end of 2020.

The Court based its ruling on the UN climate convention and the state's legal obligation to protect the lives and well-being of Dutch citizens.³⁹

Finally, there are X-factors: some scientists think the world is already overdue for moving into another small ice age (because of the tilting of the earth's axis), and that the reason that it hasn't developed is because...? That's right. Also, large volcanic eruptions can *sometimes* have a cooling effect on climate; the enormous clouds of gas and ash from Mt Pinatubo's 1992 eruption, for example, led to a cooling of 0.5°C across the world for over a year.⁴⁰

What however, if in spite of all the effort to generate power in cleaner ways, all of the scientific ingenuity being deployed across the globe in the search for new ways to slow down the process of warming (and even reverse it), plus the commitment, self-sacrifice, good work, intentions, and actions of many, many people, movements, institutions and some governments around our globe; what if it isn't enough? In enough time? As someone once asked their wife:

MacBeth: "*If we should fail?*"

Lady MacBeth: "*We fail! But screw your courage to the sticking place/And...[we still might]... fail.*"⁴¹

A pill we're unused to being asked to swallow today, where vast amounts of time, struggle and work has seen rights in the political, social and individual realms deeply embedded in our part of the world, is to see that spiritually,

we don't actually have the right to exist. If you are able to take this pill and bear the taste however, it becomes easier to see the critical spiritual role of acceptance in all of this. We allow to be present in the mind the nature and prospects of what might happen, when they arise within the mind. Being as still as you can with them; letting the images or thoughts arise and not engaging with them; see that yes, these things could occur, and some of the images may hold valuable clues for you as you discern your way forward within choices, but in terms of your actual life right here and now, they are *not* occurring - to you. We ground ourselves within the reality of this life and this moment. Being aware of layers of fear, grief, outrage, anger, despondency, and trying to not let them drive us, particularly in speech and action. And if such images don't arise in your mind, that's fine too.

“Climate change is now reaching the end game where very soon humanity must choose between taking unprecedented action or accepting it has left it too late and bear the consequences”. If we continue down the present path, “there is a very big risk that we will just end our civilisation. The human species will survive somehow but we will destroy almost everything we have built over the last two thousand years.”⁴²

It appears to me unlikely enough will be done to avert at least part of what is coming. In which case, the thinking and reality-check behind terms such as ‘sustainable retreat’ and ‘deep adaptation’ are useful to point to the evolving reality as things change. Where we live, I’ve been advised

beech and oak trees would happily replace those alders, as the former thrive in warmer, drier conditions. On the much larger canvas however, public warnings by bodies as sober as the UN of the prospect of between many millions up to a billion plus people migrating away from submerging farmland and coastal cities, deadly tropical heat, and from newly arid regions of the world to primarily, the north of the globe can sound close to science fiction – until you realise it has already begun.

In Lancashire recently, I met a woman from Mali who, with her whole family, had risked everything to get to Britain, forced to do so in good part by the continuing drought in her own country. I was told all her relatives had died along the way, but in the dignity and composure of her face, there was not a hint of what had happened. The many hundreds of thousands of those desperate to get into Europe in recent years, with the consequent strains and defensive reactions in some areas within Europe, is a small taste of what may be coming. In Britain, the desire for the country to control its own borders was the number one reason cited for the unexpected win of the ‘Leave’ side in the EU Referendum of 2016. Whatever your own view of the actual result, we all know only too well the continuing difficulties and unrest that have come with it.⁴³

So, now I know why John was overheating that day back in late July, and why our alder trees are dying; where we started off is the visible evidence in one small, northern valley of the truth of interdependence on a vast scale.

Although the future is not in your hands and what you do will not alone determine the final outcome, the two hands that are yours are the only ones you have to use along with your diligence, compassion, level-headedness and persistence.

Between all of the combined efforts of every single person willing to make any possible difference they can to avert what is coming, if in the end it isn't enough, then what more could have been done? Over 2019, the combination of the serious images and warnings in Sir David Attenborough's latest natural history TV series, ER's imaginative attention-catching ways of determined protest in sixty different countries, and Greta Thunberg's intelligent and lucid testimony on the world stage, has focussed attention much more sharply on *the* problem than ever before, which is good. But if it comes to it, could there also be room for '*Extinction Acceptance*'? Being born, by definition, was always going to be a risky business, and actually there never were any guarantees. Whether all the efforts being applied now succeed or fail, all of the merit and the beneficial karmic consequence of working to *try* to avert potential catastrophe will continue into the future, somehow, somewhere.

Within all of this, the particular, permanent, and visible offering of a monastic, is the willingness to work around the clock, within a very specific frame of reference, on freeing themselves from the grasp of all the unresolved karmic tendencies that re-appeared with their own birth; those same

tendencies that in some people tempt them to ignore the evidence that aspects of their own industry will have devastating consequences on a truly global scale. In doing that work, a monastic is hopefully an encouragement to others, thus helping them to find their own stability of being, whatever the future may hold for us all.

Notes

1. *The Lotus Sutra* trans. Kato, Tamura etc. (Weatherhill 1975) p. 255.
2. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration announced that July was the hottest month on record, with global temperatures averaging 62.13 C which is 1.71° C above the 20th century average.
- 3.3a,3b “*Existential climate-related security risk: A scenario approach*’ May 2019 by Spratt and Dunlop. A policy paper produced by the *Breakthrough National Centre for Climate Restoration* in Melbourne, Australia.
4. “*The Age of Consequences: The foreign policy and national security implications of global climate change.*” Campbell, K.M., et al. Washington DC, Centre for Strategic and International Studies/Center for New American Security 2007, p.5 of “*Existential climate-related security risk: A scenario approach*’ May 2019 by Spratt and Dunlop.
5. 2015 Paris Climate Agreement intended to keep global warming to under 3°C by 2100.
6. 6a “*Arctic wildfires: How bad are they and what caused them? ‘Extremely dry ground and hotter than average temperatures, combined with heat lightning and strong winds, have caused the fires to spread aggressively. The burning has been sustained by the forest ground, which consists of exposed, thawed, dried peat - a substance with high carbon content. Scientists say what we’re seeing is evidence of the kind of feedbacks we should expect in a warmer world, where increased concentrations of greenhouse gases drive more warming, which then begets the conditions that release yet more carbon into the atmosphere. A lot of the particulate matter from these fires will eventually come to settle on ice surfaces further north, darkening them and thus accelerating melting.*” ‘BBC News August 2 2019.
“*Staggering video shows how much of earth was actually on fire in*

2019” New Scientist December 16 2019.

7. *“Faster pace of climate change is ‘scary’, former chief scientist says”*. BBC News September 16 2019.
8. Professor Sir David King was the Foreign & Commonwealth Office’s Special Representative for Climate Change from 2013 until 2017. Previously he was UK Government’s Chief Scientific Adviser and Head of the Government Office of Science from October 2000 to December 2007. In that time, he raised the profile of the need for governments worldwide to act on climate change and was instrumental in creating the new £1bn Energy Technologies Institute.
9. The Independent, May 10 2019.
10. This was a Buddhist doctrine of Three Ages: 1. Age of the Right Law in which teaching, practice and realization in the authentic Dharma was prevalent; 2. Age of Imitative Law in which teaching and practice within mere forms of the Dharma; and 3. Age Of Degenerate Law/Mappo in which Dharma had completely decayed and there was only teaching (no practice or realization was possible).
11. Peggy Kennett was the name of the Founder of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett.
- 12 12a. *The Wild White Goose* by Roshi P.T.N.H. Jiyu-Kennett, Shasta Abbey, 2002, p.71.
13. *“Climate crisis disasters are happening at the rate of one a week, though most draw little international attention and work is urgently needed to prepare developing countries for the profound impacts, the UN has warned”* The Guardian, July 7 2019.
14. *“Gerald Meehl, a senior scientist at the US National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) in Boulder, Colorado told us he’d been anticipating changes like these for four decades, although he hadn’t been certain when they would arrive. Few of the scientists we contacted had faith that governments would do what was needed to rescue the climate in time. They’re alarmed that global warming of just over 1°C so far has already created a new normal in which historic temperature records will inevitably be broken more often”*. BBC News Sept 16 2019.
- 15 15a, 15b *“More than 11,000 scientists have ‘clearly and unequivocally’ declared a climate emergency that could bring ‘untold suffering’ unless there are significant transformations in the way humans live. The signatories, from 153 countries, said in a paper published in Bio Science The alliance of scientists, led by Ripple and*

Wolf of Oregon State University, USA said the climate crisis is “accelerating faster” than most researchers expected.” Quoted from The Times, Nov 6 2019.

16. *“Pentagon Signals Security Risks of Climate Change. The Pentagon on Monday released a report asserting decisively that climate change poses an immediate threat to national security, with increased risks from terrorism, infectious disease, global poverty and food shortages. It also predicted rising demand for military disaster responses as extreme weather creates more global humanitarian crises.”* New York Times October 13 2014.
17. Dr Friederike Otto of Oxford University, is an expert on how extreme events are linked to climate change; quoted in BBC News Sept 16 2019.
18. *‘Unearthed journal reveals coal industry knew about dangers of burning fossil fuels in 1966’* 25 Nov, 2019 New Zealand Herald, quoting original article in Huffington Post.
- 19 19a. Sandokai, quoted from *Scriptures and Ceremonies at Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey* 2005, p.8.
20. *Fossil Fuel Divestment 101: A Complete Guide to Divesting Your Money* (UK) Sarah Young July 10, 2019. <https://ethical.net>.
21. Investment consultant Paul McGuire quoting campaign group ‘Fossil Free’ in *Charity Finance* October 2019, p.44.
22. *“Nuns attack world’s largest asset manager”* BBC News, Science and Environment, December 16 2019.
23. Quoted in *Extremism Rebellion: A review of ideology and tactics.* Tom Wilson and Richard Walton; Policy Exchange.
24. *The Liturgy of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives for the Laity* , Rev. P.T.N.H. Jiyu-Kennett, Shasta Abbey Press, 1990, p.266.
25. *ibid* p.110.
26. *“Coal: Is this the beginning of the end?”* BBC News Nov. 25 2019.
27. *“World’s biggest wind farm secures Yorkshire coast contract”* BBC News September 24 2017.
28. *“In this case we are using a combination of clean air and vacuum technology within the turbine. It allows us to still have a very efficient, reliable, high-voltage network but to also be environmentally friendly.”* said Costa Pirgousis from Scottish Power Renewables. *Climate change: Electrical industry’s ‘dirty secret’ boosts warming.* BBC News Sept 13 2019.

29. “Why the EU should ban SF6” energypost.eu May 21 2018 by [Nicholas Ottersbach](#).
30. Sam Knights quoted in “My Six Months with Extinction Rebellion” BBC3 documentary by Ben Zand, July 19 2019.
31. *Shōbōgenzō* by Eihei Dōgen, Vol 2, Transl. by Nishijima and Cross, 1996, p 212.
32. *Hexham Courant*, December 19 2019. Northumberland County Council, was named in November as the joint second most-climate friendly council in England and Wales.
33. From The Times quoted in “Carbon Brief” November 25 2019.
- 34 34a. “Offshore wind to become a \$1 trillion industry.” Report by the International Energy Agency. October 2019.
35. “UK weather: Storm Atiyah brings high winds and power cuts” The Guardian December 9 2019.
36. “Greenhouse gas emissions in the UK will be cut to almost zero by 2050, under the terms of a new government plan to tackle climate change. Prime Minister Theresa May said there was a ‘moral duty to leave this world in a better condition than what we inherited’...Laurence Tubiana, an architect of the crucial Paris climate agreement told the BBC: “This is a historic commitment that will reverberate right around the world.” BBC News June 12 2019.
37. “The European Commission...launched its plan to cut EU carbon emissions to net zero by 2050...The Green New Deal offers 100 billion euros to EU member states to help curb their global warming pollution and aims to re-gear the economy away from fossil fuel and polluting industries and towards new technologies and behaviours. Brussels wants a legally binding cut of 50 to 55% in EU emissions by 2030...” European Commission launches ‘man on the moon’ plan to cut emissions to zero by 2050. The Telegraph December 11 2019.
38. “We can't see a future”: group takes EU to court over climate change. Litigants from eight countries claim EU institutions are not protecting fundamental rights. The Guardian May 24 2018.
39. “Netherlands climate change: Court orders bigger cuts in emissions.” BBC News December 20 2019.
40. *Global Effects of Mt Pinatubo*. <https://www.earthobservatory.nasa.gov> June 14 2001.
41. *Macbeth* by W Shakespeare, Penguin 2015, p.23.

- [42.](#) Foreword to “*What Lies Beneath*” by Hans Schnellenhuber, quoted in The Guardian, August 20 2018. He is a member of the International Panel on Climate Change which was jointly awarded the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize. In *Expanding the Democracy Universe*, he noted of 13,950 peer-reviewed papers between 1991 and 2012, “*only 24 do not confirm that there is a major anthropogenic [caused by humans] greenhouse effect.*”
- [43.](#) “*Democracy and liberal values, your report warns, are also in danger as governments will struggle to cope with the growing levels of inequality and discontent that climate change will cause. As access to resources such as food, water, land and housing are threatened, it says, the poor and vulnerable will suffer the most and nationalist sentiments will continue to rise.*” UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights paraphrased in *Philip Alston on Inequality and Climate Change*, Chatham House 26 September 2019.

Do We Hear the Call?

Rev. Elinore Agnew

—Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey—UK—

When visiting the Jersey Group recently there was a suggestion to talk about “Response to the climate emergency” Some people in the group are seriously committed to this work and I very much appreciated what everyone said. There was also a suggestion to discuss compassion and The Scripture of Avalokiteshwara came to mind in relation to both. This is an edited version of the talk.

How does meditation relate to the need for a serious response to what we must do right now about climate change? As a Zen Buddhist monk there is something particular that I need to do, and because of that, there are some things I can't choose to do. The following thoughts are really about how zazen can become the source of all that is seen, and how it is our every action. As we go on with meditation, the more likely it is that what we do and the choices we make will come from our true being; compassion, love and wisdom. The more fully we will live according to right action, coming from right understanding. This is a matter of continuous enquiry; being with this now, all that I am. When it is the case that something is wrong, we may need to respond and we may not know what to do. We

sit still right here. We take it to the depths of being and leave it there. Something takes place in the darkness but we need to let go. We can't make it happen and the thinking mind can't find a solution at this level. Every kind of circumstance is different here. This is not to deny anything. It is not passive, nor is it irresponsible. It is not so easy. It only becomes like this when we can see how important it is.

Meditation in the way that we do it is the whole of life, the foundation. Its presence spreads everywhere. It takes great effort and a strong engagement through all kinds of times. We go on in faith, and doubt when it is doubt. We go on no matter what. Trust comes despite us. It is often gradual, subtle change, but something is felt. We realise that we are making different choices, stepping forward, or holding back sometimes instead of speaking impulsively, acting in faith in ways that we have not felt able to do before. Things are seen in a changing light. In one way we become not so sure of anything because definitions start to fade away. This allows an openness of seeing. There is a possibility of hearing something that we may not have heard before.

This is altogether with the work that we need to do. What is the offering now? With the climate emergency, like with many things, there is ignorance, choosing not to know what is happening, and lack of willingness to make the urgent changes. It is global. So what can I do in my life now? Each one of us chooses. There are very simple changes we can make, and much of this may depend on the work that

others do to inform us. The more we can take care with each choice that we make and bring our attention to the possible consequences, the greater the collective effect for the good of the world can be. It is the everyday things: what do we eat and where do we buy it? What are we recycling, and how much plastic do we use? What about cars, air travel? What domestic fuel do we have and what are we wasting? How much can we be involved with political action and demonstrations? Only we can know this. There is much that we can all do and how we live now is where it happens.

Climate change needs an urgent response. We know that there is also the reality of war in some parts of the world, great injustice, starvation, oppression, racism, gender inequality, violation of human rights. All kinds of suffering. Meditation is serious work. The more clearly we see, the more we trust that we act for the good of all beings. It begins with the ongoing commitment to cease from evil. If the three poisons, greed, hatred and delusion are active, if they are driving us, however subtly, there will be conflict in our intention which will be expressed in what we do. We need to turn the light inwards and come to understand the presence of stillness and action, darkness and light, form and emptiness, always together.

There are many ways that each one of us can do something about climate change. Some people are working with great commitment. It has to be political and is at the same time individual. We can always be better informed and can learn more. We can do our very best in practical ways

and bring close attention to the choices we make. We respond each moment to the world as far as we understand it. Am I living as best as I can, knowing that I am not separate from anything or anyone? The more I know this, the more I can trust what I do to be good. There will be ceasing from evil. This is the expression of meditation which reaches way beyond the suffering of a particular time and can respond as needed. We are present now. As meditation is active in us, the less our thoughts and habits get in the way of what is good to do. Our self concern can be seen in a different light and we become more able to not choose this direction.

To be present is to be aware of oneself in relation to all things and to act accordingly. It is not about the scale of the action, or how global. It is right in front of us. We can see the vastness of this, or just a small fraction of it. Meditation is the commitment to open up this vision, this hearing, without limit. It can not be quantified or judged. It is not in the realm of thought and can't be defined or contained. All that we need to work with is here when we look in this way. This is the difference we can make. This is where good and evil take place. In terms of reversing the direction of climate change fast, we all have much that we can do in the way that we are living. It might be right to be involved in raising awareness and to be active politically, but there is no avoiding the personal choices that we all make. It may start with the need to know more, to choose to see. As with all aspects of life, the costs of not seeing can be high. Not caring? Maybe often to do with not seeing. Too much else going on. We sit with the sense of need, or fear that we may

not know, desire that we feel that we can't contain; anger, a sense of injustice, not being enough, not having enough. These feelings may be subtle, maybe fleeting, but they have the potential to affect what we do. We can always do something about ourselves.

Here at Throssel there are certain things that are accepted as the life that we all choose by being here, whether living here as a monk, or staying however often as a lay resident. Meditation is why we come, and we define some aspects of life so that it can work to be here together. There are the Bodhisattva Precepts. Our refuge is the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. We share the commitment to cease from evil, do only good and do good for others. Our work is meditation and all that this means.

We do our best not to kill and are vegetarian. At present we do buy dairy products and some people choose not to have them. We take care with what is given to us, to use all resources well, and to know what we are doing in relation to others. We have four cars right now and we limit their use as much as possible. We look carefully at our use of domestic fuel and endeavour not to waste it. We are conscious of how much heating and light is really needed. We do much to take care with food: what we receive, what we buy and where it comes from. We are careful about how much food we eat and not to waste it. We start every meal with The Five Thoughts:

“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 minds.

We will eat lest we become lean and die.

We accept this food so that we may become enlightened.”

We have an alms box with things given to monks. We share what has been given and then pass on what is no longer needed to each other and then to a charity shop. We use second, third, fourth hand things, and also buy what we need from charity shops when we can. We don't travel much and we use public transport where possible. We do what we can about excessive use of anything and work hard to take only what we need. We go on making the commitment to sit with greed, hatred and delusion, and not turning away. There is always more that we can do.

At the individual level there is much to see. What do I really need? Much of what we do reflects something of this. I can act in a way that supports a sense of me as a separate being, and in some ways I will do this. I can also ask “Is this good to do, and what effect might I be having?” The more that I can be still in the moment of choice, the greater my ability to see what I am doing, and the possible consequences. Much of our feeling of need can change as we sit with fear and desire, our sense of suffering. Habits may seem powerful, and we keep going. It takes a lot of kindness.

The Scripture *The Most Excellent Mirror Samadhi* begins:

“The Buddhas and the Ancestors have all directly handed down this basic truth:-

Preserve well for you now have; this is all”

It is through exploring what we have that all relationship can begin to change, and we can feel more able to let go of clinging and be willing to approach our fear of being nothing, and having nothing. In coming towards death things can fall away very quickly. There may be no dilemma at all in terms of knowing that most things are not needed, nor are they relevant. What is already there can become apparent. We can do this now. This is the zazen of each one of us. In this moment, what is driving me? Can I put down self concern and give? As we go on, we become better able to see the functioning of self concern, and the effects. It can be as if an energy, from a source not bound in any way flows more freely. It doesn't see in terms of “me” and appears to be impartial, not dependent.

It can seem as if there are two directions in a decision to act, one that involves self concern, the other that does not. The one that does not may seem frightening and unknown. The courage to take this direction is necessary. The choice seems to fall away. The self concern is not what we truly wish for and we understand this more clearly in the willingness to sit in the midst of all that is there. We see the

clinging and turning away and can choose to return. It can be very subtle, and a lot may be asked of us.

Many of us are familiar with *The Scripture of Avalokiteshwara* or Kanzeon, the Bodhisattva of Compassion: “She who hears the cries of the world.” It is a chapter from *The Lotus Sutra* and is expressed in the language of the Buddha’s time but it is relevant to this question of how to act in relation to the climate emergency now. It is about the presence of compassion in all circumstances. Can we trust like this? Something responds, beyond our knowing, beyond our doing. The scripture describes the most overwhelming and difficult experiences. It tells us to call on Kanzeon at all times, and talks of how we come to know the presence of compassion in extraordinary ways. Here are some lines:

“Just listen to the life of Kanzeon.
To calls from every quarter She responds;
Of oceanic depth Her holy vows.

When people hear Her name and see Her form,
And think of Her not vainly in their hearts,
All forms of ill, in all the worlds, shall cease.

In all the world, in all the quarters,
There is not a place where Kannon does not go.”

Compassion is apparent when we can see. We don’t always see. Meditation is the commitment to do whatever it

takes to know our true being. If love, compassion and wisdom are Buddha Nature, they are here now. If the world appears as it does, we need to truly let go of all such appearance and see what is there. How we do this is sitting still. We look carefully. Judgement has no place here. In the silence, the opposites dissolve. It is not as it seemed to be. This is about faith and not turning away. We have to find out what this means. “All forms of ill in all the worlds shall cease.” It can be seen differently. It is about how we experience all that is here now, whether it seems to be suffering or not. Seeing and action are not separate. We can trust it to the great offering that meditation is. Letting go of everything. Who we think that we are, our fears, our longing; all can be offered here. We may not find answers to many of our questions and we may not resolve our concerns in the way we expect to, but in the sitting, it doesn’t look the same any more. A space within it all appears again and again. Something always present is known to us. We could call it compassion because it can respond as needed. The world changes every moment.

The effects of meditation can be hard to see and hard to trust. We need to let go of judgement, let go of grasping and wishing for results. We are letting go of this as we sit. In the stillness what is there? There will not be an answer to all the worlds’ suffering, but something changes completely here, and this is radical. As circumstances come to be seen differently, there is the sense that what is here at present calls forth something. This is known to be enough because the depth of being is not changed by all these circumstances and

does not depend on them. This is the refuge, the depths of us, not separate from anything. We offer all that we have to the wisdom that is there in each one of us. The more its presence is active, the more we can see what to do and trust when not to do anything. This can make it a different life, and so a different world.

Do we hear the call to respond to the climate emergency? Within this call, there is something that we can rely on. We trust our lives to this, and go on.

The Way of Faith

Rev. Master Kinrei Bassis

—Berkeley Buddhist Priory, Albany, CA–USA—

This article was first published in the Journal of Shasta Abbey, July-August 1983. Parts of the article have been rewritten.

The inextricable relationship between Buddhist meditation and faith is not always clearly understood. To many people, faith is a dirty word, a blind belief in some unprovable and unknowable doctrine. Our culture is permeated with the outlook of empirical science that requires that one have hard, provable evidence to support anything before it is accepted as true. Faith, however, does not argue with the empirical mind which wants to hold truth in the same way as one holds an object in one's hand. Faith transcends this mind, and stands on the inner truth which lies at the core of all of us, the knowledge and call of our own Buddha Nature. The Buddha Heart is as real as the ground we stand on, but we gain certainty and knowledge of it only to the extent that we put the Buddhist teaching into practice and work at spiritual transformation. No one else's certainty

can become our own possession. When we train with faith in the Dharma, certainty arises naturally.

Meditation is sometimes misunderstood as being only a technique for concentrating and quieting the mind, which in turn helps us to better deal with our life and the world. Yet such a technique or mental exercise will not solve the larger problems of life such as the meaning of our birth and death. No technique can give the strength and determination to sit still and embrace the overwhelming fears and sorrows that life may bring. Similarly, the view that all one's problems will "work themselves out" is untenable, for the world surrounds us with people who are overwhelmed by their suffering. True meditation requires the faith that within each of us there is an indestructible place which fulfills all our true needs and within the stillness of meditation and through our efforts of training in daily life, we are beckoning to and coming to know that indestructible spiritual place. Faith is pointing us to that naive mind that trusts that no problems or difficult conditions can truly harm our real self.

Despair is the opposite of faith. In everyone's heart is a deep rooted spiritual longing, and all those who ignore or deny that longing are unknowingly living with some despair. Yet despair takes other forms than just hard, outright denial. Many hear the teaching, recognize its inherent truth and still turn away. This sometimes comes from the feeling that, although the aim of religious life is the worthiest goal, "It is not for me. I am different from the Buddhas and great Masters." They see aspects of themselves or their lives as

obstacles to their spiritual life rather than the very substance of Buddhist training. We all have our hidden and apparent flaws; history of mistakes and hurts, perhaps a memory of past vacillation and half-hearted efforts. Despair here is the voice that whispers, “They who have a real living spiritual life and are making progress are different from me.”

When I first began Buddhist training, faith was something mysterious to me. I thought it must be something which would support and comfort me when I was troubled, which would give me strength when my courage and will were failing. But where was it? I keenly felt its absence. My mistake was that I did not understand the close link between faith and the correct use of the will. Faith is not a passive state. Faith is to grasp the will and train wholeheartedly even in the midst of doubt and despair. It is through this effort that we turn The Wheel of the Law within ourselves, that our doubts are dispelled, and our hopes eventually fulfilled.

The seed of faith that brings each of us into Buddhism can be quite different. Some of us hear the call to train in the enlightened action of a teacher, others in the profundity of the Dharma, still others in their direct experience of the truth. The grounds of faith are not as important as our willingness to persevere no matter how much sorrow, despair, fear, or inadequacy plague us.

Faith itself is very simple: it is an underlying belief that there is a deep spiritual purpose and meaning in the unfolding of our lives. Life keeps having us face all sorts of

internal difficult conditions such as despair, unwanted desires and fears. Life keeps giving us endless external conditions we do not want like relationship problems, unwanted criticism, and various ways of failing. The ongoing solution to each difficulty is to grasp our will, to try to sit still, to try to accept whatever is happening with gratitude and to try to recognize each difficulty in our life as an opportunity to take refuge in the Three Treasures and deepen our training. Real faith is not demanding anything but trusting that whatever we need to know or do, “will arise naturally”.

Do not limit the true nature of faith by thinking of it just as an emotion. All the transient feelings of joy, gratitude, and peace are not the true refuge. All feelings belong to annica, the principle of impermanence which means everything is endlessly changing and transforming. The concept that emotional states of mind are permanent, unchanging entities is a common delusion and source of much suffering. People experience a great passionate love and become disappointed, bitter, empty when it passes away with time. Similarly, when the fruits of spiritual life are experienced and then disappear, it is easy to wonder if something has gone wrong. This doubt is intrinsic in despair, for despair is the feeling of hopelessness based on the belief that our present emotional state is our true identity and will not change. The faith that spiritual life needs to be based upon goes far deeper than any transient feeling, for it is founded in that still center within each of us in which dwells our Unborn Buddha Nature.

I have pointed out a distinction between faith and the emotions so that people will not mistakenly base their faith on just a feeling which will always be changing. Yet the feelings that accompany true religious life do reinforce one's faith. The longing to find this deep spiritual place, to experience insight into the Buddha's path, and to feel deep gratitude, all these are invaluable aids in Buddhist training. They give us the strength to deal with many of the worldly desires and feelings which we need to face and convert. They help us move toward a deeper experience of faith, but they are not faith itself. When the feeling of gratitude fades, one must grasp one's will and still express the gratitude even though one's heart may now be cold and the path forward may not be clear.

True faith is based on all-acceptance: it is to take refuge in something deeper than any transient satisfactions that we all experience. When we take deep refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, this can free us to see and experience the underlying purity that lies at the root of all our personal karma and all the world's karma. When we fill our lives with external concerns, it just means we lack in faith and we are not in touch with our heart's deepest longing. It means we are seeking our treasure by wandering away from the true treasure house within ourselves.

The Jewish Hasidic Tradition has a beautiful story which illustrates this point:

A King's son rebelled against his father and was banished from the sight of his father's face. After a time, the king was moved to pity for his son's fate and bade messengers go in search of him. It was long before one of the messengers found him – far from home. The son was at a village inn, dancing barefoot and in a torn shirt in the midst of drunken peasants. The courtier bowed and said: "Your father has sent me to ask you what you desire. Whatever it may be, he is prepared to grant your wish." The prince began to weep. "Oh," said he, "if only I had warm clothing and a pair of stout shoes."¹

Faith is the key, for it is that which is necessary if we are to find that we are truly the children of Buddha. At our core, we all possess the heart of a Buddha. If we do not seek to find our Buddha heart, we will spend our lives seeking to satisfy some superficial desire, and we will never realize our true inheritance.

The key to training is faith, yet there can be the delusion that one may inherently lack faith. All that is needed for faith is the effort of not doubting. Great Master Dōgen said, "One who would train in Buddhism must first believe completely therein and, in order to do so, one must believe that one has already found the Way, never having been lost, deluded, upside down, increasing, decreasing or mistaken in the first place."² Do not allow your doubts to go unchecked and let them control your life. The Buddha, Dharma and the Sangha are the medicine for all your doubts. There is nothing special

about your doubts; endless beings have had the same doubts you have and they chose to overcome their doubts and thus they found unshakable liberation.

Buddhist training can seem to be the most difficult task imaginable. It asks us to cast aside all the desires the self has fed through years of unenlightened action, and to go forth to that which it does not even know. It goes against all the normal pattern of living in which we seek what is comfortable, easy and known. However, Buddhist training is the easiest path in that it finally puts us in alignment with our heart's deepest desire.

The effort of spiritual training can seem arduous, but avoiding training is much harder. When we live without faith, our only refuge is ourselves. We build walls of tension and fear around ourselves. Old age, disease and death then just seem depressing and scary. Faith places our little self in the hands of the Buddha. It allows us to face our deepest fears and opens our heart so we can embrace unfolding of our life and the life of the whole world with open and fearless heart.

Great Master Tendō Nyojō said, “We must train with the same energy we would employ if our hair were to catch fire.” Yet very few of us come to Buddhism with this deep feeling of urgency. However, when we see deeply into the true nature of our situation, the very truth of birth and death and the uncertainty of everything in the world, this perception can strike deeply into our hearts and create this

urgency. When we see the deep suffering that our misguided actions have caused, then our desire to cleanse our hearts and minds is awakened. But do not put the cart before the horse. Faith is needed here, for very often, it is the effort to do Buddhist training when our hearts are cold, that helps to dissolve the obstacles and awaken us to the deepest truths.

One calls and one answers. Never doubt your ability to answer the spiritual call in your heart, for each pure act of our spiritual life is our answer to this call and will bring us one step closer to finding unshakable peace and our true home.

Notes

1. Martin Buber, *Ten Rungs; Hasidic Sayings* (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), p. 28.
2. “*Gakudo-Yojinshu: Important Aspects of Zazen,*” of the *Shōbōgenzō*, in *Zen is Eternal Life* by Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett (Emeryville, CA: Dharma Publishing, 1976.), p.137.

The Koan Appears Naturally

Willie Grieve

—*Edinburgh, Scotland*—

A few weeks ago, I went on a cycling trip with a friend across Scotland, from west coast to east coast. There's a pleasing simplicity and clarity about these trips: you start at A and finish at B. The tradition is to start with your back wheel in one sea, and finish with your front wheel in another. You know the trip will last for C days, and each day you know you're committed to cycle D miles, given that you've booked sometimes hard-to-find accommodation in advance for each night.

My friend had diligently trained for the trip, building up his cycling legs and endurance. I hadn't, due to other priorities, but felt fairly confident as I had been on similar trips before without much training, and trusted that my legs would prove strong enough.

The first day we cycled over 50 miles and reached where we were staying without incident. A good start: we both felt quite exhilarated, and agreed we could easily have

cycled another 20 miles. The rest of the trip would be straightforward, we thought, and we looked forward to the following days with anticipation.



Day 2 proved a very different proposition. 10 miles in and I was feeling out of sorts, possibly a residue of tiredness from the previous day, and my body complaining about the

treatment it was being exposed to and for which it was unprepared. The exhilaration of the previous evening had wholly disappeared. We came to a hilly section, and one hill in particular was unrelentingly steep and long. By the time I struggled to the top, I was trembling with exhaustion, my heart pounding, panting for breath, on the edge of hyperventilation. I felt a weakness upon me, and I was overcome by a conviction that I couldn't carry on. It was just too much.

From the vantage point of the top of the hill, I could see the miles ahead were far from flat. There would be many more hills, many more challenges; day after day of it. Away over the horizon lay the other sea, our destination, impossibly distant. My legs were trembling. My friend was away ahead, unseen. I had a sudden sense of panic: I couldn't carry on, and yet it seemed impossible to abandon the trip. I would be letting my friend down: how would I get home in any case? We were in the middle of nowhere. What would I do with my bicycle? My panic began to spiral, worsened by indecision and doubt, self-judgement for not having prepared properly, and gripped by a corrosive sense of physical weakness I had never experienced before.

Can't go on. Can't not go on. As I stood, tendrils of anxiety flickering, and locked into the apparent insolubility of the situation, a thought came to me; a thread of calmness, and the words which formed in my head were something like: give to the situation in each moment what it asks for, to

the extent that you are capable. No more, and no less. Each turn of the pedals, each moment, just that.

I waited until my breathing returned to normal and my legs stopped trembling. A sip of water, a few nuts & raisins. A deep breath. I began to cycle on, slowly and deliberately, each turn of the pedals, measuring my effort with exactly what seemed to be needed, to the best of my ability, but not allowing my breathing to become more than measured. Slowly the miles passed. I stopped myself from counting, measuring, assessing.

As the hours went by, I began to study the movements of my mind. I found that all too easily I could be taken out of that hard-won place of simply giving what was needed in each moment. On the one hand, I could find myself making too much effort, trying too hard, and disproportionately tiring myself out. (“My friend is miles ahead, he’ll be getting impatient” “I should be doing better than this” “There’s a long way to go, I need to speed up” “I used to cycle much quicker than this” “what’ll that car driver think of me crawling along?”). On the other hand, I could find myself going slower than I was capable of. (“Why did I agree to this trip?” “I’m too old for this”... “my heart condition...” “What’s the point of this anyway?” “Why can’t he slow down? Well, to hell with him racing ahead, showing off”.)

But in the awareness of those thoughts, I would be able to bring myself back to just this, responding to what was being asked of me, no more, no less.

Arriving some days later at our final destination, I had the sense that I had learned something important, not just simply a technique for coping with unfitnes and physical weakness on a cycling trip.

Some days later I was rereading the transcript of Rev. Master Haryo's talk, '*The Vessel and its Contents*' and came on this section:

(In our Sōtō tradition) we don't give people a koan, so there's not that sort of focus that you bring yourself back to. Our koan is noticing what's getting in the way of just doing what needs to be done; what gets in the way of just walking; your doubts, your criticisms of other people – that's the natural koan. Which can become quite extreme. And it's not uncommon in the life of a meditator to come to where those sorts of things that get in the way can take on quite a powerful and obstructive appearance – should I continue on? What's this all about? This isn't getting me anywhere. It's usually some form of doubt, or criticism; or doubts of others. And that's the koan when it really has arisen in the way we mean when we talk about the koan arising naturally.¹

So perhaps as an urban-dweller leading a largely non-physically demanding life, the situation in which I had found myself had provided me with the opportunity to experience in a particularly vivid way the koan appearing naturally in daily life.

I have a deep sense of gratitude for what felt to me an important lesson.

Notes

1. Rev. Master Haryo Young, *The Vessel and Its Contents*, an edited version of a transcription of a talk in Portobello Priory Newsletter January – April 2018 and published in the Winter 2018 issue of this Journal.

<https://journal.obcon.org/files/2018/12/Winter-2018.pdf>

A Meditation in a Time of Fracture

Tom Kirwan

—*Nottingham, UK*—

July 2019

The neurologist moves his chair to the left, adjusts the height so that his eyes are level and 3ft away from mine (as recommended) and says

“I’m afraid to say that you have motor neurone disease.”

I look over his left shoulder to see Alice holding back tears. I think of Spike Milligan’s intended grave stone “I told you I was ill.”

November 2019

In the midst of election news, Alice delivers me to the monastery in my wheelchair and I am left looking at a familiar wall.¹

I think of Rick in a favourite film “of all the walls in all the world...”²

and whilst I should be considering “nothing”, the political news that we were listening to in the car cannot but arise,

“Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world... the best lack all conviction while the worst are full of passionate intensity.”³

The anxieties provoked by the radio news and the fears arising from the diagnosis mingle and coalesce as I direct my thoughts within:

“What rough beast is this, its hour come round at last, slouches toward Bethlehem to be born?”³

Notes

1. Bodhidharma is reputed to have brought Zen Buddhism to China. In *Rules for Meditation* in Morning Service are the words “...although Bodhidharma transmitted the Buddha Mind, we still hear the echoes of his nine years facing a wall.” This references the Zen practice of meditating while facing a wall.
2. A rephrasing of a famous line from ‘Casablanca’.
- 3 W.B Yeats published a seven poem sequence in a book called *The Tower* in 1928. Many of the poems in the sequence had been published in earlier works. The sequence was called *Meditations in Time of Civil War*. The full poem can be found here: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43290/the-second-coming>

News of the Order

Monastic Sangha Gathering 2019

Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey hosted our 2019 biennial monastic sangha gathering in September. We continue to meet every other year, with a Rules Conclave every sixth year. This schedule seems to address the need to spend time with each other and discuss issues that jointly affect us all. This year most of the temples of the Order were represented, and we were grateful for the good turnout and participation.

Topics discussed focused primarily on our response to changes in the Order due to the aging of the monastic sangha, and the rate at which new monks are entering. We also talked about caring for aging and disabled monks, and what some of the financial and practical aspects are involved. This discussion included ways to offer mutual support to each other as monks encounter personal end-of-life issues, particularly health and legal ones, such as power of attorney and wills.

Another topic was looking at our approach to practice to see if there are ‘blind spots’ which may be hindering the attraction of new monks. We discussed the use of language in our scriptures, as well as gave attention to possible generational issues such as climate change and veganism. We appreciated hearing from several young novice monks and postulants at Throssel who offered their perspective on what drew them to the practice. One morning was devoted to a presentation on safeguarding, which is a current issue for UK temples and a growing concern in other parts of the world.

Generally, our mornings were devoted to discussions, leaving the afternoons open for small group meetings, get-togethers of individual monks, and the occasional walks and teas which give monks a chance to be together in a relaxed and informal occasion. We were grateful to have pleasant weather

most days, and our thanks go to Rev. Master Haryo, to Throssel Hole Abbey for organization and hosting, to all the monks who made the effort to attend, and to all the lay sangha who helped with transportation and care of temples while their resident monk was away.

—*Rev Master Oswin*

News of the Order

Canada and USA

Shasta Abbey

—*Shasta Abbey, CA–USA*—

September: The autumn was a quiet time in the monastery. A number of monks were away during September at the monastic sangha gathering at Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey. Several community members visited other temples of the Order in the UK and Europe on the way over or on the way back. We appreciate the hospitality extended by Throssel and the other temples—and by Rev. Master Kinrei who hosted several overnight stays at the Berkeley Priory.

While these monks were away, quite a number of lay sangha members responded to our request for help in staffing the monastery during September.



Some of our help this September

One weekend was a Friends of Shasta Abbey workday, which was well attended. A major accomplishment was getting all the firewood in for winter. We were very grateful for all this assistance.

October: Near the end of October we celebrated several ceremonies, including our annual Feeding of the Hungry Ghosts. On the 28th we held a renewal of wedding vows for long-time lay ministers Patrick and Sandra Tam. Their daughter Teresa, her husband, and a number of monks attended the ceremony. The Tams were celebrating the 55th anniversary of their marriage. Congratulations to them for their many years of Buddhist training.



Tams' renewal of wedding vows

The next day on the 29th the community gathered to offer a one-year memorial for Rev. Master Chosei, who died a year ago. In addition, on the 3rd of November we celebrated the annual Festival Memorial for Rev. Master Jiyu.



Altar for Rev. Master Chosei's Memorial

November: In early November we also welcomed back to the Buddha Hall a small statue of Achalanatha who graces the altar underneath the large painting in the Achalanatha Shrine. He had been undergoing restorative work in the Bay Area.

A few days later Rev. Master Oswin and Rev. Allard responded to an invitation to the monastery to provide speakers at several religion classes at Chico State University in Chico, California, where the Order has a meditation group. We appreciated this opportunity to share our Dharma practice with so many university students and were grateful for the hospitality extended by the Chico group.

—Rev. Master Oswin

Apologies for the omission of this photo from the Shasta news in the last issue of the Journal. Rev. Trahearn's name appeared in a caption without the photo below.[Ed]



Rev. Trahearn after his Dharma Transmission in April.

Lions Gate Buddhist Priory

—Lytton, British Columbia—Canada—

We have had an exceptionally busy summer and autumn here at the Priory. The statue platform is completed, and we have almost finished the work on Mandala Hall. In early September, lay minister Pierre Kohl came up from Vancouver for a week. He and John painted the walls, posts and beams. This was a big project, requiring a great deal of prep work. As well, Bob Page and John finished framing around the windows and put drywall up in the entrance. The finished building has a bright, spacious feel. The

only things left to do are completing the entrance vestibule, and installing baseboards and a heater. We hope to be able to start using the building for meditation and ceremonies before the winter sets in. We are deeply grateful to Pierre, Bob, and John, and to everyone who has helped make this building a success.

We have also worked on general improvements and maintenance around the property, including the following: repainting the exteriors and deck of Bodhidharma Hall and erecting one of our pilgrimage shrines on the deck; clearing the bushes and undergrowth in the “juniper grove” at the crossroads, where we also erected a “Kanzeon rock” and a pilgrimage shrine; making road improvements; gathering, splitting, and piling firewood for the winter.

We planted a large vegetable garden this year, and harvested tomatoes, carrots, beans, lettuce, cabbages, beets, herbs, etc. We also planted a number of fruit trees around the building: apples, pears, plums, and peaches. We made various jams and preserves from these and other fruits and vegetables. While we were away in September, John was very busy. He painted the concrete floor of Mandala Hall and did the finishing work around the skylight. At Bodhidharma Hall he re-designed the pantry by extending the bedroom wall, installing a new window, and rebuilding the shelves; it is now brighter and more compact, and the new shelves make it easier to store and find things. He repainted most of the interior of Bodhidharma Hall, including the floors in the main area and the shower area. He removed the large, unusable wood stove and chimney from the living room, and patched the hole in the roof where the chimney had been. He jacked up the house and levelled the floor. The overall effect is a more spacious and cheerful living space. Thank you, John!

In early September, Rev. Master Kōten and Rev. Aurelian travelled to the UK to attend the monastic sangha gathering at Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey, near Hexham in Northumberland. Rev. Valeria, who has been training for several months at Shasta

Abbey in California, came with a number of Shasta monks. There were about 50 monks in attendance from North America and Europe. We were grateful to be able to spend time with so many of our monastic Dharma relatives in the beautiful surroundings of Throssel. There were talks scheduled for most mornings, and we discussed many topics of interest to monks of our Order. There were ample opportunities for monks to get together on an informal basis, and there were scheduled outings to various local sights. We are grateful to the monks and lay community of Throssel for their generous offerings of hospitality, and to everyone who made this visit possible.

On Sunday, September 1, we held our annual Segaki: Feeding of the Hungry Ghosts ceremony at Segaki Lookout on the Priory property. There were about 15 people in attendance on a bright, warm day. The ceremony is a memorial ceremony of Great Compassion for all the dead, especially those who have died in unfortunate circumstances.



Rev. Master Kōten at Segaki Ceremony. [Photo by Bob Page.]

There was a procession from Bodhidharma Hall to the Lookout, during which the inkin was rung and the conch sounded. A musical kwatz began and ended the ceremony, and the names of the dead whom people wished to be remembered were read quietly while the congregation circumambulated and offered incense. After the ceremony we had a festive meal together at Bodhidharma Hall.

On September 7, Rev. Master Kōten and Rev. Aurelian travelled with lay minister Victor Stepan and Rev. Chizen, a visiting Sōtō Zen monk, to Kelowna BC, a city about three hours drive south of us, where Rev. Master Kōten was Celebrant at a memorial ceremony for our friend Lama Tsewang who died earlier this year. The ceremony went very well; there were about 15 members and friends of the Kelowna group which Lama Tsewang had been looking after for many years. After the formal ceremony there was an opportunity for people to share their memories of, and gratitude for, the life and teaching of Lama Tsewang. We are grateful to Peter Robinson and the members of the Kelowna group for the invitation to participate in this ceremony.

In October, Rev. Master Kōten drove with lay minister Michele Feist to Williams Lake BC, a small city about three hours drive north of here, to present a portrait of HH The Dalai Lama to the members of Gendun Drupba Buddhist Centre. The photo portrait had been given to us by someone, and we felt that it would be best to give it to a Tibetan Buddhist centre. Rev. Master Kōten and Michele were warmly welcomed by the people there, who gave us many presents, and we were happy to make these new friends in the Sangha.

In November, we welcomed back Rev. Valeria, who had been training with the Shasta Abbey community for several months. It is very nice to have her back again.

Also in November, Rev. Master Kōten visited the Edmonton Buddhist Meditation Group for ten days. During this

time he offered a full-day retreat, attended the regularly scheduled meditation meetings, and offered spiritual counselling to many people.

Our schedule of retreats, ceremonies, and meditation meetings continued throughout the summer and fall. We hold a meditation meeting in the village of Lytton at the Chinese History Museum at 6:00 pm on Tuesdays, and we usually meet with meditation groups in Vancouver and Victoria on the last weekends of the month. Everyone is welcome to attend these, and we welcome visitors to the Priory at any time, whether it is “just for tea” or for longer stays.

—*Rev. Master Aurelian*

Redding Zen Buddhist Priory

—*Redding, CA–US*—

The life of the Priory continued while Rev. Helen attended the OBC Monastic Gathering at Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey in northern England from September 18-30. Thanks to all who cared for the Priory building and kept the Priory schedule, meditating, offering Morning Service, listening to – and discussing – recorded Dharma talks, and coming together as a sangha. Nicholas and Nadia [the priory cats] were especially appreciative of the extra attention and generous care they received during this time.

Over the weekend of October 18-20, the Priory hosted Rev. Jisen Coughlan, Chief Priest of the Boise Zen Center, who offered a day-long retreat on Harmonizing Body and Mind, drawing on her experience as a dancer, physical therapist and student of the Alexander Technique, as well as her years of training in the Sōtō Zen tradition. 14 of us shared a formal silent meal, as well as opportunities to do “floor work” and to actually play!



Rev. Jisen and retreatants including Nicholas

Twenty-four of the Priory Sangha met on the morning of Saturday, October 26, at the first Priory Annual Meeting. We started with meditation and the chanting of the Gate Processional. We then reviewed all that has happened to, and through, the Redding Zen Priory since its opening on February 1, 2018.

Gary Solberg, Priory Treasurer, gave an overview of the Priory's financial status and announced the generous offer of a matching donation. We are most grateful for this extraordinary expression of dana. The discussion that followed about how to strengthen the life of the Priory and its sustainability was lively, insightful, and helpful. We finished our very full morning with the Dedication of Merit and a delicious pot-luck lunch enjoyed by all. Yes, "...harmony is the Sangha Treasure..."

We were delighted to welcome Rev. Valeria Allison of the Lions Gate Priory in British Columbia, Canada, to Redding Zen on October 30. She offered a very helpful Dharma talk that evening on Skillful Means in Our Day-to-Day Training to 14 Sangha members. Earlier in the day she and Rev. Helen visited the lorikeets at Turtle Bay and took in the Sundial Bridge. It is always a joy to welcome members of our OBC monastic sangha.

—*Rev. Helen*

Wallowa Buddhist Temple

—*Joseph, Oregon – USA –*

Fall weather in our mountain valley has been mostly mild, while a good snowpack is getting started in the Eagle Cap Wilderness above the temple. We are very grateful that any nearby wildfires have been minimal, with only occasional regional smoke drifting our way this season.

Monks' Travel: Both Rev. Master Meidō and Rev. Clairissa travelled to the U.K for three weeks in September to join in the OBC Monastic Gathering at Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey. It was deeply replenishing to be together with so many Order monks, both those we have trained with throughout the years and those we were meeting for the first time. Our thanks go to three of our congregation – Harold Black, Erin Donovan, and Mary Zeise – as well as to lay minister Helmut Schatz from Walla Walla, who worked together to hold three consecutive Sunday morning retreats at the temple while we were away.

We are also grateful to Rev. Vivian, who while here in retreat at the Wallowa Buddhist Temple also looked after the temple grounds during this otherwise closed period. These five made it possible for both temple monks to be away as long as we were, giving us time for Rev. Clairissa to arrive early for the Gathering, and Rev. Meidō to be with Rev. Master Mokugen (and

other monks) at Great Ocean Dharma Refuge in Wales before the gathering began.

In early November, Rev. Meidō visited the Berkeley Buddhist Priory for a few days, to join in the celebration of both Reverend Master Jiyū's annual memorial and Rev. Master Kinrei's 40th monastic ordination anniversary. It was a joy to be at the Priory again after many years, and to be with Rev. Kinrei and all who gathered for the event.

Ceremonial: A memorial ceremony was held at the temple on August 28th for Otis dog, Erin Donovan's intrepid Corgi, who passed away earlier this year. Ten of his closest human friends were in attendance.

On August 31st, Rev. Meidō and Rev. Clairissa were honored to be asked to say a few words at a community Celebration of Life ceremony held for our dear friend Doug McDaniel, who passed away peacefully on August 15th aged 83. Doug was a truly remarkable human being, and we feel blessed that he trained with us during the last five years of his life.

Our Feeding of the Hungry Ghosts ceremony this year was held for the first time indoors on a chilly October 27th, followed by a convivial potluck together with temple friends and families.

Retreat Guests: We were glad it worked out for us to offer Rev. Vivian a place where she could have a three-month individual retreat from July 10th to October 9th. The retreat guest house and temple grounds served her well in this regard. While in retreat, she found physical work helpful, kindly splitting and stacking firewood and spreading bark chips along the temple pathways. It was good to have her here, and we wish her well as her training continues to unfold.

In November, Rianna Green, who practices with Rev. Master Zenshō's meditation group in Sandpoint, Idaho, drove down from her home in northern Washington for a week-long retreat. It was good to get to know her and train together.



*Rev. Clairissa, Rianna Green, Rev. Master Meidō at the
Wallowa Buddhist Temple*

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.



Reverend Master Kōten with Rev. Clairissa, Rev. Master Aurelian, and Rev. Master Meidō on the front porch of the Wallowa Buddhist Temple during their visit in June 2019.

—Rev. Master Meidō and Rev. Clairissa

News of the Order

Europe

Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey

—Northumberland, England—UK—

Monastic Sangha Gathering: It was a pleasure to host the 2019 Gathering of monks from around the Order. 53 monks from Canada, USA and Europe as well as from temples around the UK attended. In the mornings we met as a group for discussions about a range of current issues and it was very helpful to share thoughts and experience. We begin each session by making gasshō and saying the three homages.



In the afternoons there were small group meetings and the opportunity to catch up, have tea or a walk together. Our three novices and two postulants did an excellent job of providing meals, teas and snacks.



We filled the Ceremony Hall for Morning Service

On Saturday 28th, we invited our local congregation for a social tea and a chance to meet with our visiting monks especially. A good number came, bringing plentiful delicious homemade cakes and we had an enjoyable tea together.

Towards the end of the gathering we held a festival memorial for our Founder, Rev. Master Jiyu. We offered our gratitude for her life of practice and training, and for all that she did to establish the Order and to help Buddhism flourish in the west. We also expressed our gratitude to Rev. Master Haryo at our last meal together, not just for his guidance and teaching during the Gathering, but also for his ongoing direction and support of our sangha across the six countries where our Order has temples and/or meditation groups.

Rev. Alexander's health: Some of you will know that Rev. Master Alexander has been coping with the progression of Parkinson's disease for many years now. In recent months we all came to realize that he needs a greater level of support that the community at Throssel could provide. With the help of his doctors and a social worker, he has now moved to a local care home, half an hour's drive from the Abbey. The care home manager and staff

are respectful and supportive of his wish to maintain his Buddhist practice and a small room has been made available for him to practice meditation. We visit regularly and the staff are helping him adapt to his new situation. Offerings of merit for him would be most welcome.

Segaki: Our Segaki retreat is a significant annual event for us all. It began as a quiet sesshin of sitting, with teaching from Rev. Master Leandra and a talk from Gill James, a longstanding lay minister. (All the talks are now on our website.)

In the evening in the dark (and rain!), we processed up to Myrtle Bank for the Toro. In this short ceremony, Rev. Master Leandra lit the fire (in a brazier) offered incense and gave a dedication, which was followed by singing *the Scripture of Great Wisdom and Adoration of the Buddha's Relics*.



Founders Day: Our annual festival for our Founder was on 4th November this year. (Rev. Master Jiyu died on 6th November 1996.). Rev. Jishin had trained with Rev. Master Jiyu and gave a moving dedication at the beginning of the ceremony and a talk afterwards (now on our website.)

A wild goose flew into a flying sky
And on into a deeper blue.

And on through the darkness of the darkest night.
Her true heart knew the direction home.

Community work wood chipping day: We had a community work day on Friday 13th September to make wood chips from the brush wood and branches left over from our work thinning the Sitka spruce trees around our lower car park. The wood chips will be used to refresh paths in our gardens and grounds, and as mulch in our gardens. We hired a ‘Timberwolf’ wood chipper for the whole day, an impressive and noisy machine which can process branches up to 6” in diameter.



Gathering cuttings for chipping

Building work: Building work: During August a local builder renovated two of our porches to remove damp and mould. Monks and lay trainees completed the decorating work.

Broadband for the Allen Valleys: One morning in August three monks offered help to an organisation of local people in digging a trench for laying fibre optic broadband cables to connect properties in our remote rural area.

—Rev. Alina

Dharmazuflucht Schwarzwald

—*Gutach (Black Forest) – Germany*—

We were so pleased to welcome a variety of monks to our temple over the last few months. When monks live in a temple quite far away from the rest of the monastic Sangha, it is something really precious to have visits from one's Dharma brothers and sisters. So, a heart-felt thank you to all our monastic friends who came to spend a little time with us!

Rev. Master Haryo, the Head of our Order, came to stay for a week in mid-October. It was a privilege to have his still presence in our temple. While he was with us, he also did many maintenance jobs in the building, which was so helpful for us. The memory of seeing Rev. Master Haryo patiently working away at all these things and finding solutions for them (e.g. how to prevent mice from coming into our kitchen) will stay with us.

Before that, in early October, I travelled back from the monastic gathering at Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey together with Rev. Master Andō and Rev. Alina, who stayed with us for about eight days. Rev. Master Andō's parents originally came from Germany and she still has relatives here. It was lovely having these Dharma-friends here.

Before the monastic gathering, Rev. Master Shikō from Shasta Abbey arrived in late August and stayed with us for about ten days, before going to visit Rev. Master Mokugen in her temple in Wales. We much enjoyed having her here. We went together for walks up in the forests above us, where the landscape and the smells of nature are not too different from the ones in Northern California. Rev. Master Shikō had tea with a few of our regular congregation members who were here at the time, which they much appreciated.



With Rev. Master Shikō and Ute Heim



Rev. Master Andō and Rev. Alina with Rev. Clementia

Unfortunately, Rev. Clementia was not able to join me in going to the monastic meeting at Throssel, as she is still suffering from the after-effects of the three operations she had to undergo since Easter. As I don't drive and Rev. Clementia was not able to drive our car after the operations, a variety of friends in our lay congregation helped out with the many trips to the clinic and back. We are deeply grateful to them for that.

In August, Rev. Lambert from Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey came for almost three weeks. During his stay with us he skilfully worked on a path that leads down from the meditation hall area around the back of our temple building, and made a railing along it with a thick rope, as there is a steep drop underneath it. Thank you, Rev. Lambert.



Rev. Lambert at work

In November we had a Founder's Day celebration in memory of our Founder, Reverend Master Jiyu. The photo below of our Founder's Altar was taken by Joachim.



In mid-December, Rev. Kōjō is due to come from Throssel for about three weeks, and we much look forward to her visit.

In August, our friend and Lay Minister Paul Taylor from Lancaster, England, joined us for about a week, as he has been doing every summer for many years now. We really value his yearly visits. Not long before Paul's visit, we had a few students with three schoolteachers as well as a protestant pastor come for a morning. Rev. Clementia gave them an introduction into our practice, which was followed by a discussion on the difficulties young people are faced with in modern times.

Towards the end of October, we had our week-long Segaki retreat with a few of our regular congregation attending. At the

end of the retreat, we also had the annual general meeting of our charity.

Last year we had been invited to do a funeral ceremony for a woman who lived not far from us. Her husband, who used to have a marketing enterprise, had looked at our website at the time and offered to redo it. He has now done this, and we are very pleased with it. For anyone interested in looking at it, the address of our website is: www.dharmazuflucht.info

Rev. Master Saido had been taking care of our old website ever since the German temple was founded, and we are very grateful to him for all the work he put into this over all these years. Our previous website was linked to a British webhost, so in view of a possible Brexit and in accord with European regulations, it felt important to move it to a German provider.

As always, we warmly invite anyone who is already familiar with our practise to come and train alongside us, even outside of the scheduled retreat-times.

—*Rev. Master Fuden*

Great Ocean Dharma Refuge

—*Pembrokeshire, Wales-UK*—

In September we were able to attend the Monastic Sangha Gathering at Throssel Hole, and wish to thank Reverend Master Haryo and all the kind monks there for all the hard work that went into organising the event. Pete Corbett was able to look after the Temple at this time, and we thank Pete for his steady presence and help which made it possible for Rev. Caitlin and I to travel to the gathering.

Prior to the meeting we had the great pleasure of visits from some of our monastic friends from the USA. It was a joy to have Rev. Master Shikō, Rev. Master Rokuzan and Rev. Master Meidō come stay with us for several days and we also thank Rev. Master Willard from Throssel for his visit and help with the transportation.



In addition, after the meeting at Throssel, Rev. Master Meian travelled back to Great Ocean with us for a week's visit, and Rev. Master Saïdo joined us for a couple of days, helping her with onward travels. It was a great joy and privilege to meet up with dear and precious friends and we thank Rev. Master Meian and them all, for making the long journey to be with us for a while. As well as being together in the peace of the temple, we were also able to show our guests some of the beauties of Pembrokeshire.



In the summer, alongside our usual schedule we were able to accomplish some important maintenance tasks. A local joinery company replaced five windows, and we were able to make a good start on renewing and replacing the attic insulation. We deeply appreciate all those who offer help and support, the continuation of which is so very helpful for the ongoing offering of the Temple.

The hot summer this year helped everything in the temple garden to flourish, including a new wild flower patch for the insects and bees. Swallows successfully raised two broods of chicks in the ceramic nest we put up for them in the garage, and the martins raised young under the eaves of the Temple building. It was heartening to see the cycle of life at work.

As usual, we welcome and invite guests both lay and monastic to phone or write if they would like to join us for some

retreat time, and thank all of those who help and support the work of Great Ocean.

—Rev. Master Mokugen

Norwich Zen Buddhist Priory

—Norwich—UK—

Recent events: Our retreat in Cambridge on 19th October was an opportunity to sit in stillness for the day and this was much appreciated by the members of the East Anglian Sangha who attended.



Cambridge Retreat

The quiet space of the Hartington Grove Quaker Meeting House was an ideal venue for the day. It is always a pleasure on these occasions for old friends and new from both the Cambridge and Norwich groups to be able to meet up and practise together. The quiet day of meditation and contemplation focussed on the subject of ‘Trusting’ and what that means in zazen and in our

everyday lives. Thank you to the Cambridge group, for hosting the event and ensuring that it ran smoothly, as well as to those people who offered lifts from Norwich to the retreat.

On Sunday 3rd November, we celebrated our sixth anniversary, with a festival ceremony to express our gratitude to Reverend Master Jiyu-Kennett, the Founder of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, whose legacy includes our priory. Afterwards, we enjoyed coffee and biscuits, with a Dharma talk and discussion on the *Scripture on the Immeasurable Life of the Tathagata* which we always chant during this ceremony. This was followed by a bring-and-share lunch, which gave us the opportunity to chat and enjoy each other's company.



6th Anniversary

Thanks: Thank you to everyone who looked after the Priory and kept it open for some evening events while I was away at Throssel for the monastic gathering in September. I am also grateful to the people who help the Priory to keep going by

assisting with various ongoing jobs: cleaning and housework; gardening; DIY; and the book-keeping and accounts.

—*Rev. Master Leoma*

The Place of Peace Dharma House

—*Abersytwyth, Wales*—

This October we moved the temple into our new home. The house was bought primarily with an inheritance from Dilys Harris, who gave with gladness in knowing that she could help to support the life of faith, by providing us with a suitable property. After many years of looking, we found this lovely house, which is in a quiet cul-de-sac with trees and greenery. It has easy access to town and, from the first viewing, felt like it was the right one for us.

An appeal was put out to our broader Sangha, who are spread far and wide, as the temple is used mostly by those who travel to come on retreat here, asking if anyone would like, and be able, to offer donations to help us at this time. I have been touched by how many responded, both with cards of good wishes and generous offerings. Thank you all so much.

Since The Place of Peace opened its doors in 2001 we have been in four rental properties, one inherited house and now this, our sixth home.

Knowing that we were looking for a larger statue for our altar, Reverend Master Mokugen of Great Ocean Dharma Refuge gave us a beautiful seated Buddha, shown here. He has a most tender and stilling presence that teaches beyond words.



During the time of packing and moving, Ceri, Meilyr, Steffan and Gordon helped in so many ways, including offering food and cooked meals. Local decorator Mark Hughes, whom we paid to paint the house for us, volunteered his time by doing extra work, helping where he could, which included power washing the patio. Builders Ceredig and Dai generously gave their time, because they wanted to help us.

Whilst in the process of moving, we enjoyed brief visits from Reverend Masters Mokugen, Meidō and Reverend Caitlin, when they delivered the new Buddha statue. We also had the pleasure of a visit from Reverend Master Saido. It was good to see them again.

—*Rev. Master Myōhō*

Reading Buddhist Priory

—*Reading, England–UK*—

Monastic Visitor: In early September the Priory received a short visit from Reverend Caitlin of Great Ocean Dharma Refuge.

Later that month the Prior and Reverend Caitlin met up again when they both attended the monastic gathering at Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey.

Festivals and Ceremonies: The festival for Achalanatha was celebrated at the beginning of September, and that of Bhaisajyaguru, the Medicine Buddha, in October.

Retreats at the Priory: A half day retreat was held in October, and included the Renewal of Precepts ceremony, which has become a regular feature of the monthly retreat.

The Retreat Hut at the bottom of the garden was used twice in the last couple of months for short private retreats. This facility provides an extra arm to what the Priory can offer.

Group Visits: Reverend Gareth visited groups in London, Milton Keynes and the Isle of Wight for day and half day retreats in his capacity as visiting monastic for the south east of England.

Outside residential retreats: Our autumn visit to the Benedictine monastery at Alton in Hampshire took place at the end of October. For four days we had the opportunity to follow a familiar schedule which this time included the Renewal of Precepts Ceremony on the Saturday. Reverend Gareth gave two talks during meditation periods. In order to help the monks fulfil their vow of hospitality we have taken off them the need to provide working meditation periods for us. This has led Reverend Gareth to explore alternative ways of using that time after breakfast. In doing so we discovered local routes for silent group walking. So far, this seems to have worked well.

Alms bowl: A sangha member generously organised for a local company to come in and give our vintage gas cooker a thorough deep clean inside and out. He also sourced new cooker knobs which gave the final touch to its makeover. We thank him for this kind offering.

—*Gina Bovan*

Sitting Buddha Hermitage

—Cromford, Derbyshire—UK—

As some of you already know, I will be taking a retreat for the whole year of 2020 and during that time the Hermitage will be closed. I have long wanted to do an extended retreat, and now the conditions have come together to enable me to do so, for which I am exceedingly grateful.

One of the factors that led to this point was my feeling, which was supported by my fellow trustees, that the current legal structure of the charity is rather cumbersome for how the Hermitage actually functions. When I started to consider winding up the present legal structure – a charitable company – and replacing it with something simpler it struck me that there could be a gap between the old and the new, during which I could have a long retreat.

I am therefore in the process of winding up the Field of Merit charitable company, through which the Hermitage operates. I wish extend my gratitude to all who have visited and supported the Hermitage in the almost six years, so far, of its existence.

I plan to spend most of the year living quietly here at the Hermitage. My next news will be in January 2021 when I will let you know what will be happening next in the life of Sitting Buddha Hermitage.

—Rev. Master Alicia Rowe

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

Further Information

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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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