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Wesak altar at Shasta Abbey 2018

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*Bronze robe and bowl at Throssel
(see [news](#) for the story)*

An Odyssey through Depression

Rev. Master Oswin Hollenbeck

—*Shasta Abbey, CA–USA*—



“The means of training are thousandfold,
and pure meditation must be done.”

Great Master Dōgen, Rules for Meditation

When visiting one of our smaller temples a few years ago, I was asked by the prior if I might talk about or answer any questions about training with depression. As they pointed out, most if not all of our temples or meditation groups seem to have at least one person who struggles with serious depression.

In Part 1 I addressed training with depression from a point of view of pure meditation (serene reflection meditation). Here in Part 2 I offer some adjunct practices consonant with our tradition which I personally have found helpful, along with some closing thoughts. My thanks go to the numerous people who kindly reviewed the article and offered feedback. I dedicate this article to all who have been less fortunate than I in walking through these dark places and to all who have offered me assistance.¹

Part 2—Adjunct Practices

Adjunct practices to pure or formal meditation. I'm not sure long periods of formal, silent meditation are particularly helpful for people with serious depression. Perhaps it's the intense sustained concentration required. I find for myself, while not neglecting my formal meditation, it can sometimes be more beneficial to put my energy into other types of meditation. This is of course already the norm in our tradition when we integrate meditation with daily life. We're probably already familiar with the following adjunct or 'applied' practices. In offering them, I'm reminded of the sage advice of Kohō Zenji, Rev. Master Jiyū's master in Japan, "The truth, the whole truth, and anything else that works!"

The first adjunct practice is a core one we're taught when we begin meditation practice: **'every-minute meditation/zen' or 'working meditation.'** Ground your mind in something concrete that requires your physical participation. It's something you can do. And just doing can help counter the paralyzing lethargy of depression. Remember that body and mind are one! Simple activities are best and are multitudinous in daily life right in our own home: setting the table, eating, washing up afterwards, brushing your teeth, taking a shower, sweeping the floor, washing the windows, and so forth. Once when I asked Rev. Master Jiyu how to deal with despair over the heavy karma which I felt I was carrying, she quickly responded, "Well, get weaving!" In other words, quit wallowing and do something.

There's another aspect to this type of moving meditation: the Japanese word *samu* translates more closely as **'work service.'** It is labor, often physical, which is offered in service to the temple. It is an offering, made to benefit the temple, other people, the world, all beings. Dedicate the merit of such various 'every-minute meditation' activities to others. Then at home, at work, commuting, relaxing, doing anything anywhere, **engage in other-oriented activities, if only in your mind** (with mental 'acts'). The Four Wisdoms in Dōgen's *Shushōgi* are a good place to start: charity/generosity, tenderness/kind speech, benevolence, and sympathy/empathy/identification with others. These are ways the Bodhisattva acts to benefit others. We can all practice these in the myriad daily life

activities we find ourselves in. Any one of these wisdoms can be our underlying attitude, and they morph into each other. They are ways to not identify with the depressed self.

*

Community, sangha, other beings are invaluable help in dealing with depression. A community, family, or friend(s) can help pull us out of the self-imposed isolation and withdrawal that accompanies and exacerbates depression. This is a generally recommended ingredient of depression treatment, so I'll only add that: 1) human interaction is probably essential—Rev. Master Daizui, a senior monk skilled in working with people, used to emphasize to us that human beings are ‘social animals’;² 2) we probably need to develop trust that others might have a more accurate perspective than we do in our current depressed state; and 3) we ourselves have to continually make what seem to be tremendous efforts to overcome the reluctance to participate in social activities. The benefits may not reveal themselves right off. Self-motivation, our personal willingness to love ourselves enough to do what we may not want to do, is essential. Although others who love and care about us can help us, they cannot solve our problem nor do the training and healing for us.

*

Offering the merit of your practice to other people, especially those who are depressed, can be enormously helpful. There's something about empathizing with others who share your particular brand of suffering that refocuses ourselves outside our own problems. There's a practice in some Buddhist traditions called 'giving and taking'. The first step is one which I have found extremely helpful. You reflect to yourself that you are training on behalf of all the other people in the world who are depressed. Helping infinite others is an expression of the Bodhisattva vow. Due to lack of experience, I can't say anything more about the rest of the 'giving and taking' practice, but I do know that all offerings of merit, no matter how small, "like minute drops of water eventually fill a large container" and help ease the weight of depression.

*

Recognize the value of your training to the world. Spending time on yourself is essential. It is vital, for ourselves, others, and the world to do this work. Rev. Master Jiyu often emphasized that the training of one's own karmic tendencies is a key expression of the Bodhisattva vow. Through practice we make the world a lighter place for beings in the future. This is what we mean by contemplative practice. By doing something about ourselves, we naturally help others, and it is through meditation that we learn to sense what is truly compassionate to do.

*

While our tradition's meditation is 'pure' or 'themeless,' **other types of Buddhist meditation** often have a focus or 'theme,' something to anchor the mind other than itself. **Mantras**, the continual repetition of phrases with a spiritual meaning, are one such focus. In addition to the ones mentioned in Part 1, others I have found helpful are:

- “Nothing matters and mindfulness is all.” (from Rev. Master Jiyu’s 1976 retreat described in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*);

- “Going, going, going on beyond, and always going on beyond, always BECOMING Buddha, Hail!” (the last line of the *Scripture of Great Wisdom*);

- “May all beings be at ease.” (from *The Metta Sutta*);

and

- The Three Refuges or the Three Homages (“Homage to the Buddha, Homage to the Dharma, Homage to the Sangha”).³

Using a rosary to count recitations of a mantra can be helpful for engaging more of the body—our hands—and maintaining focus. Setting such mantras to a simple tune can also help keep them in mind; using them while walking can also be good.

Reciting or chanting scriptures. Recitation of scriptures is more helpful than reading or listening to them because it's doing something. You can observe this for yourself if you compare reading and reciting when you do them. Recitation requires engaging more of your mind and

body, even if it's just an additional part of your brain, your vocal chords, mouth, and ears. Even such minimal activity helps undermine the lethargy common in depression, the feeling of "I don't feel like doing anything." I will often chant my morning service scriptures while walking around the cloister or the monastery perimeter. I use the scriptures like a continuous mantra. Doing so keeps my mind focused on something other than counting how many more rounds I have to go and thereby falling into complaining mind.

Be open to the possibility that **chanting the scriptures** may have additional value. There's a story of a French monastery that in the wake of the Second Vatican Council suspended chant as part of its traditional liturgy, a primary contemplative practice. Many of the monks became fatigued and seriously ill, most without any findable cause. A prominent physician and international ear specialist finally recommended reinstating their traditional chants, and most of the fatigue and illnesses vanished within nine months. In analyzing the sound frequencies of the chants, the physician discovered that the high frequencies produced by the chants were providing a specific 'charge' that stimulated the brain. The hearing of these chants provided restorative energy that compensated for the long hours of prayer, minimal sleep, and vigorous work which typified monastic life.⁴

I had a similar experience while training at Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey a few years ago. I wasn't able to make it to morning or evening services and was fairly depressed. I remembered this story about the French monks, so I started

listening to audio recordings of some of our festival litanies. With only 30 minutes a day regularly, that spell of depression quickly vanished! I have to add that one of my teachers suggested that it might not have been the liturgy, it might have simply been doing something to keep my mind from brooding or to stay off my computer. Regardless, something was helped by doing this particular practice. Once I was able to resume participation at services, I didn't find the need to continue listening to chants in this way.

It's important to find chants that resonate with you. These particular chants were probably helpful to me because they had personal significance. I was familiar with them and they had been offered by my master. Before becoming a monk, Rev. Master Jiyu had been an English musician specializing in ancient and medieval chants. When she concluded that English language and Japanese chant forms were incompatible, she set our Sōtō Zen scriptures to a four-part chant style developed from medieval and early English Renaissance chant forms. Most of the chants she arranged may be found at <http://shastaabbey.org/liturgy-ceremonies/> (or search Archives for specific ceremonies). Her arrangements have a similar effect on the body-mind of the listener that is sometimes ascribed to Asian chants according to the 'vibration theory'.⁵

If this type of chant doesn't appeal to you, there are other forms and styles of Buddhist chant available on the web. I find particularly useful and enjoyable traditional Chinese chants in the 'ocean tide' style and Pali/English

Theravada chanting. Find what works for you. My sense is that using ones which become familiar is probably most helpful.

*

I can't say enough about **practicing gratitude**. "Be grateful" may be the last thing that a depressed person wants to hear, but it's vital. We can be grateful even though we don't feel grateful. Rev. Master Jiyu would frequently tell the story of a monk who kept leaving the monastery and upon his return would always say, "I'm so grateful to be here." After his fourth or fifth return, Rev. Master quipped, "Remember that the next time you want to leave!" She also once commented that gratitude is the water that primes the pump of enlightenment. If we want to know peace of heart, we need to put effort into fostering the attitude of mind that is the hallmark of realization—and which helps brings it about. Frequent priming seems essential.

*

A point from another OBC master is to listen to **how we talk to ourselves**. Would we say to others that they are stupid, a failure, not worth knowing, useless, that they might as well be dead? Is this being respectful to oneself? Through paying attention to what our mind is doing, we can catch such thoughts, turn them around, and break their habit. Can we cultivate right speech and endeavour to speak true and loving Dharma to ourselves? What would the Buddha say to us if we went to Him with our troubles? How would

Kanzeon (Avalokiteshvara, embodiment of Great Compassion) respond to our call? These are other ways of looking up and not identifying with depression. We may experience depression, but we are not solely that. We are a person who happens to be depressed rather than a depressed person.

*

Remember you are not alone and don't despair. Any way we can break the lonely isolation common in depression is good. Knowing and maintaining contact with others who suffer from this illness can help. I also remind myself that my training with mental and emotional pain may not be that different than the training of my fellow monks with physical pain.

Within our Order we have monks who have trained with serious depression, some for many years. So the monastic sangha is not unaware of these kinds of struggles. Several detailed articles may be found in back issues of *The Journal of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives*.⁶ Depression doesn't stop our training. I myself have found that except for situations of extreme stress, even when serving as a prior, I could usually function adequately, make good decisions, and be of spiritual help to others. I am no exceptional practitioner, but I can also attest to small moments of insight that confirm the value of not giving up. It may be helpful to **remember impermanence**: everything changes, all is in flux. We are not fixed, stuck, or broken for all time. By doing something, no matter how small, we prove to

ourselves that this is so. In every moment we are continually creating our future.

*

None of this is easy. I continue to train in this myself. And sometimes we can have a small ‘breakthrough’ that gives us hope and confidence in the practice of ‘being still and looking up.’ While at Throssel Hole Abbey a few years ago I had such an experience. Even in a darkest moment, I could muster the faith and willingness to be bright. And then I had to do it in the next moment, and then the next. Eventually I just got on with what I was doing and the fog lifted. So it’s worth making the effort, no matter how small. Rev. Master Daizui used to teach us in regard to both self and others, “Never give up,” and it’s especially applicable with depression.

*

In closing, loving and accepting our depression is another way of saying that we are taking refuge in our true nature. Depression is not our enemy or an opponent. **We train with depression, not against it or in spite of it.** By turning to That which is pure within us, we help our own confusion and suffering. This ‘true nature’ is what Shakyamuni Buddha called ‘the infinite loving-patience of the Unborn.’ We ourselves are that love, we just need to activate it. In labelling our type of meditation ‘serene reflection’, we use ‘reflection’ rather than other common synonyms such as ‘illumination’ or ‘insight’ in order to

emphasize that we reflect the bright Buddha nature which is already there.

Or expressed yet another way, we can relinquish identifying with the depressive state and not allow it be ‘who we are,’ the totality or essence of our self. We do not deny the suffering, but we can recognize, however faintly, that it is not ‘me.’ In a fundamental sense, depression is simply (!) a condition of our skandhas. It is a temporary state. It is impermanent, subject to change, and thus not-our-self (*anatta*). It is not our inherent identity. As with all conditions of body and mind, internal and external, we want to sit still and be bright. In this way we illumine or reflect our True Nature, the True Reality, which is not separate from everything else in the universe. This is serene reflection meditation. This is what Dōgen advocated and all the Buddhas and Ancestors have taught and practiced. It is the “pure meditation which must be done.”

There’s always more, the odyssey continues. We need to always come back to pure meditation. One of my fellow monks who also suffers from depression pointed out to me a while back that I consider the possibility that I had been trying too hard to feel better. We all want to feel good, of course, it’s the ‘trying too hard’ that creates the suffering. He suggested putting more effort into accepting the painful feelings. Subsequent to writing this article and after another round of crash, climb, and new plateau, I begin to see the wisdom in his perspective. Again, not easy. We want to

remain open to new approaches and advice that may give us a fresh view on our training with this challenging koan.

OBC Teachings on Depression and Despair

Three Part Series on Depression:

- Part 1, “*The Night Encloses Brightness*,” Journal of the Order of Buddhist Contemplative (OBC), Spring 1995: 7–30.

- Part 2, “*And, at Dawn, No Light Shines*,” Journal of the OBC, Autumn–Winter 1995: 71–85.

- Part 3, “*This Truth Holds for Beings All*,” Journal of the OBC, Spring–Summer 1996: 54–78, and “*Postscript: All or Nothing*,” 79–86.

- Three articles on Depression. *Journal of the OBC*, Spring 2002: pp. 1–31, available here:

<https://journal.obcon.org/articles/three-articles-on-training-with-depression/>

- “*The Light of Buddha*,” Abbess’s Dharma talk of 20 December 2015 [winter solstice, the darkest time of year] at <http://shastaabbey.org/audio/rmmTheLightOfBuddha15.mp3>

You may be able to find copies of the older Journals at an OBC temple, or contact the Editor, Rev. Alina at journal@throssel.org.uk

Notes

1. I often address the reader as ‘you’ in order to avoid the impersonal ‘one,’ and I use ‘we’ for those who suffer from depression, especially the long-term type. Depression seems to be the same ‘animal,’ regardless of its length, cause, frequency, etc. From my reading, it seems to exist more as a spectrum of degrees rather than to consist of discrete types. On one end it includes the mild variety similar to other emotions such as anger, fear, or worry, but it can encompass longer periods of grief following a significant loss. What I offer here may be suitable for these other degrees or types. I am not suggesting that any of these teachings are a substitute for other treatment and approaches, many of which I have found helpful at times. I am also not addressing bipolar illness.
2. Rev. Master Daizui MacPhillamy was a senior disciple of Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett and succeeded her as Head of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives. He died in 2003.
3. Other possibilities are Sanskrit mantras, such as the processions used at Shasta Abbey for many of our Order festival ceremonies. See link later in article to Shasta Abbey ceremonies.
4. Katherine Le Mée, *Chant: The Origins, Form, Practice, and Healing Power of Gregorian Chant* (New York: Bell Tower, 1994) pp. 123-128.
5. The so-called ‘vibration theory’ refers to the use of specific scales, chords, and harmonies to engender particular emotions in the body. For instance, what we call the minor scale in contemporary Western music was used by ancient Greek musicians for musical compositions about death—it’s sombre, sad, and melancholy. Most of our OBC plainsong chants use musical modes which engender a bright, yet still feeling, i.e. spiritually uplifting, but not stimulating in an excitable way. See *The Idea of Creative Sound and the Theory of Vibration*, Chapter 3 of Lama Anagarika Govinda, *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism* (New York: Weiser Books, 1969) pp. 25-29.
6. See list of writings at end of article.

Note: The image at the beginning of the article is a 1000-armed Kwan Yin found in Maitreya Temple, Tainan, Taiwan.

The Heart of the Matter.

Rev Larena Dore

—Norwich—UK—

Written in response to the last (Summer) issue of the Journal

I begin from the premise that all of you reading this are practitioners of Sōtō Zen, and as such, are conversant with the value of meditative and preceptual practice: it is our blood and bones, and as such, it informs our decisions.

We are whole, we are complete – and we are human. As human beings, we face many challenges, and for those of us who experience post-traumatic stress disorder and accompanying anxiety and depression, everyday tasks can become monumental and require monumental effort – simply getting up and getting dressed can be an achievement. I have a dog, and it would not be over-dramatic to say he is a life saver – and he needs feeding and walking. I look at him with compassion and wonderment sometimes because he knows how to do the next thing, and does it.

All things possess Buddha nature. Body and mind are not separate: this is well illustrated with post-traumatic

disorder, because the body carries memories and it remembers in full technicolour horror and detail. In those moments of extreme distress and bodily panic, it is hard to be aware of anything else – yet I know Something Else, my training takes me to a deeper place. I believe Rev. Master Jiyu once said to a monk who rang a bell timidly, “If you are going to ring the bell, ring it loudly,” i.e. even if you’re worried about getting it “wrong,” ring it with conviction. When I am overcome from trauma, and a second of stillness comes, I ring all my bells and gongs loudly to bring me back to the present moment, to remind me of the here and now, that I am safe, that the trauma is not happening to me again.

Bringing oneself back to the present moment, using mindfulness, is not limited to our practice – it is widely used by psychologists, psychiatrists and counsellors. Now to the heart of the debate: does psychology detract from our practice; is it in opposition to our spiritual path? In response, I would like to give a straight answer: no. Nothing is outside Buddha Nature.

When we experience physical difficulties, we see our GP, and depending on the outcome of our assessment, we might be referred to a specialist. The diagnosis leads us to cardiologists, oncologists, urologists etc. – we are referred to specialists, people who possess skill and expertise and we trust to their judgements. Why should it be any different with mental health issues? Why not seek the advice of an expert on psychological damage, on the deep and profound effects of life-changing trauma? The ‘psychological path’ also

involves the prescription of medication; depression, anxiety and PTSD are not just about emotions, about feeling “down” or “worried” or “upset;” they are often also about chemical imbalances in the brain, and just as we take medication for physical symptoms, so I, and some other monks in the order, take medication to help stabilise the chemicals released by our adrenal and hormonal system; I just may not have been very open about it. Likewise, some monks have sought out specialists in ME, an illness that also debilitates both body and mind.

When embarking on counselling, it is important that the counsellor is right for you – if you are going to journey into what is most painful, then you have to feel a certain empathy with the person and TRUST them: you are in it for the long haul, and you have to be confident that the person you are working with is right for you, that they respect your beliefs and practices. If not, then say so! Find somebody else: I did, with the agreement of the counsellor who recognised my case was beyond her experience and that I would be better served by someone more skilled and with a more detailed knowledge. A good practitioner is also someone who is prepared to say, “I don’t know, but I’ll ask someone who does.”

Rev. Master Leandra spoke of “wise discernment” in her article and Rev. Master Leoma talked about deciding for yourself if the benefits of taking medication out-weigh the side effects (something we also have to consider when the prescription is for physical causes). [*Their articles are in the*

Summer 2018 Journal. Ed.]. Things are not black and white: we may have clear views about what we will do when we are presented with health issues, but until you are in the situation and given the options, you don't actually know; thus I would guard against the categorical. We live a preceptual life, and the precepts and meditation inform our decisions. We only have this moment and can only make good decisions based on where we are at this moment in time. Our practice is not formulaic – it is not a case of if we do this, this, and this, our difficulties will be resolved. Neither is working with a psychologist/psychiatrist/counsellor a “quick fix,” it requires months and years of hard work and commitment, just like training. It also requires courage, just as I think you'll agree Sōtō Zen is not for the faint hearted! And yet the latter is very simple. In the early years of my training, I could never understand why Sōtō Zen was referred to as “farmers' Zen,” it seemed so complicated to me, but it is just about doing the next thing, and that next compassionate act might be about accepting the help of a skilled counsellor.

Oh, and ring the bell loudly...

Thank you.

My Illness is not my True Nature

Charlie Holles

—*Norwich-UK*—

Of course the above title should be self-evident to a Buddhist but sadly that is not how I have felt till very recently. I have lived with mental illness most of my life. The symptoms of OCD (an anxiety based condition) began to show before I was a teenager and by the time I left school the disorder was firmly established. This was accompanied by depression which has always come and gone in phases. Back in the late 1960's there was little understanding of these things. I recall going to my doctor when I was a student at college and he really had no understanding of what I was seeking help for. This only made me feel further isolated and lost.

I knew something was wrong as my obsessive compulsions were not the norm. I felt shame and when people commented (often cruelly) on my eccentric behaviour, I began to develop hiding strategies to mask what I was. I judged myself very harshly. The OCD has always been in the background and sometimes when the depression has been really bad I have felt suicidal, though I never

actually tried to take my life. That pattern has persisted even until quite recently.

Even my ex-wife never knew the full extent of what I was dealing with. I simply could not acknowledge the fact of mental illness. From my 30's onward I did try to work with different therapists – some in alternative medical fields and some using different counselling techniques. What I now realise is that I was hampered by being unable to fully admit to what was happening. I did develop quite a lot of insight into how childhood trauma had shaped my state of mind but I could not get beyond that.

It was during the early 70's that I began to meditate with an Indian guru; I think what drew me to that was knowing that something was amiss in my life. In 1990 I first attended Throssel and I took Jukai the following year. At the time I was living on the west coast of Scotland, far from any sangha members and I used to visit the monastery several times a year, usually for a week or so each time. My OCD in particular made these visits very stressful and difficult and I was often reduced to floods of tears. I usually suffered a terrible migraine attack during a visit and I needed a lot of spiritual counselling.

Looking back, I see that during the first decade or so of my training I was desperately grasping at Zen practice as being what could save me and perhaps help me to be cured. Of course it does not work like this – at least not in most cases.

In a way I have managed my life fairly well in the sense of learning how to live with the manifestation of my illness. Yet it has always taken a toll on me. It is emotionally draining to be constantly 'on guard'. There are many things I cannot do. Although I am an introvert, I think that the way I had been dealing with things had further cut me off from people. I always felt as if I had to hide this dark and shameful part of me. Living with constant anxiety about situations that could be difficult due to my OCD is exhausting.

There was a period of several years from the early 2000's when my Zen practice drifted. I continued to meditate and had a lot of books that I had bought at Throssel, but I had little contact with other members of the sangha. I was hanging on by my finger tips and my OCD and bouts of depression got worse.

Gradually I re-established contact with other practitioners and perhaps about 4 years ago I began to see that I could no longer continue to hide from myself the fact that I suffered a mental illness. I had never been able to look myself square in the mirror and admit to that. The process of doing that was not instant but gradually I began to face it.

The last 18 months or so brought me to a crisis point which was at its worst late last year. The onset of age-related physical health issues added to the stress of my mental health. It was probably the lowest I have ever been and I went to the mental health service. I had reached a point where I felt that I was just marking time till I died. Perhaps

it is a little dramatic to describe it as a ‘dark night of the soul’ but I think I needed to reach that nadir to finally break through. Many things happened as a result of that experience; I developed a much deeper insight into how my illness began. Although that is not always necessary or helpful, for me it was important. I began to see how we can contribute to our state of mind through poor diet, lack of exercise and self-imposed isolation. I made changes in these areas which helped a lot.

But perhaps the most important thing has been that, at last, I have begun to accept that my illness is my koan. I no longer expect that it will be magically cured. Maybe it is in part that I am slowly understanding how the ego, the self and the personality that we think we are do not constitute our true nature. I have often thought that in some strange way it is through my illness that my small self has tried to assert itself. It is saying that this sick, eccentric being is the real me so it does not want to be free of the illness. I wonder if this makes sense.

As I begin to see that this is not my real self I can learn to live with it without it impacting so painfully on my life. Being open about what I suffer has been vital too. There is still quite a lot of fear about talking about my illness to others and it is not something I do with everyone. But it has been very affirming that since becoming more open I have not had a single negative or unpleasant reaction. In fact the love and acceptance I have experienced has been deeply touching. I am getting near a point where I can say that I am what I am

and that is fine. I am grateful for my life. I may wish sometimes that I could change it but I cannot, so I accept it. Perhaps I can say also that I am grateful for my illness.

The Mind of Poverty

Rev. Master Oriana LaChance

—*Eugene Buddhist Priory, Oregon–USA*—

I recently came across the phrase “the mind of poverty” and was struck by its power. It is the mind that is impoverished. We are not speaking about material poverty, but rather emotional and spiritual poverty – the sense that we can have of lacking something, of somehow being shut out, or of being unable to give or receive love. Along with this sense of impoverishment, there is frequently a wish to be anywhere other than where we are, an idea that if we could just get a hold of our life, if we could be “over there” rather than “here,” we could be content, full rather than impoverished. This desire to be somewhere other than where we are is often the root of our suffering and augments our inability to be right here, to do what is in front of us with a degree of integrity and grace.

One of Webster’s definitions of “integrity” is “the quality or state of being complete or undivided.” Undivided. The mind of poverty seems to be based on division: me and them; having and not having; what I have and what I want; or what I have and what I believe I deserve. Many of us

attempt to feel better by telling ourselves that at least we are fed and clothed, or at least we have our mental capacities, or at least we are not as bad off as our good friend who has cancer or our neighbor who lost their job. Comfort by comparison. Superficially, this way of thinking may comfort us in the short run, yet in the end it only reinforces our division. We want to be on the “good side” of this division, the “comfortable side.” We still haven’t addressed the cause of the mind of poverty – that is, our inability or unwillingness to accept the natural ebb and flow and impermanence of any state in which we find ourselves. Instead, we scramble to stay on the “right side” of the line, the side that offers ease and pleasure and a happy ending. When we fall onto the “wrong side” of the line – even by the circumstances of any given day – we may have a day (or a life) of complaining and despair.

It is gratitude that brings us back to the undivided. Not gratitude that arises from being on the comfortable side of the divide, but rather gratitude that arises from life itself. To be grateful for this or that, to count our blessings is a beginning, but such gratitude is dependent on things going the way we wish them to; such gratitude can always be withdrawn or diminished by the circumstances of our life. There is a gratitude that is not based on anything external or temporal, on any accounting that balances out on the pleasure side; this gratitude arises from the ground of being and cannot be diminished. It just is. No this or that, just immensity. Just, yes.

I am recalling the poem *Thanks* by W.S. Merwin that I read to our congregation a few years ago. (See <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/thanks> for the complete poem). The poem was well-liked and, at the same time, there were objections. Of course you can be thankful for the night sky and the water, but “for wars and the police at the door, and the beatings on stairs”? There is a gratitude that hums along, not always recognized or heard, that is not dependent on “does this make me feel good or not,” or “do I like this or not”, or even “is this just or not.” It is beyond any duality and extends deeper than any mind of poverty in which we may mistakenly seek to find a familiar comfort.

Merwin’s poem ends with:

we are saying thank you faster and faster
with nobody listening we are saying thank you
thank you we are saying and waving
dark though it is¹

Notes

- ¹. W.S. Merwin, *Thanks, Migration: New & Selected Poems* (Copper Canyon Press: CA, 2005), p. 280.

A few thoughts on Practice and Sexuality

Anonymous senior monk

I felt I might attempt to write something about sexuality from the viewpoint of my Buddhist practice, a personal view. This isn't easy, especially as a monk and celibate for decades, but I offer a few thoughts in the hope that something may be of help. I share some reflections on aspects which can affect how we may approach sexuality, plus one or two possible issues in relationships and a wider context of practice.

Some of us may find we approach sexuality and/or sexual intimacy with others with a complex mixture of longings and self-concerns. A significant part of this comes from our earliest encounters with sexuality, our upbringing especially. We are keenly tuned to pick up what seems to be acceptable from others, our parents especially, which in turn was shaped by the upbringing they experienced, and on it goes, back into the past. Whatever the context of our earliest encounters with sexuality, these experiences have a lasting effect on us, entangled within all the other learning of growing up. The physiology of each person is unique too, and the way sexuality expresses for each of us is deeply

individual, as well as deeply personal. This perspective shows me how there can be no standard or valid comparison for anyone's life; we all find our way in a very immediate sense, with a learning over time too.

And for young people to come to a sense of what feels 'right' for them with regard to sexuality (and everything else) and to live true to this this can be challenging. Western culture unfortunately does not assist in this; advertising and some of the press have long portrayed idealised bodies and used the draw of sexuality to increase sales. And the recent digital revolution is having quite an impact; offering easy access at home to a proliferation of sexual material on-line and in social media outlets. Over exposure to this can have effects we are beginning to see: setting up expectations, anxiety and pressure to conform in the young, with also signs of desensitization and emotional disconnection. I do appreciate this is not a simple matter.

And there is still sadly a lack of understanding, prejudice and even hostility against some gender groups – it seems to me for transgender individuals especially at present. It can take some self-confidence, supportive friendships and guidance to navigate such territory.

One of the reasons I felt drawn to write this is because of a short time in my youth when I found myself easily drawn into sexual encounters. This was in the pre-AIDS era when sexual behaviour was relaxed and loose in some youth cultures. I cannot speak for others, but for me this was not

free and easy; I see now that I was somewhat driven and self-centred and how little (if at all) the other people involved mattered to me. I could not quite see this then, though with hindsight, I recognise there was an underlying unease which I did not/could not pick up on.

I have learned since in other areas of life how self-centred taking is pretty hollow and ultimately not satisfying; it comes from and reinforces a sense of separation and lack. Being open and willing to see how I might give opens up many possibilities. Without expectation, the way is open to connect with others and learn from situations; this can be at times surprising, delightful, challenging.

And I appreciate that finding how to balance one's own sexual needs while being sensitive to others is not easy at times, especially in the early stages of finding and establishing a relationship. I think we would all acknowledge that pursuing one's own gratification without consideration for another is not respectful, yet sometimes the sexual drive can seem to override how we would wish to be. (This is not specific to sexuality; we all find ourselves driven in certain circumstances, into anger or self-defensiveness, for example.) This can be uncomfortable to see, but when we feel a pang of regret, this actually is showing us where we need to take care and that there is another way. In the ups and downs of our life, there is a working out as we find our way with gentle willingness. A trust is being expressed in our letting go and going on which we may not recognise.

Though a strong and universal instinct, sexuality can be remarkably sensitive and fluid. In a relationship, sexual needs can vary day to day for a range of reasons: tiredness, mood, preoccupation with problems elsewhere and other more subtle factors which may be harder to define. There are also changes over time, maybe through ageing or ill health, or simply a fluctuating drive. For a couple, finding a way through these changing circumstances together over time opens a wider perspective and appreciation of each other and the relationship, which in turn helps in finding a perspective for one's own needs. I recognise something of the intimacy and bonding within a longer term relationship and also a perspective big enough to allow for all the joys, irritations and disappointments of a life lived together; being without barriers or pretence (or them being seen through when one attempts to construct such!).

A longer term recognition of differing needs in a relationship is more unsettling and not easy to address. For the one partner, there can be a fear to speak: not wishing to cause hurt, not knowing how to broach the subject, while feeling the need to be true (and possibly not being too sure what this is). For the other; picking up signs that something has changed, feeling rejected, worried that they are no longer loved. It takes some courage and trust in the relationship and in each other to take the risk of talking together honestly and sensitively; and for both to be willing to listen and be open to the other's position. Sometimes talking with a relationship counsellor may be of help or perhaps taking refuge in a trusted member of one's sangha. There may well be more

options than might at first seem; compatibility has many aspects and relationships can adapt if the basis and the wish to do so is there.

Some will have times, or a lifetime, of living alone and find their way within this, forming relationships in other ways. Some have children, which opens up a whole new way of life again. My life now is as a celibate monk having taken a vow of celibacy on becoming a postulant. Celibacy is not something I have ever *thought* about; it is completely woven into my commitment to my life as a monk and finds its way within that context and perspective.

No two lives are the same; when I visit someone's home for the first time, I am quite struck by the little insights revealed in the details of a unique lifestyle which they are totally immersed in, every inch being utterly familiar to them. Being one of a couple, being a parent, living alone, being a celibate monk; each life has an integral wholeness and infinite detail as each of us finds our way in ordinary day by day living. This applies to all aspects of our life; sexuality is not seen in a special category in Buddhism. Through just meeting that which comes my way, I find that, over time, something seems to soften and change. This seems to happen somehow within or through the process of training itself, while also needing my willingness, acceptance and going on in trust.

Relationships and practice (Part 1)

Rob Livingston

—*Beijing, China*—

I've sometimes felt envious of the monks at Throssel Hole and other abbeys and monasteries for their communities of faith, and even more so for the community of practice. The sangha is an incredibly powerful force – for the individual to be part of a movement, an all-encompassing dynamic environment where all the members of the community are seeking, and not seeking, in the same way. Where ritual and routine allow for the individual to be subsumed into the sangha's spiritual mission.

I'm not built for the monastic life, however. I am called to the push and pull of the outside world, the warmth and chaos of children, the interesting and frustrating human relationships that comprise the business environment, the attendant dynamics of power, risk and decision-making and the variety of moving countries and travelling to new places.

For many years, the most challenging element of my spiritual journey was finding the time to practice. It's not that I had an exceptionally busy life, with more demands and

distractions on my time than the average man or woman – although I might have made that excuse disguised in the form of an argument. Rather it was that my previous relationship didn't create the space, either physically or within my mind for the growth of a spiritual practice. It was like a wall, blocking the sun, only allowing a stunted growth in its shadow. Wonderfully, unexpectedly, now that I'm in the right relationship there is both the space as well as the impetus to practice and study, plunging headlong once again down a productive spiritual path. I say "unexpectedly" because previously – as a young single man and then in my first marriage – I had only had the space to meditate on my own, without the demands or distractions of a partner, and even more because now that spiritual journey is deeper and more profound than what it was like ever before.

I had had a strong spiritual practice when I was younger—in school and the few years after graduation. Daily devotion, weekly service, and reading scriptures were all part of who I was, even as I explored different faiths and joined different congregations. Being single was in many ways ideal – there was that space to have but a single conversation and overarching relationship, that with God. For a variety of reasons, though, I felt compelled to get married in my early 20s, thinking that marriage and starting a family would be even more holy; a sacrament that would accelerate the spiritual journey. But that marriage wasn't successful, and as too many people know, being in a bad relationship is all-consuming in the worst way. The exhaustion of coping with a lacklustre relationship can leave

watching the television or reading crime novels as the only simple salves for filling the time between arguments. It is impossible to perceive the unknown when revisiting a recurring dispute over kitchen tiles, a household version of Dōgen's observation in the *Mountains and Waters Sutra* of the impossibility of viewing the mountains from the scale of human thought.

Finally, as I approached 40 I in a sense awakened, and realized that time was swiftly passing by and the opportunity to live a full life was being lost. I was no longer willing to squander my life, and eventually broke away from that relationship, intending to be single once again, with the space to re-engage the spirit. But something funny happened—without expecting or anticipating it I fell in love completely, truly and serendipitously with a woman who has the same spiritual orientation, but who also needed the space and support to pursue that path. With her, it has been possible to achieve a discipline and focus on practice that neither of us has had before on our own.

How does this actually work though?—is a question that we've been asked. How could it be that something that's inherently social—a romantic relationship—can create the space or even encourage the letting go of self which is required for a spiritual journey in a quiet religion such as Sōtō Zen?

The answer is in the question. In the right relationship, one forgets oneself naturally because what is paramount is

the other person, and the shared journey you are on. To forget oneself is to open to a potential state of unconditional awareness, without personal demands or expectations. Then the relationship and the dialogue are no longer a social dynamic of two individuals, relating with each other with the purpose of fulfilling their own needs; but rather almost an asocial dynamic, with two people perpetually open to the other, without constant negotiation because there are no demands, just open hearts.

This idea of subsuming oneself into the relationship is frowned at by modern western society, where individualism is praised beyond all other virtues. The pejorative charge of “co-dependency” is dismissively laid against a couple who focus on each other rather than on their own individual needs. But I believe that there is no other option for a Buddhist who chooses to enter a relationship.

But that’s all theory, in a way. How does it manifest itself in practice on a daily basis? How is it possible to sit zazen next to your lover and not focus on the self or on them?

The key comes back to the natural notion of forgetting oneself. When I sit next to my wife for meditation, it is easier to forget myself and let go of the present than if I’m sitting alone. That’s because forgetting myself in the context of our relationship is now embedded in my limbic system—while on my own it is easier to remember my own personal hopes, fears, desires, and worries. Put another way, when she’s next to me I’m not thinking about what makes me tick— when

sitting in meditation next to her, that descent (or ascent) into selflessness is faster and smoother as it is part of that muscle memory.

It's important to qualify this observation with another—I don't believe you can have a sangha just of two people, no matter how overwhelming or selfless their love. When we go on retreat, the power of the broader sangha is readily apparent, especially with the shared energy of dozens of committed trainees all seeking to let go of the self together. But when we're on our own, that dynamic of a shared commitment to letting go of ourselves helps create the space for serene reflection that is otherwise so elusive.



In their wedding ceremony at Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey, Mia and Rob kneeled and made a gasshō using one hand each, while the celebrant wrapped a mala around the gasshō as a symbol of their spiritual union.

Relationships and practice (Part 2)

Mia Livingston

—Beijing, China—

Students learn from teachers not only from instruction but also by copying them, and Buddhism is no exception. Buddhism evolved from a man who left his wife and son, chose to live a celibate and monastic life, and established single-sex monastic orders. It would be understandable, then, if his followers were to assume that in order to understand his teachings, we must also be celibate and monastic. If I were to follow this line of thought further, I come to wonder, why stop there? What if in order to understand the teachings, we must also be Nepalese and male? Perhaps we also need to be 35-year-old ex-yogis? Naturally, this is not the case. It would be folly to mistake the vessel for the contents. But at the same time we still need a vessel, and to some extent we have a choice over what form that vessel can take.

When choosing the form we want our lives to take in order to be the best trainees we can be, I can see how it could be tempting to believe that we should be as similar to the teacher as possible. While I cannot choose to be male, for

example, or Japanese in the case of wishing to learn Soto Zen, I could in theory still choose celibacy and monasticism. Certainly, many women have chosen that path before me. And so there is an assumption, sometimes in me and sometimes in others, that if I am serious about practising Buddhism, I should choose that too. Because others did; because my teachers did; because I can.

Or can I? There are just a few things which I have known in my bones for as far back as I can remember. They are constants, like the water which remains unchanged through raging storms and calm seas, through the changing of time. One of these constants is that I was always attracted to Buddhism. Before I knew its name, on my own I sought its resonance and created drawings and rituals which expressed it. It was like knowing someone “backwards”, to learn someone’s name only after I had already gotten to know them. And the other thing I have similarly always known in my bones is that I am meant, in this life and world, to have a romantic relationship.

These are two of the things that on a practical and a spiritual level make my heart whole. While the part about being attracted to Buddhism has been easy for me to admit, the bit about romantic relationships has at times felt almost embarrassing. I’m a counsellor, a Buddhist, a modern feminist, and I come from one of the most independent individualist cultures in the world (Sweden). Wanting to be in a romantic relationship has often been judged by many of my peers and I as a hopelessly outdated, unhelpful and needy

weakness. The notion seems riddled with delusions, such as “love at first sight” and the magical idea that meeting your “soul mate” will sort your life out and make you happy forever. I have enjoyed books on how the delusion was culturally and historically perpetuated (*Love Sick* by Frank Tallis) and read a plethora of scientific studies which detail how romance is merely a chemical cocktail of oxytocin and fear.

And yet. Despite everything I thought, and despite my stubborn attempts at independence, the things that I knew in my bones persisted. I couldn’t change them any more than a zebra could change its stripes. The heart leads where it will and one day it simply seemed right to follow, not out of anything as shallow as desire or as demanding as fear, not from personal preference but simply because there was no choice. I don’t know why. We belong where we belong, and where that is is not for us to say or to judge. Interestingly, it strikes me that the same thing could be said about celibacy or monasticism. We all do the same practice, try to lead a preceptual life and make preceptual choices, and we all aim towards the same destination; but the form in which we get there, that form that chooses us, differs.

From the inside, romantic relationships don’t look anything like I feared they would. I had tried to run from them, because I thought that they were a deluded navel-gazing love-in which would make my eyes turn away from spiritual practice. I am delighted to report however that there are different kinds of romantic relationships, and one of

those kinds – in my view the truest one, which doesn't operate from fear and base desire – actually helped me practice, rather than tempting me away. When my husband turns towards the Eternal, and deepens his understanding, I am more likely to as well; and vice versa. Our two faiths and motivations combined, equal more than their sum. My husband is strong where I am weak, and I am strong where he is weak. When we (metaphorically) hold hands and work together we are balanced and in broader harmony both inside and outside ourselves. Like a choir singing a song this compels us in turn to fall into harmony with the world 'outside' ourselves, and with our practice. Together we've made better connections: stronger family ties, better friends, better jobs, and a more steadfast practice than we were able to do alone. My point in this essay however is that there is no "better" way to practice; no better form than the one that we currently find ourselves in, and the form that we are naturally suited to.

And then there are the gray hairs. We have known each other since we were fifteen. Noticing each other grow old reminds us constantly of change, and of the loss of love as we know it that death one day will bring. I breathe in, and sometimes feel as if the rush of time is passing through me. One day I will have to let go for always, and so I start practising incremental letting go right now, on my cushion and through the day. Through every hope and longing, through each decision I need to make at home and at work.

Being seen—really seen—by someone every day prompts me to ask with more urgency, who am I? And how do I wish to live this life? It is hard to ignore anything when you live with someone who also wishes to understand and live only in truth. “If your first step is false, you will falter.” Like every couple and community we have had our share of arguments, but there is no winning one; only a further and deeper understanding to discover together underneath each apparent obstacle of conflict or sadness. Conflicts are like stubbing your toe on a rock, lifting the rock to clear the pathway, and finding a surprise treasure hidden underneath. When two people have devoted themselves to finding resolution, painful conflicts still occur; but they bring a gift.

The third Noble Truth, *nirodha* in Pali, is usually translated simply as *cessation* (of suffering). Arguably, that was not necessarily the full meaning of the word at the time of the Buddha.¹ Rather, *ni* meant ‘down’ or ‘within’, and *rodha* meant ‘wall’ or ‘earth bank’. In context this could be thought of as an image of fires of passion which rather than being completely extinguished are contained; sheltered; harnessed, by an earth bank. When my husband and I notice that there is something painful between us, as in meditation we first of all take care not to blame, despair, give up, look away, or act on fear or anger. Not acting on any of these things is honestly probably the hardest thing I have ever done. Next, through and despite the pain, we try to stay curious and tenderly look at the issue together, as if it were a fire that needs both nurturing and containment. Each of us asks ourselves, “what is this?” and “why is it arising now?”

Each answer gives way to a new answer, as if there were a million layers of different answers. We keep digging, asking each other and trying to understand, as layer after layer of rigid identification seems to fall off. The refusal to blame or run away, as if there were an earth bank to the fire, harnesses the power of our intention and focus. Finally after minutes, hours, days or sometimes even years, we arrive at the field that Rumi refers to: *“Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing/ and rightdoing there is a field./ I’ll meet you there./ When the soul lies down in that grass/ the world is too full to talk about.”* By seeking understanding and patience as if our lives depended on it, we have dug deep to build a foundation, a space in which there is only room for peace.² A space which is big enough to hold the fire of passion safely and productively, neither extinguishing it nor letting it run rampant to scorch the earth.

Notes

- ¹. David Brazier, *The Feeling Buddha*, Constable 2001, p. 89. Also discussed by Zenkei Blanche Hartman and Gaylon Ferguson in *21st Century Buddhists in Conversation*, Melvin McLeod (ed.), Wisdom Publications 2015, p. 104, and by Caroline Brazier in *Buddhist Psychology*, Constable 2003, p.13.
- ². This ‘contemplative discovery’ technique of conflict and pain resolution can of course also be used by single people, and in a sense it is already occurring in *Serene Reflection*. Other ways of doing it are through Eugene Gendlin’s ‘Focusing’ method, which there is information about here: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Focusing>, or through attending or practising psychodynamic, emotion-focused or sensorimotor psychotherapy.

News of the Order

USA and Canada

Shasta Abbey

—Mt. Shasta, California—USA—

Wesak: Several dozen congregation members, family and friends joined us on May 20 to celebrate the Festival of Wesak in celebration of Shakyamuni Buddha’s birth, enlightenment, teaching and death. In addition to the Wesak Festival ceremony, the weekend included, ringing of the temple bell 108 times, and a festive “picnic” (indoors due to the threat of rain). The previous evening featured special musical invocations and readings from *The Light of Asia* by Sir Edwin Arnold. It was lovely to spend this significant occasion in the Buddhist year with all who came to join us.



Wesak Altar with elephant and baby Buddha

Travel: Rev. Master Meian Elbert and Rev. Valora Midtdal spent a month traveling and visiting Dharma friends and relatives in Asia from June 23 through July 24. Rev. Master Meian was invited to address a session on *Buddhism in Times of Radical Change* at the Global Buddhist Village Symposium in Taipei, Taiwan on June 27. She and Rev. Valora enjoyed a visit to Dharma Drum Monastery and spent a week at Cheng Yuan Temple with the Abbess, Ven. Chun Ren, Ven. Ci Quan and the community.

They went on to Cheng Hoon Teng Temple in Malacca, Malaysia to visit Ven. Seck Lee Seng, its Abbess, who, like Ven. Chun Ren, is a disciple of the late Ven. Seck Kim Seng, Rev. Master Jiyu's ordination master.



Rev. Master Meian, Rev. Valora and Ven. Seck Lee Seng at Cheng Hoon Teng

From there, they traveled to Buddhist temple sites in Cambodia (Angkor Wat) and Sri Lanka, where they toured the Temple of the Tooth (site of a relic of Shakyamuni Buddha) and other temples and stupas. They took many photos and shared a selection with the monks at evening tea. Both monks were touched

by the kind hospitality offered them by monastic and lay sangha members – and even strangers – wherever they traveled. We're happy to have them both back home safely.

California Wildfires: We'd like to express our gratitude to all who expressed their concern for us during the recent Carr Fire, which was an international news item because of its severity. We were able to continue our schedule without interruption, and we invite everyone to join us in offering merit to those affected by wildfires.

Retreats: This summer, in addition to Introductory Retreats and a month-long intensive practice period, we offered a week-long retreat on *The Buddha's Teachings from the Pali Canon* led by Rev. Master Daishin Yalon and a Continuing Practice Retreat on *Transforming Daily Life*, with Dharma talks by Rev. Master Daishin and Rev. Master Kōdō Kay.

Ceremonies: Rev. Master Meian gave the Precepts to Tam Nguyen, who has been a lay resident for much of the summer, in a private lay ordination ceremony on August 10. We congratulate Tam and wish her the best as she returns to Louisiana to resume her university studies.

Rev. Amanda Robertson was the Celebrant at a June memorial ceremony for our old friend Donald Barry Wertheimer, who had been Rev. Amanda's husband before she entered the monastic life. We were glad to welcome their daughter Arnica, granddaughter Sara, and several of Don's friends who attended the ceremony.

Rev. Master Jishō was the Celebrant at a memorial ceremony for Judy Houg in July, the twentieth anniversary of her death, at the request of her husband, Adam Stolinski.

Rev. Master Meian was the Celebrant at a blessing ceremony for the new Redding Zen Buddhist Priory, where Rev. Helen Cummings is the Prior. Several monks accompanied Rev. Master Meian, and all enjoyed a festive potluck lunch with the

Redding lay sangha. Congratulations and best wishes to Rev. Helen and the Sangha as they continue their Buddhist practice together.

Rev. Master Andō Mueller was the Celebrant for a house blessing ceremony at the home of Nancy Anderson in Klamath Falls, Oregon in August, with Rev. Amanda Robertson as chaplain and precentor. The house and garden received the Precepts and the name “Garden of the Generous Heart.” Several members of the local congregation joined in the ceremony and offered the delicious potluck meal that followed.

Classes, Meditation Group Visits: Rev. Master Andō spoke with the World Religions class taught by Marty Zottola at Rogue River College in Grants Pass, Oregon in May.

Rev. Master Astor Douglas led a half day retreat at the Bear River Meditation Group in April. She offered basic instruction in Serene Reflection meditation and introduced the place of ceremonial in the practice. The morning included meditation, ceremonies, coffee and tea and the opportunity for questions and discussion. Rev. Master Meikō Jones led a retreat on the teachings of Great Master Dōgen during a stay with the group in July.

Visitors: Rev. Kōjō Bailey, a novice monk from Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey in the U.K., arrived in June for a visit of at least six months. Rev. Valeria Allison of Lions Gate Buddhist Priory arrived early in the summer to train with us for a couple of months. We’re glad to welcome these two monks and appreciate the help and training they offer.

Early August brought a visit from a group of Vietnamese-American lay trainees from the Bay Area. Organized by our friend Henry, the group of about 70 people arrived by bus in the late afternoon. They first went to the Buddha Hall to pay respects, make offerings, and chant scriptures, after which we all joined together in a festive Medicine Meal at the picnic area. They concluded their visit with a stop at the Buddhist Supplies Shop. We’re grateful to Henry and to all those who made the long

journey to visit our temple and share their Dharma practice, as well as to Laurie Ottens, Buddhist Supplies Shop Manager, who served the large group with care and grace, and to the lay residents and local congregation members who did so much to help make the occasion a success.



Bay Area tour group visitors and monks in the Buddha Hall

Work Projects: The Extern Sacristans, with help from lay guests and various monks, have continued clearing dead trees for fire safety and converting them to firewood and lumber.

The Friends of Shasta Abbey participated in a half-day woodcutting project at the home of Anne Johnson and Monty Bloom, and we're very grateful for their offering of the resulting firewood.



A local tree service professional fells a dead tree

—Rev. Margaret

Lions Gate Buddhist Priory

—Lytton, British Columbia—Canada—

Spring was slow to arrive this year, with flowers and greenery about two to three weeks later than usual. The summer months have brought hot weather, at times up to 40 C (105 F), which has helped our gardens to flourish. We have enjoyed radishes, lettuce, greens, new potatoes, herbs, zucchini, and

tomatoes so far this summer. We also planted a flower garden, several berry bushes on the water line, grape vines, and a peach tree, and we created a small water garden at Dragon Well.

We had a successful week-long Wesak retreat in mid-May, with eight people in attendance. It culminated on May 20 with a lovely Wesak Ceremony at Prajnatarā Hall, which we festively decorated for the occasion. The congregation circumambulated during the ceremony, offering incense and pouring water over the Baby Buddha. Afterwards we shared a joyful and lively meal at Bodhidharma Hall.

And we had a nice weekend retreat dedicated to Bhaisajyaguru in early August which was attended by about five people.

On June 24 we held the 8th Annual Kwan Yin Festival Ceremony in Lytton at the Chinese History Museum. There were close to 20 people in attendance, including local residents of Lytton. Afterwards, people enjoyed a nice potluck lunch together. We thank Lorna Fandrich, the director of the museum, for generously offering the space and facilities to make this possible.

We have also celebrated ongoing festival ceremonies throughout the spring on Sundays at Victor's. Over the past few months we celebrated the Keizan Memorial, Manjusri, Achalanatha, and Bhaisajyaguru ceremonies, and we have begun to hold Precepts and Shurangama ceremonies monthly.

We're happy to report that our little dog Bobi has completely recovered from his injuries sustained last winter as a result of being attacked by two larger dogs, and he is back to his energetic and feisty self. We recently brought him to Merritt so that the veterinarian, Dr. Molnar, could see him. The doctor was happy to see him and told us it was one of his most memorable cases.

In April, Rev. Aurelian had the opportunity to travel to Shasta Abbey for 10 days with a lay person who generously paid

the travel expenses. And in June, Rev. Master Kōten travelled to Edmonton to visit the Edmonton Buddhist Meditation Group. During the visit, he met with the group several times, led a day-long meditation retreat, and had the opportunity to offer spiritual counselling to various members of the group. Thank you to everyone who generously offered help and hospitality to Rev. Master Kōten during his trip. In early July, we said farewell to Rev. Valeria, who left for the US, where she will visit her family for a few weeks then travel to Shasta Abbey to spend a few months training there.

With the advent of warmer weather, we've been delighted to welcome more visitors. In April, our friends Lama Tsewang and Rev. Sukha, two monks of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, brought Sonam Khempo, a Buddhist Teacher from Los Angeles, and his wife Tsering. They both really like our temple and the surrounding mountains, which they said reminded them of Bhutan, and they recited blessings at various altars and shrines. We've also had visitors from the local area, and from Edmonton, Calgary, Kelowna, Victoria, Vancouver and the US. We welcome visitors at any time, either for day visits, longer stays, or "just for tea."

We recently had to change the Priory email address. The new address is as follows: lionsgatebuddhistpriory@gmail.com

—Rev. Master Aurelian

Wallowa Buddhist Temple

—Joseph, Oregon—USA—

Ceremony of Lay Ordination: On August 22nd Rev. Master Meidō gave the Precepts to local congregation member Mary Zeise in a joyous private ceremony, attended by three of Mary's close friends and with Rev. Clairissa assisting.

After the ceremony, the six of us enjoyed tea and Mary's home-baked cookies in celebration of her taking this important step in training.



Mary Zeise and Rev. Master Meidō following the Lay Ordination Ceremony

Memorial: On July 5th, the monks offered an outdoor memorial ceremony for Linda Sutch, dear friend of the temple who had practiced on Sundays with us for many years, and who died June 13th in Seattle. Four generations of her family gathered at a Kuan Yin shrine beneath a great pine on temple grounds to honor and celebrate her life, and we were glad for this opportunity to get to know her many lively descendants.

Wesak: This year Wesak was celebrated on a beautiful spring day in early June. The morning of meditation and ceremony

was followed by a delicious potluck meal, during which we sat and ate in small groups in various locations both inside and outside the temple. Many enjoyed a new lawn area, recently seeded, where once there had been a deck; this wide-open space to picnic and run and tumble was appreciated particularly by those who were 8 and 5 years old, and even the 9-month-old, who picnicked joyfully on the grass with his mother, reminding us all of the Baby Buddha himself.

Work on the Temple: In June, a carpenter friend stopped by with his family to share tea and then help us install a 17-inch-high Kuan Yin statue in a rooftop niche in the Retreat Guest House eaves. In July, we welcomed the professional custom installation of ten top-down, bottom-up window blinds in the meditation hall, generously donated by a friend of the temple. In August, Rev. Clairissa completed the meditation hall entry doorway project, installing trim, shelving, and new door handles. With these last few touches, we are wrapping up the remodeling of the meditation hall, with gratitude for the many forms of support which have made it possible.

Retreat Guests: The temple was blessed with many retreat guests these past three months. Rev. Veronica and her 95-year-old mother, Jane Snedeker, made a road trip together from Napa, California, and spent some delightful days with us, during which time Jane also got to visit with her good friend, Mackenzie Roorda, who lives in the area.



Rev. Veronica and Jane Snedeker outside the Retreat Guest House, Wallowa Buddhist Temple

Todd Schlapfer, with whom Rev. Meidō had taken the Precepts at Shasta Abbey in 1974, came for a few day's retreat from Flathead Lake in Montana. It meant a lot to have this opportunity to train together again now, 44 years later. Helmut Schatz, as he often does, drove down from Walla Walla, Washington, and kindly helped with many work projects while he was here. Corrinne Allyson, whom Rev. Meidō came to know over the many years of visiting Rev. Master Meiten and the Vancouver Island Zen Sangha in Victoria, British Columbia, flew down from Canada for two and a half weeks of individual retreat

time with us. It was a joy to train with her and with all these and other retreat guests.

Visitors: Mary Gray and her 93-year-old stepfather, retired Presbyterian minister Rev. Robert Groves, made the drive from Portland to see the Wallowas and visit the temple. We very much enjoyed meeting Rev. Bob, as did a temple friend who happened to stop by during our mid-day lunch and stayed to take part in the lively conversation we were all having.

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

—*Rev. Master Meidō and Rev. Clairissa*

News of the Order

Europe

Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey

—Northumberland, England—UK—

Monastic news: We recently enjoyed short visits from Rev. Master Favian, who was offered a lift here for the Introductory Retreat 7–9th June, and Rev. Master Mugō who came the following weekend. Rev. Kōjō left for a training period at Shasta Abbey on 22 June; we wish her well and extend our thanks to Rev. Master Meian and the Shasta community for supporting her training for the next 6 – 9 months. We are looking forward to a return visit in November from Rev. Vivian of Shasta Abbey who will be with us for some months.

Rev. Master Haryo left on 21 August by car to visit some temples in the UK and the Netherlands. Rev. Kanshin went with him as driver and chaplain. Our gratitude and good wishes go with him for his travels. A few weeks earlier he offered a teaching and questions session with the novices.

Summer sesshins: We were joined for our July sesshin by a group of Devon sangha who travelled up for the week with Rev. Master Myfanwy of Dragon Bell Temple in Exeter. It was good to have them with us for the retreat, led by Rev. Master Roland. The focus was on the essentials of sitting, and included reflections on teachings from the Pali Canon, Great Master Keizan and Zen Master Obaku Kiun (Huang Po). The Dharma talks are now available on our website.

Rev. Master Leandra led the August sesshin with another group of experienced and a few newer trainees, offering Dharma Interviews, classes and teas. The theme of this retreat was our universality as human beings and an opportunity to reflect on our

vows as bodhisattvas. The talks will be on our website soon. These sesshins offer a significant training opportunity and are much valued.

Three of our longest standing congregation remembered:
Brenda Birchenough: Brenda died on 1st July, aged 87, after decades of dedicated training and as a lay minister of 38 years. Her contribution is deeply respected and her straightforward, friendly and compassionate nature will be remembered with great fondness by all who knew her.



Brenda

She became a Lay Minister in 1979 and was a regular and supportive member of Throssel since the early 1970's. She started the Lancaster Meditation Group with Paul Taylor and later was instrumental in starting the Preston Meditation Group. She was given a brown Kesa in recognition of her dedicated training in 2000. On July 12th Rev. Master Mugō led a Private Funeral for Brenda, followed by a service at the Crematorium in Morecambe.

There will be a Funeral service at Throssel on the afternoon of November 17th, followed by the interment of her ashes close to where her mother and twin sister are remembered in the Cemetery.

Vajira (Dorothy) Bailey: Four weeks later we were saddened to hear of the death of Vajira Bailey who died peacefully at a nursing home in Birmingham. Vajira had already been practicing for some years with the FWBO (Now Ratnagiri) where she was given the name Vajira. Then in 1970 she met Rev. Master Jiyu who led a retreat at her house and was inspired by her and continued dedicated training in our tradition for the rest of her life. She served as a lay minister from 1970, having founded the Birmingham Group which she supported for close to 40 years. She will be much missed.

Pat Oldham: As the Journal is being finalised, we have just received the news of the death on September 6th of Pat Oldham, dedicated practitioner, lay minister and friend in the sangha for many years. Our deepest sympathies go to her friends and family and all who knew her.

[Following the deaths of Brenda, Vajira and Pat within just nine weeks, we are looking to include in the next issue a form of remembrance of their lives of dedicated training and their contributions within the UK lay sangha. Ed.]

Visit to Samye Ling: Revs. Alina, Kanshin and Zenshin visited Kagyu Samye Ling Monastery and Tibetan Centre in July. This Tibetan Buddhist complex is associated with the Karma Kagyu School and is located at Eskdalemuir in Scotland. We donated surplus and duplicate books from our library and were invited for lunch and a tour. Maggy Jones, the Librarian, showed us around the library, grounds and stupa, and Choden, one of the monks, showed us the temple and invited us to join a puja. The monks were given a warm welcome by everyone they met and enjoyed the visit.

Northern Groups Sangha Day: Rev. Lambert and Rev. Sanshin attended the day, group monks of Sheffield and Leeds.

Other monks attended for this relaxed gathering. Rev. Master Willard returned with them after a stay at Telford Priory.

Artwork installation: We are deeply grateful to Pascal de Caluwe from the Netherlands who designed and cast a bronze monk's bowl and Kesa for us and installed them on the large rock in Myrtle Courtyard during his visit for the July sesshin. This idea was inspired by the story of Daikan Enō (C. Hui-neng) named and transmitted as the sixth Chinese ancestor by Daimon Konin (C. Hongren) and warned to flee as ambitious men wished to steal the transmission (symbolised by the robe and bowl.) Finding that he was pursued, Daikan Enō placed the robe and bowl on a rock and stood aside. One pursuer, Emyō (C. Huiming), tried to take them but found he couldn't lift them. Realising that there was something that could not be stolen, he asked for the transmission from Daikan Enō

This wonderful piece of artwork is an impressive sight. (There is a recent dharma talk on the Throssel website by Rev. Master Leandra based on Hui-neng's *Platform Sutra*.)



After the installation. (Pascal is on the right)



The [finished artwork](#)

Community work on the Grounds: We held community work days in July and August for grounds work while the weather was so good. Much ongoing work is done throughout the year to care for the trees and fields and these days allow the whole community to do a major clearance of ragwort and thistles. We also gathered brushwood to a location where it will be turned into wood chips in the near future for our pathways.

Granite water feature instalment: We received a donation last year from Aylwin, of a magnificent 4 ½ ton granite water feature, along with assistance in transporting to our location from Cornwall by a generous donation from Brian. In July, Malcom Pickering, a retired civil engineer from Hexham who has worked on projects for us for some years, came with a friend with a fork lift truck to help move and install it; we thank them both for their

help. It is a fine addition to the landscape and will be filled with water gradually as the drier weather comes to an end.



The stone in place below Myrtle Bank

Carpark: We have extended our carpark behind the toolshed to make room for another ten cars nearer to the buildings. We could previously only allow five to park outside the Guest Department or at the bottom of the property. Malcolm helped us again, flattening the land and laying the foundation before topping off with a gravel course finish.

We also have a new fence bordering the nearby monks' car park; we offer our thanks to Dave who bought the materials and constructed it for us. It improves the area markedly.



New carpark

Summer barbeque, 4th July: This year, we had a 4 July barbecue celebration for our American monks, Rev. Master Haryo and Rev. Master Hugh. The kitchen monks set up the barbecue and Rev. Lambert barbequed (vegetarian) sausages and kebabs to add to a picnic meal outside the kitchen, enjoyed by all the community and our resident guests.

—Rev. Alina

Dragon Bell Temple

—Okehampton, Devon—UK—

This Autumn sees our third year of the Temple being out on the edge of Dartmoor. It is a beautiful very quiet place, very conducive to us being able to offer retreat time for both individuals and small groups of trainees as well as our usual weekly schedule of meditation, the monthly Festival Sundays and Precepts Sundays.

We welcomed our local college for a visit in July and RM Myfanwy was invited to our local Primary School to introduce Buddhism to 6, 7, and 8 year olds. One class who were very taken with Star Wars, with a big display in their classroom, were open to the concept of understanding that the force could be with them if they could two apply themselves to meditation. Another class had a group of snail fanciers who could relate to the story of the Buddha and the snails on his head.

Our local Sangha made the trip up to Throssel together for the July Sesshin and we were able to give RM Berwyn a lift back up north at the end of his very welcome stay at the Temple.

In August we had a Sangha picnic in Cornwall, thank you to Julie and Andrew Taylor-Browne for their generous welcome and hospitality.

We were fortunate to have sunny weather so we were able to enjoy our plentiful pot-luck lunch out in the garden.

Thank you to Throssel for the kind donations of two statues and a load of firewood that we were able to take back down here with us after the July Sesshin. The common room here is heated by a woodstove in winter, so seasoned firewood is very welcome.

—Rev. Master Myfanwy

Norwich Zen Buddhist Priory

—Norwich—UK—

Recent events: August was a pleasantly busy month at the Priory, as we enjoyed visits by three monks, which helped to remind us that we are part of a wider order.

Rev. Master Haryo, the head of our order, made a much appreciated visit to the Priory for a few days towards the end of the month. He was accompanied by Rev. Kanshin, from Throssel, who was driving and assisting Rev. Master Haryo on a three-week tour to temples in southern England and the Netherlands. Rev. Master Haryo's visit saw the largest gathering that the Priory has

ever had, when eighteen of our lay Sangha joined the three monks for a Sangha Evening, which started with a bring-and-share supper and continued with a Dharma talk, followed by questions and discussion. Rev. Master Haryo also met people at informal teas on two other evenings and at meals hosted by Sangha members and he made himself available to anyone who wished to talk with him individually. We are very grateful to Rev. Master Haryo for the teaching that he gave during his stay and for his presence around the Priory, as well as for finding time to fix the wobbly doorknob on the front door. A big thank you to the Sangha members who offered hospitality and food to the monks during their stay.



Rev. Master Haryo and Rev Kanshin outside the front door

A week earlier, we were pleased to welcome Rev. Alina for a brief visit. Rev. Alina is familiar with priory life, having been

Prior at Reading for three years, but this was her first time visiting Norwich. During her stay, she was able to join us for a Dharma Evening, which was very well-attended, and we are grateful to her for her contributions to the Dharma discussion. It was a nice opportunity for Rev. Alina to get to know some of our Sangha, several of whom she had already met at Throssel.



On 10th June, we had a very pleasant Summer Party, in Erpingham. The lovely setting in rural North Norfolk, together with some warm weather, made for a relaxed and informal gathering of Sangha and family, as we enjoyed a bring-and-share lunch together and strolled around the gardens. Thank you to those who offered hospitality and lifts from the Priory, all of which contributed to making the event such a success.



Summer party in Empingham

New fence: Recently, the look of the Priory has been much enhanced by a new fence being put up around the property. The ancient, rotting, falling-down fence that was covered with a thick “hedge” of ivy was taken down (one neighbour told the workmen that she’d been living in the area for over 50 years and the fence had always looked like that, as far as she could remember!). It had become a safety concern, as it threatened to collapse onto the street whenever there was a strong wind. The landlord agreed to its being replaced with smart new woodwork and the workmen did a great job toiling through the heatwave.

Thanks: I am grateful to those who have helped to keep the Priory’s garden tidy and colourful over the summer, whether by offering their labour or by donating plants. Thanks also to those who have helped with cleaning and other household tasks.

—*Rev. Master Leoma*

The Place of Peace Dharma House

—Aberystwyth, Wales—UK—

In July Rev. Master Myōhō travelled to Huddersfield to visit Rosie Pemberton, who was recovering from illness. Rosie trains at The Place of Peace, and it was good to sit with her again. Gratitude is offered to James and Julie Gore-Langton, who offered hospitality and much kindness. On the Sunday afternoon Rev. Master Myōhō had the pleasure of meeting with members of the Huddersfield meditation group, whom she knew well, and had not seen for a while. Ceri Jones, with her usual willingness and efficiency, looked after the temple during this time.

In August a memorial was held for Vajira Bailey, from Birmingham, who died on the 8th. Vajira was always willing to offer hospitality to monks and her house was often used for retreats. It was at one of these, in 1977, that Rev. Master Myōhō had the opportunity to meet Rev. Master Jishō and, at the end of the event, asked to be a monk. There are many of us who are grateful to Vajira.

In August Rev. Master Myōhō spent renewal time at the Great Ocean Dharma Refuge, and greatly appreciates all that the monks there offer. Later in the month, Geoff and Emily Nesbit visited from America with their sons, Oliver and Callum. Geoff trained here for some years and maintains a connection with the temple. It was a joy to see them again, and to know that they are doing so well.

Taking advantage of the hot weather this summer, we have completed some outside chores. The garden gate was re-stained and the shed door was finally dry enough to be given a fresh coat of paint. The garden was tidied up and weeded. Much lemonade was consumed.

Catherine Artindale continues to offer invaluable help with our accounts, and we are grateful for the time and expertise she offers in this area, especially with her end of year presentation.

Gordon Jones is always willing to maintain the garden, and to help in so many practical ways, he has also donated office supplies and delicious vegetables that he and Ceri have grown.

Thank you to all who continue to support us.

—*Rev. Master Myōhō*

Sitting Buddha Hermitage

—*Cromford, Derbyshire–UK—*

On Saturday 14th July two of us from Cromford attended the Regional Sangha Day hosted by the Leeds SRM Group. Numbers were somewhat depleted from last year, and attendance has been waning over the years, so one of the discussion topics in the session before lunch was to look at the future of the event. I personally hope it will continue as it is a great opportunity to meet Sangha friends old and new, and the venue, All Hallows Church, is particularly suitable for such a gathering.

In August I was celebrant for two funerals. Richard Moore's first involvement with Buddhism was when he travelled to India 15 or so years ago to teach science to Tibetan monks as part of the Dalai Lama's Science meets Dharma project. I visited Richard a couple of times in the week before he died, at home, aged 68, of an aggressive stomach cancer. He was buried in a beautiful natural burial ground near Leicester and the public funeral ceremony was held outside in a marquee next to the grave. Rev. Aiden assisted me with the ceremony, and again a few days later at the funeral of Peter Galbraith. Peter had been a member of the Leicester SRM Group and had died peacefully aged 89 in a nursing home. His funeral was held at the Friends Meeting House in Nottingham in the presence of many of his friends including Buddhists and Quakers. He was then taken to Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey to be buried there.

Later in August I joined the Sangha at Turning Wheel Buddhist Temple for a much-appreciated day retreat with Rev. Master Haryo who was visiting TWBT for the weekend.

—*Rev. Master Alicia*

Telford Buddhist Priory

—*Telford, Shropshire-UK*—

On Wednesday August 8th Vajira Bailey died peacefully at the nursing home where she had been living in Birmingham. Vajira first met Rev. Master Jiyu who came to hold a retreat in her house in 1970 and remained devoted to her and her teaching for the rest of her life, later making a trip to visit her at Shasta Abbey. In the 1970's she founded and then, for many years, hosted the Birmingham Meditation Group where she introduced numerous people to Buddhist Meditation practice including a number who became lay ministers and monks.

She is remembered with fondness and gratitude for her unstinting generosity in support of the wider Buddhist community in Birmingham, as well as within the Order in Britain. Rev. Master Mugō led a service prior to her Cremation in Birmingham on Wednesday 22 August. Following that, there was a service at the Birmingham Vihara where many people voiced their memories and scriptures were chanted for her benefit. Her presence is missed by all of us who knew her, particularly those from the Birmingham group and many of us at Telford Buddhist Priory.



Photo of Vajira on the altar at the Priory

—Rev. Master Saido

Turning Wheel Buddhist Temple

—East Midlands—UK—

The new temple and some initial improvements: We moved into our new property in early March, with lots of help from local lay Sangha members, which was greatly appreciated. We quickly got the meditation hall and common room set up, and other rooms were gradually sorted out over the following months, so that we are now pretty settled in our new location. We have made a start on tidying up the property and rearranging things so that they work better for the temple; even small things like coat hooks and towel rails make a big difference.

We have also been doing some work in the garden, and our Tuesday working meditation days have been a great help. Thank you to all those who have come along to help. The hot dry weather over the summer has been a good opportunity to clean and stain the garden fences, and the photo below shows the back garden before and after this had been done.

The fence on the park side is not in perfect condition, having been damaged by the ivy that was covering it in places, but hopefully it will last for a good while yet. We have also cut back the hedge, which was leaning right over the garden, and it is looking a lot smarter now.

Visit from the Head of the Order: It was lovely to welcome Rev. Master Haryo to the temple over the August Bank Holiday weekend. He was accompanied by Rev. Kanshin, from Throssel, who was driving him between different temples, and both were able to stay in our guest rooms.

We had events with Rev. Master Haryo on both the Saturday and Sunday, with the Day Retreat on the Saturday being best attended. Twenty lay Sangha members from throughout the East Midlands came along for that, making it the largest gathering we have had at the new property, and Rev. Master Alicia joined us from Sitting Buddha Hermitage as well. Rev. Master Haryo kindly offered a Dharma talk in the morning, and the warm dry weather meant that we could sit outside for lunch.

Trustees' Meeting: Earlier in August we had our first meeting of the charity's trustees, with Rev. Master Alicia and Rev. Master Berwyn joining the four local lay Sangha trustees and Rev. Aiden for the day.

Rev. Master Berwyn travelled down from Throssel the day before, and was the first overnight visitor at the new temple, and Rev. Lambert also stayed for a night following a visit to the Sheffield group. It was very nice to welcome them both to the temple.



Rev. Master Haryo's visit



Rev. Master Berwyn and Rev. Lambert

Wolk-en-Water Hermitage

—Langelille—The Netherlands—

On the 2nd of July, the Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts were given to Simon Bill by Rev. Master Hakuun. Simon used to live close to the temple but now he lives in a care-home. We did the ceremony there, in Heerestaete, where we set up an altar with the Buddha statue that he brought years ago from Thailand. It was there he first became acquainted with Buddhist faith and practice.

Simon may not have long to live and it was a great joy for him to formally become a Buddhist.



Simon

The last weekend of July was dedicated to body/mind in Harmony. Like many places in Europe, temperatures were soaring but an enthusiastic group studied various mudras such as Earth Witness, Fearlessness and Meditation.

—Rev. Master Hakuun

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

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

Further Information

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

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

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

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