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*Mt. Huangshen region*

See article: [\*Hanging by a Thread: Kanshi Sosan\*](#)

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*Standing Buddha, Northern Ch'i (550-577AD)*

This statue, made during Sōsan's lifetime in his own country, wears monk-style robes and is typical of a new style which had been evolving in northern China. Its nearer to life-size nature and lack of a standard body type or facial expression have led some scholars to speculate a new understanding of the Buddha in more human terms, rather than a supernatural divinity, was being portrayed.

It stands 116 cm in height, of limestone, with original pigmentation. Excavated in 1987, near the site of the former Longting temple, Qingzhou.

<https://www.theguardian.com/gallery/0,,687439,00.html>

*Standing Buddha, Northern Ch'i (550-577 A.D.) Limestone, 150 x 45 x 25 cm, Qingzhou Municipal Museum, Shandong Province  
Photo: © The State Administration of Cultural Heritage, People's Republic of China*

*This article is based around talks during a 2015 Intensive Meditation retreat on Chapter 31 of Keizan's<sup>1</sup> Denkōroku<sup>2</sup>. Given the context, there is an intentional ambiguity and directness in tone in places. Extra historical background has been added since. The talks begin on [page 14](#) with Keizan's text in separate italicised paragraphs. I am grateful to those who read early drafts for their valuable suggestions; and to Gesine Stone of Germany who kindly transcribed the text of the original talks. Gesine died early last year.*

## Hanging by a Thread

### Kanshi Sōsan –The Third Chinese Ancestor

Rev. Wilfrid Powell

—Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey, Northumberland—UK—

*When sentient beings see, at kalpa's ending,  
the raging fires consuming all,  
tranquil will this realm of Mine be...<sup>3</sup>*

“May you live...” runs an old Chinese curse “...in interesting times.” Five centuries after various strands of Buddhism had first begun to enter China along the Silk Routes, it was estimated at the time (554 A.D.) there were more than 34,000 Buddhist temples and over two million Buddhist monks and nuns in northern China. Many of the

temples had developed into huge entities, with church officials gaining great wealth and power. Around the time of Sōsan's birth, probably in the 530s, in eastern Ch'i China, the former Ch'i capital city of Lo-yang alone, (which was then the size of Sheffield, U.K. or Boston, U.S.A. today) had 1,367 Buddhist temples, large and small. Along with the number of large landowners, the effect of all of this on the economy was calculated to be so great that a proper central government of the country was impossible, due to the amount of man-power and money taken out of circulation. In addition, the sangha had evolved into a large self-administering body outside of the secular authorities' control.

At roughly this time, Bodhidharma, the first Chinese Ancestor, had reportedly travelled through part of southern China and a good part of the Ch'i kingdom to finally end up in the Shaolin temple/Yeh<sup>4</sup> area. He had commented to one of his successors, Taisō Eka:

*It seems to me that nowadays those of shallow perception merely make efforts on the basis of how things appear. Out of personal vanity they lavish their wealth on piling up land and water with memorial offerings, having images cast, and stupas built; empty-headedly they employ workers to construct grandiose religious structures and gaudily decorate them. They drain their minds, exhaust their strength, and mislead others through their example...How will they ever experience an awakening and see that their exertions are an attachment to exertion...<sup>5</sup>*

Yet many monks and nuns were unable to even read or recite the scriptures properly; a life of ease and safety having been their primary motive in taking ordination.<sup>6</sup> Once inside a Buddhist temple, monks and nuns were exempt from the laws of the land, paying any taxes and conscripted military/labour service. The latter was no easy life; the relentless push to complete a centralised canal system linking the Yangtze valley to Lo-yang in 604 meant every man aged 15 – 50 was eligible for conscription. Over five million people were involved, including women and children bringing food (with up to half of the labourers dying in the five months it took to finish.)

The sixth century saw the beginnings of what we now call the Chan and Pure Land Schools of Buddhism. One of the most powerful draws of Mahayana Buddhism for the Chinese was its teaching that all living beings possessed Buddha Nature and were thus able to realise Buddhahood. By 420, Sutras central to the Mahayana, such as *The Lotus Sutra*, *Vimalakirti Sutra* and *the Nirvana Sutra* had been well translated and been made available. In a country where social divisions were the rule, the ordinary people of the time had never had a promise of such beauty and encouragement put before them. A calendar of regular dazzling Buddhist ceremonies which everybody could take part in; the beautifully constructed temples with their colour, gold images, and splendid gardens, ponds and trees, open to all, must have been an uplifting sight for the sore eyes of the ordinary people whose lives were marked by poverty, drabness, overcrowding and uncertainty of the future.



The path was made easier; whether it was to simply make an image of the Buddha (even out of mud or sand, as *The Lotus Sutra* said) or to recite the phrase “Namo Amitabha” of the increasingly popular Pure Land Schools; the ideas and practices of which had begun to be actively spread in northern China after 530 A.D.

The point of Buddhism, however, is to do something about oneself, and it is the recognition by others that that is what is actually happening, when it is, which is an important factor in keeping its practitioners safe.

At this time, most of what we now know of as China was divided into three separate kingdoms; the Ch’i dynasty in the north-east, the Ch’en dynasty in the south-east and the recently-formed Chou in the West. The latter was the largest of the three and its Emperor, Wu, had earlier in his reign attempted to promote co-operation and harmony between Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism by assembling scholarly representatives in debate. The acrimony with which the first two groups had attacked each other however, had left the Emperor disgusted. The result of this was that from this point on, Confucianism was given foremost prominence in the Chou kingdom, followed by Taoism, with Buddhism third. More pressing on Wu’s mind, however, was his long-cherished wish to conquer the neighbouring Ch’i dynasty; the success of this enterprise would depend on him harnessing the entire population and all the resources of his own state. A storm was beginning to gather.



*Map showing China in 572 A.D. and the main locations mentioned in this article*

An essay was presented to Emperor Wu in 567 by a Buddhist priest from Szechwan, Wei Yuan-sung. As a novice, Wei had come under the influence of an eccentric teacher called Nameless Monk. The latter had taught him that he should act as though mad in order to achieve fame. This Wei did and burst into song or uttered predictions whenever he met someone. Ambitious for greater fame and fortune than that offered in rural Szechwan, he headed for Wu's capital, Ch'ang-an, where Buddhism received huge and popular

support. The cunning Wei decided to make his name by writing an essay attacking the religion; he called for the abolishment of all the traditional forms of Buddhism, and its replacement with a new Buddhist church constituted to include the whole country and all its people in one large sangha. Although not followed up at the time, the criticisms of Buddhism in the essay, by one of its own monks, made a significant impact upon the Emperor. Wei was rewarded with the title ‘Duke of Szechwan’, and left the monastic sangha.

Undeterred by his essay’s apparent rejection, Wei worked closely with a Taoist priest who had gained access to the Emperor to stir up antagonism towards Buddhism. In addition to its power, wealth, and vast pool of untapped military/labour potential, Buddhism also contained a number of aspects that inherently cut across the grain of cardinal Chinese virtues: monastic celibacy went right against Chinese emphasis on family life and having many children; the original mendicant ideal contravened the Confucian stress on all social classes engaging in productive labour; the Indian ideal of leaving household life went against Chinese stress on harmonious social relationships; the idea of a self-governing monastic community that saw itself as outside the laws of the land outraged Confucian-oriented officials and scholars who believed that the imperial laws applied to everyone; and finally Buddhism’s stress on the suffering inherent in existence and the urgent need to find release from the ‘Wheel of Life’ went against the Chinese view that life was good and to be enjoyed. Seven years later, some of

Wei's essay's very words and phrases were to reappear with a vengeance in a resulting imperial edict. Such can be the consequence of one person's ambition acted out on a large enough stage.

Returning to his dynasty's more military and northern roots, Emperor Wu, fed up with Buddhists and Taoists alike, adopted the classic Confucian view that Buddhism was a foreign incursion into Chinese thought, culture and religious practice. He decided instead he was going to pursue a strict Confucian orthodoxy in his kingdom and in 574 the storm finally broke. Buddhism, along with Taoism, was outlawed by an imperial edict which demanded the destruction of all Buddhist temples, stupas, shrines and scriptures.

Although not as bloody as the persecution of 446-452, monks and nuns were forcibly returned to lay life or conscripted into military or labour service. Many eminent monks fled across the Yangtze river to the safety of the southern Ch'en kingdom. In the land they had left behind, pagodas and centuries-old monasteries were levelled to the ground;<sup>7</sup> scriptures burned and monastic records systematically destroyed (it is thought by some that the latter is why we know so little about Sōsan); the temples' lands were confiscated and distributed to soldiers; monasteries' treasures seized and distributed amongst princes, dukes and ministers. Wooden statues were burned, bronze ones melted down and used to mint new currency, or broken down. Some refugees took pieces of these along with them to the safety of the southern Ch'en, and to Korea and Japan.

Three years later, following Wu's conquest of the neighbouring Ch'i dynasty, the ban was extended over the rest of northern China. Anhui province, where Sōsan lived, was in the south of Ch'i, although the province's tip south of the Yangtze river was in the kingdom of the Ch'en. Emperor Wu travelled to the newly conquered Ch'i dynasty capital of Yeh and had the monks of the area brought together. He himself read out the edict to them, pointing out Buddhism had to be suppressed as it practised unfilial conduct, instigated rebellion, and squandered wealth. He further added that as the religion was foreign, it had to be destroyed by him, and that his word was final. By the time the persecution came to an end, probably in 578 when Wu died unexpectedly, Buddhism had been wiped from the map of northern China (an exception was the Shaolin Temple which was closed but not destroyed.)



*The head of a statue is being revealed during an excavation in 2012 outside Yeh (now Handan, Hebei province) It is one of 3000 statues discovered there, most of which are of limestone or white marble. It is thought they were buried during the Emperor Wu's persecution of 577 – 578.*

One monk who had fled from the capital of Yeh appears to have been Taisō Eka, one of Bodhidharma's successors, who probably ended up in the safety of the Huangshan Mt region, 80 miles south of the Yangtze river in the southern Ch'en kingdom.

One day a Buddhist layman suffering from leprosy approached him. [Keizan takes up the story in \*The Denkōroku\*.](#)

*Upon meeting Taisō Eka<sup>8</sup> [Kanshi] Sōsan asked him: “My body is riddled with disease. Please, Reverend Monk, cleanse me of my defilement.” Eka said, “Bring me your defilement and I will cleanse you of it.” Sōsan thought long and hard about this and then said: “I have searched for my defilement, but I cannot find it.” Eka replied: “I have cleansed you of your defilement. It is fitting that you dwell in accord with the three treasures.”*

*Sōsan was a man from parts unknown.<sup>9</sup> His first meeting with Taisō Eka was as a lay person when he was in his forties. Without giving his name, he had suddenly come forward, bowed and put his request to Taisō Eka to cleanse him of his defilement.*

You have a history, most of you will know your birth-place. You are also a person from parts unknown. You gave your name to the guest-master to book in for this weekend – whose name is that? Each of you has come forward, bowed and put your request to someone to help you be cleansed of ‘defilements’. Coming to this retreat, you have done it again.

*The above dialogue ensued up to where Eka said: “It is fitting you dwell in accord with the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.” whereupon Sōsan said,*

*“Seeing you, Reverend Monk, I realize that you represent the Sangha, but I have not yet ascertained what are meant by Buddha and Dharma.” Eka replied: “[Actual]<sup>10</sup> Nature is Buddha, Actual Nature is Dharma; Dharma and Buddha are inseparable. What I have said is also true for the Sangha Treasure. Sōsan replied: “Today, for the first time I realize*

*that the true nature of defilement does not exist within or without or in-between; it is the same as Actual Nature; Buddha and Dharma are inseparable.”*

Here is **a** key of the Sōtō approach: whatever arises, recognize it, accept it with an open Eye, allow it to pass on – and, we carry on. Fundamentally, in that moment – what else is there? Allowing yourself to be caught up in something, a whole world forms, crystallizes: right there, then. A world you may profoundly regret bringing into being also teaches you that, in choosing to involve with deliberate thought, that kind of world can be one of the immediate consequences. Keep the Precepts close by in this work.

*Eka, seeing how profound Sōsan’s capacity for the Teaching was, shaved his head, saying “You are my treasure; it is fitting for me to give you the name Sōsan (Ch. Seng-ts’an ‘The Resplendent Jewel of the Sangha’)” On the eighteenth day of the third lunar month of that year [April] Sōsan took the Precepts in Kuang-fu-ssu [in western Anhui]. From then on, his disease gradually subsided.*

It’s critical that we take the Precepts seriously; study them regularly, bring them to mind at times of difficulty. This makes all the difference in the world between dis-ease gradually subsiding – or getting worse, and worse.

*After Sōsan had spent two years attending on Eka<sup>11</sup>, the latter said one day: “Great Master Bodaidaruma came from*



*India to this land and gave me both the Kesa and the Teaching; I now give them to you.”*

You have your own equivalents of spending ‘two years attending’ all around you: eating a meal, washing dishes, driving to work, making the effort to remain unscattered during a difficult meeting, breaking off what you were busy with when a friend unexpectedly needs a quiet word. Use all of this, being attentive to the circumstances. Not in an idealized way, but in a concrete, actual way. Sometimes we start a conversation with a complete stranger. Sometimes we meet somebody we know well, but on taking one look at them we sense immediately that we need to smile and keep quickly walking on past. You go to the meditation group, to your local temple. How can you help?

*Eka added: “Although you have already obtained the Teaching, for the time being you should go deep into the mountains and not teach or guide others since some political troubles are about to arise.”*

We each experience troubles whose causes sometimes arise from completely outside of ourselves. What do you do?

*Sōsan said: “Master, since you already know what is going to happen, please deign to give me some instructions.”*

Sometimes it is good to ask for further instructions; other times it’s better to just hear the hint. Hear the hint, and let it settle – before asking again.

*Eka replied; “This is not something that I personally know about; it is a prediction by Hannyatara<sup>12</sup> which Bodaidaruma passed on to me as, ‘Even though the receipt of the Teaching is auspicious within the heart, outwardly it will bring misfortune.’*

The Teaching’s receipt is always auspicious within the heart; in the world of form, it can be accompanied by consequences which are not foreseeable. The prediction was accurate.

*“These are the troubles that [s]he meant. When I compare this prediction with the number of years that Bodaidaruma spoke of, it applies directly to you. By all means examine what has just been said and do not get caught up in worldly difficulties.”*

All of us are involved with difficulties in differing forms; don’t allow yourself to be overwhelmed by them. Keep sitting.

*After this, Sōsan sought seclusion [lived in hiding] on Mount Huan-kung [[Mt. Huangshan in the southern Ch’en](#)] where he spent over ten years; this was during the time that Emperor...Wu... of the Chou dynasty outlawed Buddhism and, in consequence, Sōsan took up residence on Mount Ssu-k’ung. [Mt Sikong, north of the Yangtze. Sōsan had returned to his own ‘country’.]*



*Mt. Huangshan region*

<https://asocialnomad.com/china/huangshan/>

Buddhism had been wiped from the map of northern China. Every map however has its edges, beyond which the makers and erasers of maps have much less remit. It is one thing to destroy all the external signs of a religion; it is quite another to be able to put out the flame burning in a person's heart that is the determination to practice. As Dōgen's Teacher, Tendō Nyōjō, liked to point out;

*There is no need to burn incense, do prostrations, chant the Buddha's name, perform ritual austerities or read Scriptures; just sit there in meditation...In practising meditation, what is most important is to have a heart that aspires to the Way.*<sup>13</sup>

Though it's said the first three Chinese Ancestors of our tradition didn't have much of a fixed abode during their lifetimes anyway, even so, Sōsan had to spend over a decade in seclusion, during which "his physical appearance underwent a transformation", probably living amongst the

general population of the area. “...*the life of him who receives the Kesa hangs as if by a single thread...*”<sup>14</sup>, the Fifth Chinese Ancestor was to warn the Sixth, Hui Neng, several decades later. It’s said Sōsan spent a further decade wandering with no fixed abode. And, he kept his practice going.

In 581, General Yang Jian seized the throne from Wu’s family and became Emperor Wen, founding a new dynasty – the Sui. Wen was born, it is said, in a Buddhist temple and with his parents’ permission was raised by a nun. He was therefore sympathetic to Buddhism from a young age and is said to have tried to live by its tenets his whole life, although we might well take issue with him today on his understanding of some of those tenets.

He had seen for himself the destruction of Buddhism from 574 onwards, and also seen the deep resentment felt by many in northern China, who, on the whole, were devoted followers of the religion. He astutely recognized that Buddhism was a powerful force as a political tool for unifying a huge empire and so actively sponsored the religion’s spread. Only one month after becoming Emperor, he ordered a new Buddhist monastery to be built at the foot of each of the five sacred Buddhist mountains. Several extra monasteries were to be erected in places connected with the fortunes of his family. To further encourage the religion’s spread, he ordered every household to make a financial contribution to the cost of making new images and copying

sutras. He also made the extraordinary decision to drop all restrictions on ordinations.

Services were held every night in the imperial court in Chang'an (today, Xi'an in Shanxi province), and imperial funds were poured into repairing the damage done by Wu's persecution. 3792 brand new temples were built, 106,580 new statues made, nearly 1,500,000 images restored using gold, bronze, sandalwood, ivory and stone, and 132,086 rolls of scripture copied. In 583, he gave permission for all the temples destroyed under Emperor Wu to be rebuilt. In 590, he gave official recognition to every 'mountain temple' with at least one monk in residence, and further legalised the status of the several hundred thousand monks and nuns who had been ordained earlier without government permission.

The new Emperor Wen's Buddhist upbringing and aspirations were unable to prevent imperial aggrandisement however. In 588 he, in his own turn, finally realised his long-held ambition of invading the southern Ch'en kingdom; 518,000 troops divided into four armies were mustered along hundreds of miles of the northern shore of the vast Yangtze river, with thousands of boats assembled on the river itself. A long stretch of the Yangtze winds through southern Anhui province, where somewhere Sōsan was still keeping a low profile. One of the armies sailed down the river, attacking the towns all along its southern banks; another marched in from western Szechwan heading in the general direction of Mt. Huangshan; whilst a third crossed the river 160 miles east from Sōsan, bearing down on the southern capital of

Nanjing. In desperation, the Ch'en ruler had even mobilized Buddhist monks and Taoist priests into his armies' ranks. To no avail. The Ch'en dynasty could not withstand the attack, and in 589, Nanjing fell to the invaders; after 300 years of prosperity, the city was razed to the ground. Wen then set in motion a number of restrictive measures against the Buddhist sangha in the former Ch'en. Three of the measures were: leaving unrepaired many of the temples in Nanjing and its vicinity which had been damaged or destroyed in the battles; allowing temples not damaged by the fighting to be taken over by the victorious soldiers; and limiting the number of Buddhist temples in each department of the freshly conquered kingdom to two. China was once again one vast country unified under a single dynasty.

Following the conquest of the Ch'en dynasty, Wen began to apply his laws over the subjugated territory; this brought resentment from the educated classes, as they had been treated preferentially before. In response the Emperor wrote a work about loyalty to the Sui and ordered that all former Ch'en subjects read and memorize it. The resentment increased. When a rumour spread in 590 that Ch'en subjects were to be moved to the province around Hong Kong, almost all the former Ch'en kingdom rose in rebellion. Without much organisation amongst themselves, however, the rebels were defeated before the new year of 591. Sōsan, keeping quiet, might well have wondered what on earth was coming next.

But, there was some good news on the way. In 592:

*Whilst acting in this way, he [Sōsan] came in contact with the novice Dōshin [aged 12-14] whom he later told [after Dōshin had served as his attendant for nine years], “After my late<sup>15</sup> Master Eka Transmitted the Teaching and Kesa to me, he went [in 579, is one given date] to the capital city of Yeh where he lived for thirty years. Now that I have found you, what is there to hold me here?”<sup>16</sup>*

Our Teachers will not always be around – make full use of them whilst they are. It is true that the Buddhist scriptures and some of the recorded talks and sayings of our Teachers will endure, and also that the living example of our teachers will live on in memory for a while. These are different from the vibrant (and, depending on the depth of sincerity of the student, often life-altering) interchanges possible between two living people both rooting themselves deeply in that moment, in the faith, ethical integrity and personal experience that makes up the soil of the same track to religious truth. “*The Teacher waits to be questioned, and it is up to the student to question, and to question closely.*” it was remarked once at the end of a *shosan* at Throssel.<sup>17</sup>

*Accordingly, he went [in 601] to Mount Lo-fu [for two years] but later returned to his former dwelling place [Mt Huangshan] where [for a period of several months] both the educated and the common people hastened to prepare charitable offerings for him.*

One background reason for this interest and support may well have been that the importance to practice of sitting and

of keeping the Precepts had not been well understood in the south. “The southern dynasties were especially notorious for their laxity in cultivating these two ‘practice’ aspects...”<sup>18</sup>. Although the reign of Emperor Wu<sup>19</sup> of the southern dynasty of 502-556 A.D. is still thought to be a high point of prosperity and piety in Chinese Buddhism, the monk Hui-chiao who, living at the time, compiled *Lives of Eminent Monks*, was unable to count one truly great meditation master during these years. The majority of the ‘Lives’ concerned lecturer-monks who were known foremost for their ability to expound philosophically on the sutras, in particular the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra*.

Without your own generosity of time, material, and training over the years, this temple would have remained a beautiful dream – and unbuilt. Don’t let it stop there. Keep sitting through thick, and practicing through thin; and ask real questions about the real state of your training. “*It’s as though we are all together in a rowing boat on a river; ...*” it was commented at the end of another Throssel *shosan* “*...every time one person pulls hard on their oar by asking a real question, the whole boat moves faster down the river.*” We would be wise not to take anything for granted.

*For the sake of the monks and laity, male and female, Sōsan preached extensively on the essence of mind then, during a Buddhist ceremony, he passed away while sitting in gasshō under a large tree.*

This is in 606.<sup>20</sup>



*His poems, such as ‘What Is Engraved on the Heart That Trusts to the Eternal’ [also known as XinXin Ming or Faith in Mind] have been recorded and to this day are still circulated as Teaching. Later he was given the title<sup>21</sup> of Great Master Kanchi (Ch. Chien-chih ‘He Whose Wisdom Is a Mirror’).*

By tradition this poem is attributed to Sōsan, but there is a lack of clarity about the authorship. Because of a comment in an important writing (by Ching-Chueh – 683-750 – discovered in the Dunhuang caves) that Sōsan did not leave any written works behind, it is generally thought that he probably did not write it, although some believe he may have recited it to his students. Others feel that the poem is more likely to have been written after Sōsan’s lifetime, perhaps by an individual in the Oxhead Zen School.<sup>22</sup> Many of the poem’s lines have been used by later Zen masters in both their teachings and writings, and the essence of the poem is close to the heart of the Sōtō tradition. The point for us being, somebody wrote it around this time, and it is still being studied today.<sup>23</sup>

*The disease that plagued Sōsan’s body at the time of his first meeting with Eka was leprosy, but after meeting Eka, his karmic disease suddenly disappeared. There is nothing special about what is happening in this story.*

When we meet somebody deeply inspiring, they can act as a trigger – galvanising us into actually doing something about ourselves. At last. That flash of important insight that we do

not need to carry on living a life driven by the winds of karma can ignite a momentum in us that forever acts as a “No more!” This is very important. It is not the same thing as all the karma having been resolved. A further point on ‘understanding’ is – ‘All well and good, and, what about tomorrow?’ Rev. Master Daizui<sup>24</sup> liked to put this as “*Enlightened is as Enlightened does*”.

*Sōsan had awakened to the fact that...Actual Nature is pure and unstained. This is why upon hearing that Buddha and Dharma are inseparable, he had said that Actual Nature and Dharma were also inseparable.*

There is a way out of all of this...and it’s really worth your while taking.

*When you can truly discern Actual Nature, there is no longer any difference between dying in one place and being born in another: how much less is there discrimination between the good and bad roots of defilement. This is why the four elements and the five skandhas...*

The four elements in Buddhism are earth, water, wind and fire; the five *skandhas*: a traditional Buddhist way of looking at a human being: form, sensation, thoughts, activities based on thoughts and feelings, and – as a result – consciousness. Attachment to these elements giving rise to the sense of ‘self’.

*...ultimately do not exist; from the very beginning we are free of skin, flesh, bones and marrow.*

An early defining aspect of Mahayana Buddhism was its taking the insight that to look at a human being from the view of the five skandhas was to go a long way to seeing that in fact, there's no fixed person actually there (i.e. it's 'empty',) and apply that insight to everything. So *śūnyatā*, ('Emptiness' of a human being) became *Śūnyatā*. We can approach this insight today from a new direction too: since every atom of each and every thing around us, in all directions, as far as the eye can see, and also each atom that comprises every single part of us, can be shown to already have been part of a star that has been part of a Supernova explosion at least twice, then, what actually is this permanent 'I' that I think that I am? And so for everything else.

When things are difficult, do you hear the level of you that, in silence, accepts the gritty reality? Do you also hear the level of you that knows "Actually, does any of this matter 'a hill of beans'?"<sup>25</sup> We need to *sit* very still, and to *be* very still here.

*The disease that afflicted him therefore disappeared and Actual Nature manifested Itself. Sōsan preached widely on the essentials of the Teaching following a set sequence; after talking on the text, 'The Ultimate Way is not hard; simply reject picking and choosing', he would expound on 'The power of words fails to describe It, for It is not of past, future or present'. Truly, there is no inside or outside and there is*

*no in-between. What is there to choose, what to reject? You cannot grab hold of It or discard It.*

You and I are not the same person. Earlier this year we had a General Election. The monks here voted between them for a number of different candidates. How is it they are not all voting the same way? Look into such a concrete example, talk to the individuals, you feel the reality, the **actuality** behind the ideal of “What is there to choose? What is there to reject?” In experience there’s an awareness and a recognition of the deep sitting possible within difficult, complicated decisions. The information keeps coming, the news keeps rolling, the conversations continue; your thinking keeps probing at matters to tease out the truth of them. Rather than grabbing on to this or discarding that, you allow it all to wash through you, and let it all go; keep coming back to the deep sitting. There’s only one cross you can put on the ballot paper – which way does it seem to be going for you? We can deduce a lot of the actuality of being alive and being involved with meditation, from this example.

*Once you are beyond hatred and desire, It is crystal-clear and unmistakable, nothing is lacking at any time nor is there anything in excess.*

Hatred (or fear) and desire: two of the ten fetters in the classic descriptions of the path of Buddhist training. It takes time, it takes effort, working towards being beyond the grip of these afflictions. This sentence is pointing to a very important direction; **and**, in this moment, if you are not

afflicted with anger or with desire, then what is there, actually?

*Nevertheless, look, and probe deeply, into yourself until you find the ungraspable place which is beyond imagining or description.*

Clearing up the karma. Not a **comfortable** place, is it? Turn and look—whatever is going on, we are pointing ourselves towards and into the *ungraspable place*, the *Cauldron*. Doing this we do not need the descriptions or fantasies of others—or of ourselves. We're actually *there*, **now**, engaging with the work that is there **now** for us to do.

*Never deny the law of karma, or be a veritable log or stone; strike space hard and make it reverberate, tether the lightning and make it take form...Advice for life.*

“Breathe life into the forms” our Novice-master once encouraged us. **Use** the forms. The breath has life; the life has warmth; the warmth radiates out across Time, across Space; and, it warms you.

*...carefully set your eyes on the place that has no traces and never hide yourself there.*

This weekend we come together, we sit together, we practise together; throw yourself into the moment.

*If you are like this, although we say that ‘It’ is not some object which is before your eyes or which the sense organs settle on, you will discern ‘It’...*

Don’t rob yourself of your own Treasure-house.  
*...without deviating even as much as a dust-mote.*

Keizan notes elsewhere that past karma can always arise and begin to work on us again – even after understanding.<sup>26</sup> We need to notice when that happens, and not follow it. Awareness. Our meeting together this weekend, sitting with each other in this Hall, drinking tea and talking about the reality of our practice, finding the humility to offer our understanding to those more senior than us, is important in this context.

*Strike space hard and make it reverberate, tether the lightning and make it take form.*

#### *Notes*

- <sup>1.</sup> Keizan Jōkin (1267 – 1325) became a monk, aged twelve, under Koun Ejō in Eihei-ji, the temple founded by Dōgen in 1245. Keizan actually studied under Tettsu Gikai, another of Dōgen’s successors. As Keizan grew older he began to found temples himself, and became chief priest of Dai Jōrji. He gave the fifty-two talks of *The Denkōroku* in Dai Jōrji between 1309 and 1317. They are the only lectures given by him that were recorded. See Rev. Berwyn’s article; *Great Master Keizan: His Life and Legacy in Journal of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives*, Winter 2011/2012.
- <sup>2.</sup> *The Denkōroku*, trans. Rev. Hubert Nearman, (Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett and Rev. Master Daizui MacPhillamy, consultants), 2nd Ed., (Mt. Shasta, CA: Shasta Abbey Press, 2001).

3. From *The Immeasurable Life of the Tathagata* chapter of *The Lotus Sutra* in *Buddhist Writings*, trans. Rev. Hubert Nearman, 1st Ed., (Mt. Shasta, CA: Shasta Abbey Press, 1994) p.36.
4. The new capital city of the Ch'i kingdom.
5. *Bodhidharma's Discourse on Pure Meditation* in *Buddhist Writings*, trans. Rev. Hubert Nearman, Rev. Master Daizui MacPhillamy ed., 1st Ed., (Mt. Shasta, CA: Shasta Abbey Press, 1994) pp. xx, 381.
6. Ikeda, Daisaku. *The Flower of Chinese Buddhism*, trans. Burton Watson. (Weatherhill, 1986) p.160.
7. "There is great merit in building a pagoda as high as the thirty-third heaven, but by comparison with entering the priesthood the merit is one-hundredth... A pagoda may become ruined and unusable but the merit of becoming a priest or priestess is always increasing towards enlightenment and will never lose its merit for eternity..." from the *Monastic Ordination Ceremony* in *The Liturgy of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives* (Mt. Shasta, CA: Shasta Abbey Press) p. 506.
8. Taisō Eka was the master of Kanshi Sōsan. His dates are considered by most to be 484 – 590 A.D.
9. So few facts are known about Sōsan that the Chinese historian Tao-hsuan in his *Further Lives of Exemplary Monks* (dating from 645; in the early 20th-century, T'ang dynasty manuscript copies of this book were found in China's Dun-huang caves that were in use from the 7th through the 8th centuries. Previously, only 14th-century copies of the book were known) did not give him a separate biography, although he is mentioned by name and praised for his moderation, friendship, gentleness and magnanimity. The epitaph on his tombstone compares him to Vimalakirti due to his great detachment from the world. Dumoulin, Henrich. *Zen Buddhism: A History, Volume I, India and China* (World Wisdom Inc., 2005) p.97.
10. I would prefer to use 'Actual Nature' rather than 'Original Nature'. Also, in Rev. Master Hubert's text, terms such as these are all in capital letters to draw the reader's attention to them (see p. xvii in *The Denkōroku* for fuller explanation). From this point on I have made the substitutions without drawing attention to the changing of the original text by continually using brackets etc.
11. Sōsan is said to have led the itinerant life of a mendicant monk with Eka with "one robe and one alms bowl". See *A History of Zen Buddhism*, p. 76.

- [12.](#) Hannyatara was the Teacher and Master of Bodhidharma. There is considerable evidence that Hannyatara was a woman.
- [13.](#) *The Denkōroku*, p.276.
- [14.](#) *The Denkōroku*, p.175.
- [15.](#) Taisō Eka had been executed the previous year.
- [16.](#) "...we can also affirm the classic Ch'an position that there was a line of influence from Bodhidharma through Sōsan to Dōshin. However the nature of this transmission is expressed in the affinity of their spirit and essential teaching, and may or may not have resulted from extensive personal contact..." David W. Chappell, quoted in *Early Ch'an in China and Tibet* (Berkley Buddhist Studies Series, 1983) p. 95.
- [17.](#) See also 6-14 of *Shōbōgenzō-zuimonki: Sayings of Eihei Dōgen Zenji recorded by Koun Ejō* trans. Shohaku Okumura, (Kyoto Sōtō-Zen Center, 1987) p. 229. Also see Dōgen's advice in *Gakudō-yōjinshū* (Aspects of Zazen), in Jiyu-Kennett, Rev. Master. *Zen is Eternal Life*, 4th Ed., (Mt. Shasta, CA: Shasta Abbey Press, 1994) p. 173.
- [18.](#) Whalen W. Lai, quoted in *Early Ch'an in China and Tibet* p.65.
- [19.](#) *This* Wu is the regent with whom Bodhidharma is supposed to have had his famous conversation in the 520s, after which he is said to have fled across the Yangtze river into north-eastern China.
- [20.](#) A Chinese official, Li Ch'ang found Sōsan's grave in Suzhou in 745 or 746. *Zen Buddhism: A History, Volume I India and China*, p. 104 - 105 n. 54.
- [21.](#) By the T'ang Emperor Xuanzong who reigned 713-756.
- [22.](#) See Ferguson, Andy. *Zen's Chinese heritage: the Masters and their Teachings*, (Wisdom Publications, 2011) p. 528 n. 20.
- Also see note 7, second paragraph. Some scholars have noticed the similarity with a poem titled 'Mind Inscription' by Niu-t'ou Fa-jung (594 – 657) of the Ox-head Ch'an school and have wondered whether what we know as Xinxin Ming is an abridged version of this.
- In Tao-hsuan's *Further Biographies of Eminent Monks*, he stresses that "Hui-k'ō [Taiso Eka] was the first to grasp the essence of the *Lankavatara Sutra*" and includes Sōsan as one who "discoursed on but did not write about the profound message of the *Lankavatara Sutra*. Due to the lack of authentic evidence, comments on Sōsan's teachings are speculative." Dumoulin, Henrich. *Zen Buddhism: A History, Volume I, India and China* (World Wisdom Inc., 2005) p.97.



23. It is included in the Japanese Sōtō Zen Church's list of Scriptures and other religious texts for daily use: *Sōtōshu Shuse*, Religious Studies Section, eds., (Tokyo: Sectarian Affairs Department, Sōtō Church, 1970) p. 198. See:  
*That Which is Engraved upon the Heart that Trusts to the Eternal in Buddhist Writings*, pp. 213 to 221.  
*Hsin Hsin Ming – Faith in heart-and-mind*, trans. Rev. Master Hakuun Barnhard, on website <https://www.wolkenwater.nl>, follow links Zen Teachings / Translations of Chinese texts/poems.  
*Faith in Mind* from *Chanzong Baodian* (Hebei Chanxue Yanjiasao, 1993), quoted in full in Ferguson, Andy. *Zen's Chinese Heritage: the Masters and their Teachings*, (Wisdom Publications, 2011) p.499.
24. Rev. Master Daizui MacPhillamy was second Head of the O.B.C. from his election in 1996 until his death in 2003.
25. “What I’ve got to do, you can’t be any part of, Ilsa. I’m no good at being noble, but it doesn’t take much to see that the problems of three little people don’t amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world. Someday you’ll understand that.” *Casablanca*, (1942).
26. “My brother’s death brought up many things that it would have been better not to have bothered with thus proving the truth of Keizan Zenji’s statement in the ‘Denkōroku’ that even after understanding, one’s old karma can still work upon one and that one can still make mistakes.” Jiyu-Kennett, Rev. Master. *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, (Mt. Shasta, CA: Shasta Abbey Press, 1993) pp. 211-213.

## The Light, the clouds, and their golden edges

Rev. Master Fuden Nessi

—*Dharmazuflucht Schwarzwald – Germany*—

What a treasure we have, in that what is good and what is true can show itself to us, when we do what is needed from our side. It is so liberating to recognise that the Light of the Buddha-Nature can shine through our personalised and sometimes quite confused way of perceiving. Recognising this is perhaps what gives us the deepest confidence in life.

In the chapter on the First Column of Light in Reverend Master Jiyu's book *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*<sup>1</sup>, there is the image of a person standing in a pillar of light underneath a dark cloud, looking up towards a tiny spot of light appearing in the cloud. What follows here are some reflections on the meaning Reverend Master's profound yet beautifully straightforward teaching on the "First Column of Light", which I feel is one of the most important foundations for my training, has for me – bearing in mind that this teaching was originally given in a specific context.

The teaching on the First Column of Light is about pure meditation, inwardly looking up and turning towards our true refuge for help. The dark cloud depicted in the picture mentioned above symbolises for me, on the most fundamental level, the age-old confusion that we are prone to – which has its base in the belief in a separate self – as well as the consequences of this confusion. The all-important question then is: What is needed on my part, so that I can recognise the Light of the Unborn that shines through the confusion?

To start with, a short, very general explanation: The perception of reality formed by the images projected in our mind by the self tends to be our personal world and our compass in life. It seems to me that this is, generally speaking, our usual *modus vivendi*. We all have a personal perception of things of course, a “personal reality” as it were, it is part of our inner human make-up; but it is important to realise that it is relative and provisional, and – if this is all we know – ultimately unreliable due to its conditioned nature.

When we awaken to the fact that life based exclusively on this personalised way of perceiving is in the end not enough if we wish to fulfil our true purpose, the heart-wish to find another foundation for our life is born. When we follow it and take up spiritual training, in the course of it we learn to relinquish our grasping after the personal images that form themselves in our mind. In time, we can hold these with a lighter hand and not take them for all there is. When

what passes through our mind controls us less, and the heart thus comes to rest more in itself, its gaze turns upwards.

It then becomes possible to look in a way that is different from before, which in essence amounts to looking towards that which is beyond our personalised perception. In this inner position, which I feel is the deepest foundation both for inwardly looking up and asking for the teaching, we make it possible for Buddha and Kanzeon to keep showing us the way. “Speak, speak, give me direction”, as we recite in *The Litany of the Great Compassionate One*. We are taking refuge in the Dharma when we are in this inner position.

If we keep returning to this and forget to do so less and less, we gradually become more familiar with the eternal Light that shines through our misperception of reality and the resulting confusion in our personal inner world, even at times when that world seems very dark. There can be a quiet intuition that this Light is the expression of our true being.

What I am mostly concerned with in this article, is the impact this actually has on the way we think, speak and act in the ordinary situations of our life. The Light of our true nature is not just an abstract principle. It expresses itself in our heart as what is true, what is good and what is wise. Sometimes it manifests as right understanding, sometimes as a view imbued with compassion and empathy, sometimes as

the willingness to do what is hard to do, and sometimes it takes other forms. Always it is that which heals, liberates and benefits all. As Reverend Master Jiyu taught, every act that does not come forth from the egocentric “I” not only helps us, but all beings to move towards that which liberates from being imprisoned in confusion and suffering.

As we become more aware of the many-flavoured personal images that fill our consciousness, it can sometimes feel like a mystery that the Truth would shine through them at all! From the perspective of what we view as our personal self, any other perspective or way of perceiving than its own seems almost like an impossibility. In reality though, life continually presents us with opportunities to choose the Light of the Buddha-Nature over what the clouds would sometimes have us believe. It may not seem obvious at first that we have this choice, but when we look a bit closer, we see that we actually do. This is far from easy at times. Many old and ingrained tendencies and ways of responding to what occurs in life get in the way.

For example, often we tend to believe unquestioningly the image formed in our mind of others and of how they behave. It becomes the reality for us. When we meet someone we know, what we mostly see then is the image of the person we have solidified in our mind. When we listen to him speaking we may, for example, think to ourselves “What he says is very kind, but I feel that behind his kind words lies mostly a desperate wish to be accepted and loved. I have observed this so many times with him, poor fellow. I

wish that he would be a bit more honest by now and not hide his pain. This is simply not good enough anymore.”

Our basic perception of what is happening with the person may be somewhat correct, or it may not be. Quite apart from this, clearly our inner positioning is what will determine what our perception brings forth in us. If our reliance is mainly on the self and the images it projects, it is quite likely that, depending on the constellation of these images, it will tag on expectations, criticism and judgment to what we perceive, as in the example above. It then becomes quite a cloudy business.

When on the other hand the impulses of the self are not in the ascendancy, it becomes possible to look towards that which is beyond our personal view. In effect, it is then like requesting Buddha to help us see beyond the conditioned – or as one of the Ten Vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva expresses it, to request the Buddha to turn the Wheel of the Law (in our heart).

This inner request helps with eroding the mind that looks for faults in others, which so often grafts itself onto our perception. When looking at the person in the example above, we may then mainly just perceive someone who suffers, without anything added to it. Seeing in this way, empathy tends to arise quite naturally, and perhaps even a deeper understanding of the causes of the person’s suffering. When such understanding is there, selfless love is not far away. By making it possible for the gaze of our heart to turn

towards the Buddha-Light, we also turn towards the wellspring from which true love springs.

On a more straightforward level, the image of the dark cloud simply stands for our immediate inner suffering that is an effect of past actions and the difficulties that life brings us. It is so important not to turn away from this suffering. Responding to it with willing openness and while taking refuge, essential facets of the Dharma that would otherwise probably have remained hidden often reveal themselves to us. In effect, the suffering itself then gives rise to an intuition and quiet recognition of the Light that is beyond the clouds.

Not turning away from the dark side of our experience of life also entails that we do not seek to avoid the pained suffering that we encounter within us, by replacing it with something else. When we are under siege from difficult feelings and emotions, unconsciously we often try to counter the inner darkness with something that will brighten it, in order to regain our stability, something that will re-confirm our sense of worth. Perhaps we call up a memory and dwell on it. “How was it again when he said this to me back then? What he told me was so very kind. I think he really understands me. This so helps me now that I am feeling very low and worthless.”

It is always good to remember and treasure the kindness others have shown us. The most precious help though we can receive in dark times, manifests when we do not turn away

from what pains us by creating a counter-balance. When we stay open and receptive, our gaze eventually starts to turn upwards.

There is profound merit in our unconditional “Yes” towards whatever is there – deeper than we will probably ever know. When this yes is there, we begin to have access to what Reverend Master Jiyu wrote: “Even in the darkest place the Truth may be seen and heard; thus meditation is possible for eternity; there is always light in darkness and the Buddha may be seen therein if we have the willingness to look.”<sup>2</sup>

When we stay as still as we can in the middle of the fire of the distress and fear we are experiencing, and ask for help from the Buddhas and Ancestors, there can arise a quiet knowing that something enfolds us in utter safety and peace – even while we are going through very difficult times. The iconography of Acalanatha Bodhisattva shows how to do this. It is not something heroic though, and our frail humanity certainly has access to this.

When we are in darkness, we often find ourselves in unknown territory. No strategies will help us there, only taking refuge with all our heart and asking for the Buddha’s help. At some stage, I tended to go through very difficult nights with some regularity. When dreaming, it sometimes felt like I was passing through other realms of existence,



where the suffering was much more severe than in our human realm. On waking, for a long while the traces of that suffering were still in my consciousness, to the point of feeling almost like a different person. When taking refuge in the midst of the darkness and asking for help, rather than desperately attempting to fight off the dark remnants of the dream, the resistance would give way to an offering of merit from the heart. That offering can lead to the quiet knowing that whatever dark suffering we may be experiencing, it is not separate from the Buddha-Nature.

The dark cloud can also be a lot more personal than in the example above. With the openness that our effort in training brings, some of the painful results of having fully believed in and acted on our personalised perception of things show themselves to us more clearly. Becoming aware of the residues that this has left in our consciousness can be very humbling. By not rejecting these impregnations, and instead allowing them to be within the stillness of the heart, we are in effect looking up and turning to the eternal Light for help.

A similar principle seems to apply at times when we have made a mistake. If we are prepared not to simply focus our effort on re-establishing as quickly as possible a self-image of being worthy (after all), but unreservedly enter the awareness of the mistake we have made, the Light can then start to shine on the edges of the dark inner cloud that our

mistake has generated. This is so even while we may still feel quite ashamed of having made the mistake.

What shines through then is entirely beyond anything to do with a self-image. It can express itself in something as simple as the quiet certainty that there is that in us that knows what is right in our actions, and what is not. That which thus knows is not what we think of as our self, it is the activity of Buddha-Nature. It will always guide us, if we listen to it. If we turn towards it when we have made a mistake, it leads to a positive contrition and deepening of our commitment to do what is good, rather than sinking into a shadowy looking down and reinforcing a negative self-image.

Whatever the Buddha-Light may call forth in us, it always confirms our faith in what is good and our intent not to act contrary to it. It is unconditional goodness and finds manifold expressions in our heart.

When we, for example, walk through a town and look at the people passing by, we may become aware that quite a few have saddened, unfulfilled expressions on their face. We may notice this out of the corner of our eye and then go straight back to “business as usual” in our mind. When on the other hand we are more awake in the way we look, we sometimes find that it brings forth in us an offering of merit, such as “I so wish that all beings who are sad and disappointed may find the way to look towards what heals

and truly fulfils. I offer the merit of my faith and the “Yes” of the heart that I have found in training to all.”

This may not seem like much. However, dedicating the merit of what we are doing and what we have found is increasingly important as we go on in training, as the last of the Ten Vows of Samantabhadra states: “I vow to offer the merit of my training to all beings”.

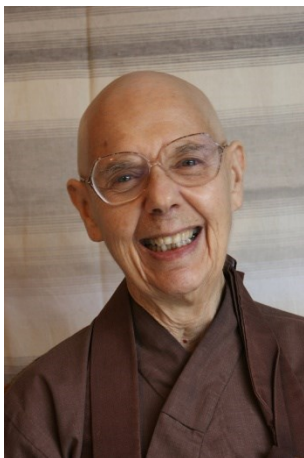
The source of our faith and of the vows we make is the Light of our true nature. When we align our lives with it, it is just as Reverend Master wrote: “What exquisite things are this body and mind; the root of the universe is exemplified therein”.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Notes*

1. *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom: or How a Zen Buddhist prepares for death*, 2nd edition (Mt Shasta, CA: Shasta Abbey Press, 1993) Plate LIV and pages 129 - 130.
2. *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, page 129.
3. *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, page 151.

## Reverend. Master Meiten McGuire

1926 – 2018



Rev. Master Meiten died peacefully in the early evening of Tuesday 2nd January 2018 in Victoria, British Columbia. She was 92 years of age. Members of her congregation were at her bedside, as was Rev. Master Meidō Tuttle; who had trained with her for many years at Shasta Abbey. Close to 100 people attended a memorial service for her, with Rev. Master Meidō as celebrant and Rev. Clairissa singing a beautiful offertory. Rev. Master Meiten was a disciple of Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett and had been a monk for almost 40 years.

She was born in California in 1926 and received her Ph.D. in Psychology in 1952 after majoring in English and Philosophy. In her professional life, she practiced clinical psychology; her last position was that of associate professor

at the University of Manitoba. In 1972, following the death of her son, she went to an ashram for spiritual guidance. This was the beginning of her commitment to finding a spiritual solution to the suffering she had experienced.

In 1978, she continued her spiritual journey at Shasta Abbey in California where she received ordination from Rev. Master Jiyu on 10th February 1979, and was given the religious name, Houn Meiten, “Beautiful Heaven in the Dharma Cloud.” In 2000, Rev. Meiten was named a Master of the Order. In 2003 she returned to Canada, settling first in Sidney, and then in Victoria, where, together with a number of lay practitioners, established the Vancouver Island Zen Sangha (VIZS) in 2006. She offered Dharma talks, meditation instruction, study groups and spiritual counseling until she retired from active leadership and teaching in 2015 at the age of eighty-nine years. The local group continued to support her and learn from her up to her death.

She offered to others the teaching and practice that had changed her own life; as she later wrote, “...the path of Sōtō Zen... (is) to help us to be true to our own True Self.” She will be fondly remembered for her warm smile, gentle sense of humour and steadfast encouragement in always looking to the Dharma to guide our everyday life.

Rev. Master Meiten wrote three books: *Reflections on the Path*, *Reminders on the Way* and *Returning to Stillness*. Downloads of these books are available as free pdfs from this link: <http://www.vizs.org/writings.php>

## Being Comfortable

Rev. Master Meiten McGuire

—Victoria—Canada—

*From Reflections on the Path: Zen Training in Everyday Life, Rev. Master Meiten's first book of her teachings, published by the Vancouver Island Zen Sangha.*

That everyone likes to feel comfortable is probably a safe generalization. Being comfortable has two aspects, it seems to me: we work to hold on to what brings us comfort, and we seek to remove that which makes us uncomfortable. The rhythm of our lives comes out of responding to that comfort/discomfort continuum. In psychology, needs and desires are distinguished, a distinction Buddhism also makes as a middle way between asceticism and self-gratification. The Buddhist mendicant is allowed only four requisites, the basics needed for sheer survival in this world. They are shelter, clothing, food, and medicine when sick. For monks, life can be simple because their needs are few. It's a good reminder for all of us that we really don't need a lot, though we do need a few things. This recognition can help us move toward simplifying our lives, and as we rid ourselves of some of the outer clutter, the mind has a chance to become correspondingly quieter.

All of us need to look dispassionately at what motivates us in our moment-to-moment choices, our daily and monthly ones, and then in our bigger view of how our lives have been

molded by choices made over the years. At some point, we're compelled to do this when the comforts we've depended upon no longer do their job or when life pulls them out from under us. Initially, many of us struggle to readapt by again securing those comforts that were taken from us. So we eat more, work more, play more, drink more. We take drugs; we seek entertainment; we travel, etcetera. When these things no longer satisfy us, we have the golden opportunity to find true comfort in the only sure place: right within the heart.

One of the koans in Zen is "Why did Bodhidharma come from the West?" Bodhidharma was an Indian monk, the twenty-eighth ancestor in our lineage and the first ancestor of Zen. He came to China from India in the early sixth century, at that time a hazardous adventure to say the least. The journey is said to have taken him more than three years. Why would someone do that? I used to puzzle over this koan and wonder what its significance might be for me, instead of seeing it as an intellectual problem. It raises the question of why we take on tasks that are decidedly uncomfortable and uncertain from the point of view of our little self, this body/mind with which we identify. What prods us to do this? Indeed, in Bodhidharma's case, as in Prince Siddhartha's, why even embark upon a demanding religious life? Why did not Siddhartha stay in the security and comfort of the palace with his status as a prince? The answer is embedded right in the question: we are more than just this body / mind that wants to be comfortable and taken care of. We want and need for our growth to challenge our complacency. Life, of course, is quite unrelenting in

providing challenges. Perhaps Bodhidharma was as fearful as most of us would be in facing an unknown, hazardous journey; still, he chose to say “yes” to that which was calling him. Perhaps he was more sensitive than most to that inner voice beckoning and whispering that there is more to life than just satisfying bodily and emotional urges – than simply eating, drinking, and being merry because tomorrow we may die. But how many of us are so fortunate?

It is only when we really know that the old status quo will no longer satisfy us that we are primed to look within for a spiritual solution to life’s unsatisfactoriness. We have to be convinced on this key point before we put real effort into a spiritual practice. Now that I’m “out in the world” after years of monastic life, I have been privileged to meet people who are searching spiritually. I see some who just put their little toe in the water of training while holding on to the belief that they don’t really have to do it, who cling to the view that there is some external fix-it-fast mode of living. I don’t see these people much at our meditation meetings and, if they do come, often they quickly disappear. That’s not a problem. They are just not ready yet to make a commitment to train; the time isn’t right for them. They’ll eventually cotton on because “the karmic consequence of suffering is compassionate,” even though that can sound puzzling initially. The inherent unsatisfactoriness of skimming only the surface of life will finally prod us to look more deeply into our lives to find life’s meaning. Sooner or later we begin more clearly to hear the call of the heart that guides us toward what is truly good to do and what isn’t. Until we are ready to hear it, we aren’t going to because we could well be



asked to do that which is not comfortable to little self, which clings to certainty and comfort.

Bodhidharma came from the West because he was answering this inner call to take a journey into the unknown. He could have died on the way. He didn't because something greater was at stake. The Buddhadharma was to come to China and he, answering his own call of the heart, brought it. If he asked "why me?" or balked because it was too uncomfortable or because he feared he wasn't good enough or because his little mind couldn't understand its significance, we wouldn't have Zen today in the form we know it. We can bow to Bodhidharma's great example and find how to follow it in our lives this very day. Every day we can put ourselves on the line and bow to that which points us to the way we can best serve all beings, rather than just stay stuck with what makes us comfortable. When we are sincerely doing our training, we know more and more that simply looking for what makes "me" comfortable is not good enough. We have too long cheated ourselves in the service of the ego and its comfort. Now is the time to move beyond that limitation. And the only way to do this is simply to do it – to rise to the challenge of moving into unknown territory. We aren't going to refine our lives except by choosing to live differently from moment to moment, bringing to bear the sincerity of our spiritual practice. We all can do this. This is the promise of the Buddha. We can all respond to a bigger picture than our little conditioned self-images that want the safety and comfort of that which is familiar.

It always comes back to our letting go, in good faith and

with confidence that the process of our longing finds fulfillment in the doing. We have to honestly and carefully examine ourselves and our motivations in order to understand where it is we are clinging. We bring up to the light of our awareness that which lies buried a little under the surface of our busy lives, and we examine it closely. Then we will see! Because what surfaces may not be comfortable, we don't always want to do this. But with training we learn that to ignore this potential discomfort is something we do at our own peril because it brings that uncomfortable sense of being out of harmony with our own heart. This is what is really uncomfortable. Of course, many of us may not be called to do something as challenging as Bodhidharma. We simply have to put aside our ideas about what is big and important – those ideas that are simply about self-gratification. Our spiritual journey is often about little, seemingly insignificant, moment-to-moment choices that confront us. Our training commitment requires that we not be ruled so much by the consideration of the comfort-discomfort continuum and instead respond to that which is good to do, that which needs to be done now. Then we let it go, ready to move on to whatever comes next. We always ask our heart, our enlightened nature, what is it good to do, what is the next step, and we follow. Then we live in life's simplicity and shed gradually the burden of self.

## There's Nothing Wrong with Death:

### The Teaching of Rev. Master Meiten McGuire

Miles Eldredge  
—Victoria, BC—Canada—

It is so painfully obvious that absolutely everything is impermanent. Over and over, our clinging to that which is impermanent is the cause of dissatisfaction in our lives, so much so that we humans seem hard-wired to re-experience this dissatisfaction, even though we know where it leads us. The brand new car that one has just purchased will immediately depreciate in value the moment it is driven away from the dealership. The new, romantic love we have just discovered will someday become less stimulating, less spicy, and with time, it will change into a form of love that is regular, daily and familiar. The wave that is ridden by the surfer must eventually crash upon the shore.

It doesn't mean we shouldn't strive to achieve our goals, but at least if we understand our attachment to things, we can be more reasonable with our expectations. Take for example that piece of chocolate cake sitting there on the

table, well I suppose you could just *have* it. By this I mean don't eat it, just hold it close. Covet the creamy icing and dark filling. Keep it in the freezer. Take it out only to admire it once every day, and never again shall it serve its purpose of being so delicious. But at least you will have it forever. But for all you know, the cake could be made of wax. So, okay, you decide to eat it. But alas, now as a consequence, you can no longer *have* it. Need I explain this dilemma any further?

Even the earth, which is 4.6 billion years old, will not be here forever. Baffling as it may seem, you would think that a mere taste of Anicca would be enough, but such is the delusion that we humans entertain on a daily basis. Over and over again we crave and avert and chase and push away until our eyeballs are spinning, and when the inevitable comes to pass, we suffer the consequence as our objects of desire slip through our fingers.

Given this circumstance, is it any wonder that the unenlightened mind fears death? One fears death because one believes it to be the ultimate ending. Yet what if we could have our wish? What if we could actually keep the things we so dearly love in a permanent, unchanging state? Perhaps even live forever? What an absolute nightmare I say! It would be like some dystopian story by Ray Bradbury or George Orwell. The scenario would be more a death than True Death itself because to make something stay the same forever would be to kill it. After all, a life in the freezer is no life at all for a piece of delicious chocolate cake! And to

impede the natural impermanence of things would be much more of an ultimate ending than any True Death. At least True Death is a change. Being into non-being. Form into Void. Born into Unborn. If anything, at least death is an unknown. It is full of endless possibility, and that is exactly why so many of us fear it. In our awareness that this life will someday come to a close, we make attempts at keeping things the same. We cling. But I say it is not death that we should fear, rather that all things in the world should never change.

In light of this, my dear teacher, Rev. Master Meiten McGuire was cremated today.

“There’s nothing wrong with death,” she was fond of saying, and “if death were a bad thing, then boy we’d all be in a whole lot of trouble.”

Moreover, she certainly did not hide the fact that she had a particular attachment to things like chocolate cake. She might have even called it a weakness with which she trained day in and day out. For many years she remained constantly vigilant and mindful of this so-called weakness, coming to the conclusion that she had a “white-sugar food intolerance,” as she would state ever so daintily. When I first met her, 15 years ago, she was very strict with herself on this matter. She once turned to me in the midst of a Dharma talk and quoted *Vespers*, “may we by our own wills and vigilance our fetters cut away,” thus invoking Achalanatha, and this was the

attitude with which she trained regarding matters of indulgence.

Then, as the years went by, something very beautiful happened. I do believe she found that she did not have to be so strict with herself. It happened in her late 80s. There was an ease with which she could simply enjoy a piece of cake, and once it was gone...no problem.

This is the way she approached life and death. By training with this familiar metaphor of impermanence.

While she did not believe in sin, as there is no sin in Buddhism, she was very fond of saying, in reference to the eating of the cake, “If one is going to sin, then sin vigorously,” and she would follow this up with a raucous laugh, the kind of laugh that filled the room entirely, the kind that instigated others to partake in the wonderful medicine known as laughter. Rev. Master Meiten was not afraid to laugh with her whole being, and in the later years of her life, she was not afraid to simply eat a piece of cake, and the notion of having a second piece was not an option. In fact it was a non-question, something not even close to being “sinful” even in the sense of a joke. It was simply an ease with the fact that everything is impermanent. It was I believe, The Great Matter for Which We Train.

Today at the crematorium, we were all given the opportunity to say our farewells to her body. When I approached the cardboard casket, which was just a modest

cardboard box, I looked down upon her, lying there in her robes, with her hands blanched nearly as white as her hair, a photograph of her long since dead son, Gregg, was placed upon her, and I realized that she certainly was not “in” there anymore. I said goodbye to her, and I returned to my seat. Then the tears came flooding, along with every memory I think I had ever had of her.

One such memory is as follows. Several years earlier, she had retired from formal teaching after a serious fall that broke her hip. Subsequently, she took up residence at an assisted living home. I would drive by this place frequently, and once in a while I would stop in to see her. I would walk into her place, without knocking, as this was our routine, because of course it was very difficult for her to get up and answer the door. On this particular occasion, all the lights were off. I hadn’t seen her in the cafeteria on my way down to her room, so I checked her bedroom. There she was, lying on her back, eyes closed, face to the ceiling, mouth agape. I said, “Hi” and she did not respond. A little concerned, I approached her, “Meiten?” Still no response. Leaning even further I checked for signs of breathing. She was unmoving. Now hovering directly over her I began to think, “Is this it?” When she abruptly opened her eyes I was startled!

“Hi!” she said.

Her face was filled with the sunniest of dispositions. I laughed as it was the only natural thing to do.

“Oh I had the most wonderful nap!” she sighed, “Could you fetch my hearing aids from the desk?”

Even as I write these words, there are tears welling up. Today, she is Truly Dead, and I am crying because, for several years now, I have been asleep. It is I who has “just woken from the most wonderful nap,” and perhaps I don’t fully understand it yet, but it took her death to snap me out of my slumber.

“Happiness is a dog asleep in the sun,” says Rev. Master Jiyu Kennett somewhere in a recorded talk I think. And a good nap really is nice, but we must wake up to live wholeheartedly. The Great Matter for Which we Train is before us. Similarly, “Of what good is it to merely enjoy life?” says Dōgen in his *Rules for Meditation*.<sup>1</sup> These venerable masters are telling us that if we only live for enjoyment, then we are as somnambulists, walking in a dream state, sleeping like dogs in the sun. Joy is certainly uplifting, something to cultivate; it is even necessary in life, but it is also transient like a piece of chocolate cake. You may eat it and then you must simply let it go. Do not attempt to store it in the freezer, like some cryogenic science experiment.

In celebrating and remembering Rev. Master Meiten today, I think of her last few years on this earth. She became quite silent, and even with the incredible aches and pains she endured, the bummer of being stuck in bed when she so loved movement, the loss of her memory when she so loved



the recitation of classical literature, (she was practically a walking encyclopedia on Shakespeare) it was amidst these conditions that she was a model for training. She practiced the “all acceptance [which] unlocks the gateless gate,” and I do believe she was fully ready to die. It was a very good death.

Today, we cremated our Buddha of the Vancouver Island Zen Sangha. After placing her in the chamber and lighting the fires, we meditated some more, and then after a certain amount of time, one at a time, we exited. The sun was shining! Here, in the gray winter of the West Coast, the sun had come out, and it was a beautiful morning. Just up the hill from the crematorium, we looked back to see smoke billowing into the air and flames spilling out of the chimney.

When I think about those flames I think about our dear teacher’s death, and I see the lessons of impermanence. I realize that there is nothing wrong with death, but if in our fear we cling to a permanent self, if we want things to stay forever, then death quickly becomes something else. It becomes something other than what it really is – something that is a terrible ending. Death is *not* a terrible ending. Just for the time being, our dear teacher was alive. She was just as alive as you who are reading this, and now obviously she is no longer alive; however, it is a mistake to think that a person “becomes” dead. The living are just that... *the living*. They do not become “the dead.” Granted, when speaking of death, it is fair to say that it is a profound change; however, in case you haven’t noticed, things have always been

changing haven't they? It's not as if death is the only change that will occur in one's lifetime. So there is nothing to be afraid of. As Dōgen writes in Genjō Koan, "... it is like winter and spring: do not imagine that winter 'becomes' spring, or speak of spring 'becoming' summer."<sup>2</sup> Thus, speaking in these terms, there is no ending; there is only a flow of immaculacy.

There is no ending, but there is, however, a good-bye, and this is the sad part. Reverend Master Meiten laughed hard and trained hard in this life. She pointed the way of training for so many of us. I'd like to say thank you to her, for having done so, for having lived this life. If there is nothing wrong with dying, then there certainly isn't anything wrong with living either! So let us continue. I cannot say goodbye to her memory; I can only say hello to this life.

#### *Notes*

1. A paraphrase from Great Master Dōgen. *Rules for Meditation in The Liturgy of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives*, (Mt. Shasta, CA: Shasta Abbey Press 1987).
- 2 Great Master Dōgen. *Shōbōgenzō Volume 1*, trans. Rev. Master Hubert Nearman, (Mt. Shasta CA: Shasta Abbey Press 1996)

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## USA and Canada

### Shasta Abbey

—Mt. Shasta, California—USA—

December was a joyous month at Shasta Abbey. The monastic community sat in silent meditation from December 1-8 for the annual winter observance of the enlightenment of Shakyamuni Buddha. In accordance with tradition, our Abbess, Rev. Master Meian, answered monks' religious questions from the altar at midnight on December 8. The Ceremony of Offering and Gratitude in mid-December gave lay congregation members an opportunity to offer gifts to the temple by passing them from hand to hand until they were placed on the altar. We celebrated Enlightenment Day again on December 24 and 25 with readings from *The Light of Asia* and invocations. The year ended with the New Year's Celebratory Retreat, culminating in the traditional ringing of the temple bell 108 times to express the resolution to practice in the coming year.



*Participants in the Ceremony of Offering and Gratitude pass gifts hand to hand*

**Ordination:** Rev. Master Daishin Yalon ordained postulant Tori Jones on December 20, giving her the religious name Houn Ona, “Grace within the Dharma Cloud.” A number of congregation members joined us for the ceremony and tea afterwards. We wish the best to both Rev. Ona and Rev. Master Daishin as they continue along the path of monastic training.



*Rev. Ona with Rev. Master Haryo, Rev. Master Daishin and Rev. Master Meian after the ordination ceremony.*

**Monk’s Funeral:** Rev. Masters Meian, Jishō Perry, Astor Douglas, and Rev. Amanda Robertson traveled to North Cascades Buddhist Priory in Washington State to attend the funeral ceremony of Rev. Master Meiten McGuire, who died in early January. Rev. Master Meiten was a disciple of Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett, who had been a monk nearly forty years. As its founding teacher, Rev. Master Meiten led the Vancouver Island Zen Sangha in Victoria, British Columbia until her retirement in 2015. We’re grateful for the hospitality of the North Cascades temple and also of the Portland Buddhist Priory, where Prior Rev. Leon Kackman hosted the travelers overnight.

***New Temple:*** Rev. Helen Cummings set forth on February 1 to take up residence at the Redding Zen Buddhist Priory, the new temple she has opened in Redding, California, about an hour south of the Abbey. We wish Rev. Helen all the best as she takes this step in offering the Dharma.

***Monastic Visitors:*** In November, the Abbess of a monastery near Chengdu, China visited for one night, accompanied by two Chinese lay followers and by Robin Littlefield of Portland, Oregon. We were honored to have them include our monastery on their tour of Buddhist temples.

It was a pleasure to welcome Rev. Jisen Coughlan, who joined us for the winter monastic retreat and stayed on for a few days afterward. Rev. Jisen has opened the Boise Zen Center in the Sōtō Zen lineage of Dainin Katagiri Rōshi, and we wish her all the best as she offers the Dharma in Idaho.

We said farewell to two visitors of our Order: Rev. Master Mugō White, OBC Lay Ministry Advisor, departed for Canada and England in December. Rev. Master Haryo Young, Head of the OBC, departed in January, heading for Throssel Hole Abbey in England, where he will be based for several months as he visits and assists temples and meditation groups of the Order in Europe. We miss them both and look forward to seeing them again.

***New Lay Ministers:*** Rev. Master Meian and Rev. Master Oswin Hollenbeck presented lay ministers' vestments to Chris Perske, Kate Transchel and Maureen "Moe" Culleton on February 11 during the Festival of the Buddha's Renunciation. Rev. Master Oswin, Executive Secretary of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, offered some reflections on what it means to be a lay minister. We're grateful for the many years of dedicated training on the part of these three long-time members of the Chico Serene Reflection Meditation Group, and we wish them well as their training deepens.



*New Lay Ministers Chris, Moe and Kate with Rev. Master Oswin, Rev. Master Meian, Rev. Margaret Clyde and Rev. Master Serena Seidner.*

***Meditation Groups:*** Rev. Master Mugō paid a weekend visit to the Bear River Meditation Group in December.

Rev. Vivian Gruenenfelder joined the Bear River group for an intensive practice week from January 21-30, 2018. Chapter 6 of Great Master Dōgen’s *Shōbōgenzō*, “Everyday Mind is the Way,” was the focus of Dharma study. The week included a daily schedule of meditation and services, Dharma talks and discussions, potluck meals and an outing.

***Naming Ceremony:*** Rev. Master Andō Mueller was the celebrant at a Naming Ceremony for Isabelle June Scott, daughter of Tod and Caroline Scott, in November.

—Rev. Margaret

## Lions Gate Buddhist Priory

—Lytton, British Columbia—Canada—

The autumn was pleasant here on the mountain, and in December, winter set in with very cold temperatures and a significant amount of snow. We are really grateful to everyone who responded so quickly and generously to our appeal for funds to purchase a new snowplow. Paired with our truck, we have been able to keep our driveway clear and passable. This is a big help to us and eases our mind greatly, as snow clearing has been a formidable challenge over the years.

We also have completed a number of other projects. Andrew kindly built steps off of the end of the new deck he built last summer. This really helps when we have to use the outhouse, especially in the winter. John cleared brush and undergrowth from around Bodhidharma Hall, something we have been wanting to do for years to help with fire suppression. We installed a propane heater for Rev. Master Kōten's room, which had a problem with being chronically chilly in the colder months. We also installed a meditation bell and drum in Prajnatara Hall. The bell is used to call people to meditation and services, and we strike the drum at the end of the first meditation period in the morning before we recite the Kesa Verse, which is our vow to train another day for the benefit of all beings.

We welcomed a steady stream of visitors this autumn and winter. People have come from Edmonton, Vancouver and other parts of BC, Ontario, and the USA for day-visits and private retreats. We welcome guests at any time for long and short stays.

In late autumn, we interred the ashes of Doris Liang at the base of the Kwan Yin statue. Doris was a Chinese-Canadian Buddhist who got to know Rev. Master Kōten while she was dying in hospice, and it was her wish that the ashes be placed with the statue once it had been moved up here. Her family and friends were in attendance for the simple ceremony we did, and

afterwards they donated a lovely meal which we all enjoyed at Bodhidharma Hall.

In November, Rev. Valeria traveled to Edmonton for ten days to visit the meditation group there. During this time she met with the group during their scheduled meditation meetings, held a meditation retreat, and was generally available for the congregation. We are grateful to everyone who made this visit possible and for all the assistance they gave.

Now that we have insulated the roof of Prajnatara Hall and sealed the windows, we have been able to use it through the winter, and it keeps warm even on the coldest winter days, which have sometimes been as low as -20 C (-5 F). In early December we held our annual Rohatsu (Buddha's Enlightenment) monastic retreat, a seven-day retreat which commemorates the Enlightenment of Shakyamuni Buddha. This is an opportunity for the community to put aside all daily activity and spend seven days in quiet meditation. The monks and lay community are grateful to everyone whose kind support of alms and training make this possible. We were delighted to welcome Rev. Chizen, a monk of the Sōtō Zen tradition whose Master lives in Poland, to join us for this week.

We also continued to perform scheduled festival ceremonies throughout the fall and winter, including Rev. Master Jiyu's Memorial, Remembrance Day, Buddha's Enlightenment, and the Maitreya Festival. On New Year's Eve, we held a meditation vigil at Prajnatara Hall followed by the New Year's Eve Ceremony, during which Rev. Master Kōten revolved *The Scripture of Great Wisdom* for the benefit of all beings. This is the first time we have held the ceremony at Prajnatara Hall. Several people from the local congregation attended. Afterward we enjoyed a festive light meal at Bodhidharma Hall and rang the temple bell 108 times.

In what has become an annual tradition, we hosted a Christmas morning brunch again this year. We were happy to



welcome neighbours from the farm in the valley below us (Sointula Greens), as well as several of the local congregation to Bodhidharma Hall for a lot of really good food and joyful conversation.

We continue to post recordings of Dharma Talks on our website. Here is the link:

<http://lionsgatebuddhistpriory.ca/Dharma%20Talks/>

—Rev. Master Aurelian

## Wallowa Buddhist Temple

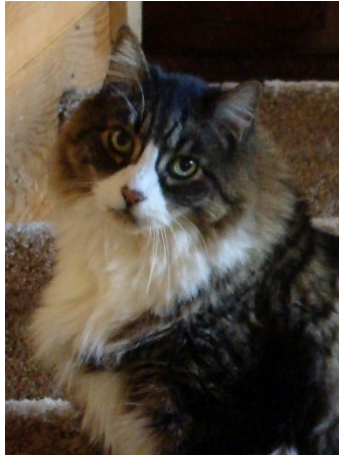
—Joseph, Oregon—USA—

**Rev. Master Meiten's Passing:** Rev. Master Meidō travelled to Victoria, B.C., Canada, on December 30th, to be with her dear sister monk, Rev. Master Meiten, for what turned out to be the last three days of her life. It was a blessing to be there at her bedside and to witness the love and care shown to her by the many congregation members, friends, and medical staff who came to say goodbye over the course of those days and/or were present when she died. It also meant a lot to Rev. Meidō to attend the monastic funeral held for Rev. Master Meiten on January 21st to celebrate her life of training. Lay minister Helmut Schatz kindly offered transportation to and from the airport for the trip to Victoria, and Rev. Clairissa kept the temple open during the times Rev. Meidō was away.

**The Passing of Others:** Deaths of three long-time friends of the temple also occurred in December and January. The monks were grateful for opportunities to spend precious time with each of them as they neared death and to offer solace to their families and friends.

**The Passing of a Temple Cat:** On December 19th, Periwinkle, the larger of our two cats, died suddenly and unexpectedly at the age of 14. Born into life as a feral kitten whose three siblings were killed by a dog, he and his mother were rescued

and eventually tamed while the temple was still located in a farm house in Lostine, Oregon. Peri grew up to be an astoundingly beautiful, exquisitely gentle, at time very shy 20-pound cat who was dearly loved and very much part of the life of the temple. We miss him and are treasuring our remaining time with his mama cat.



*Wallowa Buddhist Temple's cat, Periwinkle, Oct. 2003 to Dec. 2017.*

***Retreat Guests:*** Over the course of November and December four people came for individual spiritual retreats. Two of the retreat guests were local congregation members and the other two were from Washington state and central Oregon. It was good to have the opportunity with each guest to live and train together as a small Sangha.

***Daily Sittings for the Buddha's Enlightenment:*** Extra periods of meditation were scheduled daily during the first week of December to celebrate the Buddha's Enlightenment. Several congregation members joined the monks and a retreat guest who was with us at that time.

***Temple Closing Prompts Visitors:*** The annual closing of the temple in February to give the monks time for rest and their own individual spiritual retreats made January a particularly lively

month. More than usual numbers were prompted to come for our regularly scheduled activities, and many congregation members and temple friends from the community arranged times to visit individually, before the temple closed.

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

—*Rev. Master Meidō and Rev. Clairissa*

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## Europe

### Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey

—*Northumberland, England–UK*—

**Monastic visitors and news:** We welcomed Rev. Master Haryo at the beginning of February for an extended stay. We deeply appreciate his presence and willingness to regularly uproot himself to come here.

It's been a pleasure to have visits from a good number of other monks recently. Rev. Master Hakuun came across from the Netherlands to be with us in December, along with Rev. Bridin from Latvia. They came by car and brought their two dogs with them— Channa, a greyhound, and Lilly, a Chihuahua. Rev. Leoma, of Norwich Priory, came for monks' sesshin and stayed on. We also enjoyed visits from Rev. Master Favian of Portobello Priory, in January and we have welcomed Rev. Clementia, from Dharmazuflucht in Germany for a stay with us in February through to March.

Rev. Baldwin from Dharmatoevlucht had visited in October for a week and at one of our teas Rev. Master Daishin named him as a master. In January, Rev. Aiden, of Turning Wheel temple in Leicester was also named, as was Rev. Alicia during a visit in March. Our congratulations go to these three new masters of the Order. Rev. Master Aiden and Rev. Master Alicia came up in a bus with eight lay trainees from their area, some of whom joined the Introductory Retreat. Rev. Master Mokugen was also here in March for a few days, it was a pleasure to see her here after some years. And we welcomed Rev. Oriana from Eugene Priory for a six week stay with us and Rev. Master Baldwin for a return visit.

Rev. Sanshin had his transmission retreat in December, acknowledging his transition to becoming a transmitted monk; he is now wearing a mokuran Kesa. We congratulate him on this significant step in his training.

On 16<sup>th</sup> March, we gathered to witness the ordination by Rev. Master Daishin of Willem Dijker who was given the name Rev. Zenshin. Our newest monk is from the Netherlands and his mother, Renee, came for the ceremony to see her son become a monk. Rev. Master Mugō and Rev. Gareth were also here. We offer our congratulations to Rev. Zenshin as he begins his monastic life.



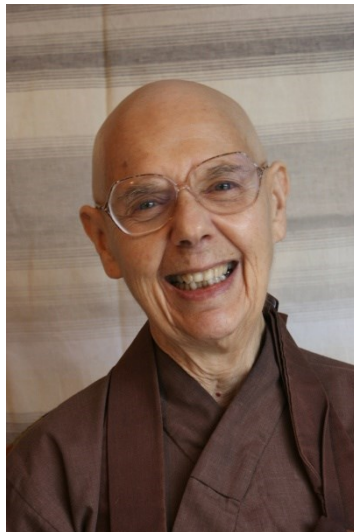
*Rev. Zenshin*

***Winter Sangha Retreat:*** We were delighted at the response we received this year to our request for support during our Winter Retreat. A good number of our Sangha came and helped with meal preparation and cleaning the temple which enabled monks to step back from this work. Monks took turns to be cook each day,

supported by a good crew of lay helpers. We were grateful for one local lay trainee who made us a delicious lunch, while another kindly took orders and shopped for us when the cook of the day needed supplies. This month is a much-appreciated opportunity for quiet reflection for the monks and always proves to be a good training opportunity for those who come.

***Memorial Ceremony for Rev. Master Meiten McGuire:***

Rev. Master Meiten, a disciple of Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett and former Prior of Vancouver Island Zen Sangha, Canada, died peacefully on Tuesday 2nd January. We held a Memorial Ceremony for her here at Throssel on Sunday 21st January with Rev. Master Hugh as celebrant. It was good to have this opportunity to remember her and offer our gratitude for her life.



*Rev. Master Meiten*

***Retreats and festivals:*** Our retreats in the winter included the Buddha's Enlightenment Retreat in December with Rev. Alina as celebrant for the festival on the Sunday, giving a dharma talk afterwards. Rev. Lambert led our New Year retreat this year,

offering teaching, with Rev. Master Leandra joining him for teas. Rev. Master Daishin was celebrant for the secular New Year festival and the Birth of our Founder festival the next day. Our first retreat after the quiet month of January was a festival weekend retreat focussed on Maitreya Bodhisattva. Rev. Jishin led the weekend. Later in February we held our first intensive weekend retreat of the year. This is a four-day silent meditation retreat which runs from Thursday through to Sunday. Rev. Master Leandra supported this retreat and offered teaching.

*A harsh winter:* About a foot of snow in January over two days brought out our snow-blower and several keen and able-bodied people to clear the lanes for the weekly deliveries and also to clear pathways between buildings. Then as February ended, a spell of sub-zero temperatures returned for over a week, with much snow and strong winds. This led to us being cut off for several days as the road along the valley was unpassable with 6 feet high drifts. At the same time, we found ourselves low on fuel for our two main buildings. We had to adapt accordingly until a delivery came; one step was to move the meditation hall to the monks' library. We were grateful for the help of our three long-term resident lay trainees, who joined in with all the necessary work of shovelling snow every day.



*Working during a snow shower between the main buildings and Myrtle Bank*

*—Rev. Alina*

## De Dharmatoevlucht

*—Apeldoorn—The Netherlands—*

***Relocation of the temple:*** In the second and third week of January the temple was relocated to a beautiful property in Apeldoorn, just opposite the royal palace. The temple is on the first floor of the building, with a large zendo, a library which also functions as a common room, a Prior's room, kitchen, bathroom, toilet and a utilities room. The ground floor rooms are used by other people and groups for various activities which all fit into the overall goal to make the house a spiritual place. The Sangha is very pleased with our move towards this property.





*Library*



*Zendo*

***Tom has passed away:*** A few days before we left our previous location at Kolibri 2, Tom, our dear temple dog, passed away peacefully after he had become suddenly very ill with kidney failure. He was ill for just over 24 hours. Rev. Baldwin was at his side all that time and held him in his arms whilst he breathed his last breath. He was 13 years and 7 months. Tom came from the



local dog shelter almost 11 years ago as a fearful and badly treated dog. He was afraid of many things, even birds, falling leaves and the moon in the sky, but especially of human hands. He was probably beaten a lot and tended to hide in a cupboard each day when it got to 4 or 5 o'clock in the afternoon. Around 9 pm he dared to show himself again. Over the years Tom grew in confidence and in the last few years he very much enjoyed greeting everybody who came into the temple with a large fluffy toy in his mouth, which is very much a Golden Retriever behaviour. Tom and I were always together, and over the years he became very close to me. He joined me on my many trips to Throssel by train and ferry and loved running after the rabbits in the monastery fields. We all said farewell during the Sunday meditation morning when Tom was lying on an altar table in front of the altar. He was buried the day after in the garden of my little hermitage cabin in the forest.

## Norwich Zen Buddhist Priory

—Norwich—UK—

**Recent events:** The day retreat in Cambridge on 14<sup>th</sup> October was well attended by members of both the Cambridge and the Norwich Sanghas. This opportunity to meet up and practise together during a quiet day of meditation and contemplation seems quite precious. The Dharma talk focussed on time and the flow of existence, with reference to Great Master Dōgen's essay *Uji*. Thank you to the members of the Cambridge Group who organised the retreat and ensured that it ran smoothly, as well as to those Norwich Sangha members who offered lifts on the day.



*Cambridge Day Retreat*

On the first Sunday in November, we marked the fourth anniversary of the Priory opening its doors. We held a ceremony to give thanks for the life and teaching of Reverend Master Jiyu-Kennett. The Priory here in Norwich is part of her legacy. Over coffee and biscuits, we looked at Rev. Master Jiyu's teaching on 'How to Sit' and this prompted such a lively discussion that our bring-and-share lunch had to be delayed.

There were plenty of opportunities, both formal and informal, for us to come together as a Sangha towards the end of the year. We celebrated various ceremonies, including the Festival of the Buddha's Enlightenment in early December, as well as the New Year Ceremony and a Renewing the Precepts Ceremony for New Year's Day. A relaxed social gathering took place for our Christmas meal at River Green Cafe in Trowse. Thank you to those who helped to organise this event and to those who came along and made it such an enjoyable evening.



*Christmas meal*

***Sangha activities:*** Various Sangha events have been taking place. One activity in particular that has recently been initiated is the Sangha Stroll, which takes place once a month. Here is Ian’s report on the first one:

“The inaugural Sangha Stroll happened on Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> November. Four Sangha members enjoyed an hour-long stroll through Earlham Park and around UEA Lake on a glorious, crisp, sunny autumn afternoon. The stroll was followed by a short browse of the free collection at the Sainsbury Centre and concluded with a well-earned hot drink at the Cafe. All Sangha members, friends and family are welcome on these strolls. For more information, please see the ‘Sangha Activities’ page of our website or email [sangha.stroll@gmail.com](mailto:sangha.stroll@gmail.com).”



*Inaugural Sangha strollers*

A group of us had an enjoyable evening on Friday 10<sup>th</sup> November, when we went together to view a photography exhibition on ‘Meditation’ by one of our Sangha, at Studio 20 in Norwich. It featured portraits of “all sorts of people meditating in all sorts of spaces”, including photos taken of members of our Sangha. The exhibition has been posted online and can be viewed at <http://www.guywilkinson.photography/meditation>.

For information about Sangha activities, there is now a page on our website, as well as a specific email address: [nzbp.sangha@gmail.com](mailto:nzbp.sangha@gmail.com). In addition, the Priory now has a noticeboard in its hallway to highlight these events. The Sangha Board also functions as a community board where Sangha members can advertise services (cards for counselling and chimney sweeping are already in place) or offer unwanted meditation equipment and furniture or ask for help with tasks and projects.

***Changes to the garden:*** In late October, we had to bid farewell to the magnificent copper beech tree that had been a prominent feature of the Priory's garden. Unfortunately it was diseased with honey fungus and had to be chopped down. Work also had to be done to remove dead wood from the tops of the two large lime trees. This was a major task, involving a crane at one point, and it was very noisy when the chainsaws and a chipping machine were in action. The loss of the copper beech does allow much more light into the garden and the Priory building, especially the meditation room, the bathroom and the hallway. At about the same time, our neighbours replaced the fence by the main entrance to the Priory and that area now looks much smarter. The other fences around the Priory are due to be replaced sometime soon.



***Thanks:*** I am particularly grateful to those people who offered help and support to me in January, when I had surgery and was convalescing from that. I am also grateful for the opportunity that I had for a week of rest and retreat time in Blakeney in October – thanks to those who made available the place of retreat

and who gave me lifts there and back. My thanks to those people who looked after the Priory while I was away in October and December, especially for enabling the Wednesday Dharma Evenings to continue to happen.

Thank you also to those who helped with tidying up the garden after all the mess and disruption from the work on the trees. Thanks as well to those who have offered help in other ways, such as by preparing the Priory's Enlightenment cards, doing the accounts and organising the recent Sangha activities.

—*Rev. Leoma*

## The Place of Peace Dharma House

—*Aberystwyth, Wales-UK—*

We ended 2017, and began this year, with our usual New Year Ceremony. We always welcome and enjoy the opportunity for monk and lay to work together, in harmony, at this time, and are grateful to Ceri Jones for donating spiced fruit punch, which was used during the Ceremony.

January was, as usual, a quieter month. Offerings were made in memory of Reverend Master Meiten McGuire, of the Vancouver Zen Sangha, who passed away peacefully on January 2nd. Sitting with her from afar, a stillness settled over the temple, and it felt like a beautiful celebration of her life of training. She taught in death as she did in life.

Retreat time began in February, when we welcomed Sangha members from Bath and Derwenlas, who came for a period of reflection. Within days of them returning home we had thick snow, which is unusual for Aberystwyth, as it usually only settles out of town, on the higher ground. Since then there have been several glorious early Spring days, with their promise of what is to come.

In January Rev. Master Myōhō was taken out for morning coffee, and given a 'Mount Shasta' rose bush, in celebration of her



birthday. This thoughtful and beautiful gift is a welcome addition to our little garden, and a reminder of our spiritual roots.

Thank you to all who so kindly made donations over the festive season, these ranged from financial offerings to gifts of home-made chutney, toiletries, stationary and garden tools. All much appreciated.

—*Rev. Master Myōhō*

## Sitting Buddha Hermitage

—*Cromford, Derbyshire–UK—*

On the last Saturday in October, members of the Huddersfield SRM Group came to spend the day at the Hermitage. After a welcoming tea we sat for meditation, and following lunch we went for a walk around the village then returned to the Hermitage for tea and another meditation period, bringing the visit to a close. I very much enjoy and appreciate these visits and hope to arrange further such group visits this coming year.

I am a trustee and member of Turning Wheel Buddhist Temple in Leicester, and on the 14th of December I drove over to the Temple for the members AGM. After the meeting, Rev. Aiden and I had lunch together and then walked round to the property that the charity is in the process of purchasing as new premises for the Temple. We weren't able to get inside the property, but I got a good sense of it from the outside and I have seen photos of the interior. I hope that by the time this news is published the purchase will have been completed and the Temple installed in its new home.

On February 4th I was invited to speak at a women's interfaith symposium organised near Derby by the [Ahmadiyya Muslim Women's Association](#). This event was organised as part of the World Interfaith Harmony Week which is a United Nations initiative that takes place annually in the first week of February. I and the other speakers were invited to talk about the founders of

our religions. There were also representatives from the [World Peace Flame](#) organisation and Derby City Council. After some questions and answers we were treated to an Asian buffet lunch which gave an opportunity to talk informally together. I was very pleased to have been able to contribute to such an event. Here I am below with the other speakers.



—Rev. Master Alicia

## Turning Wheel Buddhist Temple

—East Midlands—UK—

***New temple property:*** We are very pleased to be able to let you know that we have now moved to the new property that the temple has purchased. In the last issue of the journal we mentioned that we were hoping to move during either January or February. Soon after that however, we found out that there was a legal issue that the current owner needed to sort out before we could go ahead with the purchase. That was finally resolved in early February, and the sale was finally completed on Friday the 9th of March.

We had a lot of helping moving things over that weekend, and by the Sunday afternoon virtually everything was at the new address. Early the following week we then cleaned our rented property, and handed that back to the landlord. Thank you to all those who helped with the moving and the cleaning.

We still have boxes of things everywhere, but the Meditation Hall and Common Room are set up and functioning. It will probably take us a while to get other rooms organised. Our new address can be found at the back of the journal, and our phone number is the same as before.

Thank you to all those who support the temple in many different ways. We are very grateful for all the donations and loans that have been offered to help buy the property, and also for all your ongoing support.



*The main room is about 8m x 5m (26' x 16')*

***Visit to Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey:*** Over the weekend of the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> of March a group of us from the East Midlands travelled up to Throssel by minibus for the Introductory

Retreat weekend. There were twelve of us altogether, and we had picked March rather than February as we thought that the weather was likely to be better. As it turned out, there was quite a lot of snow that weekend, together with freezing temperatures, and we weren't sure whether we would be able to leave on the Sunday afternoon.

Fortunately, the road was ploughed just in time for us to leave early afternoon, and after a rather snowy drive down to Whitfield the roads were pretty good after that. Five of our group were visiting Throssel for the first time, and took part in the Introductory Retreat. Another five were long-term Sangha members who joined in with the daily schedule, and the other two were Rev. Alicia and Rev. Aiden. It was lovely to be able to join the community at Throssel for the weekend.



*Minibus leaving Throssel*

*—Rev. Master Aiden*

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

## Further Information

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

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

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

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