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The grounds at Eugene Priory 2019

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The Wesak Altar at Turning Wheel Buddhist Temple 2019

The Unknown

Rev. Master Myōhō Harris

—*The Place of Peace, Aberystwyth–Wales*—

On our altars there is a water cup, which sits before the Buddha. That cup represents you, me, each one of us. We train to receive what arises within us, from the great mystery that we call meditation. Like that little cup, we do not know what that will be. Only that we are ready.

The cleaning out of the cup (reflecting within, releasing our grip on how we use our minds and resolving karma), is made possible by many years of steadfast training, where we make choices that will enable the practice to change us from within.

The choices we make in how we use our minds, how we live our lives, are of vital importance to the deepening of our practice. The will, and commitment, needed to cease from endlessly recreating the same cycles of mental fabrication, is rooted in a love of the truth. Dharma is truth. When we dwell within the enclosure of meditation, offering the mind back to its source, wanting to know what is real, instead of trying to fill the mind with self-created scenarios

and strategies, we become as that precious little water cup, which has a clean, open space, ready to receive the incoming Buddha, sometimes referred to as the water of the spirit; the bringer of truth.

Here at The Place of Peace, January offers an opportunity for reflection and quiet pottering. As I settled into this contemplative time, a few things came to mind that had a common theme, which is that we sit within an unknown. This is always the case, and still there are times when we are very conscious that all we thought we knew is behind us, the future has not happened, and there is just the abiding within this unknown, and that the 'going on' lies within it. The 'going on' is not in some future time, it is now.

When we begin training, we enter a mystical path, the flavour of which is expressed in this beautiful poem:

Repose faith
Let go
Leaves fall
Just so ¹

We never know what will happen next, either within or around us, or what the response of the meditation will be to, and in, that moment; I only know that I do not wish to anticipate, or second guess what will come forth from that unknown. It is best not to try and hurry things along, or become mentally restless, especially by over thinking things,

but to abide in faith and patience, entrusting ourselves to the sufficiency of the practice, letting things ripen in their own time.

Being content within that unknown makes much possible. We are ‘just being’ (reposing in faith), within the enclosure of meditation, rather than waiting for something to happen, so there is no expectation. We listen unselfconsciously, but not for anything in particular, it is as though an inner radar is both ready, and at rest, at the same time.

This abiding should not be seen as complacency, nor is it a passive activity, for it requires all that we have to give (being fully alive), and, depending on what we are training with at the time, can also take courage and a determination to not turn away. It is a time when much that is yet to be revealed is ripening within the depths of our sitting place, as we are being prepared to receive, we know not what, only that, whatever may come, it will be the unfolding of the Buddha’s teaching, and that we are willing to go where ever it takes us.

‘Just being’ can also be described as sitting on the razor’s edge of training (the middle way), where we neither lean forward (insist), nor hold back (resist). It corresponds to the physical meditation posture, where if the head is too far forward, or tilts back a little too much, then we feel the weight of it, but when the posture is right, the head feels weightless. So when sitting within that unknown, the mind

is a pure open space (weightless, as in we do not weigh it down by imposing anything that is of our own making upon it); we keep our cup empty, so that it may always be full.

Abiding within that great mystery is sometimes referred to as sitting in the ‘third position’² and what comes forth from that is called the non-dual Dharma. I cannot describe the non-dual Dharma in words, because as soon as we try to pin it down, it becomes something it is not. It is part of the mystical element of training and cannot be caged in words, cannot be neatly summed up or understood in an academic way. Trying to do so is rather like someone saying they have ‘conquered’ Everest, when they have staggered to the top, with the aid of oxygen tanks; tiny transient specks on the face of a mighty king.

It is very tempting to try and define everything, so it seems understandable to the intellectual mind. Instead of doing this, when we cannot understand an aspect of the teaching, we can sit within that ‘not knowing’, reflect within, and repose in faith. This leaves a space, an invitation, for the mystical elements of training to lift us up, bringing new and deeper insights, rather than us trying to pull them down, to our present level of understanding.

What we can do, through training and wanting to be guided and taught by the non-dual Dharma, is to recognise when it is manifesting. We can trust it, bow to it and have the good sense to receive what it so generously offers. Body and mind then become the appearance of Dharma in this

world. It is always there, the unfolding of the truth, always working for our good, always calling us forth, and that is enough.

The longer we train, the easier it becomes to ‘not know’, to settle in contemplative reflection and wait for the meditation to ‘speak’ to us. This ‘not knowing’ has nothing to do with self doubt, ignorance or fear, it is a ‘letting go’ and a giving of oneself to the inward looking gaze. Trusting the natural purity of our mind, we have no wish to distract it from its source, which is what happens when we attempt to take the place of the Unborn by filling that unknown space ourselves. If we can refrain from doing this, and patiently take refuge in meditation, then we release the mind, setting it free. Its natural, pure awareness will open wide, to receive what the incoming Buddha brings. This is a form of bowing, of wordlessly asking for the teaching; it is also an aspect of the Precept to refrain from taking what is not freely given. It is clearly understanding the difference between thinking about something, and reflecting within, upon it. It is the ‘reposing in faith’ that the poem speaks of. It is how we prepare ourselves to be one who can receive truth, and be called forth. This is how our cup is kept full.

It can be comforting to think we know things, especially about Buddhism.

On one level, we do; we can explain the practice to another, and recite the Precepts, but no explanation can match the reality of living it, of its life and my life being the

same, being one life. We may start with a list of Precepts, and I am grateful I could have that, to point me in the right direction and invite deeper reflection upon what they are. The Precepts may, at first, appear to be a list of instructions, later they become the appearance of Buddha, a living truth that teaches, enlightens, and helps us to see the best that can be done in this moment. We do not ‘remember’ to keep the Precepts as they are always unfolding, fanning out in endless directions, responding to all situations, beyond words, beyond any list. They are our own life blood and often give guidance with the subtlest hint of an arising that stays our hand or draws us in a certain direction, even though we may not know why. The wise do not override that prompting, but trust that it has a purpose. The teaching of the Precepts is felt in body, as much as in mind, sometimes more so, because what they are, and what we are, is the same, so the very fabric of the body that gives us earthly form, and a vehicle within which to train, ‘speaks’ to us.

We can show someone how to meditate, and the words that explain it and the practice are simple, as is the sitting posture. We may speak of ‘stillness’ or ‘sitting still’, all words that we are familiar with, and yet this living purity (stillness), is so much more than a word with a dictionary definition. When the flowing of Buddha reveals Itself within us, it transcends any word. Its revealing fills our senses as it reclaims itself (all that we are), and we see how this ‘stillness’ is ‘beyond all common consciousness, beyond all thinking’.³

We are all so deeply connected that when it flows freely in one person, it calls to the life essence of another, and can awaken their wish to train. At the Taking of the Precepts retreat we hear the words, ‘Buddha bows to Buddha, and Buddha recognises Buddha’. When the mystery of that living purity flows, and we feel its tenderness, the reality of these words touches our hearts, and calls forth gratitude which deepens our commitment, and our trust in what sits upon the altar.

Sometimes things within, or around us, may not move nearly as quickly as we think they should, or want them too, and this inability to trust the natural ripening of a situation can be caused by expectation. Expectation is a form of self intervention that hinders our ability to be taught by that great mystery, because it puts something into our water cup that did not flow from the source. This dulls the vision of our inner, intuitive eye, by creating tension. Instead of ‘reposing in faith’, we are now slightly agitated, as we always are when ‘self’ is manifesting. We are holding on to something, rather than letting go, which hinders our ability to receive what the meditation brings. We can listen, and respond better, when relaxed and ‘reposing in faith’ within that unknown.

What stands out most for me, through the years of training, is that the whole of the practice is there to enable us to be one who can receive (not self create), the unfolding of the teaching, and realise, through the way we live, what the meditation, the water of the spirit, brings. It enters us from

the formless place where there is nothing from the first (which is where we sit when meditating), and arises into our conscious knowing, as the formless merges with our transient physical form. This practice shows us how our own body and mind are a living expression of ‘form is only pure, pure is all form, there is then nothing more than this’⁴ and that we can trust, and rely upon, what it is that we are. Buddhist practice is finely honed to help us do this.

When we repose in faith, we may sense that something within that unknown is drawing us deeper, and that a significant change is taking place. To receive this unfolding of the Buddha’s teaching there must be no desire for, or hope of, achievement. Deeper insights can only be received, they cannot be taken. This requires humility, and humility here means purity. There may have been a time in our life when we did not know the contentment that the refuge of meditation brings, when we saw the illusion of self identity and personal achievement, of ‘being somebody’⁵, as comforting, as though it gave us a sense of worth and value. Now we know these desires had no reality beyond the distressed confusion of our own misguided thought processes. We can look back with compassion at the person we were, and be so very grateful that we can see a better way.

The more that we encounter the beauty and purity of the mind of meditation, the less we are inclined to tamper with it or try to dine out on it. When the grasping of ‘I want’ falls away it is like being freed from restraints that held us back.

The inevitable tension that comes when we seek a refuge that is other than Buddha, falls away, and we become as free flowing water that is poured from one shaped vase to another, where the water seeks no identity, no self-image, and effortlessly takes the shape of the ever changing container, according to the need of the moment.

It is a gift to understand when we have been mistaken, or that there is something we need to let go of and cease doing. The great Buddha heart does not see a person who was ‘wrong’ and is now ‘right’; there really is no condemnation or scornfulness here, just help comes when we need it. The meditation will reveal the unresolved pain that gave rise to that endless wanting. When the inward looking gaze sees its root, compassion flows, and a need is met in the most tender way, as grief and fear are laid to rest. We feel so thankful, and as though released from a lonely, stressful place.

When sitting within an unknown, we may feel we don’t know which way is up at the moment, and there is no shame in that. Maybe we have decisions to make that will affect others, or will have far reaching consequences. Maybe something is stirring within us and we fear what it may be, or what the meditation will ask of us. The unknown can come to us in different ways. There is a saying which, for me, expresses the spirit of entrusting ourselves to the meditation, it goes something like, “I said to that which stands at the gate, the way is dark and I am afraid.” It said,

“Come, put your hand in mine, and we will walk on together”. When we intuit that the way forward lies nowhere other than within, and through, that unknown, our trust in the practice enables us to step forth into it. It is the taking of that step, in faith and trust, that makes real our wish to be a Buddhist, and walk the path of awakening. When we let the meditation call us forth, and step off the end of our known world, even though we may tremble inside, something that I have no name for, but have benefited from many times, will carry us, whilst we regain our composure.

When, in meditation, we ordinary human beings experience our own transience, and then see how formless pure essence (Buddha Nature) gave birth to, or manifests as, human form; it deepens our wish to train and understand why we have this body, this life. We want to know how its purpose can be fulfilled, and for that, we must look to its source, to meditation.

When the call to either start training, or to let ourselves be taken deeper, unfolds within us, and we respond with a big ‘yes’, never mind I don’t know how, or where to start; everything else will fall into place, like steps in walking, and the way to make real that wish, that longing to fulfil our purpose, will come to us.

By reposing in faith, the limitations that we have placed upon our minds are exposed by training, and dissolved by training. The urge to control and over think things falls away,

and we are content to be guided by the meditation. We then find that there is a known within this unknown, it is that we can trust the practice, trust the meditation, put all our eggs, the hen and the whole coop into that one basket. Trust goes beyond one who trusts and something that is trusted. Within its completeness, we merge with that unknown. Training is always taking us beyond what we think we know. Our ‘water cup’ is kept empty and open, so that it can always be full, and what fills it is never stagnant, nor does it come from an external source. The filling of it corresponds with our awakening of how to live, day in, day out, from the pure essence of what it is we are.

Turning to the Master in the Heart of that great unknown, the leaf has no wish to fight the wind, as the practice guides us, through darkness and through light, revealing that both are, at root, the same. If we can repose in faith, and let go, then the formlessness of the wind carries the leaf through the training ground of this earthly realm, as layer by layer, karmic residue is burnt out, and how we think, and respond, to what goes on within, and around us, is constantly being refined.

The two together, leaf and wind, reveal that ‘form is only pure, pure is all form, there is then nothing more than this’.⁶ The place where we sit is formless, the body we have is transient form; when these harmonise, then the light of Buddha is increasing in brilliance, which is also a description of the life of training.

Notes

1. This beautiful verse was written by Reverend Master Kōten Benson, and was inspired by the following poems:

Simply have faith,
Let all attachments go.
Do not the blossoms scatter?
Even so

Issa (on faith in Pure Land)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kobayashi_Issa

Maple leaves scatter:
One moment gleaming bright,
Darkened at the next.

Ryokan (last words) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ry%C5%8Dkan>

We can never put words into another person's mouth, and what this poem means to me may be different to how Reverend Master Kōten, or others, see it. A Dharma poem speaks to us all in different ways; that is its great gift.

2. Meditation is sometimes described as sitting in the 3rd position, which refers to abiding 'beyond the opposites'. It can also be described as the mind being fully connected with its source, rather than being pulled (by us, and how we use it) out of that innermost place.
3. *The Most Excellent Mirror Samadhi* in Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett, comp., *The Liturgy of the Order of Contemplatives for the Laity*, (Mount Shasta, California: Shasta Abbey Press, 1990) Also in scripture booklets at all temples and meditation groups of the OBC.
4. *The Scripture of Great Wisdom*, available in the Liturgy or Scripture books as above.
5. The desire to 'be somebody' and have our worth recognised is, from my experience, rooted in deep pain and grief, mixed with fear. Reflecting upon those feelings, and contemplating their root, can be very valuable, because we will learn a great deal about what has made us the way we are, and how to help ourselves, in a real way. When looking at desire with the eye of compassion and trust, the confused distress behind the 'I want' can be laid to rest. I would like to look at this in more detail in a future article.
6. *The Scripture of Great Wisdom*, available in the Liturgy or Scripture books as above.

Meeting the moment.

Rev. Alina Burgess

—Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey, Northumberland—UK—

Adapted from two talks given at Throssel in 2017 and from an earlier version of this article in the Portobello Priory Newsletter May – August 2019.

Helping on an Introductory Retreat recently, I gave the meditation instruction and was stuck by how very direct our practice is. Other traditions may use a technique to help bring oneself to the sitting. In Zen we go straight to it, we sit in the unchartered territory from the start. We sit with/within whatever we find, we ‘meet’ the moment, just as it is. I found it fruitful to explore this observation further, to look at training through this lens.

Daily life is like this too; we meet what comes to us and, being active, look to see what is needed here, what can I offer? We can only connect with this right here in the moment. It’s good to plan for a meeting and to use our knowledge of the issues and of the people we will be meeting with – and then when we get there, we need to be present and respond to what happens and see how our sense of things fits

with others'. Holding to our prepared plan may cause us to feel frustrated when others don't see things the same way; trying to implement a plan when things don't turn out as we expected doesn't tend to work well if it is not 'in tune' with what is going on.

Sitting, life, training all have this immediacy; a direct 'happening' of circumstances coming together in a particular way at each moment. We cannot anticipate any moment and sort it in advance, nor can we fix or undo that moment after it has happened (though we do meet the consequences.) Everyone has the same vividness of personal 'experiencing'. The sense of 'me' being the central point of life seems to be at least in part due to a perception and interpretation of the directness and intimacy of this experiencing. Not surprising as the experiencing is right here, in this body and mind, so it feels like 'me', but looking closely the sense of 'me' becomes elusive.

Some simple observations: experiencing is not personal to me since it is true for every living being; we respond to our surroundings all the time, even while asleep (the processing of dreams, moving when uncomfortable, hearing sounds) and from the beginning of life; we don't remember but see the wide-eyed wonder of babies experiencing everything for the first time. Now in my mid-sixties, it is clear that both my body and mental faculties are declining, yet my experiencing is as vivid as ever; it doesn't age.

That we experience is a universal constant, an aspect of life – and *what* we encounter is always changing and utterly specific, dependent on the circumstances at the time. Part of what we meet is our thoughts, feelings and reactions in response to what we encounter; our perception and retention of what happens is unique to us and our state at the time. This is how no-one remembers an event in quite the same way; we are not storing what happened as much as our experience of it. *How* we experience is highly individual, (are we curious, fearful, open) and how we have dealt with and interpreted what has happened to us so far affects us, in our forming of views and beliefs, our strategies and approach to life and training.

Our experiencing is always of and with what we are meeting; along with every step we take, a whole world of particulars are there as well. Dōgen says in *Instructions to the Chief Cook* “Our life and what we encounter are not two.”¹ He observes that there are not two separate elements involved, that it is not simply the case of something from outside coming in to ‘me’, and he leaves the observation open and undefined. In his commentary on the Precept on coveting, Dōgen says “The doer, the doing and that which has the doing done to it are immaculate.”² He ends that in keeping this Precept, “there is no desire”. First, there is something striking about hearing oneself as ‘doer’ put together in this way with what we do and the effect. Any reaction of surprise reveals how instinctively we can see our role as pivotal and assume much about how our actions happen, seeing ourselves as being key player. The two

Dōgen quotes point me to how we interact with our environment is an interconnected and complex picture. There is a quality of emptiness in the ‘happening’, with the circumstances in the moment and influences of the past, together becoming wholly just what they are. I am reminded of the ‘always becoming’ at the end of the *Scripture of Great Wisdom*. The meeting is a continuous flow, not dependent on circumstance in order to happen; whatever elements are involved cannot obstruct the unfolding of experience, of life; the details and what we do make that particular moment what it is, complete in itself.

Sometimes exploring an issue in words in this way can reveal a view or belief which has been working in the background, unquestioned. It occurred to me while writing this that when we are distracted and miss an opportunity, or something we do does not work out well, we can see these as lapses in training, as though we are only training when things are going smoothly. Such a view sets up complex difficulties of a standard to reach, expectation and judgement. It has taken me years to see that experiencing difficulty does not indicate a lack. It is challenging to sit still – and to stay especially – in the moment of the deeply unsettling ‘becoming thus’. When doubt arises, it takes much courage to allow its presence, to see it and learn from it, while sitting, unknowing, and continuing to function in the ongoing flow within which it arises.

We are not alone and responsible for everything as we never have anything to hold on to and cannot control life; the

only place and time we actually function is in the constantly evolving present. Training points us to recognise the wish that calls us to be true and to see how to follow this in the details of the situation we find ourselves in, We are not always able to catch the opportunities offered; do we expect to? We can so readily judge when there is no need to do so. We see as we are able from where we are at the time. Imagine: how would you describe the ocean if your only experience of it was swimming in it?

The German poet Rilke wrote in one of his poems towards the end of his life: “Isn’t it just like breathing, this constant interchange between attachment and relinquishing.”³ What a gentle acceptance of the reality of human difficulties; a perspective that can often come at the end of life, and from practice too.

Whatever happens and however we feel, we always encounter the moment of experience – and we meet situations exactly as we do. Sometimes our behaviour may not be as we would wish, but we cannot start from somewhere else. I am struck in seeing how unpredictable my response to a situation can be. There are tendencies, yes, but I don’t always respond to circumstances in the same way; habitual responses are not fixed. I discover my capacity only in the moment; it is not ‘mine’ at all. None of us knows how things will go and so we take a step of faith, trusting ourselves and our contribution as we follow our best sense of what is good to do. This is the reality of our life unfolding and the expression of our wish within that.

In letting go of self, we find we never were alone. Just getting on reveals a functioning going on around me of which I am a part, but which is not centred on me, not a one-way process of me encountering the world. A simple example is recognising that each of us has been part of countless others' lives as they have met and known us, some close and enduring relationships, some more casual or fleeting. It makes sense to say this, sounds obvious, yet we have little awareness of the wider picture of our interconnected lives.

Deeper than this, when I am not absorbed in my concerns and I naturally give more freely, there is the experience of somehow receiving back more than I have given. This is clear – and impossible to describe. A sense maybe that giving of oneself seems to naturally open up, or allow in, an affirmatory sense of rightness, a 'yes'. There is much more here, possibly more that something of what is true is revealed.

As we continue to sit and open more to the wider connection of which we are a part, letting go becomes clearer. It becomes more possible to sit within situations and look straightforwardly to see what is going on, both within and around us, trusting ourselves and our contribution as we follow our sense of what is good to do. There is open potential in the moment which is continually discovered, cannot be held on to, never completed, always becoming 'this'.

Notes

- [1.](#) Unable to find the source of this quote, believed to be a translation of a line from *Tenzo Kyōkun*, from a reference work on Dōgen's *Pure Standards for the Zen Community*.
- [2.](#) Dōgen's *Kyōjukaimon*, in Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett's *Zen is Eternal Life* (Mt. Shasta, CA: Shasta Abbey Press, 1999) p.213 and also available widely in priories and meditation groups as a separate booklet.
- [3.](#) *Rilke's Late Poetry*, trans. Graham Good (Vancouver, BC, Ronsdale Press 2011) p.135.

Sitting with Hurt and Blame

Rev. Master Leoma Hague

—*Norwich Zen Buddhist Priory, Norwich–UK*—

This is an edited version of a talk given by Reverend Leoma at Norwich Zen Buddhist Priory in June 2015.

I'd like to share with you something that I've found helpful in my own training recently, in the context of training in difficult situations. Most of us have probably had one or more events in our lives that have affected us deeply and that we continue to have to work with, situations that have caused us much grief. Perhaps we still feel traumatised, or angry. Or perhaps we just don't feel we have closure, we've not yet laid the event to rest. The ongoing nature of this work can make us despair that we shall ever have 'dealt with it'. Then it's easy to fall into thinking, "I'm not a very good trainee, because I'm still grappling with this after all these years", or more subtly, "I'm not a very good trainee, because this is still coming up". We can't seem to help having an ideal of training, which we don't measure up to.

For me, training in this area is about getting to the crux of the matter and then seeing how many extra layers I add.

And the heart of the matter, and what we tend to skirt around and try to avoid, is: “this hurts, this really hurts”. It’s absolutely crucial to acknowledge this, otherwise we can’t go forward. To do this, we tend to have to work our way through all sorts of difficult emotions. We have to get past those judgements of: “after all this time, I’m still feeling like this”. We have to start by acknowledging: “yes, I do feel like this - it hurts”. There is no rule book that we should be following here. Each person is individual. We each have a unique set of causes and conditions that have brought us to where we are now. We have to acknowledge our perception of how it is for us, without judgement. Perhaps another person in a similar situation wouldn’t still be hurting, but this is how it is for me now. It’s up to us to be honest with ourselves. It’s not about trying to conform to how we think we should be: “I should be coping better”.

When we do get to the heart of the situation, we find “this hurts”. There can be a simple acknowledgement that this is what is there for me, without any judgement. If we can see “this hurts”, then we can start to accept it. This can be like embracing a little child. We can be with the hurt; very, very gently hold it; let it be there. To do this can be quite emotional, as we come to experience: “it’s OK that it hurts, this is what needs to be seen”.

What we come to see also is how difficult it is just to be with the hurt. “This hurts” is, by definition, painful. So we distract ourselves, squirm away, by adding layers, especially by finding someone or something to blame: “it’s all your

fault”, “you have hurt me”, “you have caused me harm”, “you have made me feel guilty”. Then we get caught up in all that is wrong with the other person. Or we may turn the blame in on ourselves: “I am useless, worthless, hopeless, a failure”. We may be tempted to try to understand why the other person did what they did, even making excuses for them. Insights into this may be helpful, but so often this is just another area of speculation. Even if the other person actually gives a reason, this may not be the whole picture – the person themselves may not know all their motivations. So this too can be a cul-de-sac, which we go round and round in, analysing what the other person did and why. These extra layers are all stories kicking in and they very quickly obscure “this hurts”. We get trapped in those layers, flailing around, separated from the heart of the matter, so that there seems no way forward.

What is really important is to appreciate that there are two aspects here: the hurt and then all that flows from it. We can disconnect those two things, so that the hurt can be there and nothing need flow from it.

This is extremely difficult, because in these cases it is usually blindingly obvious that “it’s not my fault”, “you behaved badly, unreasonably, selfishly”, “you hurt me”. Or else: “the world is unfair, cruel”, “I was in the wrong place at the wrong time”. But it is these stories that turn us into a victim and keep us locked in there, these stories of how I am not or was not in control, because “you did this to me, made me like this”, or because “it is part of who I am that I am useless”. If we can just be with “this hurts”, without any

story, without “this hurts because...”, then there is no judgement and no victim. It is just: “this is how it is”, “this hurts”. It’s not that “this hurts” is a neutral observation as such, because there is likely to be a lot of feeling and emotion present. But “this hurts” can be there without adding any judgement or story.

One particularly compelling story can be that the other person has to make the first move. “Why should it be me who takes the first step, when they were the one who hurt me, harmed me?” Perhaps we are waiting for them to say sorry, so that we can start to move forward. But as the years unfold, we come to realise that this is probably never going to happen and by then we’re trapped in a prison of suffering. We can’t get closure, because we’re relying on externals to change. Actually, only we can end our suffering. Through meditation, we have the opportunity to break through the confines of the situation. We can change our perception of the situation and so there is the potential to change the situation itself. As our relationship to the situation changes, we don’t necessarily have to do anything. We don’t have to rush out and find the other person to embrace them. But something can shift in our heart and this will affect our subsequent actions.

What happens when we sit with “this hurts” in zazen? Part of embracing the hurt is to accept: “this may actually hurt for the rest of my life and that’s OK, so be it”. We’re not trying to chase the hurt away. At the same time, we have to take care not to indulge the hurt, not to fall into despair or

resignation. We have to take care that the hurt doesn't become "my hurt", not even that "I have been hurt". What turns hurt into suffering and keeps it going is: "this is my justified hurt, justified because of what you did". We have to sit with open hands and be very, very gentle with it. Whenever we realise that we are identifying with or investing in the hurt, we gently return to the uncomplicated "this hurts". If it is just "this hurts", there's a simplicity there. We can then let go of that thought and just be with the feeling. What actually is this hurt when I sit with it? What does it feel like? We can let it come and go in meditation, like any other feeling. We can become familiar with it. We can come to see that this actually is insubstantial, ungraspable. It does dissolve, even if it coalesces again within moments. We can be with it and then it matters less whether it is there or not. We're not looking for it to dissolve. If the hurt is there, it's there and we just sit with it. Shorn of its stories, we can come to a different relationship with the hurt. We have to stay open, not separate off a hurt self. As we sit with "this hurts", where is the undivided in this?

This is what is meant when it is said that greed, anger and delusion will not stop arising as long as we're human and that what's important is what we do with them when they arise. We are human beings, with emotions, so we have to train with the emotions that arise, which isn't the same as indulging them, letting the stories take over. The hurt associated with a particular situation may always be there – the key thing is how we train with that hurt. Can we just be with the hurt? Or does it develop into anger, resentment etc.

and keep us enmeshed in suffering. This is an absolutely pivotal point for our practice. This is where the hours that we spend looking at a wall can be utilised, so that we find an end to suffering.

We can easily trip ourselves up by saying that the presence of hurt shows the presence of self and, as a trainee, I'm working towards no-self, so "this hurts" indicates that I'm not a good trainee, as I'm far away from no-self. If we look in this way, we're trying to impose the truth from outside and we're avoiding what is true for us here now. We have to start from where we are, which is "this hurts", and move forward from here, rather than try to start from where we think we should be, which is not the truth of this moment.

What I've been describing is how we can move forward with difficult situations that have been with us for years. But this approach is also applicable to new situations that we encounter in day-to-day life. Whenever we find that we are crashing around in our heads, criticising what someone has done or angry at how a situation has turned out, we can look for "this hurts", because it will be there somewhere. That's why we're crashing around in our heads, because "this hurts". But we're getting nowhere and causing ourselves suffering. If we can connect with "this hurts", we can cut through all that. "This hurts" can be hidden behind various facades, such as: "I am disappointed with how things turned out", or "I am disappointed with you". Or it may be hidden behind fear; fear of the consequences or fear of where the situation may lead. But if we look carefully, we'll find "this

hurts”. Often, in everyday life, by the time we realise what’s happening, we’re caught up once again and the hard edge of the self is already present, criticising and blaming. We can’t seem to be able to drop it, to let it go, especially if we feel we’ve been really let down, badly treated. But what we can do is stop the hard edge getting any harder and begin to soften it. We can find that gentler approach by looking for “this hurts” and just being with it.

The more familiar we become with “this hurts” underlying our own anger and blaming, the more we can recognise that “this hurts” also lies beneath others’ anger, blaming and resentment. So we can be more sympathetic, and manage a gentler approach, when anger and blame are directed at us. We can be a bit more understanding and less reactive. This alters our response to the situation and so we can change the situation.

“This hurts” is not a doctrine of despair. It’s the stories that cause despair. So whenever we see we’re caught in a story, we can work to let it go. And a particularly important story to drop is “I can’t do this”. Yes, we can do it, if we want to. We can let go of the stories and be with “this hurts”. “This hurts”, full stop – don’t go any further. “This hurts” is an acknowledgement that allows softening, gentleness and openness to develop around the pain. It makes space for everything to loosen up and shift, so that we come to a different perception, a different relationship with the situation and we are no longer trapped in a prison of suffering.

The Lotus Flower of Emotions

Rev. Vivian Gruenenfelder

— Shasta Abbey, CA—USA—

This article is a slightly edited transcription of a Sunday talk given at Shasta Abbey immediately following the yearly Festival Memorial for Rev. Master Jiyu on 4 November 2018. The intention has been to retain the conversational tone of the talk.

We have just celebrated the annual Festival Memorial on the anniversary of the death of our Founder, Rev. Master Jiyu. Last Monday, Rev. Master Chosei, who is one of her disciples, died. He was ordained I think in 1974 – he goes way back. We loved him very much. He was unique in his approach to the Dharma and to training, and he was a very strong force in our community. He leaves a big hole and we'll miss him very much.

So grief arises; and the question arises for many of us when grief arises: does that mean that we're attached? Those of you who have seen the movie *Zen*, which is about the life of Dōgen, the founder of Sōtō Zen in Japan, will know that in that movie he cries when one of his disciples makes the decision to leave the monastery and return to lay life. Was

Dōgen attached? Is there something wrong with our grief? In honor of Rev. Master Chosei I thought I might take a few moments today to explore our emotions and how they can be helpful to us.

I began this exploration several years ago, in a talk I gave on understanding the emotions in our Zen practice. In that talk I tried to lay out the huge extent to which emotions are a part of our life. If we look, we begin to see them everywhere. I tried to show that, though we might draw the conclusion from some of the teachings we hear that the emotions are harmful and therefore to be eradicated, in fact they're important, even necessary, helpful, wise and compassionate. I concluded with some thoughts on how we might train with the emotions, from the perspective of the Dharma. Remember that in Buddhism nothing is excluded; so if emotions exist there must be a good reason for this, and maybe it can help to find this reason rather than to banish them outright.

Today as we experience the emotion of grief, as we grieve the loss of Rev. Master Chosei, I'd like to look further into this subject of emotions. Sometimes we oppose emotions to analytical thinking, or reason, or the intellect, and conclude that emotions are bad or destructive, messy, uncontrollable and dangerous – some of my emotions ARE dangerous – and that reason and the intellect are good and helpful and moral, and not quite so harmful. But I think that if we look closely at our meditation practice, we can see first of all that emotions are always present – and I've got a

question mark after the word “always” there, so I urge you to explore the supposition that the emotions are *always* present – and secondly that emotions and thoughts arise together and can’t actually be separated, like a wave can’t be separated from water. Emotions generate thoughts, and thoughts generate emotions. We experience, say, jealousy because a good friend won a literary prize that we would like to have won ourselves, which sparks a train of thought about our own failure, or how we’re going to win it next year. A story spins off the emotion; and then the thought, the story that we spin, generates more emotions. Maybe our story consoles us, and we feel calm, or inspired. We begin to consider what we will write. And on it goes.

So the thoughts, the stories we tell, feed the emotions that are arising. Thoughts arise constantly, and emotions with them, in an endless feedback loop. Scientific research shows that without emotions, we actually cannot think clearly, that we make bad decisions if we don’t have some kind of emotional life. So, to my mind, to suppress emotions in favor of thought, or the intellect or reason, is actually to do violence to our nature; and I don’t think that our Zen practice would ask us to do violence to our nature.

Maybe emotions aren’t, in themselves, the problem. Maybe it’s how we use them. You can use a hammer to pound a nail or to break a skull, if you’ll forgive my dramatic example. Anything can cause suffering and anything can be a source of liberation. If we experience our emotions with full wisdom, and bring compassion to bear on them, and then

let them go, is there any problem here? This awareness, this letting go, this flowing of the emotions are our aliveness. I'll come back to that word "aliveness" in a bit.

Now there's actually only one point I want to make in this talk, and I've cribbed it from somebody else. I was recently reading *Sailing Home*, which is a book by Norman Fischer, who is a former abbot of the San Francisco Zen Center and whose religious name is Zoketsu. In it he includes a chapter on the emotions. First of all, he refers to the aliveness I've just mentioned in a succinct and quite beautiful description of meditation practice. He says, "Meditation is essentially just sitting in the present moment of our being alive."¹ Isn't that lovely? This ability to allow things, including the emotions, to come and go within our aliveness offers us the opportunity to see them clearly and to examine them closely, get to know them, before and without doing anything. They're just there and we don't have to do anything about them.

Now I'm going to digress a bit, and take another tack. There's a short koan story from *The Book of Serenity*. In this story a monk questions Dongshan. Dongshan is Tōzan Ryokai. Those of you who know our Ancestral Line will recognize that name as one of the names that we recite every day at Morning Service. Dongshan – Tōzan Ryokai – lived from 807 to 869. He was a monk in China during one of the great flowerings of Chan or Zen practice there. A monk asked him: "Among the three Buddha bodies, which one

does not fall into any category?” And Dongshan replied, “I am always close to this.”² I am always close to this.

As is usual with koan stories, this response can seem confusing, even intentionally obfuscating. This doesn't seem terribly straightforward, does it? What the heck are they talking about? The three bodies of the Buddha that the monk asks about are the Nirmanakaya, Sambhogakaya, and Dharmakaya. I'm not going to explain those today because that's another Dharma talk, and we can get the point here without having to go into all of that in detail. So, among the three Buddha bodies, which one does not fall into any category? What he's really asking, with what we might imagine to be a certain amount of anguish, is: what is there that is Unconditioned? What in this world does not lead to suffering? Is there real freedom from the pain of worldly choices and striving? Is there freedom from discrimination? He's asking, “Where is there no discriminatory mind? How do I get to Enlightenment? What *is* Enlightenment?” We can all relate to that, I think, as a kind of question that comes up in our training that feels urgent to us. How do I get to Enlightenment?

Dongshan answers in a way that, to me, seems very indirect. He says, “I am always close to this.” I think what he is saying is that he, too, wonders about this. And so he always stays close to this question. It's an important question. It's a question that motivates and drives his training and his life; so he's saying, “I always stay close to this question, listening, investigating it. I am intimately

acquainted with this question. Yes, what is, where is, Nirvana?”

Now it might be a bit disconcerting to think the great master is wondering about these things himself; he should know the answer, right? And maybe he does. But if he were to tell the monk what Enlightenment is, it would already not be Enlightenment, since Enlightenment can't be encapsulated in a simple verbal description. There is no way he can give the monk his experience of Enlightenment without distorting it. The monk has to come to know it for himself. In any case, he's describing his relationship to this question in a way that I find quite compelling. He stays close to it. And the reason I find this compelling is because to me, meditation is always being close. I am always close to this. What emerges when we are willing to simply stay close? Close to our emotions, even! Even when they're painful and we don't like them, or think they're dangerous, or are scared by them.

When we stay close, eventually we become the feeling or the emotion; and when we become the feeling, according to Zoketsu, we find that there is “a point of purity.” Zoketsu elaborates: “In the middle of anger, you can see the passion for justice; in the middle of lust, you can see selfless love.” It's interesting to consider, isn't it? Selfless love in the middle of lust. A passion for justice in the middle of anger. He continues, “It's as if by keeping your gaze steady, you have been able to see to the bottom of the feeling.” I have an image of seeing through a clear deep pool of water, and he

says that in effect: “Through the turbulent waters, caused by your stickiness,” – we might use the word attachment, the word I used at the beginning of this talk – “to the calm, clear depth.”³

Then Zoketsu quotes a poem by the Zen Master Torei Enji called “Bodhisattva Vow”; Torei says that if you follow every thought, feeling or emotion to its end “you will find a lotus blossom, and on every lotus blossom sits a Buddha.” That’s the one point I want to make in this talk: If we follow our emotions to their end, we will find a lotus blossom, and on the lotus blossom sits a Buddha.

I find this to be a very lovely and compelling image because to me it changes how we think about powerful, difficult, defiling, scary emotions, or anything else that we have difficulty with or feel aversion to. If we are willing to stay close, no matter what comes up in our meditation, no matter how disturbing, we will find a lotus blossom; and on that lotus flower sits a Buddha.

Zoketsu gave examples of this using anger and lust. You might find other things in your own experience of those emotions; Zoketsu’s answers aren’t the only answers. Recently I had a time when I experienced a lot of fear. I woke up in the middle of the night in sheer, stark terror. I mean, you’d never know that I’m fed three meals a day and have a warm, comfortable place to sleep, would you? There I lay, absolutely terrified, I have no idea of what; and this could last for hours, it could last until morning, from 1:00 in the

morning until it's time to get up, even though I did my best not to feed the emotion, the terror. Sometimes it even arose during the day, as a kind of fear or panic or sense of doom. Rev. Master Meian sometimes calls this "nameless dread." But this was really, REALLY dread! Dread exaggerated out of all proportion. So I wondered: If I stay close to this, and follow the fear to its end, is there a lotus blossom there?

Let's start with worry, which is not quite as scary as terror, which is perhaps a little more approachable than terror. Worry is a form of fear, so we're still in the fear category. When I look at worry, what I find at the end of it – and this is my own worry but also others' worry – is a very deep care and concern, a wish for the well-being of others, that all be well. Of course, there can also be "self" in an emotion like that, which appears as something like, "I want to be the one who takes very good care of things, I'm doing it, and I'm doing it better than anyone else." Or, "I'll take very good care of things so I'm not seen as incompetent, or bad in some way, or a failure," etc. That's how self can enter into something like worry. But, even so, there's still a very deep care and concern there; and that's the lotus blossom with the Buddha sitting on it. A diamond in the muck, if you'll allow me to switch metaphors.

Now let's try terror. When we're afraid, it's often a movement of self-preservation. There's some thought that I'm going to be annihilated, and that's awful and I can't let it happen. If we're afraid that we won't get the job that we want, that threatens our livelihood, and how are we going to

eat, how are we going to feed our children? Or, I'm afraid I'll get hit by a car, or the plane will crash, or that the preservatives in my food will cause cancer. I'm taking all these to the extreme, but that's because that extreme is sitting there unsaid or unnoticed behind the little fears. We're not going to all die from the slightest thing that goes wrong, but little things cause fear because ultimately they threaten our ability to preserve our own lives.

If we stay very close to this fear, this dread, this terror, and follow it to its end, what we find is the wish to be alive. For me there is something very beautiful and very refreshing about this exuberance of life that insists on its continuance. Its continuance doesn't have to be in the form of me or you or us, does it? But life keeps living. And so at the end of our fear we find our aliveness, our vitality, our awakensness. Yesterday I heard Rev. Master Jishō say, "Awareness is Buddha Nature. Awakensness is Buddha Nature." This exuberant energy of life is a lotus blossom with a Buddha sitting on it.

Perhaps anxiety, panic, terror, these really extreme forms of fear, are actually very intense expressions of our wish to remain alive, are life rejoicing in itself. Life exuberantly bubbling forth. Life alive. A lotus blossom with a Buddha sitting on it.

Following our feelings and emotions to their end, to the lotus blossom, being in intimate relationship with them, is very different from pushing them down, repressing them,

expressing them violently, denying them, trying to get rid of them, trying to fix them, trying to overcome them. It's very different from hating them, and it's very different from wishing they'd go away. It's very different from wishing I'd never be angry or afraid or lustful again. It makes possible, this staying close to our emotions and going to the end of them, a positive relationship with what we call the "afflictive emotions" and "defiling passions." It brings us out of the tightness and smallness and death of suppression into this exuberant aliveness which our fear tries to protect. The fear is trying to help.

Then the magic happens, because then our emotions transform, slowly, gradually, bit by bit, over a life of training. We will actually feel more deeply, not less deeply; and those feelings will be able to come and go without obstruction in the richness of our meditation practice. So there comes, because of this, a lightness, a joy, a recognition of the beauty in all of life that we hadn't felt before. We actually find that we can trust our feelings, and that can be a radical step to take. Anger becomes love in this process of transformation; lust becomes empathy; fear becomes aliveness. You can fill in the blanks some other way. Emotions become a rich and enriching aspect of who we are, rather than problems to be feared, or done away with, or overcome. Then our emotions can teach us, they can show us their wisdom. The wisdom of anger might be a passion for justice. There can be wisdom in that passion for justice.

Do pleasant emotions begin to predominate? I'm not sure; maybe they do at times. I know that very strong emotions – in my own case, a very strong emotion like anger – subside to a certain extent. However, there is an ease with every emotion that arises that wasn't there before, because we're not obstructing them. We're willing to be close to them. Let me emphasize: This practice doesn't make us unfeeling. It allows us to feel deeply; more deeply, more intimately, to come to know the nuances of our emotions, in the way that we come to know the nuances of a spouse or a partner whom we love dearly and spend a lot of time with.

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Now I want to wipe out this mandala that we've just put into place. Emotions, like everything else, partake of Emptiness, Shunyata. We make them solid, but they're actually very insubstantial. There's space and air inside of them. AND, they are NOT who we are. They are insubstantial; and they are not who we are. There is not a self who is this emotion; and if we are not self, then where is there for an emotion to stick? There is just the arising and passing of the insubstantial, which, like smoke, cannot be caught or held, in this insubstantial river which is our lives.

I wish to express my gratitude to Janet Cowan, who transcribed this talk. Without her help, this article would never have seen print.

Notes

- [1.](#) Fischer, Norman. *Sailing Home: Using the Wisdom of Homer's Odyssey to Navigate Life's Perils and Pitfalls.* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2011), p. 159.
- [2.](#) Cleary, Thomas, trans. *Book of Serenity: One Hundred Zen Dialogues.* (Boulder: Shambhala, 2005), Case 98, pp. 422-24.
- [3.](#) Fischer, Norman. *Sailing Home* p. 160.

Faith in the midst of darkness

Rev. Clementia Will

—*Dharmazuflucht Schwarzwald, Black Forest– Germany*—

With gratitude to Rev. Master Fuden and Lay Minister Susan Sting for translating this article from German into English.

Experiencing darkness is part of my life. Most of the time I am not able to recognize the specific reason for this darkness. Nonetheless it often appeared to me as something very real in the past. When in the midst of this darkness, my view of things often was, and still can be today, very clouded and downward-turned. When we are in this state, it is like being stuck in the gloom of this darkness.

At some point in my life I decided to put my trust fully in the help of the Dharma. This is a decision we have to make each time anew when we are faced with darkness. It isn't really the case that one person possesses this trust and another person doesn't. It is more that we all have to align ourselves with it. If we do this, in time the trust is nourished.

As the years passed in the course of my training, phases of light free of cloudiness also started to appear more clearly for me. However, during such phases I now viewed the darkness as something that stands in opposition to the light. Because of this I rejected the darkness and fought against it, or else drowned in it. Eventually though it became increasingly possible for me neither to clutch so strongly at the darkness, nor at the light. Instead I became more able to offer up everything that appeared, as well as I could manage this at the time. In this way, my view of the world of appearances as something solid and fixed was able to dissolve a bit, and something of the Buddha-nature was able to shine through.

Today I know that the darkness is not something substantial. It is like a shadow within light. And if we are willing to look, we recognize the True Light which shines through the shadows. And yet, we are so conditioned by our habits, experiences and views, that these shadows often still exert considerable influence on us. It needs us and our constant willingness to ‘go beyond’, for the shadows to be transformed and cleansed. In what follows I would like to touch upon various aspects of our training in this area.

Our effort

When we experience darkness – even in small ways, for example when our heart closes off in the course of the situations of daily life – we have to choose to either believe in and hold on to what the mind presents us with at such

times, or to trust in the Buddha's teaching, open ourselves, follow our True Heart and be willing to do that which is truly good. If we are able to keep the precepts in our heart, they will inevitably lead us in the direction of softening and opening our heart.

Constriction and darkness are connected to feelings shaped over a long period by particular experiences and our reactions to them. As a result of these, the darkness appears to us as something very solid and personal. It takes our active effort not to believe in the shadows and not to keep immersing ourselves in them, which then tends to lead to a downward-turned view. We must fully entrust ourselves and the shadows to Buddha, to That Which is True, and to our meditation.

The following example illustrates how this can express itself in a simple situation in daily life: A person who is close to us says something which causes us to feel misunderstood, not acknowledged or undervalued. Due to personal past experiences and the traces these have left in us, this can call forth very strong feelings in us. On such occasions I first of all have to decide to stay as still as I can and not externalize my feelings, for example, by responding in an accusatory manner.

But it doesn't end there. No matter how hard I try, in the end I am not really able to repress my feelings. If I am open and honest with myself, I can detect a hardening of the heart. And if I remain mindful, I recognize that this

hardening is indeed coloring my reactions and responses to this person, albeit in subtle ways.

Something more is therefore needed from me: to truly help soften this constriction of the heart; I need to entrust it to the “Altar of the Heart”, to Buddha; with full acceptance, without in any way judging or condemning either myself or the other person. If we are prepared to take full responsibility for whatever manifests in us, a profound cleansing of the heart can happen. As we become more familiar with this process, our willingness to help that which seeks conversion grows.

While we are in a constricted and hardened inner state and believe in the existence of a separate, independent “I”-entity, it seems almost impossible not to hold on to this view, and impossible to surrender it and go beyond it. For the “I” quickly feels threatened under the influence of past experiences, mental images, concepts, value-judgments and so forth, which in turn easily lead to fear and doubt. However, when we entrust ourselves to Buddha, it becomes possible to go beyond this individual “I”.

This doesn’t mean though that all the feelings and thoughts which gave rise to the inner state of constriction and darkness instantly dissolve. They continue to challenge us. But we don’t believe in them anymore as though they are all there is, and our perception of them as something solid begins to soften. This allows something of our True Nature to shine through. True faith, a recognition and a heart-

knowing of the True Refuge, appears. This in turn makes it possible for us to remain with all-acceptance and openness in the midst of all the feelings and thoughts generated by the constriction. Provided we relinquish our clinging to our mental worlds and instead turn within towards the True Refuge of our heart, and trust, that which is True and Good will help and guide us.

When through our own experience and training we become more familiar with the darkness and the way suffering is created – and familiar with how to reside inwardly so that help can come to this suffering – we also start to have a better insight into the suffering of other beings. Compassion is thus awakened, and it becomes possible to be more open towards others.

Holding fast

In times of darkness it can seem as though our connection to Buddha, and our heart-knowing of this connection, are not there anymore. Precisely at such times, trust in the Dharma-path, meditation and our training are so important. At such times we can also receive help from the Sangha, from those who have gone before us and those who walk the path with us. They support us through their example and their constancy in training.

When we are in the midst of deep darkness, it can push us to the point where we realize that our self-centered “I” alone can’t get us any further. This often causes us to take

refuge, ask for help and devote ourselves fully to the Dharma-path, if we are open to this. Each time we experience darkness we are given the opportunity to hold on to our faith and to be still in the midst of that darkness. This allows us to penetrate the darkness more and more. And in time we are able to recognize That which is True.

It is important though not to expect that the Light of Truth will shine through the darkness right away, or that we will recognize it immediately. This is not about attaining something. It is about our being willing to help whatever presents itself to us. We do our part by turning towards the True Refuge. How help is given is not of our doing. The help comes from the Buddha-nature alone. What is needed from us is perseverance, faith, patience and all-acceptance. When we are still and surrender all of ourselves when in the midst of what is difficult, dark and confused, eventually that which seemed so solid, firm and real begins to lose its solidity for us – even if this takes a long time.

Acceptance when we are in the dark cloud

The first year or two after my ordination I was almost constantly under a dark cloud inwardly. No matter what I tried, it seemed that no light at all was shining through it. This dark cloud had become so familiar to me over the course of many years of my life that I knew that, ultimately, nothing else than the spiritual path would truly help with converting the darkness. With ongoing training though, the cloud started to be there even more clearly and continuously.

The only way I could help this situation was to continue my training, taking one step at a time, day after day. I tried as best as I could to bring the dark cloud and all the feelings and thoughts generated by it to the process of meditation and training. At a certain point I then started to glimpse a shimmer of light shining through the dark cloud. At times this light was brighter, at other times dimmer. At times there was only light, at other times only darkness.

What happened in all those years, and is still happening today, is that I am getting to know the dark cloud better and better: how it comes about, what it is made of, and how it happens that the True Light shines through it. The most important aspect of this for me is that the fear and sense of threat generated by the cloud have become much softer. Through this, true acceptance of being in the darkness, while trusting, is born.

All-acceptance and perseverance when we find ourselves in darkness are such important factors in our spiritual training. We can't avoid these aspects of training, nor should we try to sidestep them. The teaching will then unfold for us in a very natural way. When we recognize that we do not have to uphold any self-images, it becomes easier for us just to let them be. And when we do this, our gaze can turn upwards in a trusting, positive and accepting way, however our mental world may currently appear. If we learn how to do this in an area that affects us very strongly, this will have an effect on our entire spiritual life.

Alone with ...

When we find ourselves in a place of inner darkness and do not grasp at anything – neither at mental constructs nor at something “external” which might provide us with a support of some kind – it can be that we come to experience a pronounced sense of ‘being alone’. Nothing can stand between us and the Eternal. Turning towards our True Nature is something only we can do. No one, neither our master nor any other person, however close they may be to us, can take this step for us. We have to endure this ‘being alone’, and remain as still as we can, for underneath it lies the True Refuge.

In this state of ‘being alone’ it is important that in our heart we actively ask and search for help. This is accompanied by a deep and willing listening to that which our True Heart reveals, rather than entrenching ourselves in our mental worlds and believing in them. And then it needs our willingness to actually follow what the Buddha Nature reveals to us, and to express this in our actions.

The transformation

Nothing in the world of appearances, including that which is dark and suffused with suffering, is separate from Buddha Nature. Phenomena do not have the solid reality we tend to attribute to them. We start to recognize this when the “I” no longer clings so tightly to things, and through this clinging keeps perpetuating a mistaken view of them. It is then we become aware of how the Light of Buddha shines

through it all, and we can remain in tune with this Light in the very midst of both suffering and deep joy.

Then we do not have to fight against the darkness anymore, nor view it as something which is wrong, or not good. We are always “in the hands of Buddha”, even in the deepest darkness. In this, it is particularly important that we do not judge ourselves. Buddha will never reject us. All we have to do is turn to Him with a heart that asks for help. As we start to get a sense of this, our view and our perception undergoes a transformation. When we no longer perceive ourselves as something completely separate and detached from everything else, our anxiety concerning our personal “I” lessens – the “I” which, as a consequence of this sense of separation feels threatened, undervalued or not appreciated enough, and which then defends itself or distances itself from others. Then we also tend to feel a greater compassion towards ourselves and all beings. We increasingly recognize the Buddha-nature which lies at the heart of all existence and all beings.

True freedom is found when we awaken to the realization that there is an unchanging and lasting refuge. This refuge lies in the midst of both darkness and suffering, as well as light and that which brings us joy. When the Light of Buddha appears in our heart, a profound gratitude for this jewel wells up in us. And when that which is difficult and dark, our painful tendencies and the karma which seeks help and transformation, show themselves again, each time it is

up to us whether we will look up, trust and search for the Light of Buddha.

Reading

Sally Brown

—Missoula, Montana—USA—

*First appeared in the Pine Mountain Buddhist Temple newsletter
2016*

Last fall I attended a four-day silent retreat at Pine Mountain Temple. It was quite wonderful. The weather was perfect, the people attending were nice, and, of course, the food was good.

I had been on retreats before and was looking forward to the silence. In the beginning it was explained that this would be a silent retreat, all well and good, but then Reverend Phoebe added – and no other words. No reading, no writing. This was a bit of a surprise, and honestly, I wondered how I was going to fall asleep at night. I have always read myself to sleep. I suppose I could just lay there until overtaken by exhaustion and boredom!

The first night I cheated and played a game of solitaire on my phone under the covers. Yes, just like a kid. I'm glad I did because it didn't feel right and I got to experience that,

to listen to the small voice in the back of my head, to choose to make an adjustment over a small matter and to consciously experience making a good training choice. My choice was to not do that again. It didn't feel right and I wanted to avoid that feeling. I wanted to practice making better choices in small ways in order to strengthen the process of good decision making when larger issues came up.

What I did instead was given to me in an afternoon dharma talk. It consisted of breathing and being aware of the breath in the body and letting everything else go. Then using the eyes to see with no judgment, no chatter in the mind about what was being seen, just seeing and receiving the sights, nothing else. The third area was hearing. Listening with no mind, no thought of what it might be, no looking for the source of the sound. These techniques opened a whole new world of meditation for me.

I no longer needed words, I had the entire universe to experience and be a part of. I found that my mind fell into a state of relaxation, I saw more with less stress of looking, and the sounds were wonderful. Who needs music when there are birds! I slept well. The retreat ended with a feeling of connectedness among the participants – all without words.

Back home I continued to 'not read'. My pattern had been to make a cup of tea in the morning, read an article from the Newsletter or the OBC Journal, and then sit and meditate. I also initially did not go back to reading during the day or

before bed, but this was the first to go. I missed my down time. I had been use to taking a nap during the day, now I didn't need to, but I did need to sit down and not do much. Reading was it and so I went back to interest reading. A good novel can get me through a lot. And puzzles actually fulfill this need also – another gem from Pine Mountain. But I wasn't sure where meditative study reading came in.

I found the place. Some months after the retreat, and after the gray of winter had set in, I fell into a funk. My meditation time was flat. I had a problem and couldn't see through it. I turned to reading a randomly picked Journal article and as if given a gift, it hit the spot. Not only did I get a hand-up from the hole I was in, but I discovered there is a time and place for reading.

I still meditate in the morning, usually without reading first, but I will read when I need a bit of encouragement, or feel stuck, or can't quiet my mind for a few days in a row. I often breathe and scan my body, or just look or listen. It's difficult to find that peace of mind in everyday life. I bombard myself with information and thoughts, but I now know there is something else available.

News of the Order

Canada and USA

Shasta Abbey

—*Shasta Abbey, CA–USA*—

Transmission: On 19th April Rev. Trahearn Platt received Dharma Transmission from Rev. Master Meian. We were happy to see Rev. Trahearn take this step in training.

Monastic Visitors: We were glad to have Rev. Master Aurelian of Lions Gate Buddhist Priory in British Columbia join the community for two months beginning 1st February. Rev. Master Aurelian stayed through the Keeping of the Ten Precepts retreat and represented Avalokiteshwara Bodhisattva in the Jukai ceremonies. Two additional OBC monks joined us for the retreat: Rev. Master Meidō and Rev. Clairissa from Wallowa Buddhist Temple.

On March 12th we sadly said farewell after a nine month stay to Rev. Kōjō Bailey from Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey. We appreciated her bright presence in the kitchen and contribution to the community.



Rev. Master Andō and Rev. Kōjō

Then in May we hosted a week-long stay by Ven. Gang Gan Shi, a monk from Dharma Drum Monastery in Taiwan, who was traveling in the US visiting various temples. Her home temple is in New York. After Wesak in mid-May we were happy to have Rev. Master Oriana of the Eugene Priory visit for a few days. Monastic visitors always enrich our lives, and we are grateful for their visits.

Ten Precepts Retreat: The last week of March the monastery offered its annual Keeping of the Ten Precepts (Jukai) retreat. Eighteen people took the Precepts for the first time and received their Bloodline of the Buddhas certificate from Rev. Master Meian: Janice Helyn Annis, Shauna Marie Burrow, Mary Hayes DeRiemer, Janice Ann Gill, Kristen Denise Kette, Elizabeth Rose Kysar, Diane June Lade, Sebastian Joseph Lade, Robert Mazzorana, Jr., Virginie Lucie Moser, Tyler John Murphy, Donna Jean Salyer, Branden Allen Schneck, Stacey Ann

Shoemaker, Lynn Elizabeth Smith, Gary James Solberg, Guillermo Valle, and Wu Zhang.

We were thankful for the help of other retreat guests and a number of our local lay congregation setting up and participating in the ceremonies.

Lay minister retreat: On 8th—12th May the monastery hosted the annual lay minister retreat for North America. Fifteen lay ministers joined Rev. Master Haryo and Rev. Master Leon for an especially meaningful retreat. The group studied Great Master Dōgen’s *Genjō-koan* as part of the retreat. During the retreat Rev. Master Haryo announced Rev. Master Leon as a new master of the Order.



Lay ministers with Rev Master Leon and Rev Master Haryo

Memorials: On 7th March Rev. Master Andō was the celebrant for a memorial for Maël Jean Barbareaux, a 19-month old child in France, who died of cystic fibrosis. His family in

France were able to view a video made of the ceremony. Lay minister John Capel, of Sacramento, California, offered a naming ceremony via Skype for the boy before he died, with family members present at his bedside in hospital.



Memorial altar for Maël Jean Barbareaux

Other memorials this spring included ones for: Nanunanu, Donald Hart’s dog, on 4th April; KT Lund, Rev. Amanda’s sister, on 14th May; and Anne Marie Sykes, Kalden Wangmo Sykes’ mother, on 17th May. Celebrants for the three ceremonies were, respectively, Rev. Enya, Rev. Amanda, and Rev. Master Kōdō.

—Rev Master Oswin

Eugene Buddhist Priory

—Eugene, OR—USA—

Visitors: It was good to have some overnight visitors at the Priory this spring. Rev. Master Meidō of Wallowa Buddhist Priory

and several congregation members, Harold Black and Mary Zeise, stopped by in late March on their way to Shasta Abbey for Jukai. We enjoyed a social visit at one of the local Thai restaurants, and had an insightful conversation over muesli the next morning before they continued down to Shasta Abbey. Several weeks later Sherron Soo from Lions Gate in Vancouver and a friend, Bonita, stopped in on their way north, spending the night and joining us for our Sunday morning meditation and ceremony. Mona Goode from the Victoria, BC sangha also came by in early April and joined us for our Wednesday meditation and book discussion.

Travels: In May, Rev. Oriana headed south for a quick visit to the Abbey and to spend a day with Rev. Helen, Prior at Redding Buddhist Priory. It was Rev. Oriana's first visit to the new Priory and she was delighted by the lovely old building and the sense of continuing practice.

Wednesday Book Discussions: On Wednesday afternoons, the Priory offers evening service followed by meditation and a book discussion. We have been looking at Master Hsing Yun's commentary on the *Diamond Sutra*, a central scripture of the Mahayana perfection of wisdom literature. The Sutra addresses the nature of reality and challenges us to let go of our common way of understanding through the intellect, inviting us to allow the words to enter our heart/mind. Those who took part in this reading and the discussions were happily drawn into the *Diamond Sutra*.

In April, our group began to study *The Mountains and Waters Sutra: A Practitioner's Guide to Dōgen's "Sansuikyo."* This is a new book by Shohaku Okumura, abbot at Sanshinji in Indianapolis, Indiana, and author of the earlier *Realizing Genjō-Koan*. This book, too, invites us to expand our view by dropping discriminatory thought.

Grounds: This February Eugene had what, for us, was a heavy snowstorm. We had about 2 feet of snow and it was cold enough for it to stay on the ground for several weeks. There is a

long drive up to the Priory buildings and after a week of being snowbound, our neighbor, Mark, kindly plowed us out. The snow damaged about 20 trees that had already been weakened several winters ago in an ice storm. These trees will be taken down and next winter we plan to have another 100 trees planted. The 200 trees that were planted a year and a half ago are vigorous, and Larry, the forester who helps with our trees, said they will most likely “takeoff” this spring and summer and grow to 3-4 ft. tall.

We continue to work on our front and back gardens and they, too, are looking established and happy.



Grounds at the Priory

Some Extended Time at Throssel Hole: Rev. Oriana will be going to Throssel Hole in mid-September to attend a monastic family gathering. She will then be at Throssel for a 5-month stay. Between her car accident late last summer and the stepping down of Rev. Master Daishin from his position as Abbot at Throssel, it seems good to spend some time at her monastic home—resting, visiting, and contributing where she can.

While she is away from the Priory, Rev. Master Hugh Gould will be resident priest in Eugene. Rev. Hugh is a disciple of

Rev. Master Daizui Macphillamy, who became Head of the Order on the death of Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett. Residing at Throssel Hole for some years, Rev. Hugh's time at Eugene Priory will mark his return to the United States to continue his life as a monk.

—*Rev. Master Oriana*

Lions Gate Buddhist Priory

—*Lytton, British Columbia–Canada—*

Rev. Master Aurelian left in early January for a two-month visit to Shasta Abbey. His stay there went very well. He was able to participate in several retreats, including Jukai (The Keeping of the Ten Precepts Retreat). He also was happy to visit the Redding and Portland Priors. He is really grateful to Rev. Master Meian, the monastic community of Shasta, and both Priors for their warm hospitality.

On February 5, some of us attended an Open House to celebrate Chinese New Year at the Lytton Chinese History Museum in Lytton. The event was well attended and various Chinese delicacies were served. Later in February, we celebrated the first of the three yearly Kanzeon Festivals at the museum. Several people came for this, including congregation members and visitors from Vancouver, Lillooet, Merritt, and Kamloops. The ceremony was followed by a festive potluck. We offer weekly meditation meetings at the museum on Tuesday evenings at 6:00 pm, and a small group of people has begun to attend regularly. Everyone is welcome to attend this, and meditation instruction is available to those who have not yet received it.

At the end of February, Rev. Master Kōten traveled to the Coast to see the meditation groups in Vancouver and Victoria. We usually visit both groups on the last weekend of the month. In April, Rev. Master Kōten visited the Edmonton Buddhist Meditation group for ten days. During his time there he gave Dharma Talks, led a retreat, and offered private spiritual

counseling and instruction to various congregation members. Our thanks go out to all the people in these three congregations who offered their homes, provided transportation and food, and whose training and sincerity of purpose continue to make these trips a success.

This year, we opened up the week-long Spring Retreat to anyone who had taken the Precepts. In addition to the resident community, three people attended from Vancouver and Edmonton. The weather mostly co-operated, and it was good to meditate quietly with each other during the spring thaw. We ended the retreat on Saturday, March 30, with a festive brunch that was attended by the retreat guests and local congregation members.

Our next retreat was a week-long one for Wesak in late April. One person attended from Kelowna, BC. We ended the retreat with the Wesak Festival Ceremony, held in a brightly decorated Prajnatara Hall. About 15 people attended, including several families from Vancouver. We followed it with a festive and convivial potluck lunch at Bodhidharma Hall. We welcome anyone to our retreats, and we continue to offer a variety of them throughout the warmer months from March to November. Please check our website for details.

On April 7, Rev. Master Kōten gave the Buddhist Refuges to Finn, Michele's new dog, in an Animal Ordination ceremony at our Sunday meditation meeting at Victor's. We continue to meet on Sunday mornings for meditation, a ceremony, Dharma Talk, and lunch together.

Over the winter, the construction work on Mandala Hall, the new building we are constructing on Fearlessness Peak next to the Kanzeon statue, had to be put on hold. Now that spring is here, we are going forward with finishing it. The crew from Skeetchestn Indian Band arrived in early April and installed the outside siding, and our neighbour hauled several loads of gravel for the road up, improving access. We will be finishing the interior of Mandala Hall this spring and summer; that is, painting the walls, and

installing the floor, a solar-electric system with lights, and a heating system. Also, we have hired someone locally who will be installing a plaza with steps around the statue. We plan to host a picnic later in the year to show everyone what we've been working on.

On May 5, our dear friend Lama Tsewang died after a short illness with cancer. He was an old friend of Rev. Master Kōten and a big supporter of our community. He was a Westerner who was ordained in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition in the early 1980's. He was a great example to us of kindness, sincerity, and perseverance.

With warmer weather here, the number of visitors has increased. We have received visits from people locally, from Kelowna, Edmonton, Vancouver, and Taiwan. We are happy to welcome visitors at any time, whether it is for a short or long stay, or "just for tea."

HOW TO MEDITATE:

We are pleased to announce the recent publication of a new book, entitled *How to Meditate*. It is a transcription of a series of Dharma Talks offered by Rev. Master Kōten to the community of Lions Gate Buddhist Priory in 2016. In it, Rev. Master covers many aspects of Serene Reflection Meditation, including: meditation in the life of the Buddha, posture, spiritual experiences, the role of the Precepts, meditation in daily life, lay practice, ideas and opinions, compassion, and the experience and realisation of the Unborn.

If you are interested in receiving a copy, please contact us and we will be happy to send you one. The booklet is offered as dana (free of charge), and we gratefully accept any donations towards printing and shipping costs.

—Rev. Master Aurelian

Redding Zen Buddhist Priory

—Redding, CA—USA—

Rev. Helen is a member of the Shasta County Interfaith Forum (SCIF). On March 19, 2019, SCIF sponsored a Vigil for those killed in the mass shooting in the mosques in New Zealand. The Vigil was attended by more than 150 people. Rev. Helen was asked to offer a Buddhist teaching as part of the evening's ceremony. Rev. Helen, along with congregation members Patty Donahue and Chris Carrigan, offered presentations on meditation and mindfulness to groups at the Shasta Lake Methodist Church and St. Barnabas Episcopal Church. Tom Gibson, Maria Domenech Florit, Roya Mozafar, Gary Solberg, Patty Donahue, and Rev. Helen also attend the Sikh Festival for NonViolence at the Sikh Gudwara in Anderson (CA) where Rev. Helen offered Buddhist teaching on non-violence. Photo below.



Redding Zen celebrated Wesak at the Priory with a Festival of Lessons and Carols on Thursday evening, May 16, followed by a festive potluck. More than 30 sangha members enjoyed delicious food and the joys of the Sangha. On Sunday, May 19, Rev. Helen and 13 congregation members carpoled to the Abbey to share in celebration of Wesak there.

The Redding Zen now has a Board of Directors to work with Rev. Helen to create a sustainable Priory. The Board includes Patty Donahue – Secretary, Gary Solberg – Treasurer, Chris Carrigan – Facilities, Elizabeth Colleran – Marketing, with Rev. Helen as Board President. The Board has met regularly since February. Its meetings are open. Roya Mozafar and Vickie Wolf attended our May meeting.

—*Rev. Helen*

Wallowa Buddhist Temple

—*Joseph, Oregon – USA –*

Heavy snow storms, one after the other, throughout February and early March kept the temple grounds blanketed with deep snow. Fortunately, during that time, neighbors helped keep our firewood stores filled and the temple accessible, operating their own equipment or hiring a local garage to plow out our long driveway. Using the tractor loaned to us for the winter, Rev. Clairissa would then widen the driveway by pushing to either side the accumulating huge mounds of snow created by the plowing, and spread gravel on icy sections.



The Ford 1700 and Rev. Clairissa with a load of donated horse manure bound for the temple garden

Rotary Luncheon: In March both monks were invited to a special luncheon meeting of our local Rotary Club, where Rev. Meidō participated in the discussion following presentations on the topic of women in local leadership, given by women Wallowa County Rotarians on the occasion of Women’s History Month.

Jukai at Shasta Abbey: Harold Black and Mary Zeise from our local congregation attended Jukai this year, and had that experience enriched by overnight stays at the Eugene Buddhist Priory en-route to the monastery and then at the Portland Buddhist Priory on the two-day trip back home. Harold first took the Precepts at the Abbey in 2005. Mary took the Precepts with Rev. Meidō here at the temple last August; we congratulate her on the completion of the other Jukai ceremonies at the Abbey this year. Rev. Meidō and Rev. Clairissa also attended Jukai and felt blessed to be with the Abbey’s monastic community and to share in the joy of the giving and receiving of the Buddhist Precepts. We are grateful to Helmut Schatz who came over from Walla Walla to

look after the temple and hold services for the local congregation while the monks were away.

Retreat Guests: We were pleased to welcome several retreat guests this spring. Ed Florence from Sandpoint, Idaho, and Clyde Chamberlain from Kaslo, B.C., in Canada drove down together for a shared retreat. Both Ed and Clyde are members of the Sandpoint Meditation Group, led by Rev. Master Zensho. Other retreat guests came from our local area, or travelled from Montana, Maine, and Victoria, B.C., Canada.



Ed and Clyde enjoying working meditation at Wallowa Buddhist Temple

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

—Rev. Master Meidō and Rev. Clairissa

News of the Order

Europe

Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey

—Northumberland, England—UK—

Monastic News: In our May closed period, Rev. Master Baldwin from Dharmatoevlucht in the Netherlands, Rev. Master Leoma from Norwich Zen Priory and Rev. Caitlin from Great Ocean Dharma Refuge joined us for our week-long monks' retreat. It was a pleasure to have them all with us.

During tea on 12th May, Rev. Kyōsei was given a purple small kesa by Rev. Master Leandra, recognising her as a senior and teacher. We offer Rev. Kyōsei our congratulations.

In March, we welcomed back Rev. Kōjō after her long stay at Shasta Abbey. Rev. Vivian returned to the States after her six month stay with us, shortly after the monks' sesshin. We much appreciated having her here and shall miss her presence. She is not returning to Shasta; we wish her well as she takes her next step in training, initially being a resident monk for the meditation group she has been supporting for some years.

It was a pleasure to welcome a new postulant to the community on April 23rd. Charlie (Charlotte) Swallow, is originally from Leamington Spa in Warwickshire, and has been attending retreats for about five years including visits in that time to the temples in Reading, Telford, Leicester and the Matlock group. We offer her our congratulations and wish her well in her continuing training.



Charlie

Rev. Master Hugh: After 13 years with us, Rev. Master Hugh will soon be relocating to the west coast of the USA, initially to take over the day to day running of Eugene Priory while Rev. Oriana spends six months here, for rest and retreat, from September.

We are deeply grateful for the many contributions Rev. Master Hugh has made to the life of Throssel Hole during that time, largely as Bursar and Extern Sacristan and a time as a chaplain. He also served as a Buddhist chaplain at Newcastle University for a time. Rev. Master Hugh will continue with his responsibility as the OBC North America Treasurer. All our good wishes go with him for his time at Eugene and wherever his next step in training takes him after that. We will all miss him.

Jukai: Twelve trainees came to take the Precepts and make their commitment to follow the Buddha's path. It was a joy to support them through the retreat and witness their sincere wish to train. A group who had taken this step in previous years had the opportunity to renew their commitment and also helped the

community with the considerable work involved in setting up the ceremonies for this major retreat. We welcomed Rev. Gareth from Reading Priory to our Jukai this year; he was one of the celebrants during the week. We offer our congratulations to Jeff Balchin, Gary Bishop, Gina Bovan, Annie Cowlshaw, Vincent Ficociello, Gillian Hawdon, Sara Lawlor, Leon MacLean, Grant Morris, Jeremy Petherbridge, Jacob Scott, Paul Shelvey, Alan Woollin, Max Zorzan.



Jukai Group 2019 with Rev. Master Leandra

Family and Friends Weekend and Wesak Festival, 3 - 5 May: Thanks go to the families and monks who all helped to make the family and friends a very pleasant weekend together. A special *thank you* to Chris Philpott (of the Birmingham group) who conducted a wildlife quiz on the grounds and entertained us with a puppet show. Other regular favourites on Saturday included frisbee golf, playing the Training and Enlightenment board game and our annual barbecue, though this year we ate it indoors due to the cool and blustery weather.

Our Wesak Festival Ceremony followed on Sunday with Rev. Master Mugō as celebrant for this traditional celebration of the Buddha's birth. Afterwards she gave a talk, *Manifesting Buddha*, which you can find on the Throssel website by clicking

here: [Wesak day talk](#). Meanwhile the young people were offered a Dharma gathering of activities with by Rev. Kyōsei. We all came together for an enjoyable buffet meal to end the celebrations.



Wesak Festival circumambulation

Intensive Retreat, 24 - 27 May: Our May Intensive retreat which ran over four days was led by Rev. Wilfrid who gave a series of talks on the chapter in The Denkōroku on Taiso Eka, the principal Chinese heir of Bodhidharma and the 32nd Ancestor in our Ancestral Line.

Garden weekend: We held another garden weekend in April, a popular event which brought some of the local gardeners in our congregation to join us for the day. We were lucky with the weather and Julia Langley was able to organise the digging of a drainage trench and weeding. It was a good day's work



Digging the trench in progress

Work around the monastery: Work on our new carpark area is now completed and the space is fully usable, with crash barriers in place.



Our new car park

A local glaziers replaced the large window at the back of the ceremony hall with a double glazed one. The original one was single glazed with consequent loss of heat. The new one fits in well and has the bonus of having two opening windows for airing the hall more efficiently than the skylights.

The Guest department office has had a much needed restoration, including building a small office space for the Guestmaster, new carpets, curtains and lockable filing cabinets

Safeguarding Training session: On 31st May, Helen Gilbert from Thirty One:Eight, a Christian training company, came to run a training session for the whole community on safeguarding for adults at risk of harm. We thank Helen for an excellent half day session; we all found it useful and interesting as part of ongoing work in addressing our policies and procedures in this area.

Visit from the local Quakers: We were pleased to welcome 17 members of the two most local Quaker congregations on Wednesday 12th June, to an evening at the monastery. We sat together for half an hour of meditation in the Ceremony hall, followed by tea and conversation in the common room



Quaker Friends and monks in the Ceremony Hall

—Rev. Alina

Dragon Bell Temple

—Okehampton, Devon—UK—

[moving to Tiverton, Devon in July]

On the 23 March we were pleased to welcome sangha and friends for the celebration of the Lay Ordination of Fried Van Doorslier. Fried is a long time member of the South West sangha and supporter of the temple. The ceremony was followed by an enjoyable Pot Luck lunch. We wish Fried every success in his training.

Liz Crow and Jerry Bix held their wedding in a village hall not too far from the Temple on 12 April attended by family and friends.

They processed in, led by a fiddler playing a traditional wedding tune, and made their vows to each other in front of the altar we had set up. Jerry's grandson was the ring bearer, and after the ceremony, as we signed the Temple register, his granddaughter

sang a song to the glory of the moon. They processed out to the applause of the assembly, led again by the fiddler playing a joyful wedding march.

Our wedding ceremony includes the words “may we help each other grow, each in their own way”, a profound vow of love, compassion and wisdom, set in ordinary terms.

The time has come for our rental at Mill farm cottage to come to an end. Our stay in this glorious part of Dartmoor has been of great benefit. Since 2002 when we started in a wooden garden cabin, we have moved four times, and now for our next rental we are moving to the ex-mill town of Tiverton, which has the advantage of being on a mainline train service and a bus route, so no longer having the fun of talking people in, when their sat navs give up!

We will move in July to a property on Angel Street, Tiverton, in the old central part of the town, close to the river, so a good place for taking Snoopy the temple dog for his daily walks.

Thank you to all who have supported and trained at the Temple during our stay on Dartmoor, we hope to see you in Tiverton.

—*Rev. Master Myfanwy*

Norwich Zen Buddhist Priory

—*Norwich-UK*—

Recent events: In early February, we held a second Discussion Morning on training with physical health issues, which was an opportunity to examine some of the challenges encountered and also aspects of practice which can be particularly helpful in this area. It seems that the format of a Discussion Morning is appreciated and our next one will be more generalised, on training in challenging circumstances.

On 3rd February, we had a memorial ceremony for Rupert, Chris Yeomans's canine companion of 14 years, who had died suddenly a week before. Rupert had received ordination as a puppy and a photo of that event was placed on the altar, with another photo of him as an older dog, as well as some doggy chews and a tennis ball. Afterwards, we enjoyed some cookies, grapes and coffee and we shared our reminiscences of Rupert.



Rupert's Memorial

The day retreat at Wymondham on 30th March was an opportunity for the Sanghas of Norwich and Cambridge to practise together in the comfortable and spacious setting of the Fairland Church Centre, which had been recently refurbished with new carpet and a new kitchen. The theme for the day, which was set by the morning's Dharma talk, was 'What is This Sense of Self?', a question that gave some direction to our meditation and prompted a helpful discussion in the afternoon.

Thanks: I am grateful to everyone who enabled me to have a week of retreat and rest time in Wells-next-the-Sea in March, by

providing me with a place to stay and by looking after the Priory while I was away, especially ensuring that the Priory could be open for two evenings during that time.

My thanks to the team of regular helpers who have been assisting with gardening, maintenance and housework, as a result of which the garden is looking particularly well-kept and colourful, several of the chairs in the common room and meditation room are no longer wobbly, and the Priory is clean and tidy. I am also grateful for recent help with our website and computer, as well as producing the Priory's Wesak cards and keeping our accounts up-to-date.

—*Rev. Master Leoma*

The Place of Peace Dharma House

—*Aberystwyth, Wales-UK*—

In recent months, as well as our regular activities, we have welcomed guests from Hebden Bridge and Huddersfield, who came for private retreats. It is an offering to the temple when people travel across country to take refuge here, and a pleasure to see those who return many times. On private retreats all other business is put to one side, and everything revolves around the guest and their needs.

In March Rev. Master Myōhō visited Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey to take part in the Induction Ceremonies of the new Abbot. It was an opportunity to meet with new and old friends. We thank David Barlass for driving her part of the way, and Ceri Jones for looking after the temple during this time.

A ceremony of gratitude was offered to Sally Fletcher. She left a bequest to the Order and part of it came to The Place of Peace. We rely upon donations, and this was much appreciated. Sally's name has been added to the nightly list of those who are thought of at the closing of the day ceremony. This is an informal occasion where, before going to bed, Rev. Master Myōhō stands

before the altar, gives thanks for all that training makes possible, asks for protection for the temple, and for all beings, in all worlds. She takes a few moments to sit quietly with those who may be alone, afraid and suffering, and with those who have either asked for merit to be offered or who have helped us in some way.

As the days get longer, it is a pleasure to spend some time during the early evening, working in our little garden. Blackbirds come daily to drink from the bird bath and look for food. Butterflies, bees and ladybirds are regular visitors. Appreciating, and caring for life in all its forms, is part of the life of the temple. Through such simple activities we share our practice with all existence.

—*Rev. Master Myōhō*

Reading Buddhist Priory

—*Reading, England-UK*—

Festivals and Ceremonies: The Kanzeon festival was celebrated in March. Reverend Gareth was delighted that somebody new to presenting stepped forward for the festival, and he is very grateful to all those who have contributed to the presenting over the past year.

The annual celebration of Wesak took place on May 12th, and it was fitting that the newest member of the sangha, six month old baby Leon, celebrated his first festival with his parents, Konstanina and Barney, with his father presenting at this family occasion.

Jukai: In April, a group of Reading sangha members travelled up to Northumberland to Throssel to celebrate a week of Jukai ceremonies, during which four of the group took the Precepts. Reverend Gareth had the honour of participating in the ceremonies as a celebrant. The group found it an awe-inspiring and emotional occasion.

Retreats at the Priory: A regular programme of day and weekend drop in retreats continues. The drop ins have provided a bridge for those who cannot necessarily attend day or outside retreats, by allowing people to come as much as they are able.

Retreats outside the Priory: Our annual long weekend retreat at The Monastery of Our Lady & St. Bernard took place, in early May, in the beautiful environment of the Cotswolds, a short journey by car of less than 2hrs. It was a much appreciated opportunity for members of the Reading and Telford sanghas to meet and train together under the leadership of Reverend Master Saido and Reverend Gareth. As usual the Sisters looked after us very well helping to create a reflective environment, and providing us with comfortable accommodation and good, plentiful home cooked meals. Reading Priory welcomes the continued support of Reverend Master Saido and the Telford sangha.

Alongside these residential retreats Reverend Gareth continues to hold day retreats in the South East of England.

Refurbishments and Work Days: This year, the Prior is hoping to redecorate throughout the Priory. It was felt that the Priory needed a face lift and general freshen up with regards to the paintwork. This is being achieved with the Prior receiving helping hands when necessary.

Social Events: These are held regularly at the Priory. After the Kanzeon festival we had a convivial lunch followed by a walk along the nearby Kennet and Avon canal towpath. Film nights have become a feature at the Priory, our most recent being a viewing of 'Lion'. This award winning film was recommended by a sangha member. The film was generally agreed to be uplifting, and a testament to the human spirit.

—Gina Bovan

Turning Wheel Buddhist Temple

—East Midlands—UK—

Festival of the Buddha's Birth: It was lovely to welcome so many people for Wesak, the Festival of the Buddha's Birth, in early May. We had a full Meditation Hall, with people coming from Nottingham, Loughborough, Melton Mowbray and Leamington Spa, as well as from Leicester. We were also joined by Rev. Alicia from Sitting Buddha Hermitage in Cromford, Derbyshire.



Wesak Day group

The weather for our Wesak Festival was rather cool and damp, and we weren't able to sit outside in the garden, but following the Ceremony and the Dharma Talk we enjoyed a shared vegetarian feast in the Common Room. During the afternoon we had a meditation period together, and finished off with tea and cake.

House Blessing in Nottingham: At the end of March we held a House Blessing Ceremony at Ruth's new house in Redhill, Nottingham. A house blessing expresses our intention that the property be a place of practice, and our wish for the well-being of all who dwell there.

The house was first given a certificate with our Dharma lineage, to which its name had been added. We then processed through all the rooms carrying incense, wishing that the Buddha's teaching may permeate all parts of the house, just as the incense does. We were very lucky with the weather, which meant that we could include the outside spaces in our procession as well.



House blessing offering incense at the home altar

Several members of the Nottingham group came for the occasion, and quite a few of Ruth's new neighbours came along as well, which was very nice. The ceremony was followed by a shared vegetarian lunch, and it was lovely to sit in the garden in the warm sun for that.

Thank you to all those who helped to make the day a success, and we wish Ruth well in her new home.

Day Retreat in Nottingham: On Saturday the 27th of April we had a well-attended Day Retreat in Nottingham, with ten people coming for the day. As well as local group members from

Nottingham, there were also Sangha members there from both Loughborough and Leicester. We had the venue to ourselves that day, which meant that the building was nice and quiet. This was particularly appreciated during our morning meditation periods. As part of our morning schedule we also celebrated Morning Service, and in the afternoon Rev. Aiden gave a Dharma talk, which was followed by a very helpful discussion.

Thank you to all those who helped to make the day happen, either by helping to organise things, bringing contributions to our bring-and-share lunch, or other practical help, as well as by the offering of your practice. The next day retreat in Nottingham is scheduled for Saturday October the 12th.

—*Rev. Master Aiden*

Wolk-en-Water Hermitage

—*Vinkeven—The Netherlands—*

Steady work by members of the congregation has transformed the garage into a meditation hall (Wolk-en-Water Zendo). We hope to receive the funds for a bathroom and pellet-stove within a year. Rev. M. Baldwin and Sandra laid the flooring.



A 4-day retreat will be held there under guidance of both Rev. Master Baldwin and myself starting 30 May. Sjoukje worked on the bathroom area for those who will spend the night in their tent or the hall during the retreat.

On July 28th there will be a festive day to dedicate the hall.
All are welcome.



Sjoukje working on the bathroom area

—Rev. Master Hakuun

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

Further Information

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

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

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