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*Kwan Yin smiling at -18C, Lions Gate Buddhist Priory*

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*Throssel winter night*

## The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana:

### An Appreciation, Part Two

Rev. Master Berwyn Watson

—*Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey, UK*—

In part one of this article I talked about how the *Awakening of Faith* saw the Mahayana, and dealt especially with the question of ‘what do we take refuge in when we follow the Mahayana?’ The three refuges of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha were seen as different aspects of ‘suchness’, translated sometimes as ‘reality at it is’. And we started to look at how this non-dualistic view saw aspects of training, such as stillness and activity, delusion and enlightenment, which are often regarded as opposites.

As promised, I’d like to go into more detail now on the last two questions I mentioned:

What is the relationship between delusion and awakening, and how can we account for ignorance?

How does our understanding of what awakening is express itself in practice, for example in the way we do meditation?

## **Ignorance as the cause of suffering**

We've already seen how the *Awakening of Faith* does not make a real division between the dualities of stillness and activity, or even ignorance and enlightenment. And yet it acknowledges differences in people's training, and that many are bound up in samsara, or a cycle of suffering that seems endless. There has to be an acknowledgement of suffering and some way of explaining the causes of suffering.

Of course this was seen as one of the main teachings of the historical Buddha: that suffering (*dukkha*) existed, and the cause of suffering was grasping. A large chunk of the second section of the *Awakening* could be described as a more detailed explanation of how we cause suffering for ourselves. During the Buddha's lifetime he unpacked some of his teaching on the causes of suffering and expressed them in the doctrine of 'Dependent Origination.' This teaching used various lists of several links in a chain of cause and effect, for example:

[...] [T]hey experience these feelings by repeated contact through the six sense-bases; feeling conditions craving; craving conditions clinging; clinging conditions becoming; becoming conditions birth; birth conditions aging and death, sorrow, lamentation, sadness and distress.<sup>1</sup>

The point is that there is a circle of cause and effect; whilst you could say that grasping causes suffering, grasping itself is dependent on the six senses and feeling. The way out is to stop the vicious circle at some point, breaking one of the links in the chain, leading to renunciation, understanding and eventual liberation.

The *Awakening* uses a version of dependent arising, but has a different emphasis, making the point that before we grasp onto things we first have to create the sense of a separate self, existing in a world. For there to be a sense of ‘I want this’ or ‘I don’t want this’, there needs to be a sense of a self that can have wishes, and can achieve them by interacting with a ‘world out there’. The author is saying that this separation isn’t real either, but based on ignorance.

...it is said that on the basis of the ālaya consciousness there is ignorance and non-awakening, which give rise to the perceiver, the presenter, and the apprehender of perceptual fields. These in turn give rise to thought-moments in a continuous flow.<sup>2</sup>

This is dense stuff, so it’s worth looking at Hakeda’s translation too:

[The mentality] which emerges in the state of nonenlightenment, which [incorrectly] perceives and reproduces [the world of objects] and, conceiving that the [reproduced] world of objects is real, continues to

develop [deluded] thoughts, is what we define as mind.<sup>3</sup>

What follows is a detailed description of the various aspects of this mind. But what is the main point of this sort of analysis? I would say it is to explain how a sense of separation can emerge from a sentient being's mind whilst it remains essentially pure.

At some point the ability to process information from the senses, to remember what has been perceived and derive a sense of continuity from these, becomes the sense of a separate self that feels it must have some things, and avoid other things. But this whole edifice is based on a misunderstanding.

Therefore, the three worlds are illusory constructs, created by the mind alone. The perceptual fields of the six sensory and conceptual fields do not exist apart from the mind. Why? There are no characteristics to be apprehended for the mind does not see the mind, since all dharmas are produced from the mind's giving rise to false thought and since all discriminations are precisely the mind's discriminating itself.<sup>4</sup>

It is important to understand that when the Awakening says that the worlds we create are “illusory constructs created by the mind alone”, it is not talking about what is called ‘subjective idealism’ in Western Academic

philosophy.<sup>5</sup> It is not addressing the question of ‘how can I prove there is a world out there – could it all be imagined?’, but the question of the causes of suffering. Why is it that we feel separate? Why is there this sense of ‘us and them’ that can be so strong, and the feeling that we must control or fight against the world to prove ourselves?

I have found this sort of explanation of suffering useful in my own practice. At times I have to acknowledge just how wrong my views are, and it helps with this process to see that there is no blame whatsoever involved.

For example, I’m sometimes in the embarrassing position of sitting in the zendo building up judgemental thoughts about fellow monks. What Scriptures like the *Awakening* do is remind me I am totally mistaken in doing this. This may be a surprising thing to say, but consider: not only is it a misunderstanding to judge other people based on my own limited perceptions of a situation (because I don’t know what’s going on for others), it is also wrong to conceive of myself as a separate being that sees beings as fundamentally ‘other’. The sense that there is an ‘I’ that can stand back and separate itself from existence, and put itself on a moral ‘high ground’ is based on an illusion. We are always, already, part of existence. If we judge others, we judge existence and ourselves.

The act of judgement is based on the separation, founded on ignorance. As the *Awakening* describes it: “...all discriminations are precisely the mind’s discriminating

itself.” The *Awakening* offers a startling view of unity, that is in such direct contrast to my own limited views, that at times it acts as a real ‘wake-up call’; but it does this in a way that adds no further judgement.

I think this is why many Scriptures describe the cause of suffering as ignorance, and also why they are reluctant to say how this ‘ignorance’ started up in the first place. In the *Awakening*, ignorance is seen to be without origin. “This is explained as beginningless ignorance because thought-moment after thought-moment have always followed one another in a continuous flow.”<sup>6</sup>

This is also why in our Sange verse, that is read whenever we formally take the Precepts, we say:

All wrong actions, behaviour and karma  
perpetrated by me from time immemorial have been  
and are, caused by greed, anger and delusion which  
have no beginning, born of my body, mouth and will;  
I now make full and open confession thereof.

Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett, said a similar thing in the commentary she wrote on the Precepts: “By accident someone made the course of karma; it is not intentionally set in motion;”<sup>7</sup>

It is easy to resort to blame, which attempts to isolate some ‘thing’ out from the flow of interconnected reality and say ‘this thing, or this person, is the problem.’ It’s a

simplification which is inherently destructive because it takes as its basis the separation that causes the whole circle of suffering in the first place. On the other hand to acknowledge there is no real ‘first cause’ and call it ‘beginningless ignorance’ allows us to move forward. We just acknowledge that we have made mistakes because of our misunderstandings and learn from them.

When the Awakening says the three worlds are illusory constructs created by the mind alone, it is talking of the worlds of desire, form, and formlessness.<sup>8</sup> These referred to all the possible worlds we could end up in based on the nature of our attachments. Rev. Master Haryo has said in one talk that at some point in our training, we have to “give up whole universes”. This isn’t so much giving up a sense of how science sees this world, (ie. that we live on a planet in a solar system) but how we see ourselves in relation to this world. If we fall into separation by accident, but then continue to reinforce that by holding onto ideals, we do live in a self-created world of samsara as everything that happens is interpreted through the filter of separation and tends to reinforce a strong sense of self. In order to ‘give up whole worlds’ however, we simply need to drop the grasping onto thoughts in the moment. The Awakening makes it clear that to be ‘awakened’ is to be aware of thought moments, not only seeing that they arise and pass, but going on to “...awaken to the fact that as the mind [appears to] arise initially, it has no characteristic of [initial arising]”. This is seeing the real nature of the mind “that neither arises nor ceases.”<sup>9</sup> So, although giving up holding onto views of the

worlds is difficult in the abstract, the actual work is just that of practice – of continual letting go.

### **Going from ignorance to awakening**

So the Awakening deliberately avoids looking for a cause of ignorance, but how does it explain how we get from ignorance to awakening? Here the Awakening uses the metaphor of ‘habituation’ or ‘permeation’.

‘Habituation’ is like an ordinary piece of clothing that in reality has no scent; but it will acquire a fragrance if someone perfumes it. ... The pure dharma of suchness in reality has no defilements; it only has defiled characteristics because of habituation by ignorance.<sup>10</sup>

The point of the metaphor is that it allows the person to be neutral – just like clothing which can carry different scents. And because the permeation by suchness is the primary ‘scent’ if you like, it wins out in the end.

How does habituation give rise to pure dharmas without interruption? Because there is the dharma of suchness, it is able to habituate ignorance. Because of the power of [suchness] to habituate causes and conditions, [sentient beings’] false minds are made to weary of the sufferings of [the cycle of] birth and death and to take pleasure in seeking nirvana.

Because there are causes and conditions for these false minds to weary of [the cycle of birth and death] and to seek nirvana, they then habituate suchness.<sup>11</sup>

The way sentient beings progress to spiritual understanding varies according to their potential and their background. Those who have ‘virtuous roots’ become “weary of the sufferings of birth and death; they arouse the aspiration to supreme bodhi (awakening); they manage to encounter buddhas, become their attendants and make offerings to them; and they cultivate a commitment to faith.”<sup>12</sup>

Those with less developed virtuous roots still find their way forward. They can “arouse this aspiration [for bodhi] by seeing the physical image of the Buddha. Some will arouse their aspiration to awakening by making offerings to the monastic community.... Some will arouse this aspiration by learning from others.”<sup>13</sup>

Once this faith, or aspiration for bodhi, is awakened, it leads to a mind that is focused and mindful “of the dharma of suchness”, which “takes pleasure in amassing all good deeds”, which “is a mind of great compassion” that “wishes to eliminate the sufferings of all sentient beings”.<sup>14</sup>

Having developed this mind, several skilful means – or methods of training – are used to help bodhisattvas on the path. These include what we call ‘Sange’ translated as “feeling ashamed of and repenting one’s transgressions”,

making offerings to the Three Jewels (of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha), and making great vows to “liberate all sentient beings, without exception.”<sup>15</sup>

All these practices establish the trainee-bodhisattvas at the stage of ‘correct faith’, but there is a further stage of “Understanding and Practicing the way”, which is achieved through the Six Paramitas, including the practice of *meditation*.

### **The practice of the paramitas and meditation**

The Author makes it clear that bodhisattvas practice the paramitas as an expression of their understanding of “the dharma of suchness”. Here is their description of the first of the six paramitas.

Through the dharma of suchness, they profoundly understand what appears before them, since what they cultivate is free from characteristics. They conform to and practice *dana-paramita* (the perfection of giving) because they know that the dharma nature is intrinsically devoid of greed. They conform to and practice *sila-paramita* (the perfection of discipline) because they know that the dharma nature is devoid of defilement and free from the errors of the five desires... They conform to and practice *ksanti-paramita* (the perfection of forbearance) because they know that the dharma nature is devoid of suffering and free from vexation...<sup>16</sup>

We often think we need to practice in order to achieve something. It's a good motivation perhaps to practice generosity because it's a Buddhist thing to do, and you may become a kinder person, but the *Awakening* approaches it in a different way. *Because* reality has the nature of being "intrinsically devoid of greed", the paramita of giving is practiced. It is a different motivation that is based on recognising the sufficiency of the situation. On one level we would of course give things to fulfil a lack – such as offering food to a food bank, so those who are hungry can eat. But on a deeper level there is not the sense of "I must do something or else all these awful things may happen". It is more like how Great Master Dōgen puts it in his commentary on the Precept "Do only good. The dharma of Shakyamuni's enlightenment is the dharma of all existence." We practice the dharma of existence not because it is lacking, but because it is 'good-doing'; we are not separate from this existence and this includes the wish to help, the wish to give.

The *Awakening* is pointing out a path that avoids both complacency and over-concern. If we act on insufficiency and anxiety about the results, it can lead to 'burn out'. We assume that without our specific intervention everything will go wrong (which often makes us more important than we are). The solution is to act from the place of the dharma nature, that is "intrinsically devoid of greed".

To avoid complacency we are exhorted to remember the bodhisattva vow to save all beings. The author asks that we practice the gateway of giving through offering

possessions and wealth, through offering encouragement and teaching: “All this is because one ought not to crave or seek fame, profit or veneration; instead one should be mindful only of benefitting oneself and others and of being dedicated to *bodhi* (awakening).”<sup>17</sup>

## **Meditation**

The fifth paramita *Dhyana Paramita* (the perfection of meditation) is covered in a separate section on the Five Gateways of Practice, and is called “the gateway of calming and discernment.”<sup>18</sup>

This offers a wonderful insight into how meditation was practised all that time ago. Essentially it has the two aspects of *samatha* (or cessation) and *vipassana* (or discernment). From early on in many Buddhist traditions these were seen as types of meditation practice to do separately, and even now we have vipassana training for example, but the author is in line with our tradition and sees both calming and discernment as essential. “Whether walking, standing, sitting, lying or rising, he should practice both ‘cessation’ and ‘clear observation’ side by side.”<sup>19</sup>

It would be anachronistic to see the author’s approach as the same as that of serene reflection (silent illumination): a distinct Sōtō zen tradition did not exist when the *Awakening* was written, but there are important insights into our own tradition that come from studying this approach.

## ***Samatha*: the practice of cessation or calming**

The instruction for ‘calming’ (*samatha*) reads like *Rules for Meditation* in places. There is no focus on breath or thoughts of the past:

All thoughts, as soon as they are conjured up, are to be discarded, and even the thought of discarding them is to be put away, for all things are essentially transcending thoughts and are not to be created from moment to moment nor to be extinguished from moment to moment.

If concentration lapses it can be brought back to correct mindfulness which is: “one should know that there is only mind; there are no external perceptual fields.”<sup>20</sup> Maintaining this in all actions one finds entry to the *samadhi* on Suchness, and based on this “realizes the oneness of the world of reality (*dharmadhatu*)”<sup>21</sup>

Meditation is bringing oneself back to how things are: that dharmas are neither created nor destroyed. All thoughts and feelings are treated as ‘mind only’ in the sense that they are a result of the senses interacting with a sense of self – they are not held onto or pushed away. If the meditator finds themselves caught up in fame and gain or various kinds of emotional instability the advice is to be diligent in abiding in correct thought: “neither grasping nor attaching himself to [anything]”<sup>22</sup>

But this section follows with a warning: “...people’s mind will sink into [inattention] or give rise to laziness if they cultivate only calming’]...and will set great compassion at a far remove”.<sup>23</sup>

It is not enough to find a kind of peace for oneself through calming techniques. Discernment must be practised at the same time to maintain our connection with all beings.

### ***Vipassana: the practice of discernment***

The practice of discernment, or clear observation, begins with an awareness of impermanence and how this can lead to suffering for many. Seeing the suffering of others, the vow emerges: “may I, to the end of the future, by applying limitless expedient means, help all suffering sentient beings so that they may obtain the bliss of nirvana, the ultimate goal.”<sup>24</sup>

This is the cure for a kind of quietistic laziness that would result if only calming was practiced. Except when we are formally sitting in meditation, we do need to “investigate what ought and ought not to be done”. The author is encouraging us to hold both sides of a situation at once. “That is, even when one is mindful that the self-nature of dharmas does not arise, one is also mindful of the combination of causes and conditions, of good and bad karmic action, of the recompense of pain and pleasure, and of how they are neither lost nor perish”.<sup>25</sup>

Even if we have a sense of the unborn nature of dharmas, we still cannot ignore cause and effect. This is an attempt to teach something quiet subtle. At times there can be a sense of ‘there is nothing from the first’. That none of ‘my’ problems were ever substantial, but were merely imagined. This can be described as saying ‘there is neither birth nor death.’ But this is still one-sided. It is still true that all our actions have consequences. So we perhaps have to say, “this very life and death IS the Buddha’s Own Life” as great Master Dōgen puts it in the *Shōji* chapter of the *Shōbōgenzō*.<sup>26</sup>

In the Chan tradition that emerged from 5<sup>th</sup> century China, the formal meditation practice incorporated elements of *samadhi* and *vipassana* using terms that can be translated as ‘silence’ and ‘illumination’, to become the silent illumination or serene reflection school by the 11<sup>th</sup> century.  
<sup>27</sup>

In the *Guidepost of Silent Illumination* by Wanshi Shogaku, a 12<sup>th</sup> century master, you can see how ‘calming’ and ‘insight’ are seen to be mutually supporting (my italics added).

When wonder exists in serenity, all achievement is forgotten in illumination.

What is this wonder? Alertly seeing through confusion  
Is the way of silent illumination and the origin of subtle radiance.

Responding without falling into achievement, speaking  
without involving listeners,  
The ten thousand forms majestically glisten and  
expound the dharma.  
All objects certify it, every one in dialogue.

Dialoguing and certifying, they respond appropriately  
to each other;  
*But if illumination neglects serenity then  
aggressiveness appears.*  
Certifying and dialoguing, they respond to each other  
appropriately;  
*But if serenity neglects illumination, murkiness leads to  
wasted dharma.*<sup>28</sup>

Our own practice of zazen has a simplicity that I feel  
should be preserved. It doesn't seem to work to 'mix and  
match' different techniques, so I wouldn't recommend trying  
to practice in detail the particular forms of meditation the  
*Awakening* talks about. It was obviously written as a general  
manual for those wanting to learn about the Mahayana, not  
specifically as meditation instruction.

And yet I find it useful to remind myself that 'calming'  
and 'insight' have always been part of the Buddhist tradition,  
and without both, my own practice could be unbalanced. It  
seems important not to become overly attached to *either*  
states of calmness, *or* the times when we feel we've  
experienced great insights. There is a sense of continually  
and gently adjusting the practice, in a way that one monk

compares to sailing a yacht. Trimming the sails just enough to keep on course.<sup>29</sup>

The foundation of our practice is that we bring ourselves back to what *is*, right here and now. So our zazen practice expresses our understanding of ‘awakening’ as returning to what is (called ‘suchness’ in the *Awakening*). We could also call this ‘undivided existence’, where the dualities of movement and stillness, ignorance and enlightenment no longer make sense. The *Awakening* offers us a view of ‘All is one, and all is different’, as Rev. Master Jiyu put it, where our unique forms of suffering are acknowledged but never seen as separate from the Truth.

The author’s wish was “to have sentient beings eliminate doubts and abandon wrongly held views, and give rise to correct Mahayana faith, leaving the buddha-lineage uninterrupted”.<sup>30</sup>

I find it moving to think that this teaching from 6<sup>th</sup> century China still helps me in my practice now, despite the fifteen-hundred years between us, and that the buddha-lineage does indeed continue. Studying this work has affirmed my faith in the Mahayana, and I hope this brief appreciation may encourage others to study it too. My grateful thanks to all who practice and pass on their teaching.

#### *Notes*

1. *Dīgha Nikāya Sutta 1*, the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, verse 3.71. Source: Wikipedia.

2. *Treatise on Awakening Mahayana Faith*, (attributed to Asvaghosa), ed. and trans. John Jorgensen, Dan Lusthaus, John Makeham and Mark Strange, (OUP 2019), all pages from kindle version, p. 83.
3. *The Awakening of Faith*, Translated by Yoshito S. Hakeda, (Numata Center for Buddhist Translation & Research, 2006), p. 47.
4. Jorgensen, p. 85 – 86.
5. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Idealism>
6. Jorgensen, footnotes 576b-c.
7. *Kyojukaimon* and commentary, in *Serene Reflection Meditation*, Shasta Abbey Press (date?#)
8. One of Buddhist cosmologies, in which the cosmos is divided into three parts. The first and last of these three represent attachment to the senses, and are undesirable. Those in the second level have a body but do not cling to the world of illusion and senses. In Zen practice the three worlds are also considered levels or dimensions of consciousness. From <http://www.chinabuddhismencyclopedia.com/en/index.php?title=Special:Search&search=Three+Worlds>.
9. Jorgensen, p. 28 & p. 30.
10. Jorgensen, p. 92.
11. Jorgensen, p. 95.
12. Jorgensen, p. 114.
13. Jorgensen, p. 115.
14. Jorgensen, p. 115-116.
15. Jorgensen, p. 118.
16. Jorgensen, p. 120.
17. Jorgensen, p. 126.
18. Jorgensen, p. 125.
19. Hakeda, see also Jorgensen p. 133.
20. Hakeda, p. 96.
21. Hakeda, p. 97.
22. Hakeda, p. 98.
23. Hakeda, p. 132
24. Hakeda, p. 101, p. 133.
25. Hakeda, p. 133.

26. *Zen is Eternal Life*, (Shasta Abbey Press, 1999) p. 197.
27. See the OBC Journal article by Rev. Master Koten *Serene reflection meditation*: <https://obcon.org/dharma/essays-on-practice/serene-reflection/>
28. Dan Leighton trans. In *Cultivating the Empty Field*, (North Point Press 1991), p. 52.
29. Rev. Master Meian, *Journal of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives*, Spring 2013, p.1–9 Serene Reflection Meditation,
30. Jorgensen, p. 61-62.

## Turning towards Buddha

Rev. Master Fuden Nessi

—*Dharmazuflucht Schwarzwald, Germany*—

*This article is based on an online Dharma talk to the German congregation at the end of 2020.*

At the end of the year, this is my wish for us: may we – in the midst of all that we go through in life and of our inner responses to what is happening – more and more actively seek the help of Buddha within our heart. May this become a habit for us.

As human beings, we tend to perceive things mainly from the perspective of the self-oriented and discriminative mind, and steer our life from that position. Especially at times when our own suffering and that of people close to us – or more generally the great suffering in this world – hits us more strongly, something in us lets us know that this perspective is not enough. Something keeps prompting us to look deeper into our heart and to search for the true refuge there. When we are still, we hear this inner call.

When we meditate, we are responding to this call. While we are probably not aware of this most of the time, when we turn within and sit still in the midst of all that comes and goes in our mind, our gaze starts to direct itself towards Buddha in the heart. And when this happens, that which is fundamentally good and true starts to show itself.

Similarly, right in the midst of all the thoughts and feelings that are engendered in us by what is happening in daily life, we keep making the effort to look towards our spiritual heart. In time, this effort becomes like a background-intention, one that we get more and more familiar with.

This contemplative abiding in daily life is not something spectacular. When it becomes more stable and constant though, it also becomes easier to approach what is difficult and incomprehensible, in us and in the world, with an open heart, and not just from the position of our views, opinions and our conditioned patterns of responding to events.

Sometimes we then see how often old patterns condition our current thinking and actions. In straightforward situations of daily life, most of the time we may not recognize it when we are driven by these very personal patterns. We may only become aware of this when events in our life hit us more strongly. I have often observed that it is when life is difficult for us, that we are more likely to turn towards the Refuge.

\*\*\*

This was all by way of an introduction. To illustrate what I've said so far, I would like to recount a straightforward episode from myself. I chose this example, because perhaps some of you will be able to identify with it. For me the example shows how a fundamental turn-around can take place in our consciousness, when in daily life we turn towards our true heart and take refuge there.

So here is my example: at some stage in the past someone acted in a way which had a deep effect on me and left me in a distressed state. At the time I was quite surprised at the strength of my feelings. In this desperate state I found myself going out of the house and walking around aimlessly in the surroundings.

In the midst of these strong emotions, I made the effort not to just slip into despair, or to blame the other person for this painful situation. As best I could at the time, I turned within, faced my inner turmoil and confusion, and asked the Buddha for help. Even so, at first there was only a blank numbness in me, and this continued for a good while.

After a while though, in the midst of the bleak inner landscape there started to appear a little point of light; very faintly at first, then more clearly. This little "light" at first took the form of a fundamental trust; one that, if it was expressed in words, would go something like this: "I can

look for the true refuge in my heart, even in this distressed inner state! Even in the midst of these powerful feelings, I can turn towards Buddha in the heart.”

So, firstly came the re-appearance of trust. The faith that this so essential spiritual endeavor is always possible, even in difficult circumstances. Perhaps we think that this is obvious, but experience shows that when it comes to it, for most of us it isn't that obvious at all!

As I have sometimes expressed in the past, I am convinced that our faith in this fundamental spiritual capability – that we can go for refuge in the heart even when we are inwardly strongly under siege – not only helps us now, but will also greatly support us in the dying process.

Secondly, a turn-around of my view took place, mainly of the other person involved in this situation. When beforehand in my dismay, my view was turned “outwards” – by which I mean enmeshed in the net of my feelings and thoughts – my impulse had been to blame the other person for this situation.

This fault-finding attitude was now gradually replaced by empathy for the other person and the suffering they were in at the time. To some degree, I was able to understand why the person had acted in the way they did.

So, a fundamental change in my view happened, which brought a clearer understanding of the other person's

situation, and empathy. When we understand the suffering of others more deeply, selfless love is not far away.

Finally, a small insight into why this particular situation had such a strong impact on me occurred. I remembered how as a boy or young adolescent, when the suffering of people who were close to me used to express itself strongly, I would sometimes leave the house and wander around aimlessly in the streets in a numb state, at times even when it was already dark outside. I now realized that, even after all these years, the suffering of people close to my heart can still evoke very similar responses in me as back then.

In this context it feels important to mention that, when today I think of the dear people whose suffering I witnessed as a boy, my heart bows in gratitude. I owe them so much, also for having indirectly pointed me towards devoting my life to the Buddha-Dharma.

To summarize: first came the faith that we can turn towards the true refuge even in the midst of difficult inner states, then a change from fault-finding to an empathic understanding, and following on from that, a small insight into what lay underneath my confusion and distress at the time. And the main teaching was how important it is that I not allow my responses to the suffering of others to be colored by my own confusion.

Again, I have used this example to illustrate the precious turn-around that can take place – and that I have often observed – when we go for refuge to Buddha in our heart, rather than just relying on what goes on in our thought processes.

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At this point someone could say: “This is all very well, if we’re just talking about our own life and personal difficulties. But what does this have to do with the great suffering I see in this world, that always pains me so much? That’s a wholly different story, isn’t it?”

Yes, it is different, but not altogether. What we base ourselves on inwardly, will always condition our perception and our responses to what is happening; whether in our inner world, what comes to us in life, the actions of our fellow human beings, or more generally what is happening in the world.

When our perception is based only on discriminatory thinking, then judgments, like and dislike, and a sharp division between good and evil can easily arise in us. When, for example, we hear of the harmful deeds of people, we need to be very careful not to slip into despising thoughts or aversion towards them. When we do this, we ourselves bring suffering into this world. And through the despising attitude we block our access to knowing the fundamental goodness inherent in existence.

It is possible to recognize when people create suffering for others, without our getting caught in anger and aversion. When the heart turns towards Buddha, our wish for the good of beings includes all beings, and we can offer the merit of our endeavor in training to all of them.

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I would like to end with something that Buddhist sages of the past have pointed us to, which – as I understand it – could be summarized and rendered as follows:

Thanks to sentient beings, compassion arises. It appears, when we look at beings with a heart turned towards Buddha, and not just with the self-oriented and discriminative mind.

The compassion in turn gives rise to the heart-wish for the good of all beings, and to the intention to give of ourselves in whatever way we can for their benefit.

As this wish and intent penetrates and guides our thinking and actions, we contribute to the immeasurable merit of the Dharma that helps all beings.

When we observe some of our responses to what is happening in us and in the world, we may then wonder whether what the old sages have expressed is just an ideal,

something that is far removed from us and hard to reconcile with our humanity.

I don't feel that this is so, and I believe that we can all work towards applying their profound teaching in our life.

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## The Power and Merit of *Sitting Still* clears Clouds, moves Mountains

Rev. Master Mokugen Kublicki

—*Great Ocean Dharma Refuge, Pembrokeshire–Wales*—

Whilst we are on this earth, it is unlikely that we will find or create a sort of heaven realm for ourselves. As the young Shakyamuni realized, suffering exists inherently in this samsaric realm that we inhabit. The pains of birth, death, sickness and separation will be encountered by us all, and the ups and downs of life are many. Thankfully the Buddhas and Ancient wise ones have all helped point the way to finding spiritual peace and freedom within these conditions, allowing them to be the very Dharma doors and catalysts to a deeper understanding. By not clinging to or rejecting them – sitting still within them – they themselves can transform from the arrows of pain and confusion to the lotus blossoms of acceptance and compassionate understanding.

So many good words and pointing to this mysterious activity of ‘being still’ have been expressed in each generation. Yet the presence of our Buddha Nature and capacity to connect with it – and not be spun out in fear and

confusion – is something that we are born with. This capacity *is* and *will* always be there. We are even reminded of it daily by the many beautiful images found around us of the Buddha sitting serenely in meditation.

“To be still.” These words point to resting in our vibrant True Nature. At times in practice this is difficult.

It is natural that we sometimes feel the adrenalin of ‘fight or flight’. Our bodies are hard-wired to respond and react to perceived or sometimes imagined dangers...an oncoming car if we are in the middle of the road, or a fire that we need to flee from. And at times the suffering of the world, or of others or in our own life, can make us feel fearful, restless and prone to avoidance and displacement. The witnessing of this can provoke that impulse to fight or flee!

However, it is our capacity for a positive Preceptual response that matters, and fortunately that is not dependent on anyone or anything else. By accepting and embracing our current conditions, sympathizing with our own humanity and that of others – and not then settling for any low common denominator – we can allow our current situation to spur us to the True Refuge within the heart. Faith and ‘turning the stream of compassion within’ can then allow our pained thoughts and feelings to be turned inside out as it were – revealing that their inner golden lining shines with the compassion of the Unborn which weaves together all within its infinite fabric.

None of us knows when conditions are such that we are called to a deeper abiding or an even more patient endurance within our personal or collective societal conditions. It is said that karmic consequence falls into the three periods of time. Even so, the bedrock of daily practice in both ‘good’ times and difficult times deepens insight and equanimity and allows for a wider perspective when conditions cause turbulence that is difficult to bear. The humility of our own tender experience can bring forth the sincere call of the Heart and an asking for help within it; and the bringing of our palms together and bowing our heads, not only opens us wide to the deepest Dharma, but also opens our heart in great sympathy to others.

And what of the times when our inner world and the outer world seem to be spinning out of control and appear incomprehensible. It is *then, that is the very best time to be still* and place our faith and trust in the power and merit of being still. My Master often used to say: “When the earth starts shaking...sit still!”

This is not an act of inertia or avoidance, but a reaching into the heart of That which will be of the most help and healing. Nor is it choosing a sort of vacuous torpor where we block ourselves from the suffering of the world. Rather, it is a full entrusting to the wisdom of the Three Treasures and a putting down of noisy attempts at external solutions. The wisest ways to act, if needed, will undoubtedly come from this very heart of stillness.

When in distress we can find wise ways that work for us to settle our heart and emotions and come to a deeper acceptance and being still. Being patient with ourselves without heavy expectations can help that. Offering a stick of incense, making an act of kindness, taking a short walk with a moment to gaze up at the sky. Such things may help us to pause and remember to turn the stream of compassion within, remembering the larger picture and True Refuge.

At times working through difficult times takes considerable and sustained effort. And yet, what a blessing that our Buddha Nature knows that this is the right way to go. In putting this into practice, we learn from our very own blood and bones' experience: that conditions are not permanent, pains and griefs dissolve, and that there is an abiding compassionate core of the Love of the Eternal which sustains in the very heart of all beings. It is the wonder of our unified thread of wholeness and oneness. We can learn, not only from a book or saying, the truth of this. We can experience the 'water of the spirit' within our very being and know that it is shared by all.

“The means of training are thousandfold but pure zazen must be done.” This might sound like an admonition, but it is actually a wondrous affirmation that there is cessation of suffering and there is a Path that leads to it. If we choose 'sitting still'...long enough...we witness that even our moments of seeming worst extremis dissolve into the 'Pure Lake of Kindness'.

The power and merit of sitting still clears clouds, moves mountains. For myself, I have not lost my awe and gratitude that this is so. It is not 'my' or 'our' power and merit. It is the power and merit and grace of the Unborn which eternally holds open the Treasure House of wisdom and healing for all.

## Balancing and Disturbing News

Rev. Master Astor Douglas

—*Shasta Abbey, Mount Shasta, CA–USA*—

*A transcription of a talk given at Shasta Abbey on Oct 18 2020.*

Homage to the Buddha

Homage to the Dharma

Homage to the Sangha

Today I'm going to talk about something that is relevant to our current times which I think all of us have been talking about for weeks now, but it doesn't seem like it's enough. There is just so much going on in the world, I feel that it's good to keep addressing those things that occur to us that need addressing. And as some of you listen to our Dharma talks regularly, you might find that we talk about the same thing over and over again, but what happens with that is that each one of us brings our own expression and our own interpretation of what we feel would be good to talk about and what might help the world out. So that is my intention here.

So what I am going to talk about is balancing and disturbing news. The thing that cropped up is that there is a lot going on in the world that is difficult to hear. And what I am not going to talk about is that you can go and listen to the bad news then turn around and find lots of good news to listen to. That really is helpful and I do that sometimes, just to know what is going on, how people are helping each other out. And I feel that there is a lot more we can listen to in the Dharma that might help us out on a deeper level or a more thorough and satisfying way – and I’m going to touch on a few points about that today.

So what do we do when we don’t want to hear more bad news? One thing I have found that’s very effective is that I’m learning how to offer myself loving kindness. Sometimes I just feel that I have listened to too much bad news and it affects me in a way that it starts to disturb me in a very deep way. And that is not what I want to allow to happen. I find that if I offer myself loving kindness I can balance the news which I feel it is important as a responsible spiritual adult to pay attention to. And I find that sometimes I am listening to news that is upsetting and find that it is really hard to offer myself loving kindness. You know I have to kind of figure out how to do that, it’s not something that I can just press a button or turn on a faucet, it’s not an easy thing for me to do and I am learning how to cultivate that skill; that’s the way I look at it.

So how do you do that when you feel outraged, despairing or confused? One thing that I have found is that

if I review my life, I can think of some time or experience when someone offered me loving kindness. And what I came up with this time to offer you as an example is when I was in Berlin, Germany, once upon a time. I was a young adult and I decided I wanted to find something in the city, I don't remember what it was but I was walking around looking for something, maybe I was just taking a walk, but I got lost. And I didn't know the language and I was a very shy person at that time and I really got confused and scared. I was really disturbed, I was in a big city, international, I didn't know the language and didn't know where I was and I had to get back to the place I was staying at, I knew that much.

Somebody walked up to me, looked at me and said "Do you need some help?" [laughs] And I said "Yes!" I was so delighted and grateful. The person spoke really good English and just told me what I needed to know and I found my way back quite easily. Something about that has stayed with me; this was when I was in about my twenties, so it was a long time ago. It was that act of loving kindness, you know, he didn't need to do that, but he saw somebody, a stranger, me, and walked up to me and said "Do you need some help?" The timing was perfect and it helped me out. Now with that is a memory, obviously, I remember it, and it's something that I experienced and I can tap into that if you know what I mean. The memory of it was good and I can tap into that feeling I had when that person helped me out. I feel that that person's help actually was something I internalised and now I can use that; that feeling of being helped, of loving kindness for myself, if that makes sense. I can use it as a skill

to offer myself loving kindness. So I find that very helpful when I look at the bad news, that it is somehow helpful for me to have a sense of wellbeing. That's part of the balance of listening to disturbing news.

Another thing that occurred to me is that the news is... not addictive as such, but there is so much going on that every day it seems we need to pay attention to the news, whether it is watching where a wildfire is going, or something else, it just seems like there's a lot. And I realised that I choose to watch or listen to the news and I think maybe I don't have to be so much controlled by the news, but can choose when I want to listen, in other words, when I am more settled and well-balanced, and I do that and it helps a lot. Take a deep breath and say "OK, now I am ready to look at the news." And it actually does help.

And I also realised that no matter what the conditions are – and this would be for people who haven't been practising Buddhism for a very long time, and I think for all of us – is to realise that whatever conditions are, we can always practice the Precepts, always, always. I know it's one of the words you are not meant to say, but it is true, it is always a refuge. And I want to read the Precepts for those of you who don't know what they are, just as a way to give you all who might be watching this now or at a later date an idea of what we as Buddhist monks here follow very seriously as guidelines for what to do. So I am going to read The Ten Great Precepts in a slightly different way to what we are used to.

I will do my best to live in such a way that I will not kill  
I will do my best to live in such a way that I do not steal  
I will do my best to live in such a way that I will not  
misuse sexuality or covet  
I will do my best to live in such a way that I will not say  
that which is untrue  
I will do my best to live in such a way that I will not sell  
the wine of delusion  
I will do my best to live in such a way that I will not  
speak against others  
I will do my best to live in such a way that I will not be  
proud of myself and devalue others  
I will do my best to live in such a way that I will not be  
miserly in giving either Dharma or wealth  
I will do my best to live in such a way that I will not be  
angry  
I will do my best to live in such a way that I will not  
debase the Three Treasures.

And I wanted to mention to you all that are watching this on YouTube that you can find really good explanations that some of our monks have done in recent times about the Precepts on YouTube which might help you flesh out what I have just listed, to explain what they are. You can go to this link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHquMGPHIL4> This will give a chance to see what we use here as guidelines of how to learn how to act and to help others as well.

Another thought that came to my mind about balancing and disturbing news is to look at ourselves. And I'd like to

suggest that this might be a good time that we could look at our moral values, and see if we feel like they are threatened and how that might be so. And I ask for us to focus on what is it that is useful in terms of moral values and what is it that is important and what is it that is worthwhile. I think it is a good time to review those things because there is a lot going on that is incomprehensible, confusing, hard to understand – hard to know what the future is, etc. And it can kind of leave us with our cages being rattled, if that makes any sense, and it's just a good time to review these things to bring some life into them. Maybe there are some things that we no longer need to do, attitudes that we have brought to certain values that just are not great anymore because they just don't work – or something we did as a teenager that was too long ago.

But there are times when we can draw on these values; we do anyway, without our even knowing it; that is what we do when we make judgements about certain things and it might just be a good time to review that. And here's a question for all of us: Can we be honest and answer the following question “Do we have biases that predetermine our opinions?” Now that's a good one. I think it might be helpful to look at that and to see what it is that we bring to a certain situation, i.e. bad news. And again I ask are these biases useful, are they important or are they worthwhile? And to be honest with ourselves and see if we come up with a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’ or whatever. I am not suggesting anything for yourself, it is something we all have to do individually, on our own. So if we see on the news a person we don't like, do our automatic biases kick in immediately? I just offer that.

Besides just looking at these values, it might be time to renew them, to bring some new life into them, to bring them into current times, to commit to them in a new way. And also to remember that we have the Precepts as our guide and this is what we do, again, as Buddhist monks.

Now I want to move on to a story that I found very inspiring. It was an article in a magazine, called *On finding solace and solidarity in a broken-hearted world*.<sup>1</sup> And the person writes that her beliefs have been crumbled when she looks at them in relation to current world conditions. One example is the American ethos which says ‘pull yourself up by your bootstraps’. She questions that, saying “Why should I do that when there are a lot of real life stories where there is inequality in the world? What good it is going to be for me to pull myself up by my bootstraps?” Which means for me that when you say ‘pull yourself up by your bootstraps’, it means grow up and just learn to live with disagreeable situations. So it doesn’t really help anyone else.

And the second belief that she has had crumble is the phrase ‘Justice for all’. She said “How can I believe something like that when I look around and there is a lot of real life stories where justice is not being ‘for all’, in fact there is a lot of injustice.” The author felt broken hearted by what she knew and what she saw. She then said that upsetting current conditions that are prevalent have her attention. In other words, things are so bad and so disturbing to her that it has got her attention, right? You know, finally, it takes us a while to realise that things are not great, but once

we do, our attention is on it. Maybe that is why we watch so much news, I don't know. And she said that that paying attention can be devastating; very honest person, it can be. She also writes that she wasn't alone with her broken-hearted thoughts and feelings as she found out that there were many people who also shared them; she had a community to help her.

She writes:

“Despite the challenges of social distancing, I believe there remains no better antidote to despair and hopelessness than finding other people who feel as I do and working alongside them to fix what is breaking our hearts.”

And to help her heal her own heart, she has her way of doing things. This is what she writes “First, I let myself feel it all: the grief. I surrender to the grief.” Her response can then be feelings of a broken heart, but she writes “Maybe what the world needs is more broken hearted people. Next I look around and ask myself, who else is emotionally destroyed by the state of the world and what are they doing? What help are they offering?” And then she says “How can I help?” And that begins her journey to start engaging with others. With these questions and actions she says “Soon enough, I become a helper too. Working alongside other broken-hearted people is the most healing practice I know.”

Now this person started on her journey not so long ago because she is part of what she would call Gen Z,

(Generation Z, born somewhere between 1997 and 2010.) In other words she is 22 years old and she has taken this on. She decided at her college that she needed to find a way to fix her broken heart. She wore a big sign saying “My heart is broken, is yours?” And she went out into the crowd of college students and on her arms – I find this endearing – she took a permanent pen marker and wrote on her arm the people in her life who had helped her out, because she had been scared to do this. But from her doing that a lot of people would come up and say “My heart is broken too, what can we do about it?” So this has been her life and now she is doing something very effective with helping out with global change in helping other people. I find her advice very comforting in a way that is very realistic and something that I pay attention to and I have to say “Yay!” Here she is, 50 years younger than I am, that’s a lot, half a century and she has got things to say that I find actually will help the world and something that we can all follow in her advice.

So on reflecting upon very serious problems we have these days like wild fires, climate change, pandemic, political unrest, systemic racism, unemployment etc – can anything be done to help our people, our world? I say yes there is. One thing is to talk with people with the attitude of curiosity about the other person, not with your biases, but curious about what they are going to say. Ask them “We do have problems these days (pandemic etc) and they are overwhelming, what do you think can be done about them?” In other words not coming to talk with people with preconceived ideas but more with an open mind.

I think it's really good that we don't isolate ourselves in these times; it doesn't really do us a lot of good, because when we are alone too much our minds start spinning our own story and I don't know that that can be all that helpful. Talking with others helps us to connect so we don't feel so alone and overburdened by the world's problems. Maybe there is something you can do to help, that we can all do to help, something on a small scale, something do-able. It will help us to move in a direction of helping, of making our world a worthwhile place to live.

And I want to end with a saying from the *Shōbōgenzō* that Dōgen writes that I find helpful; it's in the chapter on the Buddha Nature. What he says is this:

You should investigate thoroughly through your Buddhist practice that each and every seed, along with each and every flower and fruit, is the product of an honest and sincere heart. There are seeds within fruit and even though the seeds are not visible, they become trees with branches thick and small.

Thank you.

#### Notes

1. Marcella Mulholland in the weekly *El Semanario* at: <https://elsemanariocalifornia.com/commentary/finding-solace-and-solidarity-in-a-broken-hearted-world/>

## On Hate

Anonymous

*This article was first published in this Journal in Winter 2001, just three months after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre. Published here with thanks to the anonymous author.*

With the recent terrorist attacks in the U.S., all of us have had an opportunity to view first-hand symptoms of hate. Hate can be expressed in a broad, all-encompassing fashion such as these attacks, or it can be experienced on a more personal one-on-one level.

I have the personal misfortune of currently being on the receiving end of hate. A colleague at work holds a remarkably strong feeling of hatred toward me. I am baffled at the cause of it. Nevertheless, it is quite real and all-too-frequently felt. If he is successful, this colleague will cause me to lose my job. I have speculated on the reasons for this hate, and although this speculation is often fascinating, it is certainly not productive.

Hate seems to be a step beyond anger. Anger we can all easily understand. I can become angry at people, at things, at a series of events beyond my control and at myself. For example, the tool I bought doesn't work: I'm angry at the tool; I'm angry at the salesperson who sold it to me; I'm angry at myself for not knowing how to use it properly, etc.

Hate, however, goes further; I believe it is not just anger enlarged. I think I can understand hate in the abstract; however, at the risk of sounding naive or disingenuous, I don't believe I myself have ever fully given myself over to hate. I admit to experiencing anger, perhaps even too frequently. Anger seems to me to be a reaction to some turn of events. Hatred is a feeling of malevolence toward a person or people which smoulders over a period of time and has a life of its own. Hate is not just a reaction; it seems to be a developed state of mind.

If a person has not personally experienced hate, it is difficult to understand how another person can harbor such an intense feeling. Many European Jews may have thought: how can Hitler have anything against me? I've never met the man and he doesn't know me. Survivors of the World Trade Center attack may think: I'm just a regular working person. I'm good at my job, I pay my bills, I support my family. I'm an asset to the community.

The sad but true fact is that the hater will probably not go away; his/her hate will probably not dissipate. How do we

deal with it? For starters, we can turn to the life of Shakyamuni Buddha.

The Buddha was also plagued by a person who hated him. It was his cousin, Devadatta. We can speculate on the reason for this hatred, but again such speculation is not very helpful.

When Shakyamuni was about seventy years of age, he was understandably not as robust as he once had been. His mind was still sharp but the physical body was failing. It is said he sometimes suffered from low back pain.<sup>1</sup> How many of us can identify with that! Frequently, the Buddha allowed one of his disciples to present the afternoon Dharma talk while he rested. Devadatta took advantage of this situation to urge the Sangha to follow him because the Buddha had grown too old.

Lord [said Devadatta to Shakyamuni], you are now old, worn-out, an aged man, you have lived your allotted span and are at the end of your existence. May you be content to live in this world henceforth unburdened. Hand over the Order to me...I will lead the Sangha.<sup>2</sup>

For most of us who are forty or more, we can immediately identify with this situation. The body just can't do what it used to do; the memory just isn't quite as sharp as it used to be, etc. Above all, we must remember that Shakyamuni was human. He must have suffered some

anxious moments of self-examination. He must have asked himself: do I still have my wits about me sufficiently to lead the Sangha? Shakyamuni declined Devadatta's 'invitation.' Devadatta was not so easily placated.

Devadatta hired assassins to kill Shakyamuni, but they botched their murder attempt. He drugged an elephant and got it to charge the Buddha, but that failed too. He caused a boulder to roll downhill onto Shakyamuni, but it missed. Imagine how stressful life must have been for the Buddha during this period of time! When I think of my personal hate-filled enemy, I cannot conceive of him attempting bodily harm. So far, he has confined his tactics to character attacks and political machinations. That has been stressful enough! Devadatta was sufficiently successful that he caused a schism in the ranks of the Sangha. Some accounts have it that the Devadatta sect lasted for almost ten centuries.<sup>3</sup>

So what can we find in the Buddha's actions to follow as an example? For starters, let's look at what he did *not* do. He did not give up in the face of adversity and surrender the Sangha to someone who was not fit to lead it. He did not react with equal hatred and plan counter-attacks on Devadatta. He did not walk away from the Sangha, move off to a new part of his world and attempt to start up again. This would be simply changing the external 'conditions' with no guarantee that they would be any easier. Apparently, he did not engage in verbal attacks on Devadatta. He simply continued to lead his life as best he could: he meditated, he taught, he led the Sangha.

I pray that when I am faced with travails at the hands of a hating person, I am able to take refuge in the life of the Buddha; I pray that I might recognize how relatively small my troubles are (it's only a job) in comparison to those faced by the Buddha; I will try to remember to show gratitude to the Sangha for helping me with meditation and the Dharma.

Hatreds never cease through hatred in this world;  
through love alone they cease.  
This is an eternal law.<sup>4</sup>

#### *Notes*

- [1.](#) H. W. Schumann, *The Historical Buddha* (London: Penguin Books, 1989), p. 239.
- [2.](#) *The Historical Buddha* p. 234.
- [3.](#) *The Historical Buddha* p. 238. See also Jean Boisselier, *The Wisdom of the Buddha* (New York: Harry Abrams Publishers, 1994), p. 97.
- [4.](#) Narada Thera, *The Dhammapada* (B.M.S. Publication, 1978), p. 8.

## Know the Sweet Joy of Living the Way

Rev. Master Oriana LaChance

—*Eugene Buddhist Priory, Oregon—USA—*

It began on election night in the United States – my looking at joy – and with the words of a Philadelphia pastor, “When there’s so much hate and so much resistance to truth and justice, *joy is itself an act of resistance.*” Many of the groups working on the election in Pennsylvania – an essential, pivotal state – knew of the threats to social and political justice and to an accurate count of the vote, also of threats that there would be violence on the streets on election day. So they threw a street party. A party with so much music and dancing, there was no room for violence (think ‘skillful means’), and hundreds spontaneously joined in – not only in Philadelphia but in other metropolitan areas throughout the US. The next morning the dance critic for the *New York Times* ended her editorial with: “Dancing is not just about moving your body, but reclaiming it – and with that, your faith in the world.”

So, let's look at joy, going back 2,000 plus years to Shakyamuni Buddha:

There is no fire like greed, no crime like hatred, no sorrow like separation, no sickness like hunger of heart, and no joy like the joy of freedom. Health, contentment and trust are your greatest possessions, and freedom your greatest joy. Look within. Be still. Free from fear and attachment. Know the sweet joy of living the Way.<sup>1</sup>

“No joy like the joy of freedom.” Freedom *from* being led around by the 3 poisons – greed, hatred and delusion – freedom *from* responding only out of the conditions of our lives. Freedom *to* know the sweet joy of living the Way. Note, I didn't say we are free when greed, hatred and delusion disappear. I said when we are no longer led around by them. And I don't believe that the Buddha meant we will “know the sweet joy of living the Way” when we get it all together. We don't have to be worthy. We don't have to earn it or get it right or be a near-perfect example of living the Way. The joy is in living the Way as best we are able at this particular moment. At this particular moment, know the sweet joy of living the Way. That is our intention.

Joy arises out of awareness, out of being open to the next thing. It arises out of looking, seeing, and accepting. Joy is completely unconditional. It does not depend on any external satisfaction, like money or fame or good health or pleasure or praise. It does not depend on getting something

and then holding onto it. Joy does not depend on any idea of “when I have all my ducks lined up in a row to my satisfaction, then I will be happy.” Good luck with that. The sweet joy of living the Way is available to all of us all of the time – regardless. And it is a joy because we are living in harmony with the truth.

Along with election night in the US, a more personal experience led me to consider the nature of joy. Perhaps you have experienced something like this as well. I have days when I not only teeter on the edge of despair, but fall in. I recently had a handful of those days, and then I got up one morning and I felt eager, content, full of energy and I went, “Eh, what?” Not one of the conditions that led to my despair had changed, yet something had shifted. It was a reminder that joy is not dependent on any condition. Just make room for joy when it comes, that’s all. Accept it. (and don’t try to figure it out.)

With so much emphasis on “suffering and the end of suffering,” Buddhism has a reputation for being rather somber. Not much emphasis on happiness or joy. Don’t get “the end of suffering” entangled in your mind with “the end of living” – the end of aliveness, enthusiasm, light. Don’t focus on suffering to the extent that it numbs you. Lack of aliveness and joy is not a sign of awakening. It is just the opposite. Joy – unconditional joy – leads to and beyond awakening. In a very immediate way, the awakening part is not so important – the joy part, embrace it and everything else will follow.

The Buddha taught that we don't need to stay in the realm of the three poisons. Right now, life can be lighter, more workable. Holding everything more lightly helps us to discover joy. The unconditioned, sweet joy of living the Way is the fruit of insight into no self – that is, the selfless nature of reality – and into the truth of impermanence. When we are not attached to who we think we are, life can move with and through us. We can release our futile attempts to control circumstances. When we live in this easy/loose/light connection with life, we live in joy – this moment.

In his poem, *A Brief for the Defense*, contemporary American poet, Jack Gilbert, expresses it like this:

We must risk delight. We can do without pleasure,  
but not delight. Not enjoyment. We must have  
the stubbornness to accept our gladness in the ruthless  
furnace of this world ... We must admit there will be  
music despite everything.

Three Dog Night put it like this (1970s pop song):

“Joy to the world, all the boys and girls,  
joy to the fishes in the deep blue sea,  
joy to you and me.”

And finally, let's go back to the Buddha. In the *Dhammapada*, the Buddha put it like this:

Live in joy, in love,  
Even among those who hate.  
Live in joy, in health,  
Live in joy, in peace,  
Even among the troubled.  
Look within. Be still.  
Free from fear and attachment,  
Know the sweet joy of the Way.<sup>2</sup>

Sorrow and joy always intertwine, always ride together, when we look closely enough. It is not joy in spite of sorrow; it is joy within sorrow, arising from the entangled, messy nature of our lives.

#### *Notes*

[1.](#) The *Dhammapada*, Chapter 15, Happiness, Verse 202.

[2.](#) The *Dhammapada*, Chapter 15, Verse 197.

# News of the Order

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## USA & Canada

Shasta Abbey,  
—Mount Shasta, CA—USA—

The winter and early spring were relatively quiet this year, as we remained closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. A major event at the monastery was the celebration of the 50th anniversary of its founding on November 22nd. Unfortunately, given we were closed, the monks celebrated with just the community (photo below).



Rev. Master Haryo gave a Dharma talk afterwards [https://shastaabbey.org/blog/mixed\\_audio\\_post/the-merit-of-going-on/](https://shastaabbey.org/blog/mixed_audio_post/the-merit-of-going-on/)), and the kitchen prepared a special cake for the event.



In early December we held our usual Rohatsu retreat, climaxing with a late night Abbess's Dharma Ceremony on the 7th and a festival ceremony for Shakyamuni's enlightenment on the morning of the 8th. After the retreat, Mike Summers withdrew from the postulancy to explore other training venues – we are grateful for all the help he extended while here – and then Rev. Vivian Gruenfelder spent a week with us following a stay at our Fugen Forest Hermitage.

Our January closed month was also quiet, the only significant event being the passing of Copernicus (Nic), our eldest cat, with those remarkable green eyes. He had been the companion animal of Rev. Master Chosei for many years. Nic was about 19 years old and the last of his generation of Abbey cats. On January 14th Rev. Master Oswin performed his funeral, attended by the entire community. Nic will be missed.



On February 4th Rev. Master Ando conducted a memorial via Skype for Veronique Barbareaux, a young French woman in Lyons, France.

During the pandemic we are keeping in touch with our lay sangha primarily through online Zoom talks and retreats. In February we began offering a series of talks on the Buddhist Precepts.

Also in February, three quarters of the monks began receiving their Covid-19 vaccine, and we hope the rest of the community, our younger monks, will be able to receive theirs soon. We continue to follow California state guidelines and recommended safety measures. We are grateful to Beth Gong, Hong Liam Cheng, and Jeanne Yalon-Owens for their ongoing counsel and support during the pandemic.

—Rev. Master Oswin

## Lions Gate Buddhist Priory

—Lytton, British Columbia—Canada—

Due to the health restrictions, we are still officially closed and are not receiving visitors at this time, and we have canceled our Tuesday evening meetings at the Chinese History Museum in Lytton. We all hope that in the coming year, if the situation improves, we will once again be able to open our gates. In the meantime, our bi-weekly Zoom Dharma meetings have been very successful and seem to be well received. If you are not on our email list and would like to receive invitations to the Zoom meetings, please contact us. We are also offering recorded Dharma Talks, more-or-less daily. Lately Rev. Master Kōten has been offering a series of Dharma Talks on delusion. They can be found on our website at this link:

<https://www.lionsgatebuddhistpriory.ca/Dharma%20Talks%20-%20Latest.html>

On Sunday, Nov. 8, we celebrated a Memorial Ceremony for Rev. Master Jiyu, Founder of our Order and First Abbess of Shasta Abbey.

From Nov. 29 - Dec. 6, we held our Winter Retreat. Only the resident community participated. The meditation periods and ceremonies were held at Mandala Hall, which keeps quite warm in the winter with our propane heater installed. We appreciated the opportunity to put everything aside and go deeper in our meditation. The retreat ended with The Buddha's Enlightenment Ceremony on Sunday, Dec. 6.

We had a small New Year's ceremony and celebration on Sunday morning, January 3. Two lay ministers from the local area attended. Afterwards we had a "socially distant" tea. Each person rang the temple bell ten times, and the monks offered bows at the Founders Shrine. After carefully consulting the health department information, we decided not to continue such meetings until the protocols are changed. On Sunday, January 10, we recited the *Surangama Litany*, praying for peace in the world and dedicating the merit for all those affected by the recent violence in the US.

On Christmas Day, Rev. Master Aurelian had a small stroke. His left side was affected, causing ongoing symptoms of weakness and problems with co-ordination and balance. His speech and cognitive abilities are not affected, and he can walk with a cane. Tests revealed that a 1cm blood clot in his brain had caused the stroke. He is receiving excellent care and therapy from the local health care facility and the Small Stroke Clinic in Kamloops, and he is improving each day. He is deeply grateful for all the kind expressions of support he has received.

Although we are still closed, we're always happy to hear from people. We hope that you will feel free to contact us, via email or phone, with any questions, or simply just to keep in touch.

—Rev. Master Aurelian

## Redding Zen Buddhist Priory

—Redding, CA—US—

Former Lay Minister and long-time practitioner Kirk Yarnell died peacefully on February 12, 2021, at his Redding home in the company of his wife Susan Place, his brother Scott and his son Dean. Susan and Rev. Helen recited Scriptures and the *Dedication of Merit* at his cremation on February 24. A memorial service for him will be held on April 3 via Zoom. May he be in his own True Home in peace.

February 1, 2021 marks the third anniversary of the establishment of the Redding Zen Buddhist Priory. I'm deeply grateful for the many ways the Redding Zen Sangha has brought its deepening practice to the Priory over the past three years, particularly in 2020. The Priory building has been closed since March, but the life of the Priory has expanded, continuing to adapt to changing COVID conditions, limitations and opportunities. Priory members are front line workers in a range of fields. Priory members have experienced COVID themselves, and their family members have as well. AND throughout the year we have come together - mostly through ZOOM though sometimes socially distancing on the porch - to take refuge and to share the Dharma. I'm deeply grateful to be able to share the Dharma here in Redding.

The photo below shows Nadia making sure that the Priory birdfeeders are full for the finches, sparrows, and mourning doves, as well as the jays and robins that have appeared recently.



—Rev. Helen

## Still Flowing Water Hermitage

—Meadow Vista, CA–US—

As I write, in mid-February, spring is coming to the Sierra foothills and the daffodils are blooming. Still Flowing Water Hermitage and the Bear River Meditation Group continue much as before, meeting on Zoom as described in the last *Journal*. The book group, which was just forming then, focused on *Describing the Indescribable*, a translation of and commentary on *The Diamond Sutra*, has now met several times, with Rev. Amanda Robertson as our guide, and it has proved to be a very rich exploration for all of us involved. One of the benefits of Zoom is that we are able to collaborate with monks who are at a distance and the addition of their perspectives seems very beneficial. We are very grateful to Rev. Amanda for all she has offered us. Zoom

has also allowed Rev. Vivian to meet with Rev. Master Rokuzan's Columbia Zen Buddhist Priory group in early January, and to offer another Dharma talk to Mountain Stream, the local Vipassana group, at the end of January.

At Shasta Abbey's invitation Rev. Vivian was able to spend a month at Fugen Hermitage in November and December. The quiet of the isolation there offers a perfect opportunity for deepening practice and for resting in a natural setting that is invaluable. Since she was effectively in quarantine during this time, she was able to accept Shasta's invitation to spend a few days with them following her retreat. It was glorious to be able to visit in person with so many monks and to join in the daily routine of the monastery during this time when we have been so physically isolated from each other.

In January the Bear River Meditation Group held what has become their annual 'Intensive,' on Zoom this time. Each morning for a week we sat together and then did Morning Service, and each evening there was another period of meditation followed by Vespers. Rev. Vivian gave two Dharma talks based on a chapter of Kōshō Uchiyama's book, *Opening the Hand of Thought*, and the week included two further periods of discussion on the book. Many reported having found this time to be very useful in spite of the constraints of Zoom.

Rev. Vivian will have to move out of her current quarters in a year or so and has begun thinking about and looking for other facilities that would serve well for Still Flowing Water Hermitage. The hope is that she can remain within an hour or so of the Bear River Meditation Group in order to continue serving there. If anyone has any suggestions, they are very welcome.

Rev. Vivian very much appreciates all the support, in all its forms, that has been offered to Still Flowing Water Hermitage, which has enabled it to survive and thrive. Thank you.

— Rev. Vivian

## Wallowa Buddhist Temple

—*Joseph, Oregon – USA –*

The past three months have been quiet, inward ones at the temple, with relatively mild winter weather until the last few weeks of heavy snow. The monks keep in touch with and offer help and encouragement to our congregation and many others via phone calls, emails, letters, and our “Sunday Morning Retreat From Home.” Due to our remote mountain location, we are unable to connect by live video. The number of people asking to receive Rev. Clairissa’s weekly audio Dharma talk (sent out via email) continues to grow.

We are heartened that many we are in touch with are meeting difficult, uncertain circumstances in ways that deepen and strengthen their spiritual practice. The temple continues to be blessed with help and support, even while closed to visitors because of the pandemic.

—*Rev. Master Meidō and Rev. Clairissa*

# News of the Order

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## UK and Europe

### Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey

—Northumberland, England—UK—

**December:** During our winter week-long sesshin, Rev. Kōjō successfully completed her Head Novice Dharma Ceremony, offering her teaching and answering questions on the following verse:

“The life of this one day, to-day, is absolutely vital life; your body is deeply significant. Both your life and your body deserve love and respect for it is by their agency that Truth is practiced and the Buddha's power exhibited: the seed of all Buddhist activity, and of all Buddhahood, is the true practice of Preceptual Truth.”

We congratulate Rev. Kōjō and thank her for her training during her head novice term.



*Rev. Master Leandra with Rev. Kōjō*

**New Year Retreat:** Rev. Master Mugō led our online New Year Retreat with a schedule of sittings and teaching. We live-streamed our New Year ceremony to those on the retreat and the Festival the following morning for Rev. Master Jiyu’s birthday. It was good to be able to involve our wider sangha in this way.

**January:** Our Winter Sangha Retreat was, as always, a valuable aid to monastic practice with its minimal schedule, allowing each monk to find their own way in how to use the retreat time. This year with no lay support, we organised ourselves to prepare meals for the twenty of us.

It was a wintry month here with regular falls of snow and, for some of the time, a complete absence of wind. This resulted in some beautiful scenes – see the Guest Cottage entrance shown below – and also of course regular activity in the mornings clearing snow from the lane and pathways to allow access.



**February:** We returned to our usual schedule in February, with Rev. Master Leandra offering weekly classes on Bodhidharma’s teaching. On the first weekend, Rev. Master Roland offered teaching during a meditation afternoon and Festival for Great Master Keizan. The offertory at the end of the ceremony was sung by Rev. Kōjō to a melody adapted by Rev.

Master Roland from a piece originally composed by Abbess Hildegard of Bingen, a Benedictine monastic in the 12th century. Audio for the Festival can be found here <https://throssel.org.uk/throssel-blog/festival-for-great-master-keizan/>, and Rev. Master Roland's two Dharma talks are available to listen to also here <https://throssel.org.uk/dharma-talks/two-talks-by-rev-roland/>

At the end of the month, Rev. Master Finnán led an online retreat for the Buddha's Parinirvana and the community held our annual ceremony for the Buddha's Death on Saturday evening. Rev. Master Finnán gave the following dedication:

*Many years have passed since your Parinirvana,  
Yet your presence is not hidden by absence.  
In birth and death you express perfect freedom  
And among the six paths of rebirth and four forms of birth  
You enjoy a joyful and playful samadhi.  
Turning and being turned  
Such wondrous urgency*

And a photo from the ceremony below:



In February, Pete Corbett decided to end his postulancy and left the monastery. We thank him for all he did during his time with us and wish him well as he continues his training.

**Ordination:** On 20th February we welcomed a new novice to the community, with the ordination by Rev. Master Leandra of Max Zorzan. In these unusual times, Max served his postulancy entirely during our covid closed period. He was given the name: Hōun Ryōzan, which means ‘Bridge Mountain’. Rev. Ryōzan’s Italian parents had hoped to attend but were unable to make the journey, so we sent them photographs of the ceremony. We congratulate Rev. Ryōzan and offer him every good wish for his training as he continues training with us.



*Rev Ryōzan with Rev. Master Leandra*

**Renewable energies:** A group of monks are looking at ways in which we can reduce our carbon footprint and are also considering ways of reducing our reliance on fossil fuels by using renewable sources of energy. So far we’ve commissioned a general report and are now gathering more detailed information

on what practical options there are for solar PV, ground and air source heating and wind turbines.

Work continues on replacing higher wattage bulbs in the sacristy and some of our external lighting with lower energy alternatives. The photo below shows Rev. Master Berwyn checking the wiring for opening the ceiling windows in the Ceremony Hall.



—Rev. Alina

## Great Ocean Dharma Refuge

—Pembrokeshire–Wales—

Sympathy continues to be extended and merit is being offered to all those who are having a difficult time during this pandemic with its effects in so many directions.

At Great Ocean, in common with all in Wales and beyond, we have been in long periods of ‘lockdown’ and have appreciated the care of many who have been in touch or offered support. As we are rural, our retreatants usually come from farther afield, so the kind help of the local community and neighbours, who have offered lifts to medical appointments or emergency shopping, has

been particularly touching and much appreciated. Despite the apparent or seeming limitations of this time, many important bonds of Dharma and sympathetic kindness have been deepened both near and far.

During last September and October Rev. Lambert from Throssel Hole was able to visit and offer kind help. We especially thank him for his cheerful and enthusiastic work on some maintenance projects and are glad that he was also able to benefit from some retreat and renewal time.



*Rev. Lambert at work*

Rev. Caitlin continues her extended stay at Shasta Abbey and anticipates returning towards the end of August.

Hopefully retreat and visit opportunities at Great Ocean will return to normal soon, and till conditions normalise, spiritual guidance and Dharma continue to be offered by phone and email. You are most welcome to stay in touch. Thank you.

—*Rev. Master Mokugen*

## The Place of Peace Dharma House

—*Abersytwyth, Wales*—

In December we had two Buddha's Enlightenment Ceremonies, for different time zones. These were held via Zoom, using the altar in our Garden Room, rather than at the (upstairs) Meditation Hall altar, which is not so easy to film. Heather Walters baked lotus shaped cookies for the *diamosho* offering, and posted them to the temple, and to others in the Sangha, so we could enjoy them with a cup of tea before the Dharma talk. Rev. Master Myōhō spoke of the importance of original understanding of the Dharma, coming directly from meditation, rather than a learned understanding.

We also celebrated the New Year Ceremony via zoom, with Heather presenting from the North East of England. This was the first time someone in another location had done the presenting, and it worked well.

Over the festive period we received many cards, financial donations, and offerings of food, household goods, toiletries and stationery. All very much appreciated. Thank you for thinking of us.

January was a quiet time for rest and renewal. This was greatly appreciated. In February we were ready to continue the regular monthly and fortnightly meetings, with both groups and individuals, courtesy of Zoom. This will never replace meeting face to face, but is the best that can be done in the present circumstances, whilst Covid restrictions still apply. If any group, or individual, is interested in a Zoom Dharma Meeting then please contact Rev. Master Myōhō.

—*Rev. Master Myōhō*

## Reading Buddhist Priory

—Reading, England–UK—

We are on our third national lockdown, and the Priory is still functioning well on our video communications platform. Meditation periods, services, and group meetings continue online, following a daily and weekly round. In December, a day retreat was held, culminating in the Festival of Enlightenment, with a lay sangha member presenting from home.

The deep winter months, and lockdown restrictions also provided a good opportunity for indoor social activities, and Reverend Gareth organised several film nights. After some trial and error with online services, we were able successfully to watch and discuss together, *Mandala* (1981), and *Xuan Zang* (2016).

The Priory closed briefly over the Christmas period, and in January, we embarked on a well-attended month-long winter retreat, which comprised Short Morning Services, and more scheduled sitting periods. Reverend Gareth also gave readings from Great Master Keizan's *Denkōroku*, which were much appreciated.

In early January, Reverend Gareth was invited, through a lay sangha member, to take part in an inter-faith podcast discussion. The podcast is attached to an online global newspaper for English-speaking Indians, and the discussion centred around the topic of how to find more joy in 2021 (it can be found on YouTube

<https://www.facebook.com/thesentinel.assam/videos/get-set-global-how-do-we-find-more-joy-in-2021/1038354493299896/>.

A number of our lay sangha members were able to watch the programme live, and overall, it was received with warm hearts and gratitude towards all involved.

After the successful completion of the driveway project, Reverend Gareth is currently working on the frontage to the

Priory, and a rockery, graced with statues of Kanzeon guarded by two temple lion dogs, is developing nicely.

Looking forward, our annual Spring three-day retreat will be held jointly with Telford Priory, online in March.

—Gina Bovan

### Sitting Buddha Hermitage

—Cromford, Derbyshire –UK—

I am extremely grateful for the opportunity I was given to spend the whole of 2020 on retreat, it was a very precious time. Since the start of 2021 I have been back in circulation and people are very welcome to contact me, though the temple remains closed due to Covid-19. Meanwhile, I am making more of this cheery Buddhist bunting.



—Rev. Master Alicia

### Turning Wheel Buddhist Temple

—East Midlands–UK—

**Keeping connected whilst we are closed:** Like many temples, we have been closed for nearly a year now, but we have been continuing to meet online via Zoom. We have morning meditation and morning service five days a week, as well as our Wednesday and Thursday evening meetings. We also have meditation mornings each Sunday, as well as festival mornings and the Renewing the Precepts ceremony on Saturdays.

We are still continuing to develop how we meet online, and it has been lovely to be joined by lay Sangha members from across

the country. Even when we are able to have people visit again we will continue to have an online component to our meetings, so that lay Sangha members can join from wherever they are.

**Building Project Update:** You may remember from previous issues of the Journal that we were hoping to have some building work done at the temple. The main reason for doing this was to change the layout of the downstairs rooms so that we didn't need to go through the Meditation Hall to get to the kitchen or the stairs. After much planning and preparation, the building work started at the end of November last year and is now in its last stages, with all of the work hopefully being completed within the next few weeks.

The main parts of the work were to build a porch extension outside the front door of the temple, and to convert the existing garage into rooms. Below is a photo showing the front of the property before and after the porch was constructed.



You can see that the garage door has been removed and bricked up, and the two small windows are for two WCs in the entrance area. The slightly larger window is for a shower room in the converted garage, with the window of the front room next to

it. The new front door has a ramp in front of it to give easy access, and the other windows in the house have also been replaced.

The photo below shows the inside of the entrance area, seen from where the old front door used to be. It is a far larger area than we had before, and will hopefully make it much easier for people to put their coats and shoes on at the end of events.



The two white doors you can see in the photo are the WCs, and next to them is a cupboard which has the boiler in. Beyond that is the door through to the converted garage area, which has two rooms in it, plus the shower room and a utility room.

As part of the work we have also changed the direction of the stairs, which means that they now go up from the entrance area, rather than from the back of the meditation hall. This is a big improvement for our meditation hall which now only has one entrance, as the doors to the kitchen have been closed off as well. We will now only be going into the meditation hall for meditation and ceremonies etc., rather than needing to go through it to get to other parts of the property, which will give the hall a much more settled feel.

The builders and plumbers are currently working on the final phase of the project, which is dividing the upstairs bathroom into two shower rooms, and hopefully this will be completed in the next few weeks. After the builders have finished we will then have a lot of redecoration work to do before the rooms are usable again. We are hoping to have that done in time for when people are allowed to visit the temple again, which will hopefully be some time during the summer. It will be a big improvement to the temple's facilities.

**A big thank you:** We are very grateful to all those who have continued to support the temple whilst we are closed. This has enabled us to continue covering our costs during the last year, and is very much appreciated.

Thank you to all those who are so generously supporting the temple through your financial donations and food donations, in addition to the support of your practice.

We look forward to welcoming you back to the temple as soon as we are able to.

—*Rev. Master Aiden*

## Wolk-en-Water Hermitage

—*Langelille, Netherlands*—

On March 7th our greyhound Channa passed away. Earlier she was given the Dharma name Love Only.

That is what she taught us. She will be dearly missed by all who came here.



*Channa*

*—Rev. Master Hakuun*

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**MT:** Whitefish

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Ph: 011-371-259-563-40. (Latvia)  
[www.sotozenriga.lv](http://www.sotozenriga.lv)  
elgarusins@gmail.com

## THE NETHERLANDS

### **De Dharmatoevlucht (Dharma Refuge)**

Rev. Master Baldwin Schreurs  
De Dharmatoevlucht  
Jean Monnetpark 73, 7336 BB  
Apeldoorn, The Netherlands  
Ph: (0031) (0)6 372 68 541  
[www.dharmatoevlucht.nl](http://www.dharmatoevlucht.nl)

### **Wolk-en-Water Hermitage**

Rev. Master Hakuun Barnhard  
Kerkeweg 81, 8484 KB Langelille  
The Netherlands.  
Ph. 0031 561 475 306  
<https://www.wolkenwater.nl/en/>

*Affiliated Meditation Groups:*

### **The Netherlands:**

Groningen, Utrecht.

*For details of meditation groups, your nearest priory, contact the Guestmaster at Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey, or in the US, Shasta Abbey*

## Further Information

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

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

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

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