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*Main Altar and Founder's Shrine
at Norwich Zen Buddhist Priory*

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Avalokiteshwara greets those who come by showing them the Pearl of Wisdom and the vase, which represents both the Waters of Compassion, and our own bodies which, when we train, become vessels of conversion, as we are transformed by the wisdom of true insight.

- New Altar in the porch at The Place of Peace Dharma House -

Delving

Rev. Master Daishin Morgan

—*The Hermitage, Wales–UK*—

This article comprises the opening chapters from a new book by Rev. Master Daishin Morgan, titled Delving.

Night Walks

Plenty of things scared me as a child, but I found I had an affinity for the dark. I was drawn to walk at night in the woods behind the house where I grew up on the Hampstead Garden Suburb in north London. At the bottom of our garden was an allotment and beyond that and down a bank, the wood began. When the suburb was built, the planners left two mature pieces of woodland untouched to serve as parks that were imaginatively named Big Wood and Little Wood. Big Wood was my territory as a child. It was perhaps 50 acres of mature oak trees with an understorey of hazel, crab apple and large patches of bramble. Tarmac paths ran through the wood but between those paths something of the wild remained, at least for a child's imagination. On all but the darkest nights, I found that if I looked up as I walked, I could avoid crashing into the trees by observing the canopy outlined against the sky. I learned to walk off the paths in the dark with some confidence.

I had a happy childhood—my resort to the woods was not driven by any trauma or particular unhappiness outside of the usual growing pains. When I began to play in the wood, I terrified myself with an imagined monster. It had the head of a bull and an indeterminate body made up of swirls of purple and yellow ochre. Once I had imagined the monster I could not un-imagine it, and I expected it to appear in the wood at any moment. As I came to know the wood intimately, my monster receded. I spent many hours playing there with friends and on my own. I came to love the wood and discovered that at night its character changed. It must have been when I was nine or ten that I began my night walks, especially in the early dark of winter. My family had a West Highland Terrier and I would often take him with me.

I was drawn instinctively. The woods had a presence at night that fascinated and called to me. The call was only a little stronger than my fears of what my imagination could still conjure up, and sometimes I got spooked and ran. It was not so much a presence within the wood that drew me as the presence of the wood. I was not hunting ghosts, rather a feeling that echoed inside me. As I learned how to find my way in the dark, I began to know my fear a little better. I could move fairly quietly and realized that if I met anyone, they would probably be as frightened of me as I might be of them. I saw that I could be the hunter as well as the hunted. Outside of the woods there were many things that frightened me and that I ran away from, but there, in the wood, I felt strong.

My later practice of zazen reflected those childhood walks. Although my rational mind needs to argue things through, I still follow the same primary instinct that drew me to the woods.

Delving

Life is essentially creative. I have a wish, like a banked fire inside, to express who I am. To seek an expression that is true requires delving into the depths of my being. Like an artist, I draw on what is already here, yet what is created is a new expression of life. Even if the work is a cliché, it is new at the moment of creation. If life seems like the repetition of old patterns, each ‘repetition’ is still new, it is this one now, and the world is different because of it. What makes a work worth the term “art” is that it is brought into being by the artist delving into themselves in an effort to express something true. The artist must go to the well and lower the bucket without knowing what may fill it. The painting or the poem does not already exist down that well. It comes into being through the act of delving. The artist must pick up the brush or the pen and begin. Delving involves recognising when its expression is not quite true and trying again and again. Making art, making any true expression, requires self-belief. The artist must navigate hubris on one side and self-doubt on the other, never losing faith that truth can find expression.

The truth of human life does not exist beforehand; it is not ‘out there’ nor is it ‘deep inside’. Truth appears in the making. It does not exist before it is expressed. Creative expression is in the living, and we can see that living reflected in art. That is why art is so important. Life burns to express itself. To recognise the uniqueness, the inevitable and unavoidable originality of every life, is rare. We may love or abhor what is made, but the making, the living, is a creative act.

Life is radically immediate, yet many people imagine a second, little person sitting inside their head directing operations. One of the insights that comes from delving into oneself is that there is no such person. This can be quite unsettling. The realisation comes more in the nature of an insight than an argument. It leaves the awkward question, “Who/what could possibly know this?” If it is not an infinite regression of one little person sitting inside the head of another little person...then what? One definition of ‘reality’ is that which does not depend on something else for its existence. In other words, reality is that which is sufficient. Our ‘knowing’ of reality cannot be like being another person watching us know something in our own head. There must come a point in the delving when we realise that delving is commensurate with being. From then on delving is no longer about trying to discern some fact or answer, it is life sufficiently being itself.

Zazen, or what passes for it, can sometimes have a passive quality: it takes an act of engagement to let the bucket down into the well. There is no telling what may be disturbed. Truth, sufficiency, realisation are not constructed, they are realised in their expression. Expression and awakening are simultaneous. They are not a sequence with awakening first and then expression. We cannot hold awakening even for a moment.

For someone like me who is not given to great experiences (not by choice), spiritual life has involved quite a lot of plodding. For some years I wanted to be totally transformed by an utterly unquestionable experience that would blow away all doubt and inadequacy. I thought awakening must be something like that. Instead, I had to come to terms with being ordinary. I was drawn to those aspects of the Zen tradition that emphasise the presence of awakening in the everyday, the emphasis on there being no division between training and enlightenment. I applied myself to the question, “What is this?” with some rigour. I looked closely at the gap that appears to be created between the observer and the object when looking or questioning takes place. The question, “What is this?” is equally the question, “Who is looking?”

I began to realise that the “what” and the “who” are the same thing. There was an intellectual element involved in this, but it was, and remains, an intuitive recognition.

I have had my moments, but I characterise my experience as undramatic, and I have come to value this lack of drama. I don't believe I chose a path so much as had to sit where I found myself. No two people's experience is the same, so I cannot say, "Do it like this." What is required though is a deep commitment, one that is engaged with the everyday. I can see now that we all have to plod, and the fireworks are not as anyone imagines them. Rigorous engagement is necessary, wherever you find yourself sitting.

Zazen is to sit still—that stillness is alive. It is not grasping at anything or going anywhere else, yet it involves active engagement of this profound commitment. This commitment needs refining—it is not a matter of replacing an inaccurate truth with a more accurate truth. The commitment is to this that is taking place now, and that is more complex than we imagine and easier said than done. The limitation is in our thinking, not in our being.

It is commonplace to say that we should let the past go and live in the present. Our perception of the present is quite complex. Suppose you were abducted, blindfolded and then released into a foreign land with no idea of where you were or even what planet you were on. Picture what it would be like as you remove your blindfold. Your ability to comprehend what you are perceiving is dependent on making comparisons with remembered sights, smells, etc.

Suppose that this is an utterly alien world and nothing is familiar. You would be like a newborn baby only with an adult's mind. It might be terrifying. Would you be able to make sense of anything? In this new world, you would have to slowly assemble new memories and experiences and gradually build up some familiarity before you could distinguish one feature from another. It would take some time to be able to function, and you might never feel at home. The point here is to see how dependent we are on memory for our comprehension of the present moment.

When we feel at peace, how dependent is that on familiarity? Sitting in zazen is familiar to me. That is not wrong or a problem, yet I need to be aware that it is dependent on memory. There is another step to take, a deeper awakening, a more profound renunciation, one that goes beyond the memories and the perceptions rooted in this interaction of past and present. It is an awakening to the entirely present, and we can have absolutely no idea of that at all. The moment that blindfold comes off in the supposition above gives us a hint.

A world that we can have no idea of is a place of self-abandon. I am neither free nor bound. There is an inclusive, marvellously functioning, local reality. This is only accessible if I am prepared to be present without insisting on being present as myself.

The final verse of Robert Frost’s wonderful poem “Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening” is:

The woods are lovely, dark, and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

It is in “the darkest evening of the year” that Frost feels the pull of the “lovely, dark, and deep.” We have responsibilities, and the “lovely, dark, and deep” calls to us. We fear going very far towards that “sleep” because we rightly intuit that it involves the loss of ourselves. We think the only way that can be is in death. So we divide the dark and deep from the everyday and believe that in doing so we are choosing life. It was the lovely, dark, and deep that called me to the woods as a child.

Rev. Master Daishin’s new book will be available to order from Throssel Hole Bookshop in November. A notice will appear on the [Throssel Blog](#) when it is published.

Spacious Mind

Rev. Master Kinrei Bassis

—Berkeley Buddhist Priory, Albany, CA—USA—

This article was adapted from a Dharma talk offered at the Berkeley Buddhist Priory on August 23, 2020, and the audio talk is available on the Priory website.

*The universe is as the boundless sky,
As lotus blossoms above unclean water.
Pure and beyond the world
Is the Buddha Nature of the trainee.
O Holy Buddha, we take refuge in Thee.*

A vital aspect of Buddhist training is cultivating a spacious mind. The above verse is what is recited at the closing of a meal in this tradition. That which will free ourselves from suffering is finding that spacious, boundless mind. It is easy to see the lack of spaciousness in our minds as we often spend our days filled with our worries, fears and desires.

One of our ways to cope with life is to actually narrow our focus and concentrate on the task at hand. We allow ourselves to be absorbed in what we are doing, on what we

are seeking and on what we are avoiding. Just think of much of our mental dialogue as we go through our day. Often our success in life seems to have arisen from learning to have a narrow focus and being able to fully concentrate on our specific tasks and goals. This narrowing our focus to accomplish tasks is not completely wrong. We do not want to stop ourselves from successfully focusing on the many things we need to do, but we also need to maintain a sense of a deeper spiritual purpose. This helps us have a more spacious mind and a more open heart because we will both be doing our work but also bringing with it a recognition of the impermanence and the relative insignificance of what we are doing. Some spiritual practices can actually narrow our minds and close our hearts by having us just develop concentration on something. It would be like someone who meditates well only when all conditions are conducive for meditation but gets upset when some difficulties like noise or other people become distracting.

Sometimes someone will tell me how well they do with something, for example how they can be still and present and let everything go when they play the guitar. Yet it is not spiritually significant if you can be at one with your guitar playing or be at one with anything else you are doing. That sometimes may be useful but at other times it can be something negative because it is important that we be willing to see beyond a narrow focus of what we are doing so we have a sense of its true significance in the bigger picture of our life. Much of life's irritation, frustration and worry comes out of this narrow focus that has us concentrating too

hard at getting what we want in the present rather than having an open mind that sees what truly matters in a deeper sense. Frustration, irritation and anxiety come out of this too narrow focus where we have lost sight of the broader view of what deeply matters in our life.

When difficulties arise, it is important to have what they call in Buddhism a fluid mind. It is the mind that can see both the significance and the insignificance of what we are currently immersed in. Yet one common way to misinterpret the Buddhist teaching of non-attachment and letting go of all worldly desires, is to say this means all our worldly tasks have no importance. Everything we do has an importance and simultaneously also has a deeper sense of unimportance. A good example of this is let's say I had a health problem. I can get absorbed in it, fixated on it, worried and anxious about my health problems. I can spend considerable time focusing on my symptoms of the illness. I can be filled with worries about the possibility of ongoing ill health or even dying. Taking care of my health is my responsibility and it has very significant importance, but on a deeper sense, life is flowing on and is bringing us to our inescapable decay and death. Our bodies must all fall apart. Yet we can cultivate the spacious mind that can see the deeper truth that is beyond ourselves, beyond our little mind which can so easily be obsessed with the importance of my body and the significance of what is happening in my life. Taking to heart our own inherent insignificance helps free our mind to see the deeper truth of the ever presence of our Buddha Nature.

The very concept of space can be helpful. Our mind can only conceive of space being boundless. Everything found within space has limits but space itself can only be conceived as limitless. Thus all the stuff in the world, all our lives, are just worldly conditions, but space can be seen as representing the boundless, the unconditioned. The Theravadin Buddhist Master, Ajahn Sumedho, liked using space as representing the unconditioned and everything with form or substance as conditions simply appearing and disappearing in space, the conditioned.

The quote below is the words of the Buddha from the *Udana Sutra*:

*“O monks, there is an unborn, undying,
unchanging, uncreated.
If this were not so, there would be no escape from
that which
Is being born, dying, changing and created.”*

Everything exists within space but what we pay attention to is all the things we find in the space. Space itself is unbounded and unconditioned. Space is always there but what we dwell on is all the stuff that is filling the space. But to be really aware of the space you need to stop focusing on all the objects in the space. Space is fundamentally neutral and peaceful but all the stuff in space is what we are either attracted to or repelled by. There is the expression a ‘bad space’ but the space is fine, we are having a problem with the stuff in the space. We think that this room is messy and it is a bad space. Or I may not like the fact that the trees are

dying here or how unattractive this area is. Space itself is not being affected by what appears and disappears within it. Now move this concept of space and stuff to meditation. Think of what we're trying to do in meditation, which is in a way not to concentrate on all the things that pop up in our minds. We need to let go and just bring our awareness to the stillness, the silence and our breath. This allows us to become aware of what we are clinging to in our minds and this helps us to let go of many of these habitual conditions of our mind. And then we can become more and more aware of this open and empty space in which our thoughts and feelings all appear and then all disappear.

Life can seem to be nothing more than dealing with all our various worldly conditions. All the things in our life are conditions; my body, my relationships, the news of the world, the smoke in the air and the Covid virus, my health and ill health and my savings and my expenses. There is global warming, global heating, earthquakes, fires, wars and economic downturns. These are all worldly conditions, but space is not being bound by what appears with it. And in a way, we are all longing to find that which is unconditioned. We all would like to free ourselves from this feeling of being bound by these difficult, worldly conditions.

The universe is as the boundless sky. We can all find a deep sense of the boundless by cultivating this spacious mind that seeks to recognize that no conditions have any fundamental substance and in a deeper sense, they can never bind us. And in this way, a spacious mind has room for

everything. Yet we can be aware of this spaciousness for everything only by not getting caught up in what appears in our minds. The real practice of meditation in daily life is our efforts to generate this spacious mind that allows all conditions to flow through our minds, both what we want and what we don't want: both good and evil, both pleasure and pain, both good memories and bad memories. The spacious mind, by not clinging to what flows into our minds also then allows all conditions to keep flowing out of our minds. The strong feelings like anger, fear and desire both flow into our minds and if we do not cling, they keep flowing out of our minds, and we can discover that they have the same substance as a dream.

People in the world can often have a successful life, but they generally generate their success by having a narrow focus and just concentrating on whatever conditions in their life seem most important; their family, their job, their pleasures, their accomplishments. Yet all worldly success can vanish at any moment. Think of a world today where we are dealing with a pandemic. The world is full of people who thought everything was going well in their life. And suddenly hundreds of millions of people in the world right now are having major unanticipated problems. They may have lost their livelihood, their savings, their health, and many are now stuck dealing with many new and unanticipated difficult conditions. Yet Buddhist practice points us to a spacious mind that allows us to open our hearts to all the difficult conditions in our life and still find freedom

and peace, no matter what difficulties are unfolding in our lives.

In a way, Buddhist practice can be seen as a way of creating a more spacious mind and heart. And all our suffering actually comes from this lack of spaciousness. The real source of suffering does not come from the difficult conditions that befall us. It is the way we narrow our focus and get absorbed in our reaction to the difficulty. Let's say somebody says something hurtful to you. People often mistakenly think that Buddhism will free you from being hurt. That is wrong. Life will always be giving us both conditions that hurt and conditions that feel good. The freedom in Buddhism comes from realizing both have no substance and clinging to them is the same as clinging to a dream. Yet people can generate enormous suffering from something that was hurtful by obsessing on how they were hurt. They frequently replay the hurt in their minds and make those painful conditions important. They will cling to being a victim and how others hurt them. People can be very old and dying and they may still be reliving some hurt from childhood that they have kept alive throughout their long life.

The problem is not that something was hurtful. The problem is the way we feel that something went fundamentally wrong in that we had experienced deep hurt and pain. I remember talking to someone who lost their child and they were completely overwhelmed and consumed by this loss. And many years later, they were still consumed by

the loss. Yet it is the very nature of life to have birth and death and that does not exclude children. A spacious mind can even deal with the loss of a child, one of life's most painful conditions and embrace that pain within a deeper awareness of the inescapable 'ever-presence' of impermanence, and the reality of birth and death. I also remember speaking with a mother whose child had died. She told me that although the loss of their child was incredibly painful, she had a deep sense it was all alright; it just hurt like hell. She was hurt but she said she was at peace with the hurt and with her enormous loss.

We can be filled with all the problems in our life, the problems in the lives of the people around us and the endless problems in the world. Our unenlightened mind can be absorbed in trying to solve all these problems or by just not accepting all these difficulties. Yet the Buddhist practice keeps pointing us to letting things go and being at peace. We need to work at trying to have this spacious mind that can see beyond problems and let them go. And doing this will gradually generate a deep sense of something fundamentally good and positive that is always flowing through everything.

People often feel better at the end of a meditation retreat. Even though they often may have difficulty with all the meditation and had trouble letting go of their busy mind; nonetheless, when the retreat ends, they often find that their mind is more spacious and is less weighed down with all our normal habitual concerns. This points us to the liberating qualities of the meditation and mindfulness. I can remember

when I first started to meditate, I had a difficult phone conversation with my mother that made me tense and upset. Then I remember sitting down to meditate and suddenly all these difficult feeling just washed away. And I realized, wow, I can actually let go of these difficult feelings. And it felt good. I cannot even remember what I was finding hard as it was just some insignificant way that mother could get on my nerves and bother me. But this was pointing me, in a small way, to a more spacious mind.

The spacious mind points us to liberation. If we learn to be aware of the space rather than the stuff in the space, we are helping to free ourselves. It is the way, for example, that the space in the room is not affected by what furniture and furnishing enter the room and leave the room. The space itself is unbounded. We want that spacious mind which allows all our thoughts and feelings to come in and out. We are trying not to cling to anything or push anything away. They are whatever they are. We all will have endless good and bad conditions entering our mental space. Yet when we point ourselves to cultivating the awareness of this boundless space, the specific conditions entering our mental space start to have less importance.

One of the most common ways to translate the famous lines from the *Scripture of Great Wisdom* is, all forms are empty and empty are all forms. Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett preferred using the word, pure rather than empty but I, at times, prefer using the word empty. What Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett did not like about using empty or void is that those

terms do not seem to have a positive aspect. If I tell someone, seek the emptiness, they may find it difficult to know what possible good can be found in emptiness. Yet the reason we need to seek that emptiness is that it is not really empty space, it is just empty of our little self. All space is filled with the sacred presence of what is indescribable. When we seek to let all our desires and fears go, we are then cultivating the faith and trust that within this seeming emptiness is the real life of Buddha, filling all things. Yet our normal, everyday mind can only grasp and understand conditions, can only understand stuff and does not have an intellectual understanding of the fullness we can find in this seeming emptiness. But allowing our minds to be more spacious points us to the unconditioned. We point ourselves towards liberation when we stop narrowing our minds with our grasping but instead opening ourselves to this boundless and unconditioned awareness. Experiencing this boundless space does not bring a sense of something lacking but rather brings a deep sense of peace and joy. It is why Buddhism points us to Enlightenment.

When we are less bound up in our desires we can be more aware of the space, the openness around whatever situation you are dealing with. Be aware of the fact that in a deeper sense, nothing is fundamentally going on. It's just all these various conditions appearing and disappearing in this boundless space. By changing the way we view whatever is unfolding in our lives, we can start freeing ourselves by learning to trust that nothing is really binding us. We find freedom is not found by getting rid of all our difficult stuff

but by recognizing the ephemeral and empty nature of all the stuff. Everything is just conditions that are just appearing and disappearing in our spacious minds. That's why we are trying to cultivate silence and space around all our obsessions, our fears, our thoughts, our problems. We can feel that something is going wrong when we are angry about something going wrong or we can choose to just notice it as an angry feeling just moving through our spacious mind.

We are learning to have a bigger picture in our life, a picture that includes more than just our problems and desires. If we are practicing Buddhism, we can try to see our lives within a vastly bigger picture. This bigger picture has us seeing that our lives are on the Buddhist path and this gives meaning to whatever we encounter and whatever we are doing, since it is all part of the path to Buddhahood. We are trying to be aware of the many things we have to be grateful for instead of just seeing what is lacking. We need to try to notice the bigger picture of our life so we do not get lost in the small stuff.

Having a spacious mind does not stand against the ground of Right Action in Buddhism, of always trying to do what is good. If my dishes are dirty, it's good to wash the dishes. If my room is dirty, it is good to clean my room. If someone needs help, and I can help, it is good to help. None of those things stand against the fact that "pure and beyond the world is the Buddha Nature of the trainee". Our spacious mind can embrace both the dirty and the clean room but it also true that it is good to clean the room and do whatever

we can to bring forth more good in the world. And when we cannot clean, nothing is being fundamentally damaged by the dirt so we can be at peace with something being dirty.

One of the ways we get the more spacious mind is by letting go of the worrying and complaining mind and wholeheartedly doing whatever is needed with a grateful and positive mind. When we are washing the dishes, it is good to be washing the dishes. We can be grateful for the dishes. We can be grateful that we had food to eat. Much of the suffering in life comes from people thinking they need to seek the conditions that will make them happy. People are trying to grasp happiness rather than just trusting that true happiness is already there within this spacious mind.

Suffering is always coming out of us binding ourselves. It is the second Noble Truth, suffering is due to our attachments, due to our desires. Lots of conditions can bother us, irritate us, frustrate us. All of these difficult feelings are teaching us that we are restricting our minds and hearts and not being aware of the boundless space that surrounds all these conditions. Buddhists usually think it would be wonderful to be enlightened. Yet being enlightened means you have to be at peace with whatever is happening with you in this present situation and you are fully embracing wherever you are right now. It may be good to have improved some conditions but enlightenment means we are at peace with everything whether we can change it for the

good or just need to accept these difficult or painful conditions.

Often people bind themselves with their reaction to their painful feelings. People often describe all their painful feelings to me and they want to know how they can make this pain go away. Yet, what's causing them to suffer, is not the painful feelings; it is their lack of acceptance of their painful feelings. Yes, on a practical level, none of us want these painful feelings. I never want to feel embarrassed, feel hurt, feel scared, but I can find that in my spacious mind, that it is fine to have these painful feelings. We don't have to get rid of them. We can just let them arise and pass in this boundless mind. We point ourselves to being beyond the world by not clinging to the pain and realizing that although we would prefer the pain to go away, we can still be fine with its presence. It's the nature of things. As long as I live, I'm going to have painful feelings, just like health and ill health, pain and pleasure. Enlightened beings will still have painful feelings. They will just appear and disappear like a dream within their spacious mind.

Pure and beyond the world is the Buddha Nature of the trainee.

It seems to be completely normal to feel bound by endless worldly conditions. We free ourselves by realizing the world is not outside of us but the whole world is within our minds. It is not that this very complex world is not real. It is just the meaning of everything comes out of our minds;

our desires and fears, our clinging and aversion, give the meaning and significance to everything we experience in our life and our experience of the entire world. Just like the meaning of slaughtering a cow comes from the point of view of your mind. It can be viewed as wonderful that this dead cow will be giving us delicious beef or awful that we are experiencing the horror of the killing of a sentient being. Yet when we let go and see the insubstantial nature of all the meanings we give everything, we can find that there is just boundless space. Just openness. Nothing's binding us. Everything is within the boundless heart of Buddha. Our small minds may not fully understand what this means but when we are willing to let go of our desires and try to be still with an open mind and heart, we gain this sense of something open and boundless. This awareness helps us to trust that it is good that we are on the Buddhist path and that all we need to do is to wholeheartedly take the next step.

Joy

Rev. Master Kōten Benson

—*Lions Gate Buddhist Priory, Lytton, BC—Canada—*

The following is a transcript of the last Dharma Talk of the 2021 Spring Retreat held at the Priory. Transcribed by Michele Feist.

Homage to the Buddha

Homage to the Dharma

Homage to the Sangha

The Buddha taught that there is no refuge in the impermanent, no refuge in the changing and passing moods, and emotions, and feelings that arise from past conditions.

Whether or not we recognize what these causes and conditions are, they influence us. We like particular things, we don't like particular things, we react towards some things to try to get away from them, we are attracted to other things.

One way of understanding this is like a play. You know, Shakespeare says "all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players, they have their entrances and their exits." It is as if most people are in a play. The plot, as

it were, having been written by past karmic conditions. The plot tells us what we should be doing and how we should respond to particular situations and other people.

Not understanding this, is what the Buddha called ignorance. Through meditation we learn how to stop in the middle of the play. And not just act out the role that karma and past conditioning has planned for us.

Through meditation we learn to stop. Through practice of the Precepts we learn to see. That is why when the Precepts are given it says, “in order to make them the eyes of all sentient beings.” It is so that we can see how things actually work.

This stopping and seeing in the middle of the play can be called the challenging of karma. Meditation develops the elasticity and flexibility of the mind so that it does not simply stiffly follow past channels of action and thought.

While we are following, as it were, the plot of the play, it is as if we are moving through a smoke-filled stage. We cannot see clearly where we are going, so we simply respond to the stage direction coming from our previous karma and conditioning.

How often have we encountered people or situations that, without having encountered them before, we do not like, or we crave to have, in ways that have nothing to do

with the present situation, or even the person or object?

Through training, through practice, through meditation and the Precepts, the smoky ache ceases, and happiness, dependent upon our mood, emotion, and feelings; this happiness ends.

We are used to experiencing and wanting happiness that is dependent upon having and possessing something, whether an object, a person, a mood, a feeling.

This very identification with these things is what the self is.

This happiness that I just referred to is quite different in quality and experience from the happiness and joy that the Buddha spoke of. We do not need to be a saint, a sage, or perfect in order to begin to experience this.

We just need to let go of things as they arise.

How we feel about something may not be the best guide to what is actually going on. Profound stillness and the practice of selflessness causes this joy and happiness that the Buddha referred to, to arise.

But, since it is so profoundly different from what we are used to seeking, it is sometimes hard for us to recognize it at the beginning without laying all sorts of things like guilt, etc. on top of it. The tranquility and joy that arise are not an award, nor a gift, they are what already exists, but we need

to let go in order to experience it.

As I said, this is quite different from the happiness that we are usually seeking because it is not dependent upon the arising of a particular mood or feeling. Nor is it dependent upon a particular situation or the presence of a particular person. It comes from letting go.

Letting go, letting be, not forcing. This is real. It is not something imagined and when experienced it is clear to us that it is not imaginary.

However, the training must be done in order to experience it. And unlike moods of happiness, or feelings of happiness, this joy that I am referring to can occur in the middle of disaster, in the middle of darkness, in the middle of despondency. Our bodies and minds continue to respond to circumstances as they arise, but, because we allow them to arise and pass, and do not hold on to them as they pass, joy can arise.

However, one must not become so busy and so distracted or else one will not be able to see it, if I can put it that way, at the time that it occurs. Or rather, I suppose, if one becomes distracted in this way, one will not be able to practise it.

Sometimes, or often, what the thoughts or emotions, as they arise and pass, are telling us about ourselves, about others, and about circumstances, is not necessarily true.

Once you realize this, then it can become easier to let go of whatever arises in the mind.

The focus is upon stillness, but this stillness, developed out of meditation, is not a stillness in opposition to agitation. It is a stillness whether agitation is present or not. We are so used to thinking that what the mind churns up is us.

But that is, in fact, not the case. What the mind churns up is the arising and passing of conditioned thoughts, emotions, etc. They can provide us with information, such as that if fear arises, there may be something to fear. But of course, there may not be something to fear as well.

We learn when we begin meditation to sit still, as it were, underneath a bridge and to allow the thoughts and emotions and feelings to do what they will, going back and forth across that bridge. And we are told not to chase after them, not to push them away. We are all familiar with this.

It takes a while for people practising meditation to understand that what is passing across the bridge is not us. It is what we have told ourselves is us. But in fact it is a mass of impermanence in which no refuge can be taken.

The remarkable thing about the Buddha's teachings is that, through practice, we go past the place of meaning. When people try to do this in a philosophical or intellectual way they come to the place where everything loses all meaning. It is one of the difficulties of studying philosophy. That there should be a type of meaning that leaves behind all

the different “meanings,” they do not grasp; no philosophers grasp. So they try to move the self, reform it, change it, move it about, turn it upside down, move it forward into truth, without realizing the futility of trying to do so.

When Shakyamuni Buddha taught for the first time, to the five companions, what happened is called Turning the Wheel of the Dharma. What many people do not realize is that it is not the Buddha’s words that are doing the turning of the Wheel of the Dharma. The Wheel of the Dharma turns when somebody understands. It was because somebody that was listening to the Buddha understood, that the Wheel of the Dharma turned and since then, down to the present day, this is so.

The Dharma is transmitted from person to person, through the understanding and practice of it.

Lots of things help. Scriptures and practices all can benefit. Nice meditation halls, kesas, all these things are not empty. They can benefit. And yet, one must not miss the profound lesson of the Buddha, that what he taught is about doing something about ourselves. Doing something about ourselves within the context of our lives as we find them.

This does not mean that we do not try to change our lives or that there is some problem in doing so. But we need not wait to change our lives before we can do something about ourselves.

We can do something about ourselves by continuing to try to be still when we do not wish to. By continuing to try to listen when we wish to be elsewhere. What you must realize in addition to what I said about doing something about ourselves, what you must realize, is that this, the teaching of the Buddha is not speculation or some form of psychological mind improvement. It is the profound turning about, at the deepest seat of us. And as Rev. Master Jiyu said, emerging out of the dark to find the universe as fair and wondrous as the morning star.

Homage to all the Buddhas in all worlds

Homage to all the Bodhisattvas in all worlds

Homage to the *Scripture of Great Wisdom*

Reflections on Perfection

AnneMarie Mal

—Chicago, Illinois—USA—

This article first appeared on the website of Pine Mountain Buddhist Temple where the author has spent time on retreat.

As I wipe down the kitchen counters in the Buddha house after morning meditation I contemplate my inclination toward perfectionism. I seem to have a habit of looking for what can be improved and taking initiative toward improving it (whether or not anyone else thinks it needs improving). Usually, I then proceed to point out to others what I've done, beaming with self-satisfaction.

The energy behind it is “Look how amazing I am. I saw this needed doing and I did it and now we all get to benefit. Especially me, who gets the double benefit of being recognized as a superior being for my keen eye, talent for cleanliness, and initiative”.

What I have realized while sitting on the cushion is that I cling to perfectionism as a way of creating purpose and self-worth for my life. When I can do something perfectly, I equate it as a reason for my existence. It is my cry to be seen,

validated, valued by others; to be wanted for what I can provide: a space of perfection.

What I have learned in my short time on this planet is that when a human being is not willing to let go of what they are clinging to (in my case perfectionism), life has a way of creating circumstances in which we are forced to give up that thing. I want to change before I am forced to change. I sit in the conundrum of asking: How do I complete an action perfectly, without any attachment? How do I not cling to that sense of triumph upon which my self-value sits? How can I approach each activity with the intention to do my best, understanding that the outcome means nothing about me? I contemplate the idea that I do not have more or less value whether or not I complete something perfectly or imperfectly...

In the mirror of the Sangha, I see the impact on those around me who are expected to constantly applaud my perfection. I might imagine that it would be exhausting for people to constantly have to thank me for things they didn't know they wanted or needed. It is also impossible to match or keep up with because my yearning for validation and valuation is unending.

Perfectionism also hits its limits when I cannot actually live up to my idea of being a perfect person. I see this in relation to wanting to be the perfect daughter, granddaughter, and niece. In my mind, the perfect daughter

is there for her family whenever they need her. However, I have not been able to live up to that expectation. I watch my mind immediately spiral into distress at the thought of not living up to my ideal. The thing I use to measure my value against is in shambles because I cannot possibly be and do everything for everyone while getting my own needs met.

The scripture *Sandōkai* comes to mind: “Lo!—With the ideal comes the actual, like a box all with its lid; Lo!—Hear! Set up not your own standards...”

Friends have said that they look to me as an inspiration. This is most dangerous to me because it encourages me to be further self-sacrificing in the service of my imaginary standards. It feeds the perfectionism monster and leads to a life in which I am never relaxed. This is because I am always striving for new levels of perfection that inevitably cannot ever be reached as I constantly move the bar of measurement higher.

I am left on the cushion, facing the wall of perfectionism I have adopted that at once serves everyone and no one. I wonder if I sit long enough if I will get a breakthrough, or if it is a life-long challenge for me. Is there room for me to accept myself as I am: a perfectionist? How do I wipe the dirty glasses I am wearing that are smudged with perfectionism so I can see reality clearly?

At the same time, how can I have compassion for the being that is me that desires love? Does the cat not meow, asking for a head rub? Is it not our basic human desire to need and ask for love? Though elaborate, this mechanism was put in place born of that basic desire. A normal, healthy call for love.

I imagine how I might ask for love without this elaborate game. “Hello, please love me. I am an imperfect person, and I will obsessively strive for perfection in the hopes that you will see value in me and respond with praise. This praise will then encourage me to continue my perfection-based, value-seeking activities indefinitely until I cannot possibly become more perfect and have a mental breakdown. During which I will hide from all of you so that you dare not see how deeply imperfect I see myself to be. I will gather myself up after a period of time and pretend that nothing happened and the whole program will ensue once more”.

How exhausting! No wonder I sigh with exhaustion everywhere I go! I am on a merry-go-round of an unwinnable game! And the hopelessness of it has me at once wanting to give up and try harder! How laughable our human existence!

Despite it all, I can see something in my mind turning away from this. There has been a development of distaste for gratitude given to me as a result of my compulsive perfection-based contributions. I don't want to give in a way

that expects gratitude. I want to be a contribution in a way that actually helps people in that they feel like they don't owe me anything. Rev. Phoebe says, "That which recognizes error is not itself in error". Maybe there is hope for me yet...

I think about how my control issues go hand in hand with my perfectionist tendencies. Control for me always shows up in décor and design. When I cannot see or control the future, the only thing that seems to give me peace of mind is arranging my immediate environment into a place where I feel safe and comfortable. I am reminded of a dog adjusting his pillow until it is sufficiently fluffed and settling back down to relax upon it.

The moment I enter into an environment, I'm immediately looking at what I would change to make both the energy flow better, and me feel more relaxed. In fact, I cannot relax in an environment until I have arranged everything to its maximum efficiency of use and highest level of organization and best energetic flow. It is a gift in a way, being able to intuitively create environments that feel like a warm hug. It is also a curse in the sense that I have difficulty relaxing in what I perceive to be incongruous places.

There are times it can also be annoying for the people around me to have environments moved around that they are already comfortable in. They know where everything is and have gotten used to it the way that it is. This push and pull

process can create resentment, and the resulting discomfort of those around me can be at the expense of my comfort.

I wonder to myself: How do I make room for my self-expression without judging it as a ‘bad thing’? How do I let myself be good at what I’m good at? How do we all get our needs met when our needs for comfort are competing? I think of the chairs in the Sangha house. I vacuum and put them in a straight line. Order, Clean, Zen, I think to myself. Rev. Phoebe comes by and arranges them askew. She hates straight lines, she says. I laugh inside. The thing I do to make myself comfortable, to gain myself merit as a valuable contributing member of the community is not always the way things are done here.

I’m left grasping at emptiness and returning to beginner’s mind. The form I cling to for comfort is not available. I return to my cushion. I let all the questions float away. I breathe in and out. From the ocean to the shore, the waves of thoughts arise, form, crash, and retreat again.

The Mind and Its Objects and the Call to Training

Rev. Sanshin Alexander

— *Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey, Northumberland—UK* —

A transcript of a talk given following The Festival of the Founder, November 1st 2020.

I am in the retreat hut. There is a slow and irregular pitter-patter of raindrops on the roof. Still half-asleep, I rub my eyes, remembering that after meditation last night I discovered that a large candle on the altar had melted its side, allowing wax to drip and spatter silently on to blankets, clothing, a suitcase, a laundry bag and a metal folding chair. “How am I going to remove all that?” was the question in my mind.

I’m slightly preoccupied with the question, but as it’s still dark I sit down to meditate. It will be easier to survey the extent of the spattering when daylight comes. And also there is the call to sit. It is the important thing. There is something that calls us here. We answer the call by coming.

Sometimes there is an external call: a recommendation or an invitation. Daikan Enō was directed to visit Daiman Kōnin on Obai Mountain. Dōgen was recommended to find

a teacher in China to help him find an answer to his question. Rev. Master Jiyu was invited by Kōhō Zenji to come to Japan to be his personal disciple. These are the external calls.



The Kanzeon Retreat (Monastic Retreat Hut) at Throssel

There is also the inner call, the seed of what brings us here. Prince Gautama was called by an inner sense that he needed to look outside the palace walls; something he needed to see for himself. He answered the call and plumbed the depths of his response. Aged seven, Dōgen was moved when he saw the smoke rising as his mother's cremation took place, and the way-seeking mind was aroused in him. Rev. Master Jiyu saw a monastic in the street when she was aged five and something resonated deeply within her. Arriving in Japan some thirty-three years later she realised in the midst of difficult conditions that she was desperate to meditate. The call can be subtle, or a deafening roar, and each day the call is there; the call is what brings us to face the wall, and there is always something that calls us.

Some time ago I was drawn to read the *Surangama Sutra*. And then in a recent OBC Journal article Rev. Master Jishō wrote about it,¹ which inspired me to look at it again.

The Sutra begins with a description of a time at the end of the Summer training period, when the Buddha was about to offer a great teaching, eagerly anticipated by the Assembly, and at the same time the King wished to honour the Assembly with a feast in memory of his father's death. Ananda is the only disciple missing. He had accepted an invitation to stay out overnight, and then the next day he went unaccompanied on his alms round, and when passing a house of courtesans, he is drawn close to a young woman who tries to seduce him by chanting a spell. He is on the verge of breaking his vow of celibacy when the Buddha realises what is happening, and sends Manjusri to give him support, and also to support the young woman.

On his return to the Assembly, Ananda bows before the Buddha and weeps in sorrow, regretting what he had done, and seeing that his practice was not fully developed.

The Sutra continues in the form of a dialogue in which Shakyamuni asks Ananda to explain his understanding of the nature of mind and the senses, and using a traditional system of logic, he patiently dismantles Ananda's propositions. He teaches Ananda and the Assembly that mind is not located in our senses, nor in the objects of our senses:

“Neither the objects nor the perceptions of them have an essential nature; they are all dependent on each other like intertwining

reeds. Know therefore, that the establishment of perceived objects such that they exist separately within your awareness is the foundation of ignorance.”²

Neither the objects nor the perceptions of them have an essential nature. The mind, which is our ordinary everyday mind of thinking, does not have an essential nature, and neither do the objects that the mind creates. Shakyamuni gives the example of someone pointing a finger at the moon: when we look at the finger we mistake it for the moon, and also when we look at the moon we mistake it for the finger; neither of them are our True Nature, but our attention can wander towards the finger or towards the moon.

There is wax that drips. There is the removal of it. When we are drawn to focus on the thing or the seeing of it we create an object, and there is separation; we are conscious of the object and the sense of it. This perception in itself is not of the True Mind, and at some level we know this. There is separation, and often a level of preoccupation, or fear, or worry or anxiety that goes with it. The thought of wax becomes an object of mind; the memory of wax becomes an object of mind.

As it says in *Rules for Meditation*: “The separation will be as that between Heaven and Earth ... for when the

opposites arise, the Buddha Mind is lost”³ In Ananda’s case he was drawn towards what he was hearing. He was drawn towards the object of his senses and by the impact on his senses.

The Buddha’s teaching here is not to be drawn away from our true nature by following the objects of our minds. He uses the analogy of a knotted scarf to describe the way in which our sense-faculties, including the faculty of mind, bind together with our senses to create a knot. He tied six knots in the scarf, each representing one of the sense-faculties. The scarf is our True Nature, and when the Assembly see the knotted scarf they no longer see the original scarf. The scarf is changed into something else. It’s now a knotted scarf.

In order to untie the knots, in order to see with the True Mind, we need to redirect our attention inwardly: with each sense, Shakyamuni says, we need to reverse the direction we had been following, so instead of following the external objects of our sense-faculties we are returning our attention within, to stillness, and when we have done this for one sense-faculty we have done it for all of them:

“Extricate one faculty by detaching it from its objects, and redirect that faculty inward to what is original and true. Then it will radiate the light of the original understanding. This brilliant light will

shine forth and extricate the other five faculties until they are completely free.”³

In other words, when sitting in zazen we dissolve the separation between mind and object. With the attention directed inwardly towards the still centre, there is only this.

Often it is these knots that we create in our everyday lives that call us back to meditation, this sense of ‘me’ and ‘something’. Mind and object, self and other. “He did this”, or “she said that”, or “I like this”, or “I don’t like them”. These things will arise. In his recent article on fear in the OBC Journal, Rev. Master Kinrei reminds us that we are not going to eradicate these emotions, these things that arise:

”It is a deeply mistaken view if we think we can live without fear and desire arising. They will always arise since they are one of the ways we need to relate to the world and the conditions of our life. But the liberation comes from learning not to cling to them so they can flow through our life like the weather.”⁴

Turning the light within dissolves the clinging. To *see* that we separate the objects of our senses and of the mind is to dissolve the clinging. As Dōgen says in the *Kyōjukaimon*, on the Precept ‘Do Not Steal’: “The mind and its object are one; the gateway to enlightenment stands open wide.”

Notes

1. *Journal of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives*, Autumn 2020, p.5, Rev. Master Jishō Perry.
2. *The Śūrangama Sutra*, with excerpts from the Commentary by the Venerable Master Hsüan Hua, Buddhist Text Translation Society 2009, p. 193.
3. *The Śūrangama Sutra*, with excerpts from the Commentary by the Venerable Master Hsüan Hua, Buddhist Text Translation Society 2009, p. 182.
4. *Journal of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives*, Autumn 2020, p.15, originally published in the May-June 2020 Berkeley Buddhist Priory Newsletter, Rev. Master Kinrei Bassis.

Obituaries

Hōun Meikō

May 16th, 1940—July 27th, 2021

Reverend Master Meikō Jones died on July 27th while on hospice in her room at Shasta Abbey at the age of 81. She was a disciple of Reverend Master Jiyu-Kennett. Rev. Meikō's religious name meant "Bright Peace within the Dharma Cloud." She was ordained in 1984, and received transmission from Rev. Master Jiyu in 1989. Rev. Master Jiyu recognized her as a Teacher of Buddhism in 1991. Rev. Meikō was named a Master in 1999 by Rev. Master Daizui MacPhillamy.



Reverend Meikō was a bright and energetic woman of steadfast determination, hailing originally from Burbank, California, then raising a family, working, and earning a B.A. in Philosophy and Communications at CSU, Sacramento. She became a monk in mid-life, and in her early years at Shasta Abbey served in many capacities, including as sacristan and as a chaplain to the Bear River Meditation Group.

In 1997, Rev. Meikō volunteered for and was appointed as Prior at the Portland Buddhist Priory, a position she held for eighteen years. While there, she ordained Rev. Clairissa Beattie as her monastic disciple; they trained together for ten years. As Prior, Rev. Meikō served a growing congregation, including a joyous collection of Dharma School children and their parents, and a succession of four rescued German Shepherds. With dedication, she persevered in ongoing restoration of the temple's historic building. In particular, she oversaw landscaping, building the Kuan Yin shrine/guest room, and making the meditation hall wheelchair accessible.

Under her leadership, the Portland Priory continued to be a good example of an urban temple. Rev. Meikō maintained a strict monastic schedule for residents, while at the same time providing a refuge for many of her neighbors, who were not necessarily Buddhist. She also instituted a traditional alms round in the Selwood neighborhood, where she was accompanied by monks from other temples and always received a generous response.

In 2015 Rev. Meikō returned to Shasta Abbey, where she again became a pillar of the monastic sangha, serving as sacristan for several years and then in the Bursar's office and filling in to help wherever she was most needed. After a long decline during which she exhibited great patience and fortitude, she died on July 27th. She was a monk for over 37 years. With deep love and appreciation, we offer our gratitude for her life and wise teaching.

—Rev. Master Scholastica & Rev. Master Oswin

Hōun Renée

October 29, 1944—July 12, 2021



Reverend K. L. Hōun Renée Doak, was ordained at age 55. Her monastic name meant “She who is reborn within the Dharma Cloud.” Wholeheartedly, she lived the next 22 years as a monk at Shasta Abbey.

Rev. Renée was born October 29, 1944. Early on she came to know impermanence and the transitory nature of life. Her brother died early in his life. Her father died early in hers. She grew up and spent much of her adult life

in the Springfield, Missouri and Arkansas Ozark Mountains area.

She led a full life, married twice, and gave birth to a daughter. She spent time in the Peace Corps, serving the women of Sana’a in Ethiopia. She enjoyed jewelry making and quilting.

Rev. Renée was deeply attentive to her mother throughout her life, even moving her to Mount Shasta where she moved into the Abrams Lake RV Park near the

monastery. Myrtle became a good friend to the Abbey and was mourned by the community when she died.

Rev. Renée took to the practice of Sōtō Zen and deeply appreciated time at the Abbey as a lay person. For several years – each summer – she would take a Greyhound bus for the nearly 3 day trip from Missouri to the Abbey. She became a lay minister in the late 1990s.

She entered the monastic community as a postulant on April 30, 1999, and was ordained by Rev. Master Ekō Little on September 22 of that same year. She was transmitted on December 21, 2004, and received her Teacher Certification on June 20, 2007. Over her monastic life she served the community as infirmarian, as well as vestiarian.

Rev. Renée was an excellent gardener, creating lovely garden spaces around the Abbey grounds. She loved cats—particular Koko, Yum-Yum, and Katishaw—but was friends to all Abbey cats, most recently Mitra, who had been Rev. Master Meikō’s cat. She was generous in her willingness to take on special projects for the community and maintained a bright spirit in spite of numerous health problems.

With characteristic courage and straightforwardness, Rev. Renée briefly expressed dismay about her declining health, then moved right along to accepting her rapidly changing situation. It was remarkable to see how quickly and graciously she realized the time had come to ask for and accept help. She died peacefully on July 12, 2021. May she be in her own True Home in peace.

–Rev. Helen & Rev. Caitlin

News of the Order

USA & Canada

Shasta Abbey

—Mount Shasta, CA–USA—

Funerals and Memorials: In the summer of 2021 the community focused on the dying and deaths of two of our long-term members, Rev. Master Meikō Jones and Rev. Renée Doak whose obituaries precede this page. We provided hospice care for both monks. Rev. Renée died on 12th July, followed by her cremation on 20th July and her funeral on 31st July. Rev. Master Meikō died on 27th July, followed by her cremation on 3rd August and her funeral on 14th August. We welcomed a number of OBC monks and lay guests for both funerals. Both monks will be sorely missed.

On 22nd July we offered a second-year memorial for Richard Markley, a long-time friend of the monastery. He had been a member of the Fresno Meditation Group and frequently helped us with translation work. His wife Yasuko and two friends attended the ceremony. Rev. Master Andō was celebrant.

On 21st August we held a memorial tea with Eileen Burke-Trent in memory of her late husband Roger. He had been a long-time supporter of the monastery and a founder and active member of the Chico Meditation Group. Afterwards, we installed his ashes in a beautiful turquoise urn in the Avalokiteshwara Shrine.

Other News: On 11th August we welcomed a short visit by Henry and two assistants from San Jose to make offerings on behalf of Vietnamese donors in their area. Their annual summer visits had been circumscribed by Covid restrictions, but the donors wanted to offer food and toiletries gifts anyway.

(photo below). We are very grateful for their great generosity over the years.



On 17th August we hosted an overnight visit from eight male and female monks from the San Francisco and Los Angeles Dharma Drum Mountain temples. Being monastics from the Chan tradition, they participated in our meditation sittings and services and enjoyed a couple of lively discussions with Abbey senior monks after an extensive tour of the monastery. They were eager to learn how we are offering the Dharma to Westerners.

As the summer ended, we sadly said farewell to Rev. Caitlin Clark, of Great Ocean Dharma Refuge in Wales, who had been visiting for the last year and a half. She was of immense help in all the monastic offices in which she served, and we appreciated her bright willingness and companionship in community life.

—*Rev. Master Oswin with Rev. Master Andō*

Still Flowing Water Hermitage

—*Meadow Vista, CA–USA*—

At the end of May Corrinne Allyson, a lay Sangha member in Victoria, British Columbia who had been part of Rev. Master Meiten's meditation group, asked Rev. Vivian to come to be with her for the final days of her life and to be celebrant for her funeral. It took two weeks of intensive paperwork to secure a 'compassion waiver' in order to be able to enter Canada in these times of Covid. It was an honor and a privilege to be with Corrinne in her last days, to help and support in any way that arose, to join in with the small community surrounding her during this most important of life's events, and to perform funeral rites when the time came. Rev. Vivian returned to the US at the end of June.

Since then she has traveled twice to Shasta Abbey, once for Rev. Renée's funeral, Rev. Master Meikō's cremation, and a 49-day memorial for Corrinne, and once for Rev. Master Meikō's funeral. She feels fortunate to live close enough to do this, and is grateful for the hospitality of the monks there, and all they did to offer the ceremonies.

Rev. Vivian is hoping to remain at her home temple for some time now while she searches in earnest for a new location for Still Flowing Water Hermitage, needed by next April. Sadly, because of the current serious surge in Covid cases here, the Bear River Meditation Group has made the decision to return to Zoom meetings only, eliminating the in-person option. We will monitor the situation closely and return to in-person gatherings as soon as it seems safe. Rev. Vivian remains infinitely grateful for all the support in all its forms that the Hermitage has received, especially in the form of the training and practice we all do together.

—*Rev. Vivian*

Wallowa Buddhist Temple

—Joseph, Oregon –USA—

We are grateful that our mountain weather is bringing cooler temperatures and clearer air, after a summer of extreme heat and unhealthy smoke haze from regional wildfires. Our main ongoing project in the temple forest is to remove dead lower branches from the trees and otherwise reduce fuel for fire safety. Living as we do in a region unused to the recent higher temperatures, the thoughtful donation of two air conditioners kept indoor temperatures bearable during the hottest periods. Fortunately the nearest wildfires were quickly gotten under control.

The temple remains open for individual visits, emails, and phone calls, of which there are many on a daily basis. We continue to offer a weekly email with attached audio Dharma talk from Rev. Clairissa, for independent home listening during our suggested Sunday Morning Retreat schedule or as desired. As we are unable to hold online video meetings due to limited internet service, we are glad that listeners continue to join our email list both locally and from afar, and that people are finding it helpful to be in touch on a one-to-one basis to explore many aspects of the Dharma and practice in the midst of all conditions.

Each Sunday morning, we offer merit for all those on our transfer-of-merit board in the temple's Kanzeon shrine, reading aloud the names of those who receive our weekly offering of recorded Dharma. Because of the surge in Covid infections in our county and state, the temple is not yet resuming group activities, nor hosting overnight retreat guests for now.

It was a joy in late July to receive a visit from the monks of Pine Mountain Buddhist Temple, Rev. Masters Seikai and Phoebe, whom we had not seen for some years.

In mid-August, Rev. Clairissa travelled to Shasta Abbey, where she spent three days with the monastic community there on

the occasion of Rev. Master Meikō's monastic funeral ceremony. It was good to be together with the abbey monks, to see a number of other order monks and congregation who had also gathered for the event, and to pay respects on behalf of both of us to Rev. Meikō, who was Rev. Meidō's Dharma sister and who ordained Rev. Clairissa to the monastic Sangha twenty years ago.

Our gratitude abounds for the continued support of kind friends from all quarters, and for the abundance of homegrown garden produce of all sorts from our local friends. Most recently, we have enjoyed making our seasonal favorite zucchini soup (courgette to those in the U.K.), sharing some with neighbors and congregation.



—Rev. Master Meidō and Rev. Clairissa

Eugene Buddhist Priory

—Eugene, Oregon—USA—

On Sunday, June 13th, the congregation, Rev. Master Oriana and Rev. Master Hugh gathered in person, outside, for the first time since the Covid pandemic began to celebrate the Festival of Wesak. Following Rev. Oriana's Dharma talk she officially stepped down from her nine years as the prior and Rev. Hugh stepped in as the new prior. The congregation expressed their deep gratitude for Rev. Oriana's years of service and teaching and welcomed Rev. Hugh.

Towards the end of June, the state of Oregon stopped the mask mandate and allowed people to gather in public places phasing in to a degree of normalcy. The priory cautiously opened its doors to in-person gatherings with small numbers of congregation coming on Sunday mornings. Since it didn't seem prudent to have our entire congregation gathering indoors we started doing hybrid in-person/zoom meetings. Unfortunately, this brief move towards normalcy was short-lived and with the new Covid variant we are once again required to wear masks when gathering at the priory. So, we continue with predominantly a zoom meeting format and wait to see how things continue to unfold. Anyone wishing to join the Eugene Priory zoom meetings is most welcome to get in touch.

During this time Rev. Hugh continues to settle in and get used to his new role. In addition to regular contact with the congregation, with his previous background as the Buddhist Chaplain at Newcastle University in the UK, he is reaching out to the local universities and community colleges, as well as the greater Eugene city area.

The Eugene Priory is located on 4.5 acres of beautiful forested land. With the clear signs of climate change in the area, various ways are being looked at to manage the land and vegetation. Various invasive species of trees and shrubs need to

be cleared to maintain the health of the native forest ecosystem, as well as thinning out older trees that have died due to increasing dryness.

Rev. Hugh has already cut down about 30 larger dead fir trees and many of them will be milled into lumber by a local portable bandsaw mill company. As longer term projects we are looking at building a garage for the priory car and relocating our firewood storage shed.

—*Rev. Master Hugh*

Redding Zen Buddhist Priory

—*Redding, CA–USA*—

In spite of significant challenges from fires, smoke, and Covid, Redding Zen Priory continued to offer the Dharma via Zoom to the extended Sangha through Sunday ceremonies and Dharma Talks, evening classes, and Saturday retreats, as well as spiritual counseling and Dharma conversations.

Rev. Helen, with several Sangha members, attended the funerals of Rev. Master Meikō Jones and Rev. Renée Doak at Shasta Abbey. We all appreciated the opportunity to say good-bye to our dear friends, as well as having tea in person with monks and lay friends after the ceremonies.



The photo here shows the view from the Priory porch during the summer when many wildfires were burning in California.

—*Rev. Helen*

Lions Gate Buddhist Priory

—*Lytton, British Columbia–Canada*—

As many people have heard, a catastrophic fire tore through our small village of Lytton on June 30, 2021. It followed several days of extreme, unprecedented heat, with temperatures on the day of the fire reaching 49.6 C (121 F). The fire was intense, hot, fast, and devastating. In 26 minutes, most of the town of Lytton was completely destroyed. Two people died, and it is considered a miracle that there were not more deaths. People fled with the clothes on their backs and most people were left with nothing.

The fire quickly spread across the Thompson River and into our own Botanie Valley. Reverend Master Kōten and Reverend Aurelian were in Hope, BC, south of Lytton, staying in an air-conditioned motel that someone had generously offered. Reverend Valeria had left earlier for the USA on a family visit. John, our resident lay person, evacuated north to Lillooet with our two dogs and cat. The monks went to Chilliwack, a small city south of Hope, where an evacuation centre was established. Emergency Services provided us with hotel rooms and meals. The three of us found ourselves sometimes together, sometimes apart, in Chilliwack, the Vancouver area, and finally all of us back in Lillooet, where congregation members generously opened their house to us while they were away for the summer. We only moved back on August 25 after some heavy rains and cooler temperatures, which lessened the fire danger throughout the province.

During this time, we had two medical issues to deal with, one animal and one human. A growth on our dog Lewis's back required surgery, medication, and a period of convalescence. Later, Rev. Aurelian experienced a TIA (transient ischemic attack,

a mini-stroke), which required an emergency airlift to Vancouver. (The symptoms quickly resolved and he is fine now).

It is very good to be back. Everything feels safe and peaceful now. We are deeply grateful for all the support and merit we have received both from government agencies and from the Sangha. Over the next few weeks, we will assess our new situation. All the amenities, including medical services, post office, grocery store, etc, that we depended on in the Village of Lytton are gone; and it will take us some time to adjust.

Because of the loss of postal services in Lytton, our new mailing address is: PO Box 128, Lillooet, BC V0K 1V0. **Please note: We can only receive packages addressed to our post office box; there is no possibility of door-to-door delivery.** Our phone number remains the same.

—*Rev. Master Aurelian*

News of the Order

UK and Europe

Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey

—Northumberland, England—UK—

Thanks to the easing of covid restrictions we were able to open our doors for residential retreats again in August. We held a weekend retreat and a week-long sesshin, each one attended by a small group of lay trainees, all of whom followed the careful bio-security measures which the guest department had devised. This meant that everyone, including the community, was able to have a safe and rewarding retreat.

Preparations are currently being made for a somewhat scaled-down Jukai, which we anticipate will enable a number of lay trainees to take lay ordination, and to enjoy some of the other ceremonies which are traditionally part of that retreat.

We have resumed offering meditation instruction for individuals or family groups, since day-visits by lay trainees again became possible. And our Tuesday classes have continued, taking place once again in our marquee, rather than online. Our hope is that into the cooler Autumn months, these talks can revert to being held in the lay common room.

In July we held memorial ceremonies for the two Shasta Abbey monks who died. We chanted scriptures and made offerings of incense and food in remembrance of Rev. Master Meikō and Rev. Master Renée. They were both well-known to many of us, and fondly remembered. We also marked the first anniversary of the death of a dear Dharma sister Rev. Master

Myfanwy on July 1st with a dedication at morning service. The photo below shows the memorial for Rev. Master Meikō.



We have continued to hold our monthly festival ceremonies, posting photos and audio recordings soon afterwards on our blog. In recent months we have celebrated the lives and teaching of Great Master Bodhidharma and the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshwara.

Several building maintenance projects have been completed over the summer. Our fire alarm system was upgraded such that every building in the temple now has a smoke detector. We are grateful to the company who carried out the work which was quite difficult as it involved operating in tight attic spaces. They also willingly complied with our request to wear face coverings whilst indoors. The monks did likewise when walking through the areas in which the technicians were present. Also some local joiners built a new storage shed for the sacristy's use, replacing the old one which had served us well for over twenty-five years.

The monks have enjoyed several community work days over the summer during which we cleared thistles and ragwort from our fields. This is a routine task, the bulk of which is usually performed by lay retreat guests. Their absence this year has

enabled the community to have the pleasure of working together in a way we don't often have the opportunity to.

—*Rev. Master Roland*

Norwich Zen Buddhist Priory

—*Norwich, England-UK*—

Settling into the new Priory: The process of settling into the new Priory continues to go well, although there has been much work needed, in order to get done all the repairs and improvements required on the property. During August, the electricians did their work throughout the house, while the roofer carried out various tasks, including replacing the flat roof. The Japanese knotweed found on the property has been given the first of several treatments that will be required over the next few years. Besides these major projects, there are various ongoing DIY and maintenance jobs that we have been addressing. One of these jobs that has been completed beautifully is the founder's shrine in the meditation room.

The garden group continues to meet every Tuesday afternoon and the result of their great work is now showing in a variety of colourful flowers that have sprung up. There is an opportunity for people to make donations specifically for improving the garden or contributing towards any large purchases that the Priory may require, through the Gratitude Fund. Donations can be made to the Priory's bank account giving 'Gratitude Fund' as the reference. For the time being, donations to this fund will go towards buying some rose bushes and other plants for the garden.

Attending the Priory: The life of the Priory has continued, despite all the work that is going on to improve the functioning of the building. It has been quite wonderful to be able to welcome people to meditate and join events in person.



Now that lockdown restrictions have been lifted, people can come along to the Priory to attend meetings. However, due to the high level of coronavirus infections still prevalent, a limit of six people at a time is being kept on events, so anyone wishing to attend is asked to check in advance. We continue to share our meetings via Zoom, so that all events can be accessed either in person or online, and the plan is that this will go on indefinitely.

Recent visitors: It has been a great pleasure to have several monks visit the Priory from Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey during the summer. Rev. Kōjō and Rev. Sanshin had a short stay in June and Rev. Master Daishin (with his dog, Meg) visited for a couple of hours. In July, Rev. Alina stayed for a few days and Rev. Master Leandra came by for lunch, while in August, Rev. Lambert dropped by on his way back to Throssel. It has been lovely to have their company and to show them the Priory and experience their positive reaction to what is unfolding here.

Summer Party: It was wonderful to hold a Summer Party again this year, having had to forego it in 2020 due to the pandemic. The party took place in the glorious garden of a Sangha member in North Norfolk. On a pleasantly warm afternoon, we enjoyed the tranquil setting, each other's company and a delicious bring-and-share lunch. This was the largest gathering of the

Sangha after many months of lockdown and so it was particularly valued.



Thanks: I am very grateful to everyone who continues to support the Priory in all sorts of ways, especially with the ongoing work of keeping the house and garden functioning and well-maintained.

—*Rev. Master Leoma*

Great Ocean Dharma Refuge

—*Pembrokeshire–Wales—*

Fond remembrance, gratitude and prayers were extended to old monastic friends Reverend Master Meikō and Reverend Renée who recently passed away at Shasta Abbey within the tender care of the community there. How precious are all our Dharma connections!

After many months of formal lockdowns during the pandemic, the ease on restrictions has brought a small, steady stream of retreatants and guests both lay and monastic to Great

Ocean once more. Even though we have been able to keep in touch in other ways, it is a joy to carefully resume this important aspect of Temple life.



Gratitude is given to Judy Moore and Eric Jones, who were of consistent and kind support to Rev. Master Mokugen and the temple during the isolation and inability to travel in the lock down periods and many thanks are offered to the kind neighbours who were able to help with travel to necessary medical appointments etc.

The Carmarthen meditation group has formally closed recently with Eric's long planned move to North Wales. We thank Eric for his many years of service to the members of the group and new inquirers, and wish him happiness in his new home and location.

In September Reverend Caitlin is expected back from her extended and fruitful stay at Shasta Abbey, and we look forward to her return.

In August Rev. Master Mokugen was able to pay a visit to Rev. Master Myōhō at The Place of Peace, and it was a great joy

to be able to meet up once more and see our dear Dharma friend in her beautiful Temple there.

In common with many folks, here at Great Ocean we make efforts to help protect and nurture the flora and fauna of our 'patch' as best we are able, and this covid period has been an excellent opportunity for this. Thanks go to Dave Hurcombe and Aylwin Nissen for offering plants to beautify the Temple grounds. A healthy population of hedgehogs comes regularly to feed at the back door, and with good advice from various conservation experts we have special nest boxes to help the martin population, and a special nest box has been put up in the garage for the annually returning swallows. Many thanks go to Chris Barker for making a splendid home for the swallows which was taken up in the first season! The Refuge of the Dharma certainly extends to all beings!



As usual, we welcome and invite guests both lay and monastic to phone or write if they would like to join us for some retreat time, and we thank all those who help and support the work of Great Ocean.

—Rev. Master Mokugen

The Place of Peace Dharma House

—*Abersytwyth, Wales*—

Over the summer, life here has continued at a steady pace. One or two locals have been in, but, as our Sangha are spread far and wide, contact is still mostly via Zoom, telephone and email, which has gone well. The influx of tourists to Abersytwyth has caused a sharp increase in Covid cases, so everyone is being cautious.

In July, Reverend Renée Doak and Reverend Master Meikō Jones, two of the senior monks at Shasta Abbey, died. Rev. Master Myōhō knew them both well. Ceremonies were offered in gratitude for their training, and there was a meditation vigil. This was not a time of grief, but of quiet reflective stillness, when the merit of their lives flowed out and blessed this little temple.

In August we had the pleasure of a visit from Reverend Master Mokugen. This offered a welcome time of Sangha Refuge with a dear friend.

A new altar was set up in the entrance way, a picture of which can be seen at the front of the Journal. Step by step, enhancements are made to the temple.

Thank you to everyone who continues to make offerings to The Place of Peace, be it their time and experience, or financial donations. Our lives touch each other's in many different ways.

—*Rev. Master Myōhō*

Reading Buddhist Priory

—*Reading, England-UK*—

The Priory has maintained a regular round of calendar events, mainly online but with some limited in-person attendance once partial easing of Covid restrictions allowed this to happen.

In late July, restrictions in England were lifted and the Priory doors were finally fully opened to all to wish to visit, although the plan is to trial a hybrid of in-person and online attendance for meditation and group meetings, to see if this is a viable way forward in the long term. Introductory sessions on a monthly basis have resumed with in person attendance.

Reverend Gareth, with some help from sangha members, has moved forward with projects relating to the property. The frontage is developing nicely, with planting established, seeded grass growing, and small areas of rockery being developed to complement the main rockery that hosts statues of Kanzeon and two temple lion dogs. The loft has been cleared in readiness for supplementary insulation, and external repairs to the roof have been carried out by a local firm.

Recently, Reverend Gareth was invited to attend online meetings of SACRE (Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education), the local council's initiative on teaching religion in local schools. There is no national curriculum for this subject, and Reverend Gareth is there as the Buddhist advisor to this inter-faith advisory group.

—Gina Bovan

Turning Wheel Buddhist Temple

—East Midlands—UK—

Welcoming visitors back to the temple: After being closed for nearly eighteen months, we will be welcoming visitors back to the temple from the start of September. However, we will be starting off cautiously, with events being initially just for existing Lay Sangha members whilst cases of coronavirus remain quite high.

For now we will have a limit of four people per event, and existing Lay Sangha members can book in advance by email, text or phone. If we reach the limit of four, we will give preference initially to people who haven't been able to join via zoom, and for weekend visits to people from outside Leicester. All of the events will still be accessible via zoom as before.

We look forward to welcoming visitors to the temple again after such a long break.

Redecorating our main rooms following the building work: We are very pleased that the redecoration of our Meditation Hall is now complete, and a picture showing the room before and after all of the building work and redecoration is shown below.



You can see that the doorway to the kitchen on the left-hand side has been blocked up, and the patio doors in the right-hand corner have been converted to a window, with an additional radiator in front of it. We have also changed the direction of the

stairs, which no longer go up from the back of the hall. All of these changes have made a big difference to the feel of the Meditation Hall, as we now don't need to go through it in order to get to other rooms.

We had temporarily been using the Common Room for meditation and ceremonies, but now that the Meditation Hall is in use again we have been able to set up the Common Room properly for Dharma talks and meetings. We have recently been donated some very nice chairs which we are now using in the Common Room; they are the blue and gold ones and purple ones in the picture below.



Once our Meditation Hall and Common Room had been completed, the only other room which is used for all events, and was still in need of decoration, was the new entryway which leads to these rooms. This has been completed over the last few weeks, and the next picture shows the entryway before and after the redecoration.



The new entry way is probably five times the size of the space we had before the building work was done, which will make things a lot easier for everyone when people are arriving and departing. Unfortunately we don't have the carpet for the entrance yet, due to delays with the supplier, but we hope it won't be long before it is fitted. In the meantime we have plenty of mats and rugs that we can put down to cover the area.

It's very nice to be able to get the temple's rooms back functioning again after all of the disruption of the building work, and we look forward to welcoming visitors to the temple again over the coming months.

—Rev. Master Aiden

Dharmazuflucht Schwarzwald

—*Gutach (Black Forest) – Germany*—

The current situation at the temple: We have been having guests staying at the temple for various lengths of time over the summer. It's a joy to have congregation members being here on retreat more regularly again. Earlier in the year we were mostly reducing the number of guests to one person at any one time. In more recent months we were again able to have three guests at any one time, all having been fully vaccinated against Corona. We are planning to have a week-long Segaki retreat towards the end of October.



Main Altar, Dharmazuflucht

We are still keeping to the basic safety and hygiene Corona measures when we have guests here. Over most of the summer we kept the windows open in the meditation hall, both for meditation and for the services. As the weather gets colder, we will start using

again our air purifier in the meditation hall. In the common room, the kitchen and the whole of the downstairs area, we keep wearing face masks when guests are in the temple.

Online Dharma meetings: Since last year, we have been offering online Dharma meetings once a month for those in our congregation who wish to participate. They generally consist of a meditation period to start with, followed by a Dharma talk and a discussion. Rev. Clementia and I alternate with giving the Dharma talks. Given the positive feedback we have been getting, we will be continuing with these monthly meetings. They have added a whole new dimension for us and the German lay Sangha. Thanks to these Zoom meetings, some lay trainees who had never been to the temple have now started to come also in person.



Outside Altar, Dharmazuflucht

Weekly online meditations: In addition to these Dharma meetings, lay minister Ute has started some time back, together with lay minister Irene, to also have an online meditation evening once a week, which generally also includes some social

interchange. These meetings too seem to be quite popular with those who are participating in them.

German Dharma talks on our website: For some time now, we have been putting some of the Dharma talks given during the online meetings on the “Dharma” page of our website www.dharmazuflucht.info. We keep updating the list, and Elmar very generously helps us with this.

—*Rev. Master Fuden*

De Dharmatoevlucht

—*Apeldoorn, The Netherlands*—

New website: Sandra, our postulant, has built a completely new website for the temple. She has also built new websites for the Utrecht Meditation group and Wolk-en-Water Hermitage and used the same website layout so that the three websites together express the unity within the Dutch Sangha. The website address has stayed the same: <http://www.dharmatoevlucht.nl/>

Wednesday evening live stream meditations: Since the beginning of the corona crisis last year we have been live streaming the Sunday morning meditations as well as the Wednesday evening meditations (the first sittings) on [De Dharmatoevlucht YouTube channel](#). Each of them starts with a short Dharma talk of 5 to 10 minutes, given by Rev. Baldwin. From the beginning of September we will be live streaming the Wednesday evening meditations with a short Dharma talk in English to give the wider Sangha an opportunity to join in with the sitting. The live stream starts every Wednesday at 7:30pm Dutch time and lasts for 30 minutes. The videos can also be used when sitting at a later date or time.

—*Rev. Master Baldwin*

Wolk-en-Water Hermitage

—Langelille, Netherlands—

In May, Cloud and Water Hermitage has resumed most Dharma-activities that were offered before the pandemic: evening meditation, day retreats, weekend retreats and so on. All this finds place in the spacious meditation hall where we can keep 1½ metres distance.

The Zoom meditations, also the international ones, are continuing as well. Topics for the coming season will be: *Tao-verses*, *The Most Excellent Mirror—Samādhi* and Zen Master Dōgen’s *Uji*.

We are glad that the water damage of this winter has been repaired and the hall has been repainted. The photo below shows the two cherry trees that have been planted to offer shade in the hall. They were a gift of the lay-sangha when the hall was newly opened a few years ago.



—Rev. Master Hakuun

TEMPLES OF THE ORDER—USA / CANADA

Shasta Abbey

Rev. Master Meian Elbert, Abbess
3724 Summit Drive
Mt. Shasta, CA 96067-9102
Ph: (530) 926-4208 [Fax: -0428]
prior@berkeleybuddhistpriory.org
www.shastaabbey.org

Berkeley Buddhist Priory

Rev. Master Kinrei Bassis
1358 Marin Ave.
Albany, CA 94706
Ph: (510) 528-1876 [Fax: -2139]
prior@berkeleybuddhistpriory.org
www.berkeleybuddhistpriory.org

Columbia Zen Buddhist Priory

Rev. Master Rokuzan Kroenke
426 Arrowwood Road
Columbia, SC 29210-7508
Ph: (803)772-7552
www.columbiazen.org

Eugene Buddhist Priory

Rev. Master Hugh Gould
85415 Teague Loop
Eugene, OR 97405-9536
Ph: (541) 344-7377
info@eugenebuddhistpriory.org
www.eugenebuddhistpriory.org

Idaho Panhandle area and Sandpoint Meditation Group

Rev. Master Zensho Roberson
P. O. Box 74
Saint Maries, ID 83861
Ph: (208) 245-4950
RevZenshoR@gmail.com

Pine Mountain Buddhist Temple

Rev. Master Phoebe van Woerden
941 Lockwood Valley Road
Maricopa, CA 93252
Ph: (805) 633 1143
pmbt@pinemtnbuddhisttemple.org
www.pinemtnbuddhisttemple.org

Portland Buddhist Priory

Rev. Master Leon Kackman
3642 SE Milwaukie Avenue
Portland, OR 97202
Ph: (503) 238-1123
prior1@portlandbuddhistpriory.org
www.portlandbuddhistpriory.org

Redding Zen Buddhist Priory

Rev. Helen Cummings
1190 South Street,
Redding CA 96001
www.reddingzen.org/
Ph: (530) 962-0317
reddingzen@gmail.com

Still Flowing Water Hermitage

Rev. Vivian Gruenenfelder
PO Box 1374, Meadow Vista,
CA 95722-1374
stillflowingwaterhermitage@gmail.com

Wallowa Buddhist Temple

Rev. Master Meidō Tuttle
62916 Hurricane Creek Road
Joseph, OR 97846
Ph: (541) 432-6129
temple@wallowabuddhisttemple.org
www.wallowabuddhisttemple.org

CANADA

Lions Gate Buddhist Priory

Rev. Master Kōten Benson
P. O. Box 128
Lillooet, BC V0K 1V0
Ph: 250-999-3911
lionsgatebuddhistpriory@gmail.com
www.lionsgatebuddhistpriory.ca

Affiliated Meditation Groups

CA: Auburn, Chico, Morro Bay,
Ventura

ID: Sandpoint

MT: Whitefish

CANADA:

Edmonton, Alberta, Lytton BC
Vancouver BC

TEMPLES OF THE ORDER—EUROPE

UK

Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey
Rev. Master Leandra Robertshaw,
Abbot
Carrshield, HEXHAM
Northumberland NE47 8AL
Ph: 01434 345 204
gd@throssel.org.uk
www.throssel.org.uk

Dragon Bell Temple
Rev. Master Willard Lee
Cross Farm
Drewsteignton
DEVON
EX6 6PA
Phone: 07342 200 782

Great Ocean Dharma Refuge
Rev. Master Mokugen Kublicki
Penwern
Felindre Farchog
CRYMYCH, Pembrokeshire
SA41 3XF
Ph: 01239 891 360

Norwich Zen Buddhist Priory
Rev. Master Leoma Hague
NORWICH,
Ph: 01603 219464
info@norwichzen.org.uk
www.norwichzen.org.uk

The Place of Peace Dharma House
Rev. Master Myōhō Harris
P. O. Box 207
ABERYSTWYTH
SY23 1WY
Ph: 01970 625402
www.placeofpeacewales.org.uk

Portobello Buddhist Priory
Rev. Master Favian Straughan
27 Brighton Place, Portobello
EDINBURGH EH15 1LL
Ph: 0131 669 9622
favian.straughan@homecall.co.uk
www.portobellobuddhist.org.uk

Reading Buddhist Priory
Rev. Gareth Milliken
176 Cressingham Road
READING RG2 7LW
Ph: 0118 986 0750
rppriory@yahoo.co.uk
www.readingbuddhistpriory.org.uk

Rochdale Zen Retreat
Rev. Master Peter Bonati
The Briars, Grange Lane
Hutton
PRESTON
PR4 5JE
Ph: 01772 612 112

Sitting Buddha Hermitage
Rev. Master Alicia Rowe
CROMFORD
Derbyshire
Ph: 01629 821813.
alicia@fieldofmerit.org
www.sittingbuddhaheritage.fieldofmerit.org

Telford Buddhist Priory
49 The Rock
TELFORD TF3 5BH
Ph/Fax: 01952 615 574
www.tbpriory.org.uk

Turning Wheel Buddhist Temple
Rev. Master Aiden Hall
7 Chadderton Close
West Knighton
LEICESTER
LE2 6GZ
Ph. 0116 210 3870
www.turningwheel.org.uk

Affiliated Meditation Groups:
UK: Aberdeen, Aberfeldy,
Birmingham, Cambridge,
Cirencester, Cornwall, Dundee,
Galloway, Hexham, Huddersfield,
Inverness, Jersey, Lancaster, Leeds,
Leicester, London, Milton Keynes,
Newcastle-upon-Tyne, North
Lakes, Nottingham, Sheffield,
Teesside

GERMANY

Dharmazuflucht Schwarzwald

Rev. Master Fuden Nessi
Wonnenbach 4
77793 GUTACH
Germany
Ph. +49 (0)7833 - 96 56 408
www.dharmazuflucht.info

LATVIA

Sōtō Zen Riga

Rev. Bridin Rusins
Sōtō Zen Riga
Tomsona Street 30-8
Riga LV1013
Latvia
Ph: 1-215-666-5634 (direct line as if in US)
Ph: 011-371-259-563-40. (Latvia)
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

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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