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Garuda Bird Statue at Lions Gate Buddhist Priory

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Persimmon

Rev. Master Jishō Perry

— *Shasta Abbey, CA - USA* —

When I first moved to Santa Barbara my neighbor gave me my first persimmon. I had not eaten one before. The first one I tried was bitterly astringent. I learned to wait for the fruit to ripen fully. I became a big fan of this fruit.

My neighbor came to learn meditation. When she moved to San Francisco, she was kind enough to rent us her house that was bigger than the little duplex I rented next door. It came with a beautifully mature persimmon tree. The tree was abundant. I was happy to share the bounty. Many people wanted me to share it with them. I was able to send or bring boxes of persimmons to Shasta Abbey every fall.

When I eventually moved back to Shasta Abbey, one of the things I missed most about Santa Barbara, besides the people, was the generous and wonderful persimmon tree. The Abbey had a lot of fruit trees, but no persimmons. One year I got permission to get a persimmon tree to plant at Shasta Abbey. The local nurseries did not stock them, but one was able to order me one. I planted it joyfully. I later

learned that it takes eight years before it would bloom. One of the tree-loving monks came up to me this spring with the joyful news of buds blooming on the persimmon tree.

I read an article this spring about a Japanese man who came to Hawaii in the early part of the 20th Century. After he worked in the rubber trees he earned enough to buy ten acres, sight unseen on the side of a volcano. He planted one half of his ten acres in persimmon trees. They have supported his family for over a hundred years. In an article about his farm the writer referred in passing, to the “spiritual meaning” of persimmons. It struck a chord with me. I started to sit with the idea of the spiritual meaning of both the tree and its fruit. The tree requires patience before it produces fruit and the tree takes inedibly astringent fruit and transforms it into exquisitely sweet food. It is like Great Master Keizan. He got fed up with his temper, which he transformed into Compassion through his Buddhist training. The second Bodhisattva vow is: *However inexhaustible the passions may be, I vow to transform them all.* This is the transformation the persimmon manages to make with its fruit and with patience.

Generosity and patience are a necessary part of the process. In order to get the nourishment from the fruit, we have to wait for it to fully ripen. As with our training, the blossoming of our meditation requires years of practice even after understanding manifests. Some believe that our training

just begins when the first kenshō opens the heart. And *The Scripture of Great Wisdom* suggests that there is no end to the training process: “going, going, going on beyond, and always going on beyond, – always BECOMING Buddha. Hail! Hail! Hail!”¹ Even the trees become Buddhas when we see how we are not separate from them.

A village grown old
not a single house
without a persimmon tree.²

Basshō’s haiku reminds us that spiritual maturity comes with time and age. Dōgen says,

Within these Precepts dwell the Buddhas, enfolding all things within their unparalleled wisdom: there is no subject or object for any who dwell herein. All things, earth, trees, wooden posts, bricks, stones become Buddhas once this refuge is taken. From these Precepts come forth such a wind and fire that all are driven into enlightenment when the flames are fanned by the Buddha’s influence: this is the merit of non-action and non-seeking: the awakening to True Wisdom.³

Trees can be seen as a symbol for generosity, frequently producing more fruit than a single family can consume in one season. Persimmons require patience in

becoming mature enough to welcome their first bloom and in allowing the fruit to fully ripen, transforming the astringency into delicious sweetness. Transforming our old karma is a major part of the training process. We have much to learn here.

Trees are of course enormously generous in many ways, not just with fruit. Also, they are willing to give selflessly. Many of the things trees offer us can be appreciated only by killing them, however trees give many things simply by existing.

Notes

1. *The Liturgy of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives for the Laity* 1990 copyright P.T.N.H. Jiyu-Kennett, Shasta Abbey Press, Mt. Shasta CA 96067, p. 74.
2. Bashō, Matsuo, unknown source.
3. *Shushōgi* in Rev. Master P.T.N.H. Jiyu-Kennett, *Zen is Eternal Life*, 4th ed., rev. (Mount Shasta, California: Shasta Abbey Press, 1999) pp. 98-99.

A Prayer of Silent Illumination

Rev. Master Mokugen Kublicki

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

A prayer of silent illumination: we start with the pure intent of the heart.

It is a wondrous mystery that this pure heart and intent exists within us and all beings. It exists at this very moment—not in some far-off land, some far-off place, some far-off kalpa—but here and now. By grace and mystery, the true heart beats within us and within all beings, whether we are in the midst of joy or in the midst of suffering.

With both confidence and humility, we can turn the stream of compassion within to the unchanging source—to silent illumination.

In Japanese there is a word: moku, sometimes translated as ‘silence’. This moku is not a dead, lifeless silence—nor a dead, lifeless vacuum. This ‘silence’, this silent illumination, is the still vibrant heart of the Unborn

from whence everything emerges, and to which everything returns. Here radiates eternally illuminating, inherently purifying and clarifying, bright Truth.

The symbolic black of a robe, which young monastics first receive, may appear lifeless and dull. Yet black is made up of colours which can stream a rainbow. Dark black is also the fabric of light! Just so, however things appear, we always have the bright potential of First Mind — the widest and most completely fathomless beating heart of the Unborn.

A starling against the sky may have the appearance of a black shadow but, looking closer, its simple body glistens with rainbow colours and vibrant drops of life. It is enough that it is a starling in the wide sky in the palm and fabric of the Unborn. It is enough to fly that sky, to know the Unborn, to know the Mind that seeks the Way: first mind, last mind, forever mind, forever Buddha.

The prayer of silent illumination: what draws us to this mystery? Yet Its call is to rest in ever-present, true, bright nature. To expect nothing, to seek nothing, to grasp nothing.

The heartfelt prayer of silent illumination rises in our being—whether clouds, emotions fly in the winds of the mind—bodhicitta, the mind that seeks the way is

unchanging, luminous and gathers no trace. Where indeed can dust alight?

The prayer of silent illumination: a prayer of no words, the prayer of a full heart. We lift our eyes in the faith of the offering of an open heart. Burdens can be laid down, fears allowed to pass, and worries can dissolve in their inherent impermanence.

The grace and prayer of silent illumination resonates and is heard: we can entrust all to the All.

The prayer of silent illumination: —expecting nothing, seeking nothing, grasping nothing—just opening the hand and heart we find then that no thing is lacking and no thing can be held onto in a tight grip.

The prayer of silent illumination: when, in letting go, we find that we do have all that we need, and all that we seek is in our palms and heart. All that we attempt to fix and grasp simply dissolves.

The prayer of silent illumination: where, in opening the heart, we find the fullness of Great Compassion, Great Love, Great Wisdom.

The prayer of silent illumination: where radiates the jewelled luminescence of eternal gratitude, eternal bowing, Eternal Life.

May the prayer of Silent Illumination guide and enrich our day, our night, our stillness, our activities, our comings, our goings. Our life, our death: the Light of Buddha increasing in brilliance and the Wheel of the Dharma always turning.

May we rest there with gratitude eternally.

“In the sapphire of the night
ahead the road is dim,
yet Thy bright light
calls to rest within
ever luminescent Truth”

Going Beyond Self and Other

Rev. Master Favian Straughan

— *Portobello Buddhist Priory, Edinburgh - UK* —

Perhaps we could be forgiven for assuming that a defining characteristic of the human race is its ability to generate conflict around notions of group identity. The other day, I read about experiments using everything from ethnic, political, religious and gender typing to the flip of a coin to divide people into groups, promoting loyalty to that group and a willingness to view others as outsiders and therefore potentially hostile. I have found for myself how easily I slip into an us-or-them mentality when I am watching the news, for example, sure in the knowledge of who the good and the bad are and, of course, of the camp to which I belong.

Buddhism asks us to question the belief that our primary identity is a separate, permanent self, and points to the resulting suffering engendered by that view when situations and encounters in life are viewed as a series of threats and obstacles to be wrestled with and overcome. Buddhism suggests that there is another way of being, which involves a profounder human experience in which the sense of separation dissolves for a while, to be replaced by a deep empathy, rooted in the universals of shared joys, hopes and griefs. Others are in actuality our kith and kin by any

definition that goes deeper than a surface look. The more that we let go and open up to that compassionate response, the more the connectedness of life becomes our authentic experience. It is as though we have discovered a capacity to expand the circle of our identity beyond self, family, clan and nation to a sense of our oneness with life itself, and we find that this is where our loyalty and allegiance finally lie.

To approach this way of being must take courage, because it no doubt goes against strong conditioned tendencies to keep that circle small, tight and well defended. First, we need to wake up to the inner patterns that tend towards that response. That is a risky business, because we are not now simply relying on old categories of thought and feeling to tell us what the reality of this moment is presenting us with. But if we persist in being open and present, risking vulnerability, we have an opportunity truly to meet the situation, and then, through our deep connection, to make wise and compassionate responses.

We may find ourselves despairing of our human condition at times, when we witness the news stories of the conflict and pain we inflict upon one another. But getting off the bus today, an elderly woman slipped and fell. Two people immediately picked her up, while others gathered her shopping together. There is nothing extraordinary there, yet we are charged with the possibility that, if the human race is to survive at all, it is upon that very instinct for empathy and caring action that our hope rests.

Trust

Rev. Master Jishin Kinson

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

This is an edited transcript of a talk given during an online weekend retreat in July 2021. It has been adapted for the Journal.

Today I want to highlight the presence of trust in a practice of Buddhism.

It develops; we don't actually start with a whole lot of it. There may be a few people here tuning in who are actually quite new to Buddhism. Well you've got to start somewhere. You know it's like playing the saxophone – where do you start? Well you start where you can really, and so I hope that if you are new to practice that you'll get something from the talk, and if you've been practising a while it's really more an affirmation of what you already know, to help you keep going.

Trust, respect and humility – these are three qualities which develop as a result of practising zazen and following the Precepts and being aware of your own behaviour and of your own tuning into things.

And these three qualities are not just supportive for the best practice but they're actually conducive to happiness. So if you're not feeling too happy at the moment; you've got issues and so forth, think about those three qualities: trust, humility and respect.

They're not aimed at anything; don't try and fix them – they are general qualities of the heart. There's no need to analyze them, it's something experienced and present in the method of practice. I was just listening to Alan Watts on YouTube and he was saying that Buddhism is not a doctrine, it's a method. And these qualities, if you air them, and give them a chance, they can make your heart sing; they really do directly address our tendencies towards emotional turmoil and mental suffering.

As we discover the value of a Buddhist practice, trust becomes taking the Three Refuges: refuge in the Buddha, his teaching (Dharma) and those who from their training can point us in the right direction (Sangha). Trust the Buddha of yourself and of a practice of waiting, looking and listening.

The theme of this talk today is 'Trust Buddha, and tie your camel.'

So what does this phrase, 'tie your camel' mean? Have you heard it before? Rev. Master Jiyu has quoted it, so you may well have heard it. Trust God and tie your camel' is an Arabic saying. For us, we might say 'tie your camel' means to respect the fact that cause and effect is of substance in this life.

Whatever you read about a deep experience of Truth being beyond notions of causes and effects, nevertheless within our human life, never doubt the relation of cause and effect. In fact, have an element of trust in it; that cause and effect are of substance to our human lives. We're a part of that. We really should respect everything we've learned so far.

So, 'tie your camel' is saying don't just get off your camel and walk off, because the camel will walk off as well. Trust Buddha, and take care of obvious things in the realm of cause and effect.

We find Buddha's presence in quietness. Trust a practice of waiting. Trust the nature of you who listens and looks. Listening and looking may have the presence of Buddha when your mind is quiet and not attached to thoughts and feelings.

When we worry and have anxiety, trust is often swept away, and replaced by doubt, and so too is waiting, listening and looking. We are actually undermined by worry. I heard it once said, rather wisely I think, that 'Do not Worry' should be a Precept. 'Do not turn away from Buddha by allowing yourself to develop worry.' The more you worry the more you develop its power, and it's blinding, actually

Moving on, there's a question: 'What should I do?' It is a question that arises for all of us more than once. Sometimes the question is of a big thing, sometimes it's just

a small thing, Maybe it's to do with a circumstance or maybe we have a wish or a desire and we don't know quite how to fulfil it. What should I do?

You know you can be without answers here. We get to feel at a loss. We actually start to worry a bit too – get anxious. We struggle with indecision, especially if the question seems to be a big one for us at the time. Well, you can ask this question of yourself in meditation ‘What should I do?’ and then, wait and listen; trusting, respecting the Buddha nature of yourself. And, don't forget there is always the tying of the camel.

Tying your camel, here, would be seeing if you can take just one small step – usually an obvious and ordinary step – in finding your way towards an answer to your question. Just take it; trusting the taking of the step. It is a positive thing to do. It is taking care of what needs taking care of. It is responding to that in you which is prompting you to do something.

Often here when you're asking ‘What should I do?’ there's another, implied question: ‘Do you know all you need to know?’ If you don't know, or if you suspect you don't know all you need to know, then there is your first step: find out. The result of taking a small step changes the picture for you, or it may be a key to the next step. This is a way, a very good way to start to resolve something which needs resolution, one which is asking you: ‘Come on, do something!’ This is tying your camel, you see – taking care

of what you can take care of, that you know you can, and you instinctively know something of the result of that. At least you're doing something when you need to do something, even just that is useful.

Yes, tying your camel does involve an element of trust actually, because you're then obliged to really listen and pay attention to the unfolding of what it is you are finding out, or what it is you're stepping towards. You're unfolding something there and you have to trust that this is the right thing to be doing.

When I gave this talk on Tuesday in the marquee to some local sangha members, one person who'd done Jukai was reminded of the *Ceremony of Following where the Precepts Lead*, the *Ketchimyaku*. It is a ceremony where you're literally taking one step at a time, and following. You're trusting and allowing an unfolding of a path. And there you go, can you see why trust is so important to Buddhism, to a practice which is long-term? There is an element of allowing things to unfold and continue your practice. The often-heard phrase 'keep going' has meaning here.

This question of 'What should I do?' brings me to another important question: 'what do you want?' What is your wish? Most people can easily say what it is they don't want. It's easier to identify too. We are well practised in aversion, and so we can easily say what it is we don't want. Many of us – not all of us I agree - but many of us are afraid

to turn towards what we want. We're afraid of it, we even hesitate to voice it, because it is exposed – we are exposed. Our deepest wish would be exposed. And, what is the fear? Well the fear, simply put anyway, is that we can fail. We might not get what it is we really want.

Failure isn't the demon we think it is. Now this isn't just a Buddhist thing, is it? This is what some of us have learned through our lives when we have actually 'failed' at something. I can give this talk because I know what I'm talking about. Failure is not the demon we think it is, so firstly let's put some wise thinking in here. It's better to fail than to hang back and never take a step towards what it is you really want – that's wisdom isn't it - it's better to fail having attempted something, than never take a step towards it. And what you can find in failing is that failure is not a finality. That's what you're afraid of, you think failure is the cut-off. It is not. You have to fail to know that, I think. It is not final.

So if there is to be failure in taking a step towards what you want, bring it on! Then you'll see! This is tying your camel again. And, trust Buddha – that's where you find that failure is not the finality it seems to be. Honestly things have a way – dare I say it, it sounds too simplistic – but things have a way of working themselves out in life, but you gotta tie your camel, you've got to step forward and not hang back.

I would like to just ask you something to end with:

When you heard me say ‘What do you want?’, was part of you slightly taken aback, remembering that there is the Buddhist teaching, the Buddha’s own teaching, that grasping after things causes suffering? Did that occur to you there somewhere? Well I think there’s a cautionary note with Buddhist Dharma. A step forward with Buddhist Dharma is to ask and find out, you know, rather than presume you’ve got it completely right, because with a teaching like ‘don’t grasp after things’ you’ve got to recognize the context – what exactly it’s pointing to, and just how specific the meaning of the Buddha’s words actually are. Otherwise you’re liable to fudge it you know, and then it becomes ‘Oh I shouldn’t want that!’ and you become someone who doesn’t move – human nature includes desire. I think I would say simply that grasping after is a different response from enquiring into a desire.

The Tarmac Lorry and the Badly Parked Car

Kate Lawlor

— Cirencester, Gloucestershire — UK —

This is an ordinary story of a seemingly ordinary day in my life in February 2022. My sister had driven us to our weekly Sōtō Zen meditation class. We had not been able to find parking so we had to drive a little distance away and park at the end of a narrow lane which was a no through road. It ended at the entrance to a large estate and area of woodland. We were vaguely aware of a large tarmac lorry at the end of the road, but did not think anything of it. My sister parked carefully and close to the pavement.

Two hours later, we emerged from our meditation afternoon. It had been a particularly lovely afternoon and I was feeling very still and quiet. During the second meditation, Allie, a group member, read out the Precept “Do not steal”. During tea and questions, we discussed all the manners in which stealing could be interpreted. One of the things that struck me during the reading out of that Precept, was that the doors of zazen always remain wide open for us. Another way of seeing this would be to call it the gateless gate. I find this an inspiring concept, as it is saying that truth is always here every minute and we do not need to grasp after it, for it is already there. We also discussed the reason

behind the ceremonial and attention to detail in our tradition, and why there is this approach. In our tradition we are encouraged to place shoes neatly outside the meditation room on arrival. We carry out precise and exacting ceremonial, with offering, gongs, bows, incense at the right time. To a newcomer, it can seem quite strange and might even be seen as pious or obsessive. Some may even feel an aversion to it at first. However, the heart of it is about being fully present in the situation. Being right there in the moment. Taking care. By taking care and being present in the ceremony hall, we set an example of taking care in our lives, avoiding carelessness, being aware of our surroundings and of others around us, and being generally present in all we do in our ordinary daily lives.

When we got back to the car, I was feeling very still indeed and the words for *The Scripture of Great Wisdom* were resonating in my head “When one with deepest Wisdom of the heart....”

It is not that I am always still, in fact far from it. After more than fourteen years of regular sitting practice, I still fly off the handle sometimes and experience all the usual human range of emotions. Anger, anxiety, low mood and all the others regularly pay me a visit. I am not sure I get fewer of those feelings than before, but I think the main difference now is that I can see their impermanence more than I could, and have a clearer view of the nature of my own suffering, and possibly of the suffering of other people I interact with.

Anyhow, as we approached the car, we were greeted with quite a sight. Since we had left, more cars had parked

behind us. The huge tarmac lorry had tried to leave and pass one of these cars. In doing so, it had become totally stuck and could go neither forward nor backwards. A wooden post on the grass verge opposite further added to the dilemma, and the driver could not manoeuvre his vehicle without damaging and even lifting the offending parked car.

People had come out to see what was going on. I saw a local woman bearing a tray of hot drinks for the driver and his assistant. When we looked, we could see that the car that was causing the blockage had been parked carelessly. The wheels were not straight and it had left too much space between itself and the pavement. The lorry driver told us he had been waiting there, stuck for two hours. The police were trying to trace the driver but to no avail. We were stuck too, until the lorry could move. I was expecting the lorry driver to be angry or frustrated as his shift had long since finished and he was ready to make the long journey home to Gloucester. Instead, I was amazed to see him being so kind and patient. He was joking and smiling and did not seem to bear a grudge or be angry about his predicament. He had the stature and look of a laughing Buddha and also the cheerful serenity. He was an ordinary man in an ordinary job, but one who had the chance to act either in anger or the opposite to anger, and he had chosen the latter.

While my sister and I waited and pondered on the best action to take, we got to thinking about the situation unfolding in front of us. We both admitted that the driver of the obstructing car had not parked extremely badly, just carelessly. Both of us felt that on a rushed day, we might have easily done the same without thinking. Yet the

consequences had now caused considerable havoc and the consequences were playing out, following the driver's lack of care and thought. Equally, if the lorry driver had been fully present and aware on driving down the narrow street, he might have noticed that he was passing a school where parents would be likely to park. He would have noticed that the very narrow street had few cars parked on it, but it would only take one car to park badly and he would be stuck. He too could have anticipated and predicted. He probably looked without seeing.

I myself have a strong trait to be careless. I go about my daily life too quickly. I feel rushed most of time, despite being semi-retired. I no longer have to rush around as I did when I was a nurse but I still struggle to slow down and take more care. This is my particular kōan in daily life, so I feel I understood how all this could have happened.

Seeing this seemingly fairly ordinary situation play out in front of me; a big tarmac lorry stuck in a tiny lane; a badly parked car whose driver would be blissfully unaware of the police trying to call them and of the charade playing out; the lady bearing hot tea, and myself and my sister also stuck – and she would be late for her tutoring job which she was due back for. I was suddenly filled with a light bulb realisation. After years of theorizing about mindfulness, awareness of the moment, pausing, slowing down and above all, being present in that moment, I was utterly blown away by the concept of paying attention to the now. LOOKING and really opening my eyes. I was suddenly struck by the

massive value of the small things leading to the bigger things. The putting down of the shoes neatly; the ceremonial; the bows; the care with our environment, the equipment we use and most importantly having an understanding of cause and effect. Our small daily actions make a massive difference. The driver of the car, if they had been aware, would have noticed the tarmac lorry and its need to exit at some point, and would have parked in a thoughtful and caring way. Likewise, the lorry driver could have been more present and aware of the likelihood of cars parking in the narrowest part of the road. The lorry driver was a personification of Buddha with his kindness and patience, and he made a bad situation better. The kind local woman made the situation better with her tray of tea. We too often have these small but significant opportunities to make the world a slightly better place. Do we always see them I wonder?

We can all make a difference. We do not need to be in a prestigious job to make a difference. We can just wake up to the present moment. We can look around us and see what needs doing right now. I was humbled by the situation, as for the first time, I was aware with utter clarity of the significance of being here now, doing what is good to do and making a difference in our own small everyday way.

The Precept of not stealing can mean so many things. The careless driver stole the lorry driver's time. Other Precepts all link in. The lorry driver chose not to speak ill of the driver who had caused the obstruction. The lady with tea

was carrying a kind and selfless offering. We all have the opportunity to be awake to what needs doing right now. I am so grateful for our ongoing practice and the Sangha. Training with others is such a privilege.

There is one more twist to this tale. We decided to attempt to exit the scene so that my sister would get back in time for her client. We thought we would attempt to enter the wood where the road reached a dead end, and see if we could find an escape route. As we entered the large gates, we caught a glimpse of a white van, disappearing through the trees. We followed it in pursuit and found ourselves in a seemingly deserted building yard – but there was the white van. Of all the coincidences, it was the chap who had done our patio! He insisted on escorting us – going some miles out of his way – to an exit from the wood which was not open to the public. He was the most cheerful and kind man and also had a serenity and caring quality. It felt like another lesson in trust and kindness in an unexpected situation.

May all beings be happy. May all beings be free from suffering. May I do only good.

You Don't Accept

Rev. Master Willard Lee

— *Dragon Bell Temple, Devon – UK* —

This article was published on the Dragon Bell Temple website, February 2022.

In trying to become an accepting person, we get in our own way and smother the possibility of real acceptance. At best we make a clumsy imitation of what is always energetically liberated, cannot be contained and is simply unconditional.

If our actions are tinted with signs of resigned frustration, defensiveness, striving and the like, it's because the causes of non-acceptance are being excluded. This might be a useful signpost to what the way of zazen is – the deeply transformative and inclusive way of acceptance – not a static shell.

When impulses to deny or chase after arise, where are they based? On what are actions of body, speech and mind, based? Other than a confused human mind, is there anything in this universe that is not always manifesting acceptance?

The selflessness of existence is hard to see if we are viewing the world as if it's a drama and we are an audience apart. All of it is only mind. . Us human animals seem to believe that because we want or perceive something to be so, it should be so. Wild animals, for an example, are instinctively and biologically propelled through life, but they aren't creating delusive non-acceptance, even when fighting for their lives. Humans are different to other animals in some respects. For one – thankfully we are graced with receptive capacity for illumination, beyond being driven by imprints. For another – we have the ability to create the conditions to poison ourselves with greed, hatred and delusion, something else an animal can't do.

The posture of formal seated meditation is nothing other than the opportunity for the precise realization of acceptance and for it to be actualized throughout body and mind. In giving ourselves to reality so directly, we are letting go of ourselves concretely. It becomes clearer that all situations are providing the same opportunity to get free of restriction. Realizing sitting like this, unrestricted vitality is not something compartmentalized from any other activity or time. Transforming the rigidity that comes with clinging to body and mind, the dynamics of existence are outside of what comes with attempts at forcing an interpretation or adopting of a viewpoint from which to observe the world.

The buoyant expression of original freedom is found in immersive participation where even realization is forgotten, a beautiful transparency of being. This endless way of zazen

is together with everything in detail, whatever it is, at the same time. Sometimes then, acceptance is 'yes', and sometimes it's 'no'. The responsive nature of us comes forth in numberless ways because it is seamlessly with everything else and not fixed. This seamlessness is beyond any assessment of accuracy, so we can forget being self-conscious about it and trust. Mistakes too are clearly mistakes; the way of reality is one of radical unforced honesty, poised and open to being taught. Not limp indifference then, not brittle preservation and not aggressive assertion.

Neither old nor new, true mind doesn't repeat tired ways or need to create original ones. There is no need to be confused about this trying to anticipate correct responses to things; mind is not a self and acceptance isn't created by one. In intimately entrusting ourselves, over and over, it's clear that ungraspable reality cannot let us down. We will be understanding that we don't need, never have needed, never will need, anything else.

Moving News

Rev. Master Seikai Luebke

— *Pine Mountain Buddhist Temple, CA - USA* —

December, 2021

For the third time in its history, Pine Mountain Temple is moving. Originally the Santa Barbara Buddhist Priory, which was started by Rev. Jishō Perry in 1979, the temple moved once in Santa Barbara, and then over the mountains to Ventura County and the Ozena Valley in early 2000. Now, exactly 22 years later, we are moving again. Revs. Phoebe and Seikai have been the only two monks and residents of the temple since our last monk resident, Rev. Leon, moved on in 2009.

Since then, we have gotten that much older and no longer have the strength to maintain our many buildings and 45 acres of land. The Covid Era, with its ever-changing norms of appropriate human interaction, has radically changed society. Our original purpose for being here—to function as a retreat center for people wishing to immerse themselves in an environment devoted to Zen practice—can no longer be fulfilled, and it is time to move on.

The person buying the temple is awed and delighted by the facilities, the grounds, and all the care, love and attention

to detail that have been poured into the temple over its 22 years of existence. She intends to hold retreats and maintain what she is inheriting from us. She treasures the stupa, the statues and the meditation hall. Exactly what the nature of her activities will be we cannot say, but we have been making this transition with the intent of helping her be a success in this location.

After the monks had made the decision to move and gotten the go-ahead from the head of our monastic order and our lay supporters last August, we set the wheels of moving in motion, putting the temple on the real estate market, and holding a large moving/yard sale at the end of September. The sale was a big success; with the help of many of our regulars we were able to move along a huge quantity of stuff which we will no longer have need of when we move. In downsizing the temple from three houses to one, and two large utility buildings to one 2-car garage, we've had to shed a lot of weight. Many people left the temple happily carrying some small treasure they had found—or a piece of furniture.

Around that time a couple who were looking for a facility like our meditation retreat found us listed for sale, and in October made an offer on the temple which we accepted. They asked for a 90-day escrow to give them time to raise funds for the purchase, which ultimately failed. In early December, the purchase agreement was dropped. We were sorry to have lost two months, but in the meantime we got a lot done in the way of tying off loose ends, organizing and packing. All during the fall we were actively looking for

a house to buy and turn into a small temple, and made offers on four such houses, but the real estate market as it currently exists is very competitive and unless you have the money and/or a loan in hand with which to buy a place, you're out of luck. But it was nevertheless an education in real estate dealings, and the agent we have been working with, Kelly Morgan, has been great in giving of her time and energy in helping us both sell and buy something new.

Seemingly without any time gap at all, our potential new buyer arrived at the gate inquiring about the temple just as the first sale had fallen apart. Being herself in the real estate business, she moved quickly to make an offer, which we accepted, and to open an escrow account. The offer was well under the asking price, but we accepted it rather than taking the risk of months or possibly even years going by before we would get another one. And since her intention is to continue using the property as a meditation retreat, it was the best thing to do. The conditional use permit is good for another 18 years.

January, 2022

Now it is January, and our search continues. Ownership of the temple has passed to its new owner on January 11 and we are actively attempting to purchase a house in the city of Santa Paula, California. Although the house would be well suited to being a small temple, and would accommodate the two monks very nicely, all sorts of problems have arisen with regard to actually buying the place. For a start, the

house is owned by a realty company (not an individual) which is notoriously hard to work with. Ms. Morgan has told us many times that most real estate agents won't deal with this company, and so far in our dealings, we can see why. Further, the house may have deferred maintenance problems; it is an "as is" sale, meaning that the seller does not take responsibility for problems the building may have in exchange for a reduced price. In theory.

All the expert advice we have received about the purchase of this house has been in the realm of "let the buyer beware." So, on that level, taking in all the normal considerations, we would be wise to keep looking. The problem for Rev. Phoebe and myself is that, after 40 or more years of monastic life for both of us, we don't think the way the world thinks. And here is a situation in which applied Zen practice comes into the picture, and few people understand why we think the way we do.

We cannot push away that we love the house and want to make it into a small temple. Our hearts are telling us to forge ahead despite the obstacles, in spite of it being a "flawed" house. If it weren't flawed, it would have sold months ago. And this is how monks practice: we take something that is flawed, in bad shape or needing repair, and with love and care, improve it. I've done that my whole life with houses, and I've done it with my own life. The world tells you that everything needs to be really spiffy and modern and essentially without flaws. Subconsciously, it is probably the same message we tell ourselves. But reality is

different: we are who we are, we're not special or particularly spiffy human beings; but we have everything we need to engage in practice and awaken to the truth.

With each passing day in January, our perceptions of what is really happening with this move change—sometimes subtly and sometimes significantly. With each step that we take it becomes ever clearer that, more than anything, this house has been chosen for us and a sort of veil has been drawn over it so that the rest of the house hunting crowd doesn't see it or doesn't pursue buying it. Although the company owning the house hasn't been easy to work with, nevertheless we owe them a debt of gratitude for making a mess of the real estate listing, which put people off. Their agent was unreachable. When we made an offer on the house, their counteroffer was not unreasonable, and so we accepted it. The house went into escrow on January 10, and escrow is set to close on January 25.

To her credit, our agent said to Rev. Phoebe and me that if we really love the house, we might as well so ahead and make an offer, even if it is overpriced or has flaws. She was sensitive enough to what was going on to see this, and it was after we had all sat around at the house and had a conversation about it that she was able to arrive at this place of sympathy.

Meanwhile, packing up the temple, cleaning it, and reducing the sheer quantity of stuff is an ongoing project. Lots of people have offered their time and energy to come

and help us with this, and Rev. Phoebe and I are deeply grateful. Starting with the moving sale in September, and now with the actual move happening, all the help we have received is very heartening. People want to help the temple continue to be a success and a place of refuge. Our small Sangha is pulling together to make it happen.

On a day in January three different inspectors came to the house to do their various jobs. It turns out that, yes, there are a number of maintenance problems and minor code violations, but on the whole it wasn't enough to discourage us from going through with the purchase. So now we have passed the point of backing out of this real estate deal on account of there being too many substantial flaws in the building. It was built in 1985 and is basically in good repair; it does have termites in spots and will need to be tented and fumigated. We will need to hire people to do that; to do electrical work, painting inside and out, rebuilding outdoor steps.

Houses always need work somewhere. The home inspector who came to look at the temple compiled a report which was 108 pages long—seemingly in spite of my many years of wholehearted maintenance of our buildings. On one level it was humbling, even if the vast majority of these defects were very minor in nature. An offer was made to increase what we receive for the temple if we went through the list and fixed them all, but I could see that I never would be successful at that even if I tried. Before I could come close to the end of the list, new problems would manifest. It would be, and is, endless.

Which brings us back to being human and needing to work on ourselves. However long we may have lived up to now, whatever shape we may appear to be in, physically, psychologically or spiritually, we can look honestly at ourselves. It means putting down pride, thinking that we're really good people, better than most. It means putting down the self-defeating thoughts that we can't do it. Training your mind, like maintaining a house, requires that you keep at it from one day to the next without worrying so much about whether you're ever going to be finished. Chances are, you won't.

As I'm writing, we are still at least two weeks away from moving. As I said, escrow closes on January 25th, and then there will be some work to be done prior to moving in; that might not happen until the last few days of January. Rev. Phoebe and I are excited about our new place, about setting up a new, small temple with a beautiful meditation hall, and having events open to the public. We hope to see you at some point in our new location, Santa Paula, California. We will be keeping our name, Pine Mountain Buddhist Temple, and status as a non-profit religious corporation.

February, 2022

Escrow on the new temple closed on January 20, and the actual move took place on the 28th and 29th. The movers we hired to haul all the heavy stuff did a good job, and their work was paid for by members of our congregation. We also had the help of several of our friends who hauled stuff in

their cars and pickups down to Santa Paula. Moving itself is always a chaotic business, and in this situation, given that we were downsizing from a large place to a small one, the challenge to reduce and organize all the temple furnishings and our own belongings was great.

Moving is also exhausting, and Rev. Phoebe and I both fell sick within a week after the move. Rev. Phoebe spent a day in the hospital, which fortunately happens to be about six blocks from the new temple. As of mid-month we are both regaining strength day by day. Meanwhile, work on the temple itself is an on-going process that will continue for several months—or longer. We have hired a man who had worked for us at the Ozena Valley temple—building the stupa and its surround, for instance—to rebuild a stairway which runs alongside the house and down into the back garden. The old steps were made of wood and had largely rotted out, and, as we discovered, rotted a hole in the house. The new concrete steps are beautiful; the concrete workers who came for a day did a fantastic job. The masonry crew is working on the last phase now, a flagstone walkway. When completed, there will be a series of five terraces along the steps leading down to a water feature in the garden, which awaits resuscitation. Garden designing and rebuilding also await for the future.

Our beautiful meditation room will soon get a new carpet, and much of the rest of the house will have old carpets removed and new flooring installed. In the Covid

Era, with its supply chain problems, all of this seems to take considerably longer than it used to. It's an opportunity to practice patience.

Rev. Phoebe and I helped to build Shasta Abbey during its early years, and then in our middle years we built Pine Mountain Temple; now it appears we will spend our later years in a small temple that will be more along the lines of a small Temple or Priory of the OBC. In that light, temple building seems metaphorical for one's life as a Buddhist trainee, and in our case, as monks. Temple building is only possible because we first work on ourselves. Since that process will be ongoing until we die, it should come as no surprise that work on the physical temple will continue as long as we are alive. We are happy that we have found suitable circumstances to do this, and grateful to everyone who has supported us in any way over the years to make it possible.

Fear and Fearlessness

Neil Rothwell

— *Edinburgh, UK* —

This article originally appeared in the Portobello Buddhist Priory Newsletter, September—December 2019.

Fear is something that most people experience to a greater or lesser extent, and it can sometimes feel like an obstacle in training.

The various words used to describe fear point to its different aspects. The word “fear” itself refers to the basic emotion. “Stress” highlights the external triggers of the fear, pressures in the environment which are not usually an immediate danger. “Anxiety” points to the pathological aspects; irrational fears that can impair our functioning. Anxiety is also a clinical diagnosis, but it exists on a spectrum from mild to severe, the milder end being in the normal range of experience. “Worry” highlights the stream of thoughts and visualisations in the mind which maintain or produce the fear. “Unease” is the low-level background emotion which is quite common. Anger is closely related to fear; we talk about the fight or flight reaction.

The experience of fear can be divided into three aspects. Firstly, thoughts are often predominant, as in worry. These thoughts are often unrealistic – we think that something bad is going to happen, whereas in reality, it is unlikely. When we look back on worry, we tend to find that events did not turn out the way we thought they would. The second aspect is body sensations. These are real, physical sensations which are the body gearing itself up for flight or fight. They are harmless, being a normal body function. Thoughts and body sensations are intimately linked. The body reacts to thoughts, and arousal in the body causes temporary changes in the brain which tend to cause us to think in “black-and-white” terms rather than more subtly. The final aspect is action. All emotions are gearing the body and mind for action. In the case of fear, the action tendency is avoidance. It is significant that, in zazen, we do not engage in these actions, but continue to sit while the emotions arise and pass.

Fear can be thought of as an inheritance of a human body, something evolved in our ancestors to survive in difficult circumstances. Our upbringing can also be an influence. As children, we learn what is safe and dangerous partly by watching the reactions of the people around us, and if they are displaying a lot of fear, we will tend to pick this up. Certain aspects of our current society can also contribute e.g. an over emphasis on external achievement. These factors again highlight the universality of fear.

Like everything else, fear is impermanent. All emotions are inherently unstable, designed to elicit a response then to

subside. Sometimes, fear does not go away as quickly as we would wish. It seems to linger, but if we look closely, we see that it is constantly changing. For example, it may disappear for a while, but then an anxious thought occurs which reactivates it. This is why it can be helpful to let go of the concept of fear when we meditate. When an emotion initially occurs, it can sometimes be helpful to name it, as a form of recognition and acceptance, but then dropping the label allows us to see the moment-to-moment experience, and how it ebbs and flows rather than being something solid.

There is much to be learned from fear. The willingness to sit through it strengthens our faith in zazen. We see it is possible to experience intense emotion while still maintaining the awareness of meditation. Zazen enables us to let go of the thought patterns which trigger and maintain the fear. We can receive insight into the mental investments which underlie fear. In doing so, we start to see the roots of fear. For me, this is often self-doubt and fear of fear itself, but underneath this is a wish to be caring and helpful – it's just that I can get too attached to how this should express itself. Seeing these roots helps us to stop generating as much fear. We can sense its pure and empty nature. It is a liberating process, and therefore we can welcome fear when it arises, even though it is never going to be pleasant.

Fearlessness develops out of this. Training causes us to see our fears more clearly, and then to confront them. This can mean acting even while experiencing fear, rather than avoiding it, if that is what feels right to do. So fearlessness is

not the absence of fear. We can act without being dictated to by fear, while still taking it into account. I saw an example of this at a conference I attended a while ago. It was a large conference and the person organising it was constantly responding to problems and questions from people, while giving off an aura of calmness. I mentioned this to her later, and she said that other people had picked up on this calmness, but that she was tense inside. By being aware of this tension, she was able to experience it while still transmitting a sense of peacefulness.

As we come to know fear in ourselves, we accept our vulnerability, and see more clearly how fear affects the people around us. This deepens our empathy and connection with others.

Unconditional Love

Rev. Master Myōhō Harris

— *The Place of Peace Dharma House, Aberystwyth, Wales – UK* —

This was taken from a talk on the December issue of the Dharma Reflections series.

Over the Christmas period, a few people sent me cards with pictures of their children on them. As I was sitting here, reflecting one afternoon, it came into my mind that over the years, there's something I've noticed across the board with lay trainees, and it's the great love they have for their children and grandchildren. They are grateful to have them, and would do anything, and everything they could, to help them. There's joy and delight when they speak about them. The thought arose, that if people could have that same attitude of mind towards their spiritual training, then they would go far, and their practice would deepen in leaps and bounds.

When we receive instruction in how to meditate and train, we're all given the same basic set of instructions on what to do, how to start and how to go forward. Then it is up

to us as to how much we wish to give of ourselves to that practice – that’s the key factor. These are not instructions such as, ‘This is how you programme your kitchen boiler’, where there’s just one outcome. These instructions are like a door that you can open to another world, to a different kind of life.

At first it may seem that meditation is just one of a number of things that you ‘do’ throughout your day, and perhaps you don’t feel that great a connection with it. And it is true that if you don’t have a hunger for the truth, if you don’t *really* want it, then probably you won’t put that much effort into it. But if you want to find the truth (what is real), as much as you want your children to be happy and healthy and to succeed in life, if it feels intensely personal to you – which training is, it’s personal to each one of us – and if you can open your heart to it, then you will find that those instructions are like roots from which something quite magnificent will come forth. This is because a deep caring about the Buddhist way and a quiet love of training will grow. When we wish to give all that we can, we open up and offer ourselves to be taught, to be awakened, and through this trust in the practice, much becomes possible.

Years ago I had a cat called Charlie. One day I had just put a clean sheet on my bed when Charlie came in, jumped up, and walked across it. Looking at his muddy paw prints I smiled, thinking they looked like beautiful plum blossoms. Sitting down and reflecting later that day, it came to me that,

when you love, you don't see dirt. This is how we can look at ourselves, and others, and all the painful or challenging things that may arise in meditation. The eyes of the Heart Mind, of inner reflection, see no dirt, they see the Truth, which reveals and clarifies what we need to understand so that we can resolve, or lay to rest, inner confusion. If we can receive these insights, in the simple (yet profound) purity of gratitude and trust, then the path forward opens up.

Gradually it dawns upon us that what is being revealed is not external to us, it is within us. It is our true life, our essence, the life of Buddha that is unfolding, opening up and blossoming within and as our human life. From being an activity which we may have thought of as something 'I do', our view of meditation changes, and it becomes something that I am. What is unfolding is the fullness of what I am, and with that comes the realisation of what a wonderful gift it is to be a human being.

At the Buddha's Enlightenment festival we celebrate our human potential, and as that unfolds, enriching our lives, we see how the instructions we received, in simple uncomplicated words, have opened the way to us having a completely different understanding of what it means to appear in this world in human form.

Those instructions, those basics, they never cease to be relevant and our understanding of them is ever broadening and being refined. They're always there, like 'the roots in the mud of the world' from where we started, with our hopes,

our dreams, our fears – our not knowing what would come of this practice of Buddhism. Through them is drawn in the spiritual nourishment of ‘I take Refuge’, which fans out into every aspect of our life.

The Precepts also take on a different meaning. What starts off as a static list, soon becomes something else. It becomes the unfolding of the life of Buddha. Just as you don’t have to ‘remember’ to love your family, so we don’t have to ‘remember’ to keep the Precepts. They are there within the natural essence of your life, my life, ever-flowing, ever-teaching, ever-increasing our ability to understand and see clearly, so we are always becoming Buddha. This is not because we are never good enough to get there, but because everything is constantly changing, as our individual life fades and appears, as form manifests from the formless, and we and all that exists are the endlessly changing manifestations, or appearances of the great mystery that we call Buddha.

In *The Scripture of Avalokiteshwara Bodhisattva* it says to ‘cherish a longing deep’ within us. If you can cherish and nourish the wish in your heart to train, just as much as you may wish to cherish and nourish your own children, then training becomes a labour of love, it becomes as natural to us as is breathing. Just as you may look at your children as they grow up and consider carefully how you can help them – what their needs may be, and how you can support them – so we need to look at ourselves in the same way, recognising our spiritual needs. We all have them. This is not a fault.

Responding to them is the means by which the confusion of the past is laid to rest and future distress is prevented. By recognising these needs, mistaken views are clarified, and whatever it was that entrapped our mind, keeping it small and tight and limited, can fall away.

With this falling away, comes an awakening, an opening of our eyes, and we see that this purity, which is our true essence, is also the essence of your children, and of all that exists. It is at the root of the love that you have for your family and it unites you with all life, all things, including the so-called inanimate. If you can abide within that living essence, and not use your mind in a way that is tainted by judgement or desire, or various forms of selfishness, then you will be able to love, and live, with an innocent purity, that will benefit both yourself and all around you.

When we don't have that connection with the refuge, our fear of our opinion of ourselves, or our doubt, can make it very difficult to look within. We begin to live more and more externally, instead of allowing the inward-looking gaze to go where it naturally wants to go, we pull it outwards, away from its source, creating a mental world of endless thinking and pretence, because we don't want what the awareness of looking within reveals. This is a lonely and unsatisfactory way to live.

If your child had started to go down some wrong paths and get into trouble, and make life very difficult for themselves, you would do everything you could to try to

help them, and doing so would come from love. It would not come from anger, nor hate, nor impatience, nor feelings of ‘they’re no good’. It would be, ‘How can I help this being I love so much?’ We can have that same attitude towards ourselves. Relaxing into inherent faith, abiding there, taking time to contemplate the way forward, not filling that space with our own tangled thoughts, but patiently waiting for true direction, is an activity Buddhism calls, ‘turning the stream of compassion within’.

When we relax into meditation and abide within its spacious tenderness we find a total acceptance, from which comes a deep reassurance that puts a fragile, vulnerable being like myself at ease. It stills and settles us. It is enough. From this comes contentment which enables an even deeper relaxation of body and mind, as they are drawn together within that purity. It is this which helps us to resolve our karma, by enabling us to relax in trust, and be completely honest with ourselves, because that’s what resolving karma requires. Taking Refuge, entrusting oneself to the inward-looking gaze, not fearing the truth, and never turning away from anything the meditation brings to us, we can see what is needed and there is no doubt in our minds that we can take that next step.

The love of the great mystery never gives up on anyone. Meditation never asks anyone to do anything that they are not capable of doing. It offers step-by-step

guidance. It gives every single being the same opportunity to find and enter their true home. For myself, home is a place where I belong. The ancient Buddhist writings say that ‘the land that is nowhere is our true home’. We don’t need to fight for our place in the meditation hall, it is freely given, it is there, waiting for each one of us, and is the formless universal mediation hall within our being. It is the abode of our own completeness. Ironically, it is a ‘place’ where we no longer exist, where there is no need for personal identity, and it is this that brings the greatest peace.

Dōgen said, “Every step I take in this limitless world is my home.” As he walked the many twists and turns, the ups and downs of a human life, the roots of his being disappeared into the place where there is nothing from the first. From that fathomless source, which we call the refuge, a temporary appearance comes forth for a purpose. Finding and fulfilling that purpose is a labour of love. Just as when your family need help, and you will always offer it, so when we need spiritual guidance we can turn to the meditation ‘as a child turns to its mother’. In some of my darkest moments the all-accepting tenderness of the great mystery has permeated my being, bringing reassurance and confirmation of that unconditional love.¹ We are already known to the core, and what is needed, will come. The unmistakable reality, the truth of it, will be as a liberating gift of grace, bringing clarifying insights that resolve age-old confusion. We are constantly being taken beyond all that we think we

know. We do not have to know anything. The practice finely tunes and unfetters our awareness, so that it becomes as a net that is ready to catch, to receive, what the meditation brings. Training is doing one's best to become the embodiment of what enlightened awareness reveals. It is how we show gratitude for that unconditional love.

Homage to the Buddha,
Homage to the Dharma,
Homage to the Sangha.

Notes

1. When talking about Buddhism we use words, doing our best to describe something that transcends words, and which does not have a neat dictionary definition. This is certainly the case with the term Unconditional Love, or with any mystical aspect of Zen.

Speaking from my personal experience, which is all I have, it is not an emotion, it is not the opposite of hate. What I am trying to convey is a mixture of purity, a sense of cleanness and innocence that leaves me feeling very grateful and unfettered. There is also tenderness, and an unfailing trust in me, which could also be described as reassurance, or as full and complete acceptance.

Here are two occasions describing how that love has manifested, and helped me. Once, as a young monk, feeling weighed down with despair, in meditation I felt my robe became a golden hand of pure love that carried

me. A tender warmth filled my being. It reconnected me with my purpose, and from that love came a reassurance that I could, and would, keep going. On another occasion, when I thought I would give up, and leave the monastery, what came to me in meditation, with such gentleness, were the words, “I will love you if you go and I will love you if you stay”. This broke the tension that had built up in my young and overloaded mind, and of course I stayed. If we do our best, something else within that great mystery will step in, and give help when needed. Experience has shown me that there is compassion and understanding for us. We should never think of Zen as being hard and cold.

News of the Order

USA & Canada

Shasta Abbey

— *Mount Shasta, CA - USA* —

We have had a very quiet winter and spring this year, although we continue to have lay guests for a few days at a time. We hope the Covid restrictions will ease up soon.

New Master. At a Sunday 13 February evening tea Rev. Master Meian named Rev. Amanda Robertson as a new Master in the Order. Rev. Master Amanda was ordained on 28 November 2000 by Rev. Master Ekō Little and Transmitted by Rev. Master Meian Elbert on 5 February 2010. She served for many years in the bursar's office and is now the monastery infirmarian. We congratulate Rev. Master Amanda on this important occasion and wish her well in her future training.

Community. We have had several additions to our community in the past few months. Rev. Valeria Allison, a disciple of Rev. Master Kōten Benson, moved from Lions Gate Buddhist Temple in Lytton, BC, in the summer and fall to take up residence at Shasta. She is helping in the Guest Office. Rev. Kalden, a former OBC monk (Rev. Berenice), now training in the Tibetan Vajrayana tradition in India, is spending several months training with us. We have appreciated her bright spirit and her assistance in the kitchen and with caring for older monks. Lastly, our Vietnamese novice monk, Rev. Quang Tue, continues to practice with us, and we appreciate his fine example of training.

— *Rev. Master Oswin*

Portland Buddhist Priory

— *Portland, Oregon – USA* —

Because of health and energy limitations, and the demands of running a temple, I have not felt up to sending news to the *Journal* but, since things have been more momentous lately, I thought the *Journal* readers might like an update of the Priory happenings. So, here is some of the news of the last two or so years.

During the pandemic: During the lockdown period of the pandemic, we moved our three weekly meetings to Zoom and have included ceremonies offered via Zoom. Lately, in addition to the Zoom aspect, we have been welcoming in-person visits for our weekly classes and for spiritual counselling. Our classes are now a hybrid of Zoom and in-person participation, and we will continue to offer the opportunity for some aspect of remote, online participation (via Zoom) even after things normalize with the pandemic.

New Priory Residents: The last few years have been a busy time at the Priory starting even before the covid-19 pandemic. In December 2019, Trinity Treat, now a lay minister of the Order, moved into the temple in order to deepen her training and continues to live here and is a help around the temple.

Early in 2020, we also welcomed Rev. Master Hugh Gould to the temple. He came to us after a short stay at the Eugene Buddhist Priory. Rev. Master Hugh had just returned to the US after living at Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey for a number of years.

In the spring of 2021, Rev. Master Hugh was offered and accepted the position of Prior of the Eugene Buddhist Priory. We were most grateful to have Rev. Master Hugh as a part of our

small community and his teaching and help with a number of projects around the temple (including replacing the main bearings in our washing machine, helping to remodel our library room, insulating the pilgrimage shrine floor, and building a new fence)



New fence at Portland Buddhist Priory was greatly appreciated.

Lay Ordinations: During this period, we have held three lay ordination ceremonies. In the late winter of 2020, before the pandemic struck, we held a lay ordination ceremony for four people: Bill Aubrecht, Amy Wiley, Jessica Perry and Ken Price. Since then, we have also been able to give the Precepts to two people, Karu Wojtaszek and Jason Cerf, in private ceremonies here at the temple. We wish them all well in their training.

New Meditation Hall: Since we moved to this location in 1989, we have thought that the temple would benefit from a bit more space and, over the years, this need has waxed and waned as the size of the Priory community has shifted and changed. In the summer of 2019, this issue came up again and, together with the

Priory counsel, we came up with a potential design for an addition to our building. Primarily, the new design would add space for a new, larger meditation hall on the same level as our existing meditation hall. Additionally, we hope to add living space in a finished daylight basement and a rooftop patio / deck area for a container garden and seating space. At that time, we started a fund-raising campaign and began to save money for this project.

Because of the nature of financing for non-profits in the US, our expectation was that we would need to have the money in hand to start the project. In the fall of 2021, we were offered the funding to begin the project, and since then, we have been looking into hiring a contractor and designer to build the project for us. Because of our location, permission for our project by the local authorities is complicated and we are going through that process which could be lengthy. To find out more about our project, or to see how you might help us, there is [a dedicated page on our website](#).

— *Rev. Master Leon*

Wallowa Buddhist Temple

— *Joseph, Oregon – USA* —

Winter at our 4400-foot (1340-meter) elevation in the Wallowa mountains has been especially cold this year, with abundant snow and persistently icy conditions on the ground.

Thoughtful Offering: At the turn of the year, the monks were contacted by a local family in our congregation, wishing to donate their older four-wheel off-road vehicle with small plow attachment. Their thoughtful offer couldn't have been more timely! This sturdy Honda Rancher was quickly pressed into

service clearing this year's abundant snowfall and hauling firewood up the steep, icy drive.



The McEwan family offering their Honda Rancher to the Wallowa Buddhist Temple.

February Renewal: The monks spent the month of February in rest and renewal, as we do each winter. This was a priceless opportunity for setting down many of our usual commitments for a time, and turning within to reflect on what matters most in our life of training, before resuming our ongoing activities with new clarity of purpose.

Open One-to-One, Offering Merit and Dharma: The temple remains open for individual visits, emails, and phone calls. Each week, during our Sunday Morning Retreat, the monks offer merit for all beings and for all those on our transfer-of-merit board in the temple's Kanzeon shrine, reading aloud the names of those with whom we have been in touch.

We continue to offer to our regular emails with attached audio Dharma talk by 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 these audio reflections are proving helpful and encouraging to the widespread listeners on our email list.

Potential for Individual Retreat Guests: One of the main purposes of the Wallowa Buddhist Temple from its beginning almost two decades ago has been to offer individual retreats. Currently, we are exploring the possibility of resuming in-person retreats as ever-changing conditions allow, with priority for those who have already made requests. If you are opening to the possibility of a future retreat here with the monks, you are most welcome to contact us.

— *Rev. Master Meidō and Rev. Clairissa*

Lions Gate Buddhist Priory

— *Lytton, British Columbia – Canada* —

Winter here in the mountains began with very cold weather. Night-time temperatures went down to -30C and daytime to -15C. This cold snap persisted through December and into the first part of January, after which it slowly began to get warmer. By maintaining hot fires in our wood stove, we managed to keep relatively warm in Bodhidharma Hall, our living quarters. The new Mandala Hall was tolerably warm, thanks to the propane heater. We also received about four feet of snow in one week. Fortunately our old Diesel truck and snowplow met the challenge.

Because of the catastrophic floods in the fall, we remained mostly cut off from the outer world until mid-January. We were able to get groceries and supplies from a nearby town and from a food bank arranged by Skuppah, a local First Nations (i.e. Indigenous) Band, who received and offered basic food and supplies via helicopter. We really are grateful to the engineers and crews who worked tirelessly to open the roads in extreme cold weather, and to the members of Skuppah Band for their assistance.

On January 21, the three of us were traveling on the Trans-Canada Highway when we encountered a patch of black ice. The vehicle skidded out control across the highway into the ditch and overturned on its side. With the assistance of passers-by, two of us were able to exit the vehicle. Rev. Master Kōten was taken out by paramedics who had to break the windshield to get to him. We were shaken up, but fortunately no one was seriously injured. Emergency vehicles very quickly attended, and an ambulance took us to the regional hospital in the nearby city of Kamloops. The vehicle was written off. We had the use of a rental vehicle until we could purchase a new vehicle: a 2019 Dodge Ram 1500

pickup truck. The truck is a four-wheel-drive crew cab (four doors, full-sized back seat). It should suit our needs well. We were able to purchase this vehicle with funds left from generous monetary offerings during the summer fires, as well as money donated after the accident. Great Master Dōgen said: “When a small need arises, a small use appears. When a great need arises, a great use appears.” We are deeply grateful to all those who helped us at the time of the accident, and to everyone who made a new vehicle possible.

We now have our own YouTube channel. The channel has the latest “Year in Pictures” slideshow for 2021, as well as some older clips of the Priory and an assortment of Buddhist films and programs that may be of interest to viewers. Here is the link: https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=lions+gate+buddhist+priory

We were contacted by Northwest Dharma News, a publication based in Seattle, USA, requesting an article about our experiences with the heat, floods and fire. The article was published in January. Here is a link: <https://northwestdharma.org/canadian-soto-zen-temple-survives-fire-floods>

Throughout the winter, we have continued our daily practice of meditation within the activities of ordinary daily life. We held our week-long Winter Retreat in early December, and we celebrated the following Festival Ceremonies: The Buddha’s Enlightenment, New Year’s Celebration, The Buddha’s Parinirvana, and Kanzeon Ceremony. Due to increased Covid restrictions, we have only begun receiving local guests in the past few weeks. We are currently assessing the Covid situation and hope to be able open up more widely in the spring.

— *Rev. Master Aurelian*

News of the Order

UK and Europe

Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey

— *Northumberland, England–UK* —

We were pleased to have Rev. Master Daishin Morgan staying with us for the whole of January when we held our Winter Sangha Retreat. He gave teaching to the community once a week, and we set up a video-link for his monastic disciples to log in from their respective Priors, enabling them to ask questions and join the Dharma discussion.



Sadly, the usual practice of having lay residents take care of the cooking for the month was not possible this year, so teams of monks took turns to run the kitchen. The weather was more benign than usual for January, so we were spared the hours of snow-shovelling which are often a feature of the daily schedule.

New Masters: During one of the Winter Sangha Retreat classes Rev. Master Daishin named two new masters of the Order, Rev. Alina Burgess and Rev. Jishin Kinson. We joined him in congratulating Rev. Master Alina and Rev. Master Jishin on

receiving this title, and we thank them for their many years of dedicated training.



Retreats and Festivals: Since the closed period ended we have fortunately been able to hold several residential retreats, including introductory for the first time in two years. We have had to limit the number of guests to fifteen per retreat, to keep everyone safe, so they have been fully booked. We have also welcomed lay trainees to two Sunday Festival days, celebrating the Buddha’s Renunciation and the Bodhisattva Achalanatha, as well as the Festival of the Buddha’s Parinirvana which took place during the intensive weekend retreat in February.

Research on renewable energy and EV charging points: A group of senior monks is looking at ways to move away from fossil fuel use in our boilers, and seeing how new technologies like air source and ground source heat pumps could help us in the future. We have invested in a thermal imaging camera so we can find ways to reduce heat loss in our buildings, by helping us spot gaps and missing insulation.

Also, local electricians will be visiting soon to check suitable places for electric vehicle charging points. We hope, in time, to be able to install two standard car chargers for use by guests coming on retreat.

— *Rev. Master Roland*

Dragon Bell Temple

— Exeter, Devon – UK —

In December 2020, Dragon Bell moved from small town Tiverton to rural Drewsteignton, 12 miles West of Exeter. Since then we have been ticking along with a temple life where we are sharing the space with a long term supporter, Chris Drewe, whose house it is.

Cross Farm is situated in lovely countryside and the temple makes use of a small attic room zendō as well as common room, both of which are currently well suited to our purpose. Like everyone else, we have had ebbs and flows in what we have been able to make happen over the last months, a mix of intermittent in-person events with regular online sessions. In the past year and a half we arranged four meditation days in various rented venues around Devon and Cornwall.

On February 19th this year, we held our first full meditation day at Cross Farm. There were nine people attending, which is about our current capacity. The intention is to continue running these days together with meditation mornings on a regular monthly schedule along with our other weekly events. Currently, we are unable to offer residential retreats, something that is hoped for in the future.

Our thanks to Chris.

— Rev Master Willard

Norwich Zen Buddhist Priory

— Norwich, England – UK —

Recent events: On 5th December, the Festival of the Buddha's Enlightenment was a lovely celebration, attended by six of our Sangha in person, while others joined us online. A few days later,

we were able to enjoy a Christmas meal at the River Green Cafe once again, having had to forego it last year. Six of us came together for what was a very pleasant occasion, chatting in a relaxed setting, enhanced by some delicious food.

The Priory held a four-day sesshin in mid-December, which was the first time we have scheduled one of these intensive meditation retreats. It worked very well, with several people joining in person or online for all of the retreat or for various parts of it. Besides several meditation periods each day, we ate our meals in our places in the meditation room, reciting the full mealtime scriptures. The new Priory is an ideal environment for a silent retreat and those people who attended were enthusiastic enough to hope that we could do more sesshins, so we'll aim to schedule a couple each year. It was a joy to come together to practise and to support each other in this way. A big thank you to everyone who contributed to the success of the sesshin by sharing their training and especially to those who kindly cooked the lunches.

On 31st December, our New Year Ceremony was preceded by an evening of meditation. On the following day, we re-committed ourselves to our practice in a Renewing the Precepts Ceremony.



– Rev. Master Leoma

The Place of Peace Dharma House

— Abersytwyth, Wales —

We began the year with the New Year Ceremony, revolving *The Scripture of Great Wisdom*, and benefiting from this profound ceremony through which we take refuge in the flowing out of Truth, and in how to find it for ourselves. Since then there have been Zoom meetings for both individual trainees and group meditation meetings and ceremonies, where we are pleased to welcome Sangha in Australia.

January was a quiet time of Rains Retreat, offering both rest and renewal. Being able to settle into a period of contemplative reflection, where one makes the offering of giving oneself to inner abiding, is always fruitful. It is one of the ways we show gratitude, and through which training can deepen.

The temple now has broadband. Prior to this, the signal strength was insufficient to send out the monthly Dharma Reflections talks as MP3s, and Steve Roberts, of the Newcastle Group, has kindly been doing this on our behalf for the last two years. Steffan and Ellie Jones donated the increased monthly cost of upgrading, and Steffan installed the new router for us. Steve also donated an extra memory appliance, as our computer was slowing down, and Steffan installed it. We would like to thank both for their generous help and support. If anyone would like to be sent these talks (via a Dropbox link) then please contact Rev Master Myōhō on: placeofpeacewalesinfo@gmail.com.

Three named storms have hit Aberystwyth hard in recent weeks. We are grateful to have escaped with no more than a broken fence panel. The garden bushes swayed wildly in the wind but, in true Buddhist fashion, held firm until the disturbance had passed.

At the End of Day Ceremony 'We pray for peace in all the world, we pray that evil may be overcome by good, and we pray for the cessation of all disaster'. Afterwards merit is offered for both people and animals, and there are offerings of gratitude for this practice, and all that it makes possible. Standing before the altar, in silent reflection, we pray that all beings in all worlds may find True Peace.

Thank you to all those who sent donations of dana, food and toiletries over the festive period, and to those who make offerings on a regular basis. As you can imagine, they are greatly appreciated at this time. Thank you for helping to support the life of faith as it continues to unfold in this temple.

– Rev. Master Myōhō

Reading Buddhist Priory

— Reading, Berkshire – UK —

The Priory has continued to welcome both in person and online attendance, the latter proving particularly popular with sangha members from the wider community who are able to attend early morning meditations and services on a regular basis.

Festivals and Ceremonies: In early December the Festival of the Buddha's Enlightenment was held. It attracted a good number of people, some of whom were able to attend in person for the first time in a couple of years since the onset of Covid. It was a joyous occasion, and a wonderful experience to be sitting together after such a long time. The New Year was celebrated with a day retreat incorporating the New Year's Eve Ceremony, and was well attended. It was followed by The Buddha's Renunciation Festival at the end of January. In late February the

Parinirvana Festival took place after evening meditation, the service progressing dramatically from darkness to light.

Retreats: A morning retreat was held in mid-December, providing a welcome opportunity to retreat and refresh at this busy time of year.

After the start of the New Year, Reverend Gareth went on a personal retreat, his first since he took up the post of Prior some five years ago.

Maintenance and Improvements: In addition to the regular calendar round, during the past year Reverend Gareth has focused on improving and maintaining aspects of the Priory building and grounds. The ridge tiles were removed and re-mortared in, and the attic space cleared and re-insulated. The old apple tree in the back garden has been professionally pruned, and in the front garden a new lawn was seeded, and a couple of small rockeries created. Sangha members have helped where possible to do so.

– *Gina Bovan*

De Dharmatoevlucht
— Apeldoorn, The Netherlands —

Ordination: On Sunday 23rd January Sandra Westhoff was ordained by Rev. Master Baldwin and received the name Hōun Reizan. Rei is the Japanese word for devotion and zan for mountain. So the full name means: The Dharma Cloud above the Mountain of Devotion. Rev. Reizan's mother and son were present at the ceremony, as well as a small group of lay trainees, this because of Covid restrictions. The ceremony was therefore live-streamed on YouTube to our wider sangha which was very much appreciated. We wish Rev. Reizan well during her novice training in the coming years.



—Rev. Master Baldwin

Further Information

The Order of Buddhist Contemplatives was founded by the late Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett. The Order is dedicated to following the tradition of Serene Reflection Meditation (Sōtō Zen).

The main offices of the OBC are at the two training monasteries in the Order, Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey in England and Shasta Abbey in the USA.

More information can be found via the Order's website at: <http://obcon.org/>

Information on the whereabouts of the Order's temples and meditation groups, with their website and contact details, can be found at: <https://obcon.org/temples-and-meditation-groups/>

As well as the two training monasteries mentioned above, there are a further nine affiliated priories and nine meditation groups in North America, and in the United Kingdom there are ten priories and twenty-two meditation groups.

There are also Priories in both Germany and Latvia, plus two Priories and three meditation groups in the Netherlands.

Four issues of The Journal are published each year. They are available as PDF or Ebook files via the Journal's website: <https://journal.obcon.org/>

There is no charge for The Journal, though donations are always welcome via: <https://journal.obcon.org/donations/>

An annual compendium is available at the end of the year via print-on-demand, comprising all the articles which appeared in each issue during the previous twelve months.

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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