



The Journal
of the
Order of Buddhist
Contemplatives

*Serving Members and Friends
of the Order Worldwide*

Volume 37 Number 3
2564 B.E. (Autumn 2022)
ISSN 0891-1177

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Achalanatha Altar at The Place of Peace

Autumn 2022 Issue

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Proofreading: Thanks to Gina Bovan, Eldridge Buultjens, Chris Hughes, Eric Nicholson, Leonard Selzler and Eric Xuereb.

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Beyond the Opposites of Good and Evil

Rev. Master Haryo Young

— *Shasta Abbey, CA – USA* —

This is an edited version of a talk given after the Wesak Festival at Shasta Abbey in May 2022. Transcription by Willie Grieve.

Well, good morning, and thank you all for coming. It's gratifying to see so many people after these two years of drought; and as we start to open up slowly, it's nice to see you all coming again. And I'd like to thank Rev. Master Meian for inviting me to say a few words.

Today we celebrate the life of the Buddha in its entirety – the birth, His life of teaching and His death – with a certain emphasis on the birth of the Buddha because of the ceremony we've just done.

When you read what we sang today, or read stories of the Buddha's birth, the accounts usually contain some miraculous aspects: trees consciously bending down; the Buddha taking seven steps; lotus blossoms appearing where he stepped; His being born from the right side of his mother, or him stating "I alone am the World-Honoured One". And

one might ask – is the truth of Buddhism dependent on those aspects of the story of Buddhism being true?

I wasn't there, so I cannot speak with absolute certainty as to what happened, but my guess is that much of what is written down is the result of generations of the story of his birth being transmitted orally. And of course a story is easier to remember if it's interesting, so I think some of what we have are embellishments to make the story more memorable.

I also think there's some symbolism included: seven is often a number associated with stages of spiritual progress in religion. And the infant's stating "I alone am the World-Honoured One" may be an addition to encourage faith. (When do you hear anyone claiming "my religion is second best?") I can understand the value of adding elements to the story that factor in our human nature and help us to just get on with our practice and not wonder whether there's something else that's better out there. Seeing it as a skilful means of transmitting a story that inspires confidence and faith in those who hear it makes sense to me; but it needn't go beyond that, to talking down or denigrating what others do as lesser.

When I became a monk some years ago, I was fairly naïve. I was following more the path of discipleship than that of 'becoming a monk'. I didn't ask: "What does this mean, and what does that mean?" I just bowed when we bowed, and did what we all did. So I can't tell you the meaning of some of the things that we have in our practice.

I created a personal meaning for various aspects of our practice. For example, the Buddha on the altar has always symbolised the Buddha within me, the Buddha within all of us. In pouring water over the baby Buddha, as we did today, we can look at that water as symbolising the cleansing power of compassion and acceptance, for ourselves, as well as for others. So if you're wondering about the meaning of something, you can ask about it, or you can find a meaning for it within for yourself.

What do we actually know for sure about the Buddha's life? The teaching was transmitted orally for generations before being written down. We can assume He existed; that He was born, that He taught, and that He died. The true facts of his life may not be known, but the validity of Buddhism is not dependent on the absolute truth of the story: the truth of Buddhism is proved by doing the practice, by applying the teaching.

In terms of what words the Buddha actually spoke so long ago – well, it obviously wasn't English for one thing, so there's the matter that translating is not an exact science. There's also the aspect of consistency of an oral transmission. I don't want to under-estimate the accuracy which can be maintained if someone's practice is to hear something and pass it on orally. At the same time, I know how things can change quickly. I know I've given a talk, and five minutes later someone will say – I really like what you said about such and such; and that was news to me!

I would guess that the earliest Scriptures are likely to be the most accurate, but in terms of knowing the absolute

accuracy – did the Buddha say those exact words, and what did he mean by them – well, I don't think we need to do that. I don't know that we even could.

So what do you have to believe in? I think a bottom-line thing is that you have to believe you can change. I think most of us have come to practice Buddhism because of the wish for some sort of change. If we were completely content, we'd just be at home watching television or whatever. But usually there's something we want to add to what we've got; something that inspires us, that we think we don't have. Or something we'd like to fall away; some aspect of suffering that is hard to endure, and that we want to become less.

So it's necessary to believe you can change. But you also have to be willing to look at yourself, and do whatever work that's required. Buddhism offers a way to do that work. It's not the only way to do that work: it's just a particular way to do it. And it's a way that leads us in a direction of suffering less and finding pleasure, joy, happiness in life.

Suffering can exist on a variety of levels. It can exist on the physical level of pain: learning how to pay attention so that when you're driving you don't have an accident and suffer pain. That's perhaps the coarsest type of suffering – physical pain – but obviously there's emotional pain, psychological pain; and there's the existential pain of just simply having a self that seems very perishable, very isolated, and with the anxieties and fears that can come upon one when death is at hand. Buddhism does offer ways to come to terms with all these aspects of suffering; but again, it requires doing

the work to walk that path, and not just to believe that it can happen.

I look at the story of the Buddha's life as a template for the average person's life; it has a universal quality. The story says he was protected from seeing suffering in his palaces: don't we do that with our children? Don't we try to prevent them from suffering, try to minimise it, and protect them from physical harm or disturbing events that might scar them emotionally? Don't we protect ourselves from whatever is disturbing to us, whether it's trying to avoid confrontation, or whatever else we've all got on our list of things we'd like to avoid?

We try to minimise our suffering and turn towards that which is enjoyable or pleasurable; and that's baked into us biologically – which ultimately is good. It's an artefact of evolution, of our animal selves, but unfortunately some of that baked-in stuff still within us includes the propensity for anger; the propensity for recognising and then judging others as different from ourselves. But now we have the human intelligence to look at those parts of ourselves and say “No”. There was a reason perhaps on the animal level for us to behave in certain ways; but we don't have to now, we can see that the reasons no longer apply. However we have to make that choice and just not say; “Well, because I feel a certain way, that's the truth of things and justifies my actions.”

The Buddha, according to legend, saw the four sights – old age, disease, death and the wandering mendicant – which,

according to the story, shook his world and got him thinking. It's not uncommon for us to encounter those sorts of times in life which get our attention. Someone drops dead in front of you, or you get a glimpse of something more profound about life and you want to pursue it: you want to know more about it. Something may cause you to question the meaning of your life. What time do you have left? What are you going to do with it?

Just as the Buddha's *status quo* was shaken by what he saw, ours can be shaken on a personal level by circumstances, and this probably happens to everyone at some point in life. Presently it feels like it's happening now on a global basis with what's going on with war, or economies, not to mention Africa being on the precipice of famine – which you don't really hear much about in the news. But it's mind-bogglingly tragic.

If we have the eyes to see, life is repeatedly showing us the reality of impermanence, and the need to really look at our lives – what are we doing with it? When I drive when I'm visiting temples I will often see an animal that's been killed on the side of the road. I might say the Three Homages or just be still for a moment; but if I really think about it, and not think it's 'just' an animal, like a fly or an ant, I realize that just as its life force was snuffed out, I'm as vulnerable as it was, and that nature doesn't offer me any special dispensation from that happening just because I'm a human being. I then make sure my focus is on my driving since there could be a 'wham' for me at any instant if I lose my attention.

I don't know when I will live my last day. None of us does. You know, if I were to ask who's next, one of you should be holding up your hand! I notice as I get older, the backdrop against which I make choices is different. For example, on a practical level, I might be looking to buy some online data storage, and one option might be a life-time subscription for a one-time price of a hundred dollars. Or you could pay \$20 per year, so five years could be the break-even point. Now I'm 71, and I have to do the calculations – how long am I going to be alive? How much do I want to buy ahead of time?

The whole mindset gets influenced by how far along you think you are. Rev. Master Jiyu used to say “There are a lot of graves in the graveyard shorter than me”, equating the length of the grave to the age of the person. So who knows, this could be my last talk. When I realised that that could be true, I started playing with the idea. What if this really was my last talk, and if it's my last chance to pass on anything I thought worth passing on: some aspect of the Dharma, or words of encouragement.

If I were falling out of a building, I might yell out – “Carry on friends! Don't doubt you can prove the Dharma true for yourself if you practice!” – and that would be it. But I've got a little more time than that; although if I took the time to compose something, it would certainly be longer than the time we have available now. But it would probably contain something along the lines of the following:

I remember a few years ago listening to one of those late night talk-shows, which are usually about nothing particularly weighty. I don't know what the subject was at the time, but in any case there was someone who called in and said he'd been reduced to living in a cardboard box. He'd lost everything; he was at rock bottom. And he said that something had happened to him that he wanted to share over the radio: he said he saw (and these are my words because I can't remember exactly what he said) the glory and miraculous quality of ordinary human consciousness; and it was clear he had gone through some sort of transformation. His was not an intellectual conclusion, but a direct experience of something about his essential nature. Circumstances had taken everything away from him: he had nothing left, but somehow he found a way to look up rather than down, a way to carry on. He had nothing, and in that emptiness something had the opportunity to shine through.

Sōtō Zen is sometimes called the comfortable way. I think generally that means we don't engage in difficult ascetic practices: we simply sit in meditation as a core element of our practice. For a westerner who wasn't raised sitting cross-legged in meditation, I wouldn't call it comfortable in that sense! But what I take from it is that, unlike the man in the cardboard box who had everything taken away from him, our way is to let things go one at a time as they arise, rather than suffer the trauma of life stripping us bare.

And by letting go I don't mean cutting off or devaluing things; I mean not clinging to things in a way that denies their reality – the fact that all things change. And doing so – not

clinging to things – allows us to be more at ease with the relationships we have, not only with people, but with the things of our lives. The letting go is not grasping onto something, but more like letting it fall from your hand. It's still there, but you can pick it up as needed. It's not a rejection or a cutting off.

Getting back to the man in the cardboard box: if he were a good communicator, and maybe had a little charisma, and could share what he found in a way that answered a need within his culture at the time, he might have started a religion. I'm sure there are many people out there who have had such deep insights into their lives, but it doesn't go much further than themselves. If the man in the box did get the attention of others who thought: "I want what he has", they might look at the externals of what he did, and think – "I'll get my own cardboard box" – and do what he did.

But of course his transformation had little to do with the cardboard box: it had something to do with the process that was going on inside him. This reminds me a bit of the story of the monk who said he was sitting in zazen to become a Buddha, and the master started polishing a tile next to him to make a mirror. The disciple said: "you can't polish a tile to make a mirror" and the master essentially said: "Just sitting cross-legged won't make you a Buddha" – unless of course one does the inner process at the same time, which strictly speaking is independent of sitting or any outward form.

If the man in the box understood his own inner process, he might try to communicate it, knowing however that having

a complete understanding of whatever process or steps he laid out was not ‘it’. The understanding of a doctrine is not the same as the understanding one gets by actually practicing the teaching. But you have to start somewhere: one starts with the known which points and leads to the as yet unknown.

And herein lies the shortcoming of most of us: that being the tendency for our intellect to focus on what it understands and just put aside what it can’t get a hold of. Our intellect attaches and identifies with what it understands; what the ‘I’ in us understands. Now this is not to say that there is no benefit to the intellect, for of course there is. It’s because of our intellect that we can realize the consequences of our behaviour in terms of what causes suffering for ourselves and others. We aren’t just at the mercy of our animal instincts: we can distinguish between right and wrong, and choose compassion over cruelty. We can choose good over evil; and by ‘evil’ here I mean those thoughts, words or deeds that cause suffering and reinforce profound separation between self and other. We can choose love over hatred; light over darkness.

When I became a monk, Buddhism was not in our culture as much as it is now. You tended to hear about it – at least I did – if someone in your circle of friends told you something about it. I can remember a few books that were out then: *The Three Pillars of Zen*; *The Teachings Of The Compassionate Buddha*; *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind* (I don’t think I had read that). Of course there were the works of Alan Watts which were very popular but I just hadn’t read much of that. Nowadays it’s a very different scene. There wasn’t the

internet then: now you can spend day in and day out, probably for the rest of your life, and continue to find new expressions of Buddhism. There are innumerable YouTube talks and books which point out the importance of cultivating the virtues of compassion, love and wisdom; and point out the importance of aspiring to the good, and the transforming of our selfishness and harmful behaviour. As important as morality is, it's not a final resting place as far as Buddhism is concerned. Doing good is not a bench at the end of the road on which to sit, although I suppose it depends on what you aspire to, and by that I don't mean to judge that to which anyone aspires.

I'm just saying there's something beyond both good and evil; something beyond the opposites of good and evil. And to encounter that requires not getting stuck with or resting in the good; resting in love or light. Not letting them become a subtle anchor for the self. As kids we used to do an experiment where you'd hang a thread in sugar-water, and you'd come back some days later and there'd be all these crystals that had attached themselves to the thread. And the doing of good should not become a thread to which the self gets attached, and becomes hard and set, or turns to judging others.

This doesn't mean you don't do the right thing: you don't forget about being compassionate and kind. But it's something you let go of and move through as you do it. There is something beyond separate selves helping other separate selves, which of course has merit – but there is a bigger picture. Buddhism offers a more profound understanding of 'what is'.

Now we can all appreciate the value of not acting from a selfish point of view. The problem is actually doing so when our conditioning or instincts are acting upon us. It's not always easy to restrain ourselves in thought, word and deed even when we know it's the right thing to do. And the problem with doing good is that we don't appreciate that it too has some hooks; we can fail to realize that we have to walk past it as well. (Again, the string in the sugar water.) We walk past good as we do our best to do the right thing. As to what lies on the path beyond the opposites of good and evil, that's something we have to find out for ourselves directly, so I won't give you any definition to hold on to.

But I will say that to encounter it sheds light on how influential the workings of our minds are in creating the meaning of the reality in which we find ourselves. And you also see that you have much more 'say so' about how your mind works and the reality it creates. You realize you have much more say so than you had appreciated before: how to let go of the stuff of the mind; and you also have an appreciation of how to let go of the mind itself.

Rev. Master Jiyu's University – Durham University – had a motto: 'That which is true is greater than that which is holy.' But I might ask: "What is greater than that which is true?" Regarding this aspect of keeping going, I found a section recently in the biography of Mae Chee Kaew, a Thai Buddhist nun considered a modern-day Arahant. She died in 1971, and I encountered a passage that I found very much to the point which resonates with our teaching of letting go, and having no resting place. I'll quote some of it, not exactly – the

vocabulary is a little different – and her practice may emphasize different aspects of the overall practice; but it does help me make a point. Her biographer wrote:

When the offshoots of delusion were completely cut, her mind converged into a nucleus of supreme, sublime radiance: a radiance so majestic and mesmerising that she felt certain it signalled the end of all the suffering that she had been striving to attain.

Having relinquished all attachment to the factors of personal identity, the subtle radiant splendour at the centre of the mind became her sole remaining focus.

Sounds pretty good! And she decided to speak with her teacher and tell him what she had found. She spoke of her progress over the past year, carefully detailing the consecutive stages of her experience and concluded “With her lion’s roar, the radiant emptiness of mind that permeated the entire cosmos and transcended all conditions.”

When she stopped speaking, her teacher looked up and calmly asked: “Is that all?” She nodded. Her teacher paused for a moment and then spoke:

“When you investigate mental phenomena until you go completely beyond them, the remaining elements of consciousness may be drawn into a radiant nucleus of awareness, which merges with the mind’s natural radiant essence. This radiance is so majestic and mesmerising that even transcendent faculties like spontaneous mindfulness and intuitive wisdom

invariably fall under its spell. The mind's brightness and clarity appear to be so extraordinary and awe-inspiring that nothing can possibly compare. The luminous essence is the epitome of perfect goodness and virtue, the ultimate in spiritual happiness. It is the core of your being. But it is also the fundamental source of all attachment to being and becoming. Ultimately it is attachment to the allure of this primordial radiance of mind that causes living beings to wander indefinitely through the world of becoming and ceasing. That centre of knowing appears as a luminous emptiness that truly overwhelms and amazes; but that radiant emptiness should not be mistaken for the pure emptiness of nirvana. The two are as different as night and day.

The radiant mind is the original mind of the cycle of constant becoming; but it is not the essence of mind which is free from birth and death. Such radiance is a very subtle natural condition whose uniform brightness and clarity make it appear empty. It is the very substance of mind that has been well cleansed to the point where a mesmerising and majestic quality of knowing is its outstanding feature. When the mind finally relinquishes all attachments to forms and concepts, the knowing essence assumes exceedingly refined qualities. It has let go of everything... except itself. It remains permeated by a fundamental delusion about its own true nature. Because of that, the radiant essence has turned into a subtle form of self without you realising it. You end up believing that the subtle

feelings of happiness and the shining radiance are the unconditioned essence of mind. But emptiness, radiance, clarity and happiness are all subtle conditions of a mind still bound by delusion. When you observe the emptiness carefully, you will observe that it is not really uniform, not really constant: sometimes it changes just a little but enough for you to know that it is transient. Try imagining yourself standing in an empty room: you look around and see only empty space everywhere. Absolutely nothing occupies that space, except you standing in the middle of the room. Admiring its emptiness, you forget about yourself. Once the mind has let go of phenomena of every sort, the mind appears supremely empty, but the one who admires the emptiness, who is awe-struck by the emptiness – that one still survives. The self as reference point which is the essence of all false knowing remains integrated into the mind’s knowing essence. The self perspective is the primary delusion. You forget that you occupy a central position in that space. How then can the room be empty? As long as someone remains in the room it is not truly empty. When you finally realise that the room can never be truly empty until you depart, that is the moment when that fundamental delusion about your true self disintegrates.”¹

So here we have her teacher pushing her beyond perceptions of emptiness, radiance, clarity, happiness, experiences of joy – pushing her beyond them, saying “Keep going, don’t stop there”.

He's not disparaging them: he's just saying there is more. Which reminds me of our underlying maxim in zazen, where we don't try to achieve any particular state – nor is there a state in which we rest, however wonderful it may be. It reminds me of the phrase 'beginner's mind' and also: "It is difficult to keep the initial humility to the very end".

As I mentioned before, aspects of Buddhism (which aren't necessarily unique to Buddhism) such as different forms of meditation, have made their way into our culture a considerable amount, but I hope that Buddhism does not devolve into just a therapeutic tool to improve the life of the self, but continues to lead one to a place of liberating insight into what the self actually is or isn't.

Speaking as a monk, I hope the master-disciple relationship does not fall into disuse or fade from the scene because the mere appearance of hierarchy is deemed not politically correct. I also hope that Masters do not tarnish the relationship by letting their humanity get the better of them. And I hope the master-disciple relationship in its various forms does not lose its efficacy because Masters are afraid to be Masters, lest they be accused of not being sensitive enough or nice enough to their disciples; or are afraid to give hard teaching that challenges the disciples and students, especially at those critical make-or-break times in the disciple's or student's spiritual life.

In other words, I hope Buddhism does not lose its edge as it grows in the West. I hope it continues to challenge us to be more than we appear to be.

Religion can become like a golden cage in which it's easy to see the gold, but hard to see that it's a cage, and yes, one may walk happily and freely within the cage, but still not know freedom in its deepest sense.

Note

1. Bhikkhu Silaratano. *Mae Chee Kaew - Her Journey To Spiritual Awakening & Enlightenment*. Forest Dhamma Books, 2009, pp. 191-197.

Bodhidharma's Outline of Practice (Part Two)

Rev. Master Leon Kackman

— *Portland Buddhist Priory, Oregon - USA* —

This article was originally published, in serialized form, in the Portland Buddhist Priory Newsletter. This is a continuation from the Summer 2022 issue of the Journal.

Seeking Nothing: A Note on Finding and Having

“They fix their minds on the sublime and let their bodies change with the seasons.”

Occasionally, in our seeking, we find what we want and we get to have that thing. We might get what we want after a long period of working toward that thing. Or maybe it shows up early or along the way of our life as a gift. We might say to Bodhidharma, when we hear what he has to say, “you say seek nothing but I have what I want; don’t bother me with your negativity.” And Bodhidharma might just bow and go about his business.

And still, the Buddha and Bodhidharma have said what they have said and we have heard it.

There is impermanence and there is “the sublime”.

Having heard, and for a moment recognized what we have heard, a little itch begins to take root in us: something like the thought, ‘at the very least, this thing that I have found will eventually be lost’ appears in the corner of our mind. Rev. Master Jiyu used to say something like, “all are called, few pay attention to the call, fewer still heed the call.” The truth of impermanence and “the sublime” are truths that we recognize in our own hearts; this part of us that recognizes these truths is called Bodhicitta or, “the mind that seeks the Way”.

When Bodhicitta is awakened within us, even in a small way, by ‘hearing’ the bell of “the sublime”, it starts that itch. The first meditation group that I was involved with recommended reading Chogyam Trungpa’s *The Myth of Freedom*. As I remember it, I found the book helpful but got diverted to something else. Only later, after I had established myself in practice, did I pick it up again and finish it. After I picked it up again, I had to laugh when I came across a section where he says, “don’t start to practice unless you intend to go all the way. If you start and then stop, it will always be as if there is something unfinished in your life.”¹ I laughed because I could see that for me, the itch had started, the bell had rung and couldn’t be unring. (Although I think for me, that bell had rung even before I encountered Buddhism.)

Eventually, if we follow this call, this itch, we will come to a place in our life where we have to look more deeply at

what we have found. But a lot of the time, with the things that we cherish, we don't want to look too closely. We want to avoid looking, because we fear that we will lose what we cherish, because we do not wish to admit that we have already lost it. How much suffering do we humans create by trying to keep things as they are? By trying to keep our "bodies from changing with the seasons", in one way or another?

When I first went to Shasta Abbey, in the cloister between the kitchen and the Buddha hall, tucked into a small niche, was a diorama called the Kanzeon garden. I was there for an introductory retreat and for the orientation tour we stopped and looked at this diorama. The monk leading the tour said it was a three-dimensional representation of a traditional Buddhist mandala called the mandala of the six worlds, wheel of life or the Bhavacakra.

Explaining the complicated topic of the mandala of the six worlds is beyond the scope of this commentary (this webpage: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhavacakra> is a reasonable and more thorough introduction) except to say that there are two of the most important points of Buddhist practice contained in this type of teaching. One is that help and practice can be found in whatever circumstance we find ourselves. And the second is that there is something beyond the continuously cycling wheel of existence; the continuous cycle of 'calamity and prosperity'.

Also, it should be said that in Buddhism it is taught, and so implicit in the mandala of the six worlds, that no realm is

permanent: hell is not permanent; heaven is not permanent; our human situations are not permanent.

Anyway, the version in the cloister at Shasta Abbey was three-dimensional and was set up on a triangular slope about seven feet across at the lower base of the triangle. The slope was covered in green AstroTurf. Each of the six worlds, the hell realm; the animal realm; the realm of the hungry ghosts; the heaven realm; the asura realm – a type of aggressive god; and the human realm, was represented mostly in action figures of the day. He-Man and She-Ra were there; Barbie and Ken were there; Stretch Armstrong and a host of others including various monsters and the like were there.

As the monk explained some of the highlights of the diorama, she eventually came to a small scene set partly up the slope. (At the bottom of the slope were the lower realms – hell, hungry ghost and animal – at the top was the heaven realm with some richly attired figures on string caught in the moment of ascending.) Our small scene was part of the human realm and depicted a farmhouse facing downhill, away from the heavenly realm. Around the farmhouse there was a well-tended garden and the family was gathered on the porch, happily listening to live music.

The point I remember about this was that the house was set up so that the people had their backs turned away from the part of the diorama representing working toward understanding the deeper aspect of life. It was explained that

there was no problem with any of the things going on in the scene, just that there seemed to be a deliberate not looking at the deeper aspects or potential of life.

When we are confronted with the prospect of looking more deeply at what we have found, it can appear as if we are being asked to choose between practice and what we like or love; or between practice and our health; or between practice and our well-being; or...? But really, what we are asked is to look deeply and let go of that which cannot be held on to.

Often, when we consider letting go, our mind jumps to the conclusion that we are asked to get rid of or cut off the thing we hold onto; we think we are asked to break our commitments or renege on our responsibilities but this is far from the truth. Really, what we are being invited to do is to allow our mind, our relationships, our work, our recreation, our heart, “to change with the seasons”. We are invited to allow these things to be alive, even though that inevitably means that they will die.

When what we have found, whatever that might be, feels threatened, and particularly feels threatened by practice or the Dharma, perhaps we are not yet seeing things clearly? If, at that time of being threatened, we can turn toward the deeper matter, toward practice, toward “the sublime”, we have the chance of helping along the transformation that got us going on the path in the first place.

Seeking Nothing, Continued

“Those who understand this detach themselves from all that exists and stop imagining or seeking anything.”

We can think that a teaching like “Those who understand this detach themselves from all that exists and stop imagining or seeking anything” is too extreme, is too exotic; but, in our Sōtō Zen practice, this is what we are doing, in a small, steady way, each time we sit down to meditate. Sōtō Zen is, I understand, called “farmer Zen” in Japan. This is, in part, because it was originally practiced by the peasant class in contrast to Rinzai Zen which was practiced by the Samurai class.

There is also another meaning to this farmer Zen. In our practice, there is a need for the steady undramatic patience of a farmer. We get up in the morning and go to our meditation seat, patiently tending to the garden of our practice. Each time we choose to practice, in small or large ways, we are choosing ‘reason over custom’. The ‘custom[s]’ here are the ingrained habit patterns of our lives, especially those distorted by greed, hatred and delusion.

When we hold onto these habits and patterns, they tend to obscure and distort our True or deeper self; they distort the “Sublime”. When we wake up and “choose reason over custom”, we choose to practice, in a steady, step-by-step way; we harmonize ourselves with our True self.

In *The Most Excellent Mirror—Samādhi*, a poem by Tōzan Ryōkai, (807-869) recited (or sung, in our case) during the Sōtō Zen full morning service, the opening line reads:

The Buddhas and the Ancestors have all directly handed
down this basic Truth:

Preserve well for you now have; this is all.²

Every day, at morning service, we hear, we are told: you already have what you need. This is what Bodhidharma is telling us when he advises us to discover where we seek; where we act on discontentment with what we have; where we fall into the trap of believing that we lack something on a fundamental level, and to let go of these distorting customs. One of my teachers used to say “the more I practice, the more ordinary I appear.” and Dōgen says, in *Rules For Meditation*, “...training and enlightenment are naturally undefiled; to live in this way is the same as to live an ordinary daily life.”

When we work toward “detach[ing] from all that exists and stop imagining or seeing anything”, we are entering fully the actual life that we have right now. This is an invitation to fully live the ordinary, wonderful life that we have right now.

As I write the following, I am sharply aware that what I say here will not do the subject justice. It is my hope that you will not take what I say as an attempt to be definitive on the subject but rather, it is an attempt to bring something up for consideration in meditation.

Practicing the Dharma

The fourth of the four practices, Practicing the Dharma is as follows (from the Red Pine translation):

Fourth, practicing the Dharma. The Dharma is the truth that all natures are pure. By this truth, all appearances are empty. Defilement and attachment, subject and object don't exist. The sutras say, "The Dharma includes no being because it's free from the impurity of being, and the Dharma includes no self because it's free from the impurity of self." Those wise enough to believe and understand these truths are bound to practice according to the Dharma. And since that which is real includes nothing worth begrudging, they give their body, life, and property in charity, without regret, without the vanity of giver, gift, or recipient, and without bias or attachment. And to eliminate impurity they teach others, but without becoming attached to form. Thus, through their own practice they're able to help others and glorify the Way of Enlightenment. And as with charity, they also practice the other virtues. But while practicing the six virtues to eliminate delusion, they practice nothing at all. This is what's meant by practicing the Dharma Path.

"The Dharma is the truth that all natures are pure."

This is a tricky one. I mean, is he saying that anything goes? That bad acts are really good acts? That causing harm is somehow permissible? No, “those wise enough to believe and understand these truths are bound to practice according to the Dharma”; we are “bound” to act according to the whole of the Dharma, including the Precepts. He is pointing to something here that is different and deeper than our ordinary understanding of things. He is actually not commenting on the things and situations outside of ourselves in a philosophical way; at least those things aren’t the significant part of what he is pointing at.

Let me repeat this: when talking about Buddhist Wisdom, we are not commenting on the rightness or wrongness of an action that takes place outside of ourselves, it is closer to say that we are talking about what happens within the individual and how they perceive or respond to an action.

What I mean is, imagine that some action occurs outside of ourselves that we witness. That action has consequences that are hard to bear for the beings in the vicinity of the action (maybe even us). What the Dharma is helping us to understand and learn is that we can change how we see and understand that action, and that new ‘seeing and understanding’, which is closer to being in accord with fundamental reality, will help us to understand the action and respond to it in a way that does not increase the suffering.

All through this *Outline of Practice*, Bodhidharma has been giving us kind advice about how we can shed our own conditioning which covers up our own wisdom. When we connect with our own wisdom, the world appears differently; we understand the world, and the events and things that appear in it, differently.

Most of us are driven by fears and misperceptions which we may only have a vague awareness of. We are like that person in the classic dream who is being chased by a monster. That person often doesn't even know what the monster really is. But when that person decides to stop running, something changes. When that person decides they have had enough running, when they decide that whatever that monster might be, facing it is worth the benefit of no longer being caught in the endless running. When they stop and turn around, then they will be able to put to rest that suffering which is driving them. They will be able to face and accept what they are running from. Waking up from the dream is also significant, since we then have the opportunity to see that we have created both the running self and the monster.

Often we stop and turn around out of desperation and weariness: we have just had enough. But there is another aspect of our turning around which is this strange sense, this itchy feeling, that there is something more that we just aren't seeing fully yet. We have this feeling, which can be vaguely vexing, that maybe the Dharma is really pointing to an experience that we do not yet fully know, but that we could know.

This itch, this sense, is what allows us to consider that we could actually be pure ourselves. While it is true that we are Pure, and our sense that the Dharma might actually offer us a way out of our suffering is accurate, we can still view this through the distorted lens of the discriminating self. We might think “I am a me and you are a you.” Because we think like this and hold onto that thinking, because we view the world from the perspective of the small self, we distort what purity is.

This is what Bodhidharma is saying when he says:

By this truth, all appearances are empty. Defilement and attachment, subject and object don't exist. The sutras say, “The Dharma includes no being because it's free from the impurity of being, and the Dharma includes no self because it's free from the impurity of self.”

The impurity of self is the result of looking at existence through the lens of the discriminatory mind. With the discriminatory mind, we try to define and solidify the self; this attempt to define and solidify is what makes the self impure.

When we hear that “all natures are pure” from the point of view of the self, we can mistakenly hear it as a confirmation of a view. We might have the view that “my self, with all these characteristics which I both like and do not like, is real and exists and is good.” When we hear the teaching that “all

natures are pure”, we might mistakenly think that the self, as we conceive of it, is pure and is therefore true and reliable. But the view, the belief, that the self exists, in a way that can be held onto, is not a reliable view; this view about the self is what will cause us suffering if we hold onto it.

Of course, the Dharma regularly tells us that a view of a separate, unchanging self is a mistaken view and Bodhidharma reminds us of this when he says “the Dharma includes no self because it’s free from the impurity of self”. We can also see the effects of this unreliability by paying attention to how we react to circumstances that arise in our lives. How do we react when someone suggests that we are wrong? How do we react when someone suggests that we are bad? That we are impure? How do we react when someone does not confirm our ‘rightness’ or the purity of our small self? Do we feel these things as a threat? A judgement? When we are criticized, do we automatically and with heightened and inflamed emotion feel we need to defend ourselves? Feel we need to prove the other party wrong or incompetent? Of course, few of us will think that we are never wrong and therefore should never be told no, but how much effort do we put into creating a cloud of obfuscating dust with our vigorous assertions about how we should not be told that we are wrong?

Over time, as we sit, determined to take refuge in the activity of meditation, day in and day out, steadily and patiently coming back to our cushion, we gradually begin to soften our grip on the self: we can come to gradually see that

the self we are so bent on defending is just a continuously changing phantasm like the flame of a candle which cannot be held onto.

We all do this creating a self, holding onto and defending a self. And, we can all, no matter what suffering we come from, learn to let that self dissolve; we can learn to let it shift and change, dance, like that candle flame. We can dissolve our suffering if we persist in keeping going with our Dharma practice.

As I sit writing this I feel this unsettled feeling brought about by hearing some news about something that didn't go my way. As I do the work of writing this, I notice the feeling arising and, letting go of it (even though the feeling doesn't go away), I bring my mind back to the work. As I sit with it, I recognize it as that feeling like having the carpet pulled out from under me that often comes with betrayal or disappointment. In this case I know that there was no betrayal from outside of me, there is only the self having hoped that the thing would go my way and, grasping after that hope, I started to look at the situation as if, of course, it was going to go the way that I wanted. This is how we create suffering around the self, but also how we can train with the self and let go of the suffering and the habits of our own mind which create or increase suffering. Gradually, as I work on this, the feeling dissipates.

Steadily, patiently, I turn around and look; being willing to see what is there and the truth of what is there. Steadily,

patiently, I ask myself is there a way that I am breaking the Precepts? Steadily, patiently, with as much gentle kindness and friendliness as I can muster, I release my grip on whatever I find myself holding desperately onto. I do my best to let go where I hold on. This is practicing the Dharma.

When we accept and know, in our blood and bones, the truth that all natures are pure, it is the basis for a boundless compassion and loving-kindness: a bit of a mystery but, nonetheless, true.

Practicing the Dharma, Continued

“The Dharma is the truth that all natures are pure.”

In a note for this fourth practice, Red Pine says: “The Sanskrit word *dharma* comes from *dhri* meaning to hold, whether in a provisional or an ultimate sense. Hence the word can mean *thing, teaching or reality.*” This fourth practice corresponds with the fourth noble truth which is the means to the cessation of suffering. Practicing in accord with the Dharma is practice in accordance with reality, whether provisional or ultimate: thus, Buddhism has no argument with scientific reality, even though it does “hold” that there is something beyond conventional reality. It is interesting to me that Bodhidharma apparently bypasses volumes and volumes of Buddhist teaching and instruction on practice to focus on this one thing: “all natures are pure.”

This Purity is the “Pure” (shunyata) mentioned in the *Scripture of Great Wisdom* and is often translated as

emptiness or voidness. Using the word “Pure”, in this context, underlines that emptiness in the context of Buddhist Wisdom does not mean a kind of blank non-existence. It would be closer to say that an “appearance” in existence is empty of a concept of a self: it is pure of the overlay of self or any concept or overlay.

“The Dharma includes no being because it’s free from the impurity of being, and the Dharma includes no self because it’s free from the impurity of self.”

We get confused by the idea of purity and impurity. We think of it like we might think of excrement. Excrement is impure, in a physical sense, because it makes us sick if we are not careful of it. Impure equals sickness, sickness equals bad. In this equation – which works provisionally in conventional truth – impure equals bad. Defilement equals bad. But this is all relative to our self; excrement is only bad relative to the self that does not want to be sick (which is reasonable).

In another important sense though, excrement is just a complicated thing in the world and is neither good nor bad. Excrement, in this sense, is just a step in the process of life. It even contains its own kind of life (which is why we have to be careful of it!). In this sense of it being neither good nor bad, excrement is pure; it is “free from the impurity of being” one thing or another. What Bodhidharma is pointing at here, relative to our mind, is that, if we have mental suffering around excrement, or around anything, (like, we have a mental or emotional aversion to dealing with whatever it is)

we are quite possibly making it impure by holding onto a view of it. Letting go of our view of a thing or situation doesn't mean that we somehow transform it into something that we no longer have to be careful of: like excrement, it could still make us sick. But not holding onto a view of a thing, enables us to deal with it most effectively.

From this perspective, much of our practice is coming to see where we hold onto some view or opinion about our self or about the world. As I mentioned earlier, the second noble truth says that the cause of suffering is attachment. We normally think of attachment to objects, things and conditions, but we should also be very careful to understand that attachment also applies to our views and opinions about everything. Being attached to our views and opinions is likely to be the most significant area where we create suffering for ourselves and others.

“Those wise enough to believe and understand these truths are bound to practice according to the Dharma.” If we are suffering, if we are in conflict with others, especially with the Sangha, we might look into whether we can let go of how we are looking at things; let how we are looking at things change. If we are ‘practicing according to the Dharma’ – and practicing according to the Dharma is practicing in accordance with what is real – we can at least seriously consider the possibility that there is some further idea, opinion or way of looking at our life or the world, that we could let go of.

Again, though, in this Fourth Practice, Bodhidharma is pointing toward Emptiness or Purity: Shunyata. He eloquently points out that this Buddhist Emptiness is not about some indifferent, despairing, cold blankness.

And since that which is real includes nothing worth begrudging, they give their body, life, and property in charity, without regret, without the vanity of giver, gift, or recipient, and without bias or attachment.

That ‘that which is real contains nothing worth begrudging’ is not the source of despair, it is the source of freedom to respond to life from a place of positive generosity. “They give their body, life, and property in charity, without regret.” This place of ‘giving without regret’ and ‘without bias or attachment’, is giving from our deepest nature. When we let go of regret and bias and attachment, we open up to our deeper life; this practice is lively and not static.

Even our giving is an act of ongoing training: “and to eliminate impurity they teach others, but without becoming attached to form.” Being attached to form, holding rigidly to one way or another of doing things, is one way that impurity arises. Impurity is the delusive mind that covers up the Fundamental Purity; one of the primary delusions is the belief that the discriminatory mind and its projections are true, the sense that they are fundamentally reliable.

When we teach others, when we relate to others at all, we have to learn how to let go of all judgementalism about

them or us. No matter my position, I am not better nor worse nor the same as another person. Just today, I happen to have the job of teacher and I have to take responsibility for that. As a teacher, it is expected of me, in practicing the Dharma, that I will look carefully at how I give rise to the impurity of pride and let that go; I must work to convert any pride or inadequacy that arise. Pride (“I am better than another”) and inadequacy (“I am lower than another”) are the evidence that we are enmeshed in the discriminatory mind. Converting pride and inadequacy is letting go of ‘the vanity of giver, gift, or recipient.’

“But while practicing the six virtues to eliminate delusion, they practice nothing at all.”

The six virtues are the six pāramitās:

- Dāna pāramitā: generosity, giving of oneself
- Śīla pāramitā: precepts, virtue, morality, discipline, proper conduct
- Kṣānti pāramitā: patience, tolerance, forbearance, acceptance, endurance
- Vīrya pāramitā: energy, diligence, vigor, effort
- Dhyāna pāramitā: meditation, contemplation
- Prajñā pāramitā: wisdom, insight

To practice the pāramitās while practicing nothing at all is to understand that the prajñā pāramitā permeates all of our life; practicing the prajñā pāramitā is to be actively alert to when we are holding on to anything in our minds or spirit and

to let that go. This way of practicing allows our understanding to grow and deepen.

The Prajnaparamita one should know
To be the Greatest Mantra of them all,
The highest and most peerless Mantra too;
Allayer of all pain Great Wisdom is,
It is the very Truth, no falsehood here.
This is the Mantra of Great Wisdom, hear!
Buddha, going, going, going on
Beyond and always going on beyond,
Always BECOMING Buddha. Hail! Hail! Hail!²

This is what's meant by practicing the Dharma. Practicing the Dharma is endlessly enriching, endlessly lively, endlessly profound.

Notes

1. Trungpa, Chögyam, *The Myth of Freedom*, Shambhala Publications, 1976.
2. *The Liturgy of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives for the Laity*, Shasta Abbey Press, Mt. Shasta, 1988.

Meeting Suffering with the Heart That Seeks the Way

Rev. Master Fuden Nessi

— *Dharmazuflucht Schwarzwald, Germany* —

The “Yes” of the heart towards whatever is here for us right now, both in our inner life and in the outer circumstances of our life, even when it is imbued with suffering, is an aspect of the Heart/Mind that seeks the Way.

There are times in life when we become more acutely aware of the suffering in existence. On a personal level, there can be times when we are confronted with major changes in ourselves or in our immediate surroundings that cause us grief; or times when aspects of our life that before seemed clear, suddenly feel incomprehensible. Fears that didn’t used to be there are then often in us.

It is so helpful at such times if we can bring these difficult inner states into the refuge-taking heart. If we are able to do this, we are often just left with a simple “I am willing”. And even while the difficult states may still be in us, sometimes our heart then also intuits our true, eternal Refuge.

In one of the Mahayana sutras, it says that the Buddha is like the sun, permeating everything with His pure, golden rays. This I feel also refers to the activity of the Goodness emanating from our true Refuge. Thanks to it, the confusion and suffering of the past can find the help that it needs in the present.

For this to happen, our willing acceptance towards what is given to us in life is necessary. When we close ourselves off from what is here in the present, or try to evade it, we shield ourselves from these healing rays of the Buddha-Nature. When on the other hand we meet what is given to us in life with acceptance, we start to orient ourselves towards the Goodness inherent in existence. In a way, through this inner “Yes” we are entreating Buddha to turn the wheel of the Dharma.

It is not easy though to always keep open and receptive towards what is difficult and often also incomprehensible. There is something Reverend Master Jiyu told us, that has always inspired me: “It is extremely difficult to simultaneously accept, let go of and appreciate our obstructions”.¹ The “Yes” of the heart that I have been referring to, encompasses these three ways of approaching our difficulties. It leads to a genuine refuge-taking in the midst of them.

It seems to me that, what often prevents our openness towards what is there in our inner life and outer

circumstances, is our strong tendency to base ourselves on an ideal of how we think we should be, and of how life should be.

In the *Sandōkai* it says: “Here born we clutch at things, and then compound delusion later on by following ideals”. Our ideals of how we think things should be, and the subsequent fixed views that have formed in us based on these ideals, solidify what amounts to an unhelpful rift in our perception of life. It’s difficult to describe in words all that this rift entails, but I believe that it can prevent us from knowing the Dharma and the compassion that is inherent in what is right now. As our ideals and the rift soften, there can be a quiet intuition in the heart that we, and what comes our way, are within the same stream of being, at the heart of which is goodness and compassion.

When there are difficult states of feeling in us that we find incomprehensible, it is somewhat normal and human that at first, questions such as these arise: “What is going on here, is this normal? Am I doing something wrong, is there something wrong with me?” If at this point, we let our ideals of how we think we should be sweep us along, we greatly complicate matters.

If on the other hand, we are able to be with an open and accepting heart with these feelings and what caused them, a response is sometimes called forth in us, that can express itself something like this: “I am here for what life brings me,

I am willing to be fully here for what is in me now, even if it is difficult and I don't understand what is happening.”

In approaching our inner difficulties in this way, the wheel often turns around. From feeling threatened by what is in us, there is a turn-around from looking down to looking with trust. We are thus making it possible for Buddha to teach us by means of what is there.

* * *

And then there is of course the great suffering we keep witnessing in the outside world; in the happenings in the wider world, and perhaps also in our immediate surroundings. Here too, we can respond with the Heart that seeks the Way. Offering merit to the beings who are suffering is an expression of this.

When we hear of the intense suffering that some people are undergoing, for example in a war situation as in the Ukraine at the moment, there is often considerable grief in us. We are deeply connected to all beings, much more so than we are probably aware of. And there is a natural love for beings in us. Therefore, hearing of and witnessing their suffering can at times make us feel quite miserable. For some, it may even bring forth in them a negative and depressed view of the world and of existence.

It is so helpful if we can bring this grief too, and all it evokes in us, into the refuge-taking heart. It doesn't

necessarily go away, but it is softened there. A positive movement is then set in motion, that gives rise to wishes from the heart and prayers for those who we know are undergoing so much suffering. We can hold them in our hearts, offer them the merit of our endeavour on the spiritual path, and recite prayers or scriptures for them.

In our temple, in the ceremonies we hold for all those who are victims in a war, we pray that they may not only find the outer help, refuge and protection that they so urgently need right now, but also the eternal Refuge within their own hearts, the source of Goodness.

Our offering of merit can also take very personal forms. It can be something as simple as offering the merit of the peace and the trust that we have found by responding to our own difficulties and suffering with acceptance, to the people who are currently undergoing much more severe suffering than we are.

When we hear of people inflicting great harm on their fellow humans in a war, this not only fills us with grief, but often also with a strong indignation towards those who are responsible for the all the misery.

While it is understandable that our heartfelt wishes and prayers go first and foremost to the victims, we should be very careful not to let the indignation turn into hatred towards those who are perpetuating the war.

When we don't allow ourselves to be carried away in our thoughts by the anger, and instead turn with it towards Buddha in our heart, the anger, hatred and accusing mind soften. It then becomes more possible to dedicate our prayers to all, without exception, including those who are responsible for the great suffering.

* * *

There seems to be a direct connection between the willing acceptance of our own suffering and difficulties, and opening our heart more widely for the suffering of our fellow human beings.

Thus, the “Yes” towards what is difficult in ourselves and in our life – which is in itself already an aspect of the Mind that seeks the Way – can turn into deeper aspects of Bodhicitta. In the last two vows of the Ten Great Vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, these are phrased in terms of serving all sentient beings continuously and offering the merit of our training to them.

May our initial, simple “Yes” of the heart call forth and deepen these vows in us too.

Note

1. Jiyu-Kennett, Reverend Master P.T.N.H., *Roar Of The Tigress Volume 2*, Shasta Abbey Press, p. 181.

Climate Disaster

Michele Feist

— Williams Lake, BC - Canada —

Journal readers will no doubt have heard the news in 2021 about the catastrophic wildfire which destroyed the town of Lytton in British Columbia, where Lions Gate Buddhist Priory is located. Lay minister Michele is a long-time member of the Temple's congregation. The following story was co-created with the [Climate Disaster Project](#). Based at the University of Victoria in Canada and led by faculty at a growing network of 12 other post-secondary institutions, the project works with people who have lived through climate disasters to share those stories using a trauma-informed process. It's the beginning of a decades-long project to create the world's largest archive of climate narratives. "Because stories create community, and community creates hope."

Raised on a remote farm in Fort St. John, BC, Michele discovered her love of the outdoors early. She'd fill her backpack with a pop and a peanut butter and jam sandwich, cross the river that ran beside the farm, and wander into the hills. By twenty-two, Michele moved to Vancouver to complete a psychiatric nursing diploma at BCIT, and later her registered nursing degree. Her diverse thirty-year career included mental health nursing and palliative care.

A practising Buddhist of thirty years, Michele developed close relationships with the monks at a small temple in Vancouver. The Abbot of this temple did the marriage ceremony for Michele and her husband Grant. When Grant died in 2014, Michele pursued her and Grant's dream of moving out of the city. The monks had relocated to the Botanie Valley so she found a home in Lytton, a town which she calls "a hidden gem because most people drive by it".

"It's not a shiny Shaughnessy kind of neighbourhood. You either saw the beauty or you didn't," says Michele, describing its rundown buildings and the amount of love in the place. "I'd sit under my tree, have my morning coffee and, because of where my house was located in Lytton, a good chunk of the population would wander by."

The little house she lived in was over a hundred years old and built after the town's last great fire. Michele poured years of effort into fixing it up: hauling rocks, landscaping, and painting the exterior a bright yellow. She spent most of her time gardening, exploring with her large eleven-year-old rescue dog, Finn, and socialising with neighbours and friends.

After the wildfire that spread through Lytton destroyed Michele's house, she bought a home in Williams Lake where she continues to explore, garden, and remodel the house through labour and love.

As she recounts: "We had all been on alert because there was the George Road fire up the hill. People were on edge. The night before, I couldn't sleep and there were a bunch of us out watching the fire. Peggy, an older friend that lived up

the way, said, “I think I’m going to pack a go bag.” We didn’t dream we’d need it.

I packed my husband’s memorial album, a couple of statues that are one of a kind. The weirdest thing: a fridge magnet that I treasured, that reminds one to be kind. I put those in a box and then I packed the bag. I packed the ugliest bra, two pairs of old beat-up underwear and pants that didn’t really fit because I thought, “I’m not going to use these.”

It was so hot. Because we were in a drought from April onwards, the area was incredibly dry. In fact, twenty minutes before the fire, my friend Christine texted me and said, “How you doing?” I said, “It’s fine. But one spark leads to disaster.” We were just coming out of the heat dome. It was set to break the next day, so the temperature had come down a little bit, but then the wind picked up. It was a nasty, nasty wind. It was blowing harder than I’ve experienced and Lytton’s a windy enough place.

When the fire happened, it was very fast. We were all in our houses. I was making dinner. I looked out the window and I saw the quality of smoke had changed. There was a thickness and it rolled along lower. This roiling, brown, awful looking smoke. I knew we were in trouble then. I walked out onto the front porch just to see the lay of the land and that’s when my friends drove by. Kerri said, “Get out.” I just knew at that point.

I went in, grabbed the two things that I’d had ready in case of an evacuation. Grabbed the dog, put him in the truck.

I was ready to run. I was in the truck and going, then I just got an internal nudge. I actually thought, “Oh —.” And I turned the truck around and went to get my neighbour. I knew I needed to find out if she was okay because I knew she was asleep. I worried that she’d get missed.

The front door was shut but I blew on in. She was awake. Her son had called her and she was standing holding her phone. Her house was quiet. We had this little back and forth. I remember at one point, we held hands. I said, “Lorna, we’ve got to go.” And she said, “I know.” She grabbed her purse and we went.

There were embers falling on my head. People’s backyards were on fire. What I saw was people going up and down the street, banging on doors and making sure that everyone was accounted for. It’s such a small town and we were able to say, “Okay, tell everyone that Lorna’s okay. She’s with me.” My friend Michele, she saved a friend because Peggy kept running back into her house. So she grabbed her and said, “Get in your car and drive.” These little actions were going on all over the place. We’ve compared notes, and that is why more people didn’t die. Every single person that could, helped someone.

There was someone directing traffic. He was pointing to go north and all I could think of was: “The wind is coming from the south. I’m not letting the fire chase me.” So I went south. It was terrifying because there was zero visibility. I knew there was a vehicle in front of me. I knew someone was following me. And I was so afraid to go. I wanted to drive very

quickly but I knew I couldn't because I'd ram the person ahead of me. I was also afraid I was going to get rammed by the person behind me. So we just crept along. There were flames six to eight feet high on either side of my truck. The smoke was so dense. I just kept going. And I knew in the back of my head somewhere that Lytton was gone.

When I got to Hope, it was right before the long weekend. There was this whole juggling act of where can displaced people go. Tourists are way more attractive than evacuees who are panicking, hauling their dogs and their kids and the rest of it. I kept thinking "I'll just sleep in the truck."

The monks sheltered me. One contacted his brother in Ontario and said can you get on the internet and find Michele a place? They found me, for one night, a hotel in Hope that would take the dog. Then we scrambled again. I got booked for two weeks at the hotel in Chilliwack. It was a bit hellish because it was still a heatwave. I had two weeks to think about, "What am I going to do?"

So I sold my truck and bought this little RV and ended up taking it to a place where they were letting us camp for free for a good chunk of the summer. Its own little circle of hell because in the campground there were many evacuees, a couple of whom were quietly, not in any way intrusive, but just quietly, despairingly drinking to get through the day. Two of whom have since died.

Everybody wanted to go home. It was becoming increasingly apparent that there was no external rescue coming. There was no organization. There was no assurance

of any kind of interim housing being set up. And I thought, “Well, okay, Feist. It’s time for you to look after yourself.”

I ended up trading in the RV and getting a small car. The rest of the province was also on fire. I drove up the Coquihalla to get to Kamloops and there were fires next to the highway. I met my friend in her hotel where she and her husband and her dog were evacuated. And we just cried. We just cried together. And then I carried on because what do you do? You need to keep going.

I drove out of the smoke. I contacted my financial advisor and said, “What can I afford?” I’m privileged because my credit is good. I found a house. It’s not my dream house, but I’m converting it. It’s part of my belief system and values that if you find yourself in a situation, it’s good to apply an application of love. So that’s what I’m trying to do. The little yellow house in Lytton is paying for the little yellow house here.

Initially, there was a great impetus to “Let’s rebuild, let’s get back.” With the insurance payout it was very clear to me that my insurance was not going to cover a rebuild. I didn’t know if rebuilding was even possible. It’s been so screwed up from minute one that people don’t even have their debris cleared yet at the one year mark.

I worry that there are becoming various categories of people that could divide us. There are the people who lost their houses, the people who didn’t lose their houses, people

on the west side of the river who still have their places but they've lost the community. And people all around because Lytton was a hub for 3,000 people. So they've all lost even if they've got a home. I know people that want to rebuild, that are trying to rebuild. I also know people that just want to put it all behind them. I'm somewhere in the middle.

I'll visit for sure. I will definitely be back for visits. It's a beautiful place. Such good people. The temple is there. My husband's ashes are up at the temple. The Abbot of this little temple, my teacher, sat with me when we sifted the remains of my house. That was last September. The authorities were very worried about toxicity. It was lucky there weren't a lot of people around and the security was kind of lax that day. So the monk and I were able to do just a little walk. It felt so good to walk on that ground.

The house is decimated. We weren't allowed to be on the property but a volunteer group, all masked and PPE'd up, went in and sifted. I got a couple of items out of the fire. It was scorched. It looks like a bomb blast went off. But the acacia trees are unbelievably resilient. I had an elm tree in my front yard. Half of it was green, and it sheltered a little bit of my lawn. So there's this little patch of green. There were flowers trying to come up.

I think, ultimately, that we incline towards life. That we're really not as a species trying to kill ourselves off. That maybe it's going to get more uncomfortable before it gets more comfortable, but that we have the capacity to look up.

What gives me hope? Planting the garden, watching seeds come up. I don't incline to think we're completely a lost cause. We just keep putting one foot in front of the other. We're in the situation we're in and keep plodding along."

Called and Connected

Rev. Master Alina Burgess

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

Adapted from a talk given at Throssel on Wesak day 2022.

Thank you for coming to join us to celebrate the Festival of the Buddha's Birth, it's good to have you all with us. A joyful festival like this, or just coming to the monastery, can elicit a sense of affirmation, connection, reminding us why we train and what it means to us. In a talk a while back, one of the American monks spoke of a deep aspiration for Truth. That struck a chord for me; the wish to know Truth and to be true feels deeply based.

I see that I have always felt this wish but didn't recognise what it was for many years. I experienced a quiet question at the back of my mind, right from my early years. The urgency became stronger as the years passed. I really didn't know what it was – and I could not ignore it. I tried all sorts to 'settle' it and taking on a new activity engaged me for a while but was quickly revealed to be 'not it.' I was doing my best to solve something which I recognised was deep and significant, but didn't know to stop and listen to what was calling me until I discovered practice.

I see that the call to turn within was functioning before I recognised what it was. Dōgen said in the *Body and Mind Study of the Way* chapter of the *Shōbōgenzō*: ‘The thought of (or aspiration for) enlightenment *arouses itself*, [my italics] it is not dependent on conditions or limited by them.’ I didn’t generate a wish to practice, coming was an (eventual) following of what was being called for. My not attending to the call for so many years did not hinder it, in fact it became stronger to catch my attention, it seems. Dōgen says the aspiration ‘arouses itself’, suggesting that it is active in our engagement with our life.

In busy interactions during our day, we find our way, sometimes triggered by habit and reaction, sometimes connected and present – and we instinctively know when we are going adrift and feel the rightness of following what we feel to be true. We are drawn to sit, even though there are times and circumstances when we dig our heels in and resist, or ignore the quiet beckoning. Once sitting, letting go and staying open to the wish is challenging, yet even quite early on, we recognise when we are off track: “this isn’t it”, and come back.

Sometimes an insight comes from out of the blue and quietly opens. Recently a statement came to mind which I was comfortably secure about, felt was unquestionably true, and as it came to mind, I saw clearly “Oh, that’s not it.” It was quietly revealed in a new light. My previously held idea was washed away; it was humbling, I saw I didn’t know, needed to leave the conjecture and be willing to rest in the unsettled, unresolved, to look again. In whatever form they come,

experiences of suddenly seeing something have quite an impact. As they fade, nothing graspable is left, yet something has been seen and known, a suggestion perhaps of the inner transformation over time through practice.

And in the practical realities of our day, we *are* finding our way. The idea I had been holding on to was all I could see – and then I was shown something more, with no trace of judgement, simply quietly shown. It's like that for us all, our sincere effort now is what we can see and do at that time; trust it and go with it, but hold it lightly, and seeing more, let go and move on anew.

There is never a complete 'right answer'. There is always more to see as long as we live, not because of any lack in capacity, but because we live in the dynamic of the moment with everything else involved too. There is no solution, but a living out in real time. Everything I do is a response, in one sense, to others, to circumstances and to my best sense of what is good to do. When alone and quiet, I am as I am in response to my thoughts and feelings.

Shinshu Roberts, a contemporary Zen teacher, points to 'our tendency to define our experience rather than be open to its ambiguity'¹. When we have defined something, it feels like we 'know where we are with it.' This feels reassuring, but it's a false reassurance as we have stepped aside from the flow of what is happening. More than that, defining our experience sets something up, which we then react to and build on; we create a safety net against the unsettling ambiguity.

It calls for much to stay on that edge of unresolvedness and allow our feelings to show us our insecurity, show us that we don't know. It is not a problem that we don't know, it is always the case, as nothing in life is ever fixed but is always unfolding. It is not 'my' life. When we let be for a while our viewpoints, concerns and agenda, and just be where we are, everything is seen to be quietly functioning without me steering. It's not about me, yet there is no diminishing of me, it's a quite different viewpoint. All circumstances and encounters, and in response, all steps taken, all mishaps, joys and embarrassments of everyone present have their effect in shaping what is here and what happens next. There is a lively fullness in this.

Shinshu Roberts says "There is never a time when all the elements of a situation are not coming forward to meet us". All the elements of a situation – and people – are not just part of our life, but are 'coming forward to meet us' she says. This is referencing a quote by Dōgen in *Genjō Kōan*² "That *myriad things come forth* and illuminate the self is awakening." Rather than 'carrying the self forward' i.e. seeing ourselves as centre stage and attempting to control things, when we let go and allow ourselves to meet whatever comes, the moment opens to us and shows us how we are, what is going on, and something of what is needed may become apparent.

There is a striking line at the beginning of *The Most Excellent Mirror—Samādhi*: "The Buddhas and the Ancestors have all directly handed down this basic truth, *Preserve well for you now have, this is all.*"³ [my italics] 'You now have' expresses much. 'Now' is emphasised by its

unusual position, and being unqualified means every moment. It is the same with ‘you’; it refers to anyone reading the scripture, no exception. Being about everyone equally, ‘you have’ can’t be talking about possession of anything that others don’t have, but about the true nature of what is here.

The dedication at the beginning of the ceremony expressed this too: “The newly-born Buddha looks around and sees that his nature is the Truth. He takes seven steps to reveal that all that exists has the same nature.” I read this as pointing to how the Truth the Buddha later realised was already present when he was born and that his life was already expressing this.

The two words that precede ‘you now have’ in *The Most Excellent Mirror—Samādhi* say something about practice from this perspective. ‘Preserve well’ is an unusual but rather helpful expression. ‘Preserve’, as in keep your practice alive, commit to it, explore it, become with it, grow with it. There is a shift in approach to training, no longer approaching from a point of view of lack, but from the deep wish to see what we can of what is called for and how we may help. The circumstances of our life continue and our habitual tendencies still get triggered, but any challenging traits can be appreciated not as obstacles to training, rather what we train with as best we can when we find them here. They arise through a complex set of conditions and history that have come together to be just like this now. There is no need for judgement, but to see and accept, then do our best to see what is needed. Even though almost all of our lives is familiar territory, in meeting each moment, we don’t know; it is new experience and we have to look to where we are to have a

sense of what's good to do. What's needed is not clearly definable, but we alight on something and take a step and see what's next.

There is a quite unfathomable depth at work within this active training. I have talked a bit about my sense of connection and the guiding call as a way to try and say something about this deeper context. It shows me why letting go of self-view and looking deeply are so much a part of practice. It is freeing, and such a relief, to let go of self concerns and to allow life in and to appreciate what is here. Life has a fullness and an edge too as there is always the question of what is called for. What can I do to help is not a chore, but a fulfilling offering that connects me to others and to my life.

Notes

1. Roberts, Shinshu. *Being Time: A Practitioner's Guide to Dōgen's Shōbōgenzō*. Wisdom Publications, 2018.
2. Great Master Dōgen. *Genjō Kōan* in *Shōbōgenzō*. Tanahashi, ed., Shambala, 2012, p 29.
3. *The Liturgy of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives for the Laity*. Shasta Abbey Press, 1990, p. 61-2.

News of the Order

USA & Canada

Shasta Abbey

— *Mount Shasta, CA - USA* —

Community: At evening tea on Sunday, August 14th, Rev. Master Oswin presented Rev. Allard Kieres with his Teacher of Buddhism certificate and his purple vestments. Rev. Allard was ordained in 2012 and will have been a monk ten years on the 19th.

On Tuesday, August 16th, the community held an entry ceremony for Rev. Quang Tue Nyugen, which was a modified ordination ceremony in which he took Rev. Master Meian as his master. He received his robes and vestments, begging bowl, and Precepts



(he had already renounced the world and had his head shaved when he ordained in the Vietnamese Mahayana tradition). Rev. Quang Tue retained his ordination name, and together with the Hōun family name his complete religious name, Hōun Quang Tue, means ‘Bright Wisdom within the Dharma Cloud’. Rev. Quang Tue has been training at Shasta Abbey since March 2021.



Other Ceremonies. On June 19th, Rev. Master Andō was the celebrant for a naming ceremony (below) for Soto, a small terrier



mix dog who lives with Gayle Yamasaki in Klamath Falls, Oregon. Soto is a rescue dog from a southern California animal shelter. Several other monks attended the ceremony.

Then a week later Rev. Master Amanda was the celebrant for a funeral for Bernie, a 15-year old Shih Tzu who lived with local congregation member Scott Ward. The funeral was held at the outdoor Jizō Shrine.

On August 4th Rev. Master Oswin performed a 49-day memorial for Dixie Feiner, a Eugene Priory lay minister who died on June 16th. Afterwards we scattered her and her late husband Milt's ashes in the monastery cemetery. Her funeral was held at the Eugene Buddhist Priory on June 26th.

FOSA Work Day. Friends of Shasta Abbey (FOSA), a local group of lay trainees dedicated to supporting the work of the Abbey, sponsored a Saturday morning, August 6th, work day focusing on cleaning up the Abbey grounds, picking up tree bark, and stacking firewood as a part of fire abatement. Everyone enjoyed working together, and FOSA provided pizza for everyone's lunch. Other recent FOSA projects have included contributions toward cloister roof repair and a new septic tank.

Retreat. The summer ended with a retreat led by Rev. Master Kinrei Bassis, Prior of the Berkeley Priory, on the the theme of *Finding our Peaceful and Compassionate Heart*. Each day Rev. Master Kinrei lectured on one aspect of this practice: peace, compassion, equanimity, Bodhidharma and the eight worldly winds, right view, and connection. In addition, he saw everyone for sanzen and led discussions in the afternoons. The retreat was attended by 28 people locally and another 22 online. We were very grateful for Rev. Master Kinrei's offering of the Dharma.

— *Rev. Master Oswin*

Eugene Buddhist Priory

— *Eugene, Oregon – USA* —

On June 2nd, Dixie Feiner, a long term member of the Priory and Lay Minister, died in her home at the retirement community where she had been living for some years. She was 84 years old and had been suffering from various health issues for some time. Rev. Hugh was able to be with her shortly after her death and read, as she had requested, some of the Exhortations of the Dying. A few days later Rev. Hugh and about a dozen congregation members

gathered at a local mortuary for her private funeral ceremony and cremation. Dixie was a lay disciple of Rev. Master Oswin and he was able to travel up from Shasta Abbey and be the celebrant for her public funeral ceremony on June 19th. Many of the congregation attended the ceremony in person and we were also able to broadcast the ceremony via a Zoom link. We were joined via Zoom by a number of Dixie's relatives from the East Coast of the US. Following the ceremony, we had a community tea and enjoyed sharing memories of Dixie and hearing some stories of her life from her niece Roberta. Up until the last few months of her life Dixie offered support and encouragement to congregation members and new people alike. We are grateful for her training and spiritual friendship over all these years. She will be deeply missed.

The Priory has continued along quietly and steadily this summer with its weekly schedule of meditation, ceremonial and Dharma talks. Although we have been open for some time to in-person meetings, due to the ongoing Covid situation many people still join us via our zoom links that run concurrently with our main Wednesday and Sunday meetings. A few new people have started regularly attending the Priory. In addition to regularly attending meetings we have been very grateful for their additional offerings of helping with ongoing cleaning in the Priory as well as outdoor work on the property. Recently, thanks to the additional help, we have been able to re-open the perimeter trail which circumambulates the 4.5 acres of property. A number of congregation now regularly walk the trail enjoying the Ponderosa pine forest area, the denser, darker Douglas fir and fern forest, and the open Oak savannah area.

Throughout the spring and summer, we have slowly chipped away at clearing out Scotch broom and blackberry patches which are trying to take over many parts of the forested areas. Progress has been made, particularly with the Scotch broom, but much more work needs to be done. We have also been looking at the fire safety and general health of the forest and have slowly begun thinning out trees in various places.

So far, the summer has not been too oppressively hot or dry and we have been fortunate with forest fires. As we begin to head towards the autumn we look forward to meeting the usual influx of new people both from the larger Eugene area and students returning to the University of Oregon and Lane County Community college.

— *Rev. Master Hugh*

Wallowa Buddhist Temple

— *Joseph, Oregon – USA* —

Reverend Master Haryo's Visit: It was a delight to host Reverend Master Haryo Young for a four-day stay at the temple in July. During our weekly Sunday Morning Retreat, Rev. Master



Reverend Master Haryo offering the Dharma,
Wallowa Buddhist Temple Sunday Morning Retreat

Haryo offered the Dharma for our local congregation who then enjoyed the opportunity to ask questions and receive teaching. Then we gathered outdoors in the shade and shared tea, chocolate cake, and other goodies. The monks very much appreciated being together with Rev. Master Haryo, as did those who came to meet with him one-to-one while he was here. We are also grateful for his wise, experienced help and advice with repairs around the temple.

Bright Summer: The temple has resumed Sunday Morning Retreats and individual retreats, and we have welcomed an increasing number of in-person visitors over the summer. In August, the monks enjoyed a bright sunny morning picking cherries, at the invitation of our neighbor down the road. We also enjoyed the resulting cherry pie that Rev. Clairissa baked to share with friends who came to visit.



Pie offering, Wallowa Buddhist Temple main altar.

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 have resumed 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*

Canada

Lions Gate Buddhist Priory

— *Lytton, British Columbia – Canada* —

We have had a pleasant summer after an unusually cold, wet spring. The temperatures have been hot at times, but nothing approaching the heat of last summer. Another fire occurred in our

general vicinity. This one was on the other side of the Fraser River. It flared up quickly, and like last summer, many people had to flee in a big hurry. Sadly, several homes were lost. The fire has now gone into the high mountains of the Stein Valley, and it is being closely monitored by firefighter personnel.

Over the past few months, in addition to festival ceremonies, we have conducted several private memorials for deceased loved ones. On May 27, we attended a Celebration of Life for Irene Buttuls, a local friend, at the Buttuls' residence, as she had requested. We sang Dedication of Merit, and Rev. Master Aurelian said a few words in remembrance of her.

On Saturday, July 23, we held a large public animal memorial for all the pets and other animals who perished in last year's fires. About 15 people attended, many of whom traveled a considerable distance. The ceremony had been announced on Facebook, and we received a very long list of names of pets and animals which were read at the beginning of the ceremony. Afterwards, we had a social tea, with cakes, beverages, and doughnuts.

We continue to hold Zoom Dharma meetings on Thursday evenings and Saturday afternoons. If you would like to receive notices of these meetings, please contact us.

We are very happy to be able to welcome visitors and retreat guests again. We have held two day retreats on Saturdays, and we have welcomed many visitors from British Columbia and other parts of Canada over the summer. Some stayed for several days and others visited for a few hours. You are most welcome to visit, for an hour or a few days or longer. We have several options for overnight guests. If you are interested in attending retreats or coming to stay at other times, please feel free to contact us.

News of the Order

UK and Europe

Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey

— *Northumberland, England – UK* —

Abbot's Retirement: Rev. Master Leandra has made the decision to step down as Abbot of Throssel. Now in her mid-eighties, she has served with tremendous kindness and dedication since March 2019, and has come to realize her health is such that the time is right for her to relinquish the role. Monks and lay trainees have expressed their gratitude for her help over many years, and paid tribute to the compassion and energy she has



shown as abbot. We all wish her well now that her life as a monk is taking her in a new direction. More information about her future activities will be forthcoming in due course, and an announcement will be made by Throssel when her successor is elected.

50th Anniversary: At the end of June, Throssel held a day of celebration to mark 50 years since the temple was established. We were pleasantly surprised that a large number of lay trainees made the journey to join us for the festivities; it was fortunate that the Covid pandemic had eased enough for us to welcome so many people.



After a ceremony both celebrating our Founder, Rev. Master Jiyu, and offering thanks for the temple's existence, we were delighted that Rev. Master Daishin, who made the trip up from Wales for the occasion, offered a Dharma talk in the ceremony hall. The rest of the day comprised an informal lunch, and time for tea and catching up with Sangha friends, many of whom we had not seen for years. It was such a joy to share the occasion with a sizeable gathering of fellow Buddhists.

Vice abbot Rev. Master Berwyn, who was celebrant for the ceremony, created a slideshow illustrating the history of the temple – this was shown in the common room in the afternoon. It included video footage of Rev. Master Jiyu at Throssel in 1972.



Retreats: Jukai, the Ten Precepts retreat, took place at the end of July and was attended by a small group of lay trainees, seven of whom received lay ordination, thus expressing their commitment to following the Buddhist Way. Our congratulations go to David, Martyn, Kevin, Ian, Vincent, Stephen and John on taking this

important step. Rev. Master Leandra was Precepts master (photo below), and gave four Dharma talks during the week.



In the following month a sesshin was held, which over twenty people attended - our biggest retreat for three years. Rev. Jishin led the week-long event, sitting zazen with the participants, and giving Dharma talks which can now be heard or downloaded from Throssel's website, as can those by Rev. Masters Daishin and Leandra mentioned above.

Water shortage: In common with most of the UK we had a very dry start to the year, and by August found the water level in our borehole was getting low. This necessitated imposing some limits on water usage, a measure we have not had to take for many years. Fortunately these restrictions were minor and our retreat programme went ahead without too much inconvenience. Because of this, as well as welcoming the rain which has fallen since September began, we have also been exploring all our options for ensuring that we have the infrastructure to provide a reliable water supply for all our buildings into the future.

Green energy projects: We now have permission to install 24 solar photovoltaic panels on the roof of the meditation hall. Contractors should be able to start the installation sometime this month, and the work should not be too disruptive. Once complete, this equipment will contribute significantly to saving energy and reducing our electricity bills.

— *Rev. Master Roland and Rev. Sanshin*

The Place of Peace Dharma House — Aberystwyth, Wales —

On June 5th we joined the rest of the country in celebrating the Platinum Jubilee of HRH Queen Elizabeth II, who, as a young woman, dedicated her life to serving our country and people. Pictures of her were placed upon the altar, we offered gratitude for a vow well-kept, and for her example of all acceptance, in being willing to take on this enormous responsibility that life had brought to her.

In July we made offerings to Lord Acalanatha, The Immoveable One. Rev. Master Myōhō gave a talk on how the roots of our being come forth from the vow, the true wish that we were born with, and how Acalanatha exemplifies the training that enables us to hold fast to this, and not become sidetracked.

Later in July Geoff Nisbet and his family visited. Geoff trained at The Place of Peace for several years, when he was ‘right hand man’ to Rev. Master Myōhō, who was celebrant at his wedding. He now lives in America, and still supports the temple. It is always good to see old Sangha friends, especially ones who have offered, and continue to offer, such dedicated service and a fine example of lay training.



The Nisbet family in the Common Room

In August guests from the Leeds area, and the N.E. of England, visited. Heather Walters, who has trained at The Place of Peace since it was founded, came for a private retreat and, after the Covid years, it was good to see her in person.



Working Meditation in the Garden Room

As the summer draws to a close, the parched lawns are beginning to ‘green up’, and, as the last of the young birds have vacated their nests in our hedges, we prepare to have everything cut back for the winter. During the heatwave the blackbirds lay on the lawn, with wings outstretched, and heads resting on the grass, and sunbathed, showing us gratitude in action.

It has been good to train with those who have come, and we also continue the regular Zoom Dharma meetings for those who cannot visit, in person, as often as they would like to.

The monthly Dharma talks are still being sent out as mp3 files and, if anyone would like to receive them, please contact Rev. Master Myōhō.

Finally, thank you to everyone who continues to support this small, contemplative temple, both financially, and with gifts of home grown produce and household items, all of which are much appreciated.

— Rev. Master Myōhō

Reading Buddhist Priory

— *Reading, England – UK* —

As summer unfolded, the worst of the pandemic died down, restrictions considerably eased, and in-person attendance at the Priory began to increase. The Zoom option to join in is still in place, although this is now levelling out alongside in-person attendance.

Day Retreats: In early July Reverend Gareth was able to visit the London Meditation Group, his first visit in over two years since the pandemic. He reported that it was good to meet up again with sangha members and renew his connection with the group.

School Visits: In late July, in order to help with their studies, twelve GCSE students and two teachers from a local secondary school came to the Priory. Reverend Gareth gave a short presentation based on questions that they were seeking clarity on. This was followed by an engaging and lively question and answer session. The students explored the meditation hall, and showed particular interest in the altar and side shrines.

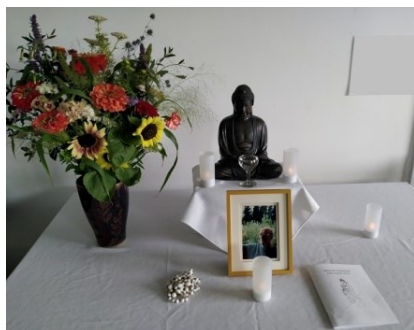
Socials: The Priory hosted the first lay sangha social event since before the pandemic, and it was held after the Sunday group morning on June 5th, coinciding with the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. Friends and family came along, and it was a relaxed and festive occasion, celebrated over a bring and share lunch.

Throssel's 50th Anniversary: A small group from our sangha accompanied Reverend Gareth to participate in the celebrations on June 26th. It was lovely to meet up with the monastic community again, and with so many other lay sangha members, some of whom had been present from the beginnings of Throssel. It gave a sense of depth and wide experience to the occasion. Reverend Master Daishin's talk after the commemorative service was deeply moving.

— *Gina Bovan*

Turning Wheel Buddhist Temple

— *East Midlands – UK* —



Funeral for John Ferris: In early August we were very sad to hear that John Ferris, our friend and long-time Sangha member from Nottingham, had died. John's funeral ceremonies were held on August 23rd, with a private cremation in the morning which his close

family attended, and then a public ceremony in the afternoon. The public ceremony was held at the Attenborough Nature Reserve in Nottingham, which was a very nice venue, and the main part of that was our memorial ceremony for John. Rev. Master Alicia from Sitting Buddha Hermitage came over for the ceremony. The memorial was followed by some very nice eulogies from a family member and a work colleague. A picture of the memorial altar is shown above.

Regional Sangha Day in Leeds: It was lovely to see so many Sangha members in Leeds for the Regional Sangha Day on the 16th of July. The event was held at the Jamyang Buddhist Centre (photo below) in the Holbeck area of South Leeds, which is where the Leeds meditation group holds its meetings.



Monks from Throssel and other OBC Temples attended: Rev. Masters Saidō, Mugō and Alicia; also Revs. Sanshin and Kanshin as well as Rev. Master Aiden. Altogether there were nearly 30 people present. The day started at 10am with a meditation period, followed by Morning Service and a Dedication of Merit Ceremony. We then stopped for a cup of tea, and this gave us all a chance to catch up with old friends, as many of us haven't met since late 2019. After the break Rev. Saidō gave a Dharma Talk on Ceremonial. After a break for lunch there were a number of activities on offer, including going for a walk or playing the 'Training and Enlightenment' game – a board game developed at Shasta Abbey. We then all came together again for Evening Service and meditation in the main hall. Thank you to all those who organised the day, in particular the members of the Leeds meditation group.

Nottingham Day Retreat: On the 23rd of July we held our first Day Retreat in Nottingham since the Autumn of 2019. The retreat was held in a room in the library in Beeston, and ten lay Sangha members took part, from Nottingham and the surrounding areas.

It was really nice to be able to practise together again in this way after such a long break, and we hope it won't be quite so long before the next Day Retreat. The venue worked very well for the retreat, and thank you to all those who helped organise the day.

— *Rev. Master Aiden*

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.

The Journal of the OBC is administered through the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives Activities Trust (reg. No. 1105634 in the UK), and the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, a non-profit corporation, in the USA.

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