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## **Autumn 2023 Issue**

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## Do You Need To Be Religious To Practice Zen?

Rev. Master Berwyn Watson

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

The brief answer is: it depends on what you mean by ‘religious’. If we see ‘being religious’ as believing in a set of religious doctrines that define belonging to a particular religion, then I would say the answer is ‘no’.<sup>1</sup> If by being religious we are implying that we would have faith in something more than just what we know now, I would have to say ‘yes’.

There are two reasons why faith cannot be left out of Zen practice. Firstly, I don’t believe that the Sōtō Zen tradition can be separated from the Buddhist tradition as a whole. And despite attempts from some to be selective and create a western form of ‘secular Buddhism’, the Buddhist tradition usually implies some form of faith in its various forms.<sup>2</sup> This is especially true in terms of actual Buddhist practice. It is just about possible to write an academic book about Buddhism and say its doctrines are ‘secular’ in many ways. But this leaves out the important fact that Buddhism is actually practiced by living people. Who, in whatever tradition, regularly make devotional offerings, follow various forms or preceptual guidelines and practice some form of meditation.

The second reason is that faith in the Buddhist practice in the tradition I know (Sōtō Zen) is inseparable from its main practice of zazen or meditation. Zazen is an expression of faith. We meditate facing a blank wall, and just sit, neither following thoughts or rejecting them. We don't do anything else. If we already knew everything, if we were satisfied with our lives as they are, there would be no reason to do zazen. And if Zen was solely a form of mindfulness training, designed to enhance our health or wellbeing, then the meditation would be guided in some way, and there would be a definite aim. But the practice is formless: we sit with an open mind, without expectation. In the end there are no techniques, or ways of getting somewhere. We even have to give up the idea of the self as a separate being that must achieve something. If practicing this doesn't imply a faith, I don't know what does.

What this 'something' is, Zen teachers are very cagey about pinning down with words. Perhaps because it sets up an expectation in our minds, and that is precisely what we want to avoid. But in one famous poem by a Zen master, it is called 'Faith in mind'. The 'mind' in this case being represented by the Chinese 'Shin' character – meaning 'heart-mind'. This is broader than the intellectual mind (although it includes it), and implies that the wish for understanding is itself already an expression of 'mind'.

For me, this is the basic faith that if I drop my judgements and opinions, I will come to know a truth that will help overcome the sense of separation and dissatisfaction that seems to rule my life at times. It is faith

because the very simplicity of the practice implies that what I will ‘gain’ is not the addition of another set of beliefs and doctrines to prop me up; it is rather that by dropping everything, what I actually need will be revealed. As Dōgen puts it “All you have to do is cease from erudition, withdraw within and reflect upon yourself. Should you be able to drop off body and mind naturally, the Buddha mind will immediately manifest itself.”<sup>3</sup>

My first encounter with Sōtō Zen and meditation was with a Zen monk in a library near Leeds where evening meditation instruction was being offered by a small local group. I remember my first words to the monk as something like: “I only want to learn meditation, I’m not interested in being a Buddhist ... etc”. I was somewhat defensive, looking back on it. How then did I end up becoming a Buddhist monk and Abbot of a Buddhist Monastery? Other people see me as a religious person, and according to some definitions, I have to admit I probably am. But I haven’t undergone any subtle mind control to disable my rational faculties, (as far as I know!) In some ways I recognize in myself the same skeptical mind that I displayed in my first encounter with Zen practice.

So I know from my own life experience that ‘faith in mind’ does not mean a rejection of the intellectual faculties that enable us to make rational choices. It does not involve an unquestioning devotion to a historical person or living person. It does not involve a blinkered adherence to a set of religious doctrines either.

It is not surprising that I was somewhat afraid of some aspects of religion in my 20s when I started meditating, and wanted to distance myself from them. In Bradford in the late 1980s, I witnessed Salman Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses* being publicly burnt in a square in the centre of the Town. Windows of bookshops were smashed. It seemed violence was being justified in the name of religious beliefs. (Although I hasten to add, this violence was carried out by a very small minority. I knew a lot of ordinary Muslims in Bradford, as I taught English to them as a volunteer at the time, and like me, they were shocked and dismayed at what happened).

I am still skeptical about religious claims of absolute truth, but what has remained after thirty or so years of practice is a sense of the value of faith, or trust. And according to many definitions, faith is one important aspect of 'being religious'. There are many accounts of the value of religion, but this is one I can relate to:

Religion is at its best when it helps us to ask questions and holds us in a state of wonder – and arguable at its worst when it tries to answer them authoritatively and dogmatically.<sup>4</sup>

The wonder Karen Armstrong talks about is an aspect of faith. Many of the overtly 'religious' aspects of Zen are ways of expressing and showing gratitude for this wonder. Bowing is one example, and making various offerings in ceremonies such as memorials is another. They express and confirm something. But these aspects of Zen practice such as

bowing, that we can call ‘devotional’ are not done out of fear or as some means of subservience. I’ve come to see how they arise out of the basic faith. I have to admit I don’t know everything. In fact I often don’t even know what to do next. Bowing seems to be a physical acknowledgement of this recognition of some basic humility and realism. It is not anti-rational. More and more it seems that it is the subtle forms of hubris that are obviously irrational and destructive.

I need to work on my tendency to see myself as a separate being that is in control all the time. Bowing has become part of the recognition of connection and dependence on everything around me. It now seems both devotional and realistic and rational to acknowledge these connections and work within them. Is there a hard and fast separation between what we call devotion and reason? Is it not sometimes ‘reasonable’ to feel gratitude and wish to express it?

Another aspect of ‘being religious’ is sometimes seen as following religious observances or practices. I have met many people who are attracted to Zen because it doesn’t seem to emphasize elaborate ceremonies or rituals. There is a spectrum even within Sōtō Zen, but most Sōtō Zen temples and monasteries, including Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey, do some kind of chanting after meditation in the morning, and have other Scriptures that are recited during mealtimes and other daily activities.

‘Rituals’<sup>5</sup> were one of the things I was afraid of when I first asked a monk about zazen. I think the fear came from a



sense that I would be required to do something that made no sense at all. That I would have to suspend belief indefinitely and my basic autonomy would be undermined. My early experience of local meditation groups affiliated to the OBC helped me to approach formal ceremonies with an open mind. I was encouraged to just try practices like bowing, and leave any final decision ‘on the back burner’. This was different from telling me I had to destroy my doubts, and reassured me that I wasn't just being asked to take part in a kind of ‘magic’. Engaging with what was going on in a ceremony brought about change. It was not a matter of doing some esoteric actions to manipulate the world in some way, but choosing to change my own mind by taking part.

One of the verses we learn at Throssel is the mealtime verse, which goes:

We must think deeply of the ways and means by which this food has come, we must consider our merit when accepting it. We must protect ourselves from error by excluding greed from our minds. We will eat lest we become lean and die. We accept this food so that we may become enlightened.

To say this verse, either aloud or to yourself, is not just a formal ritual in the sense that it must be done in the same way in the same particular situation to make something spiritual happen. When I travel on the train and eat some sandwiches I've made, I just say the verse to myself. Its ‘efficacy’ is in reminding myself of where the food came from and all that was involved in making it, and in some

ways what my purpose is. It's just a pointer back, a reminder that I don't exist just to consume. In this way, traditional forms can be very helpful, but they cannot be imposed upon us, nor are they required to define us. I choose to say the verse because it helps. Although some ceremonies are more formalized than this, the principle is the same.

There is another aspect of faith that seems critical in our current times when the climate emergency is all too apparent. In the face of seemingly continuous 'bad news', it is easier to despair, and I've read recent reports about the prevalence of 'doomscrolling' or 'doomsurfing', defined as "the act of spending an excessive amount of time reading large quantities of negative news online."<sup>6</sup>

Religious beliefs can often be equated with an unrealistic optimism in the future: that regardless of anyone's actions all will somehow be resolved in some future divine intervention. Or that the worthy will be saved and reborn in a version of heaven. But what I call faith does not need to take this form.

Several authors have made a distinction between a kind of false hope that just ignores difficult trends and a hope that emphasizes the value of our actions in the present. I like the way some Buddhist-inspired authors have distinguished between artificial optimism and 'active hope'. Active hope is "as a state of being in the present in which one acts regardless of outcome".<sup>7</sup> To act with the intention to 'do only good', but at the same time to relinquish expectations about outcome, does seem to be a useful definition of active hope – a hope that to me implies faith.

We are faced with choices every day, and the goals we have and the values that come from faith are important. They can help motivate us and give coherence to our actions. For example if we aim to move towards carbon neutral it provides a framework for action that can be followed through by reducing the use of particular fuels. At the Abbey we have recently installed 24 solar photo-voltaic panels that reduces our reliance on fossil fuels. We may not know for sure what the outcome of such actions will be; but there is nothing wrong with hoping we make a contribution.

The problem is more the grasping onto definite results, and then the tendency to measure our achievements in a way that can be artificial. I believe that many of these problems arise because of a false sense of separation that we must then overcome.

We have an underlying sense that we are separate beings that have to move through time to achieve some goal in the future. That we are individual beings going from A to B. Things that stop us doing this become obstacles to be overcome, and if we overcome many obstacles we can perhaps feel heroic about it. Zen practice is a practice of faith because it allows us to act towards goals but without this framework of a separate 'me' that goes from A to B. In Buddhism, giving, or 'dana', for example, is seen as good in itself, and the founder of Sōtō Zen, Dōgen commented on this:

If you are to practice giving to yourself, how much more so to your parents, wife, and children.

Therefore you should know that to give to yourself is a part of giving. To give to your family is also giving. Even when you give a particle of dust, you should rejoice in your own act, because you correctly transmit the merit of all buddhas, and for the first time practice an act of a bodhisattva. The mind of a sentient being is difficult to change. You should keep on changing the minds of sentient beings, from the first moment that they have one particle, to the moment that they attain the way.

This should be started by giving. For this reason giving is the first of the six paramitas. Mind is beyond measure. Things given are beyond measure. Moreover, in giving, mind transforms the gift and the gift transforms mind.<sup>8</sup>

The value of actions like giving cannot be proven in the same way that a scientific experiment can prove something, so there is faith involved here. This faith, for me, is based on the experience of meditation. Zazen has shown me that each moment is complete, and that concerns about how I will be seen in the future are just additional thoughts. This applies to the moment of giving as well. There is no need to measure ourselves in terms of something we can count and assess. Just doing our best to improve things, is the demonstration and activity of faith that does not require an external measurement to justify itself.

So, Zen practice does not require the suspension of our critical faculties or rigid adherence to a fixed set of doctrines

and rituals, or a forced kind of optimism that ignores disturbing facts. If these are what puts you off religion, then you don't need to worry. In my own experience none of these are required. My fear that they may be required was based on a false view of the role of faith in religion.

Zen practice does require a certain kind of faith. This faith is open-ended. It does not need to be 'faith in a particular thing'. But it does need the willingness to sit down, face a wall, calm your mind and be open. This is not easy, and I found it very difficult as a beginner and still do. So I am not trying to make religion or faith 'easy'. It was, and still is, one of the most difficult things I know, and also the most rewarding.

For example, this morning when I sat in meditation, I found it difficult to face the anger and confusion that was swirling around my head as a result of some events of the previous day. I had to just keep sitting in the midst of it all, resisting the temptation to get up and just pace around. It sometimes seems that I will do almost anything but face up to things and acknowledge my mistakes. This radical honesty seems to be what makes zazen difficult at times.

The 'reward' from zazen is harder to define. Sometimes it is just a subtle sense of there being 'more'. That what is here and now, is not only my confusion, there is more. Sometimes there is a more concrete sense that I am being helped, but by what, I don't know. I don't feel I need to call this a transcendent being or bodhisattva, or even something internal I could call 'buddha nature'. 'It'

somehow does not require definition. This lack of definition at first seems just frightening. As I've gone on it sometimes still appears frightening, but also awe-inspiring. I'm not sure if it will ever be 'easy', but there can be no wonder without risk. This open-ended faith just keeps opening out, past any comfortable definitions we may construct.

On this level the practice perhaps goes past definitions of what it means to be 'religious' or not. All attempts to define the truth in relation to externals have to be abandoned. However, if we reject all aspects of the religious life before we even begin, we cannot get to this place.

When I first asked for instruction from a Zen monk, I said I only wanted to learn meditation. But that first step seemed to lead to a shift in perspective. We can only take one step at a time. But looking back on my own practice I can now see that faith was always there.

### *Notes*

1. See definitions of religion that often refer to beliefs: "a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, especially when considered as the creation of a superhuman agency or agencies, usually involving devotional and ritual observances, and often containing a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs." (Dictionary.com). Others are **religion** noun: "[uncountable] the belief in the existence of a god or gods, and the activities that are connected with the worship of them, or in the teachings of a spiritual leader." (*Oxford Learner Dictionary*).
2. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secular\\_Buddhism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secular_Buddhism). Stephen Batchelor's two works are representative: *Buddhism Without Beliefs* and *Confession of a Buddhist Atheist*.

3. From Great Master Dōgen, *Rules for Meditation*.
4. Karen Armstrong, *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 2010), 118.
5. I.e. [Britannica.com](https://www.britannica.com) definition: 1: a formal ceremony or series of acts that is always performed in the same way [count] a religious **ritual** an ancient fertility **ritual** The priest will perform the **ritual**. [noncount] He was buried simply, without ceremony or **ritual**. 2 : an act or series of acts done in a particular situation and in the same way each time [count]
6. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doomscrolling>
7. In Macy, Joanna: *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy*, for example.
8. Kazuaki Tanahashi (ed). *The Treasury of the True Dharma Eye, Zen Master Dōgen's Shōbō Genzō*, (Shambhala, 2012) 474.

## Willing Acceptance

Rev. Clementia Will

— *Dharmazuflucht Schwarzwald, Gutach – Germany* —

Practising willing acceptance is a gateway to trust and Right Understanding.

In formal meditation we sit in willing acceptance by being here openly with everything that shows itself, without interfering with it, without judging it, without dividing it into ‘should be’ or ‘should not be’. This is especially important when what shows itself is something we don't want or we find painful or difficult.

I can still remember how this step of willing acceptance in meditation was a very important experience for me. When I started to meditate, undefined fears gradually appeared, which I had tried to avoid for a long time. When I first found the courage to really be open with and in the midst of these fears, without rejecting them and without striving for something else, I was trembling inside, and sweating, yet at the same time there was a deep trust, and for the first time I realised that this fear is not something as solid, fixed and independently existing as I had previously thought.



Most of the time, however, when we entrust ourselves fully to the meditation, what I have just described happens in a natural way without perhaps our even being aware of it.

It is so important in our spiritual practice that we try not to avoid what is showing itself to us, internally as well as externally. We come to trust what shows itself to us, that which is given to us in our human life, is in fact that which fulfils our human existence, in the midst of, and as part of, the Buddha Nature.

That which shows itself to us is like the mud in which the roots of a lotus flower lie, from which the lotus flower gets its nourishment and comes to blossom<sup>1</sup>.

It is up to us how we meet what shows itself to us in our human existence, so that eventually a deeper trust and understanding can show itself, and the Buddha Nature can find expression in our lives.

#### Without refusing and without interfering:

In order to find willing acceptance, it is very important that we do not strive after an ideal or image that seems perfect and right to us, and then want to get rid of and reject anything which does not correspond to or fit this image, or which apparently prevents us from living up to this ideal.

This striving and rejecting can lead to a habitually dividing mind and consequently to solidifying our opinions in the way we perceive right and wrong, good and bad, and

to grasping and rejecting. This often then results in disappointment and even in resentment or aversion.

I know all of this well myself. For example, I often find myself making the effort to be open, flexible, generous and not narrow-minded. This intent is of course a good one, but if I then cling to this image and insist on living up to it, it can easily happen that I become very tight inwardly when something shows up in me that does not live up to this image. So, I then tend to reject what shows itself to me, and fight against it inwardly.

What is important here is that, instead, we approach this with an inner “Yes” and a profound acceptance of what is showing itself to us, that we meet it with mindfulness, sincerity, and in a non-divisive openness. We need to let ourselves be softened by it and not strive for an image of what we think is good and how we think we should be.

We can allow everything to drop to the ground of the heart of meditation where it is held and finds purification and healing.

This is particularly important when what we see appears to be suffering.

Figuratively speaking, we shouldn’t deliberately pull the lotus flower out of the mud in order to free ourselves from what is painful, for then the lotus flower will wither. And this is what we do when we reject what shows itself. Our responsibility is rather to be there for that which shows

itself as suffering in us, and to help it so that it can be softened and find healing and liberation.

When we learn to say “Yes” in the midst of what appears as painful, difficult and dark, in willing acceptance and with openness; when, in the midst of suffering, we take refuge in our ‘True Heart’ – in Buddha – trust, and a right understanding of what we had perceived as suffering, emerges. An understanding of what suffering is, how suffering arises, and a maturing understanding of what we can do to help and purify this suffering appears. In this way the Lotus Flower can grow and Buddha Nature can unfold in us and through our lives.

Finding our way into complete acceptance  
and the “Yes” of the heart:

Actually, we practise this in formal meditation, abiding with everything with an open heart and without interfering.

If we find this kind of inner abiding over and over again in meditation and then also in our everyday life, it nourishes a trust that helps us find this “Yes” of the heart in the moments when we are in the midst of difficulties and suffering.

How we find this willing acceptance and the “Yes” of the heart in our everyday life and in our lives will feel a little different for each of us. What is important, however, is that we try again and again to find our way into this.

Using a personal example, I would like to illustrate how this often feels for me in everyday life. When something gloomy and constricting appears in me, I sometimes perceive this solely in terms of suffering and I don't want it, at first. So, I usually try to avoid it by distracting myself. Most of the time it doesn't get any better, so then I try to fight against it inwardly or try to find my way back to a more pleasant state of mind again.

Sometimes this pattern goes on for a long time. Until I feel like I am on my hands and knees, figuratively speaking, and I stop fighting against the gloom or trying to avoid it. Something inside me asks for help and, just then, I sense an inner softening, as well as a softening of what beforehand had seemed to me to be merely hard and murky.

It is not that what I perceive to be my individual self just vanishes then, but rather it entrusts itself and opens up to what Is, to what is Eternal, to what is Unborn, and finds refuge in the Buddha.

What I have tried to express here, I can also find in some verses of the *Litany of the Great Compassionate One*<sup>2</sup>, which are each shown below, followed by my brief comments:

All, all is defilement, defilement, earth, earth.:

That which we perceive as suffering, constricted, solid, confused or clouded often feels heavy like earth, when we just conceive of it as defilement.

Do, do the work within my heart.:

We cannot change the view of what we perceive as defilement with our will alone. We need help, and we find this help if we are fully here in willing acceptance with what is in us. What beforehand seemed to be just defilement can then be softened.

O great Victor, I hold on, hold on!:

We do not turn away from what is suffering and difficult. We entrust everything. We trust that if we do not turn away, softening, cleansing, transformation and help will happen.

Awakened, awakened, I have awakened!:

Through the softening there is a transformation of the way we perceive things, and a right understanding of the suffering as well as the cause of the suffering. Our fixed views can be transformed and find liberation.

O merciful One, compassionate One, of daring ones the most joyous, hail!:

When a softening of that which is suffering and constricted or confused happens, the Compassion inherent in Buddha Nature can flow into it all. What appears to us as constricted and as suffering may then still be there. But we also perceive the Compassion and Mercy that embraces and permeates it. This brings us deep trust, courage and joy.

## *Notes*

1. P.T.N.H. Jiyu-Kennett, *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom, or How a Zen Buddhist Prepares for Death*. Plate LX1: The Path of the Lotus, p. 154. Shasta Abbey Press, 1977.
2. *The Liturgy of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives*, p. 84. Shasta Abbey Press, 1987.

*With gratitude to lay minister Paul Taylor who helped with the translation from German into English.*

## A Gift From Mom

Rev. Veronica Snedaker

— *Napa, California – USA* —

My mother recently gave me a cup. It has JAPAN stamped on the bottom. I think it is a pretty common design, I've seen it often in second-hand stores. It's unusual as cups go only because it has two layers; an inner layer which holds your hot liquid and an outer layer which keeps your hands away from the heat, a handy innovation in a handleless cup. There are nine heart-shaped cutouts in the outer layer; the hearts are upside down and there are three sets of three each. Through the cutouts you can see the inner cup with its somewhat paler glaze.

It is interesting to me that my mother never offered me the cup before. She has had it for years, part of a set of cups with a matching teapot. She gave me the teapot and most of the cups years ago, when I got my first apartment. That set went away to the second-hand store some time back, when I found that my life did not include tea parties. For some reason, she kept this cup; it was larger than the others but I don't know what special purpose it had originally. Anyway, she kept it and has used it as a water glass for some time.

But she gave it to me recently, with the air of someone delivering something really unusual and special. And it is, for the bottom has dropped out. That is, the bottom of the inner cup has separated from its walls, and now rests on the bottom of the outer cup. It is now ‘useless’ ... as a cup.

Now, my mother is 100 years old, and she does not give up her things lightly. They have deep value to her, because they ground her in her past, when she was able to walk easily and could keep her life organized and she could remember people’s names and stories. They ground her in certainty and provide her with a framework that her present capabilities do not. So I try to take everything she gives me with grace, even though I can’t imagine using it or even liking it.

Ajahn Chah is reported to have told a story about a water glass. While holding up a beautiful, expensive glass given him by a devoted lay student, he told his audience, “It is already broken. If you see it as already broken, you won’t be sad when it does break, and you can use it freely and with gratitude, without worry that you might lose it and its valuable qualities.” It is a great lesson in impermanence and non-attachment.

And now my mother has given me a cup. A cup that is—literally—already broken.

Today, to write this note, I’ve taken the cup outside to see it in direct light so that I might better describe it. It is



quite lovely and I understand why the style was so popular. The beauty of the glaze and its color is apparent only in the sunlight, at least to my eyes; I may never before have seen it so illuminated. And my power of description is not up to the task so you must go with your imagination rather than a further, inadequate word-picture from me.

And it is, still, already broken.

As with so many things my mother gives me, I get two gifts: the gift of the object itself, and the gift of deciding how best to employ it. Often that decision takes the form of, how can I most respectfully dispose of this item? But the broken cup, the cup with the bottom fallen out ... I put it on my altar, where it, along with the Buddha and a portrait of my master, receives my bows twice daily.

After a few days I knew what it was for, and I cut up a piece of paper into small slips. On each slip of paper, I wrote a name, a name from my personal merit list. They sit in the cup, and receive my bows of form and of gratitude, and share in the merit of my daily practice. And they offer back to me too, the great power and resilience and true-heartedness of the people who are in need of merit, that is, all of us. That true-heartedness flows and sometimes explodes like lava from a volcano, merit and blessings exploding from the bottom of the bottomless cup, the cup that is, and always was, already broken.



## Observations About Myself — It Helps to Keep Training

Brett Hanson

— *Fountain Valley, California - USA* —

*This article first appeared in the Pine Mountain Buddhist Temple Newsletter.*

I appreciate the Dharma offerings I read from Reverend Masters Phoebe and Seikai, and it seems appropriate to make my own offering. I have taken the approach of writing about my own experiences and how Buddhist training has helped me to understand my place in the world. Perhaps the reader will make a connection or relate in some way.

When I was a young adult, I decided that some of my emotions and personality traits needed to change. To manifest these changes, I attempted to control my feelings and thoughts and steer them in the direction that I felt would make me the best version of myself. Controlling thoughts and emotions did not work well for me. I was overly analytical and continually aware of my thoughts. I felt uncomfortable because I could not just be “myself” without evaluating my performance as a human at every moment. Since I could not do well at controlling my thoughts, I

decided to control my actions in the physical world by exercising and eating well. My approach toward exercise was working out with weights and running more than was needed to maintain good health. I did not see bigger muscles because I lifted weights too frequently and did not get enough calories. My vigilance over my eating took the form of being very careful to eat only what I deemed to be very healthy food and to perform mental calculations on the number of calories I consumed. I underestimated the number of calories I needed. My lack of eating sufficiently resulted in binge eating. The binge eating meant I was out of control and created a vicious cycle. This behavior was taking place when I began to practice Buddhism. My focus in training was to allow the thoughts to arise and pass without acting on them or passing judgement. This was very helpful and gradually I found a more balanced approach to my relationship with eating and exercising. I am also learning to be more accepting of myself just as I am. When I look back at where I was, I find that now I am in a much better place. Of course, there is always more training to be done. I see that thoughts can be managed beyond simply letting them arise and pass. For example, I now see that self-criticism can be helpful to identify areas in which I can improve. It is the negative judgement of myself that is unnecessary. Now I focus on softening the self-critique and making room for a more positive assessment. Instead of concluding, “that was a dumb thing to do”, there is room for, “maybe that was not the best approach; I will try something different next time.” Making an effort to see my life through the lens of gratitude is another example of gently managing thoughts. Finding the positive aspects of a situation is yet another way in which I

would coach my younger self on the benefits of “controlling thoughts.”

I struggle with anxiety. It seems that sometimes when a thought about something I dread, fear, or find unpleasant arises, I have developed a very fast (we are talking gunslinger quick!) mechanism for squelching the thought. This sequence happens so quickly that I do not even realize it has happened until I experience an uneasy feeling. I have not been able to reverse-engineer the process to get to the source. It seems that the anxiety I experience is a signal that I need to pay closer attention to my emotions as they arise. This has been a challenging reflex to observe in action. So far, I have been able to “catch” it just a handful of times. Habits of thought require ongoing attention. The difference between now and when I was younger is that I have learned not to force the solution and to judge myself less harshly. I have learned that the process of noticing is enough. I may observe the feeling-blocking reflex in action and allow the feeling to arise and thus decrease anxiety—or maybe not. I have developed faith that the practice is enough. This is where ongoing training is so valuable.

Another area in which I have lots of opportunities to practice is anger. When I was a young boy, my frustration would be expressed in the most severe swear words I knew: “pee-pee, potty, poo-poo!” I wish I could say I have outgrown this tendency, but alas that is not the case.

I have strong opinions about the way events should unfold. When a thing does not go as I think it should I can

become incensed. I have a few flashpoints; my anger can be quick to ignite because someone is not following rules of traffic and common courtesy. I can become upset when a physical action does not result in the expected outcome. For example, if I cannot loosen a bolt, I can be furious that it is not following my will. After all, I have very good reason for removing that bolt so it should cooperate with my plan! The commonality in these moments of daily living is that I can plead a pretty compelling argument for my viewpoint. Self-righteousness is very seductive! This is an area that still has lots of room for improvement. It is frustrating to observe that I am still quick to anger. I am always very disappointed in myself when I indulge in an anger outburst. The outward expression that explodes is not productive, nor is it helpful. It is frustrating to repeat what I know is not good to do. The best I can report is that slowly I am improving on noticing when a situation starts to unravel, and I am getting better at not adding fuel to the fire. Perspective helps here. I may not be a continuous example of equanimity anytime soon; perhaps not even in this lifetime. The important thing is to continue the work of finding balance.

Recently I was walking along a downtown area and on the other side of the street a loud altercation unfolded between two young men. One man was very upset and vocal about his anger, reaching the point of threatening to kill the other. I could sense that when the threat was made, his anger was at a tipping point. It could have been allowed to lessen, but instead it was stoked. It can be hard to stand down at such a key moment; the emotion seems to almost demand to continue. I was grateful that two large men were hovering

between the two angry parties in such a way as to indicate that they would intervene if the anger was expressed physically. I was distressed to witness the strong emotions, even from across the street. The argument served as a vivid reminder of how my own anger creates negative consequences. It inspired me to keep my anger in check. It also made me happy to observe that sometimes I reach the tipping point and even when I spark, I usually choose not to fan the flames that far.

Some five or so years ago, I saw a picture of myself in which my head was thrust forward. The picture gave clarity to a comment made to me years ago: that if I were an animal, I would be a turtle. Since then, I have been working to improve my posture from the shoulders up. My progress is going slowly. I am finding more and more occasions in which I become aware that I need to correct my posture. It seems that my default is head forward. The interesting part is my attitude towards the moment I realize that my head isn't upright on my neck. I can be aggravated about it and think, "here I am again; back at square one." In my better moments, I am grateful for the awareness and the opportunity to improve my posture. I think of it as a gong during meditation, reminding me to bring my attention back to the present.

For me, this personal posture challenge illustrates why Buddhist training is simultaneously hard and easy. I think the hard part is when we realize that we need to make an adjustment in our thoughts/actions/deeds that will bring us closer in alignment to a way of living that reduces our

karmic output. We might think, “I’m ‘doing it wrong! I’m inadequate. I am making such slow progress or no progress.” The easy part is that the recognition is enough; our Buddha nature will take care of the rest.

The more our practice grows and our faith blossoms, we realize the “hard” part isn’t difficult. We let go of our judgement and ego and appreciate the insight. From this viewpoint, it is hard to imagine a life without training. I think this is why I have seen Reverends Phoebe and Seikai express surprise when someone says training can be hard. Life is harder without it.

‘Little by slow’ is the theme of my experience as a Buddhist and I have an analogy to describe why I think it is so for many people. Generally, one doesn't see immediate benefits when starting a meditation practice. Much like dieting. If one is about to reach for another piece of cake, there is an immediate reward if the cake is eaten (this sure does taste good!). There is no immediate feedback in not eating the cake. A person doesn’t suddenly see or feel the body becoming leaner. It is disappointing to not experience the taste of the cake. If one stood on a scale after refusing extra cake, the needle would not drop a pound to reward the self-control. Only after weeks and months of declining the extra calories does one begin to see the results in the mirror and on the scale. As time passes, carrying less weight and having more energy are the reward. Training is the same way. As time passes we see things with increasing perspective and clarity. It does not happen immediately!



Years ago, my sister observed that emotions don't have opposite and equal reactions. She noted that after being concerned or worried about something for an extended period, the relief did not last the same length as the preceding concern. She did not feel happy and elated for the corresponding duration once the situation was resolved. I thought of my own experience in school, being worried about doing well on an upcoming test long before exam day. After completing the test and doing well, I did not experience the corresponding amount of joy and jubilation to match all the worry I had felt, certainly not for the same amount of time I invested in worrying! I simply returned to my setpoint. This is the direction in which Buddhism points us, the middle way.

I am prone to dyslexia, which manifests in a number of ways. I rarely remember names of people or shows (or anything specific), and I get confused when directions consist of more than one or two steps. I am unable to remember specifics of a recent conversation. If I am given a verification code of 5 or 6 numbers, I frequently remember them out of order. I have a vivid memory of being given a list of words to learn to spell in high school. The list had 20 words or less and it took me well over two hours to remember how to spell them sufficiently to pass a spelling test. The common thread of my dyslexic experience is that I regularly experience an outcome other than what I expected because my thought/interpretation/mental formation is one thing, and the outward experience is another.

The way I have adapted to this untrustworthy aspect of my mental processing is to interact with the world based on the impressions I form, rather than specifics. I can recognize plots and characters, even though I can't recall the name of the program or actor. I can recall the conclusion drawn or the message received in my interactions with others, though without the exact words. I either depend on someone else to navigate or I use the map/GPS feature in my phone. I triple-check my number recall and mathematical computations. I rely on the computer by using copy and paste and spell-check. I can usually identify when I have misspelled a word, even if I can't summon the correct order of the letters. When I am able to develop processes and systems for accomplishing tasks, I am much less likely to make a mistake. When we all follow rules, it helps make things more predictable and I am less unnerved.

I have been writing this article over a period of months. As I reflect on what I have written, an insight occurred. The dyslexia I just described is one of the reasons for my temper; it is frustrating when one thing is expected, and a different thing takes place. Frustration can quickly turn to anger. The anxiety I experience also has roots in my dyslexia: it is troubling when my internal mechanisms are not reliably consistent. Like almost all insights, it is helpful to have an explanation, but it does not change the work to be done. Insight or not, the solution is the same: continual training.

## Patience and the Three Pure Precepts Go Hand in Hand

Rev. Master Enya Sapp

— *Shasta Abbey, California - USA* —

*This is an edited transcript of a talk given at Shasta Abbey in June 2023.*

I would like to start with a story about an animal that I grew up with in the Midwest, the buffalo. Actually what I knew was what's called 'The bison of the Great Plains', which is sometimes called a buffalo, but is in fact a distant relative. This is a *Jataka Tale* story, of one of the lives of the Buddha. In the *Jataka*, the central character, whether it's an animal, a human, a divine or semi-divine, is a Bodhisattva or a Buddha-to-be. Although in some of the stories He is only a passive onlooker, in most of the *Tales*, He practices one or more of the ten virtues which must be perfected in order to become a Buddha. So today we're going to talk about *Mahisa Jataka number 278*, the buffalo and the effort of patience.

Once, when the Buddha was a Bodhisattva, He took birth as a powerful buffalo in a remote forest. In appearance, he was as forbidding as a rolling cloud of

thunder. Though in the form of a brute animal, this great Bodhisattva maintained a quality of virtue for so long that it would not leave him. He was very patient. Some influence of karma must explain his form of a buffalo, even though his very nature was a boundless compassion. For a series of existences cannot exist without karma. Freedom from karma could not lead to an animal rebirth. So even with the Bodhisattva's mind full of Dharma, some small residue of karma caused Him now and then to take the form of an animal.

So it was that a proud and wicked monkey liked to torment this Bodhisattva, knowing that he had nothing to fear because anger had no power over this Great One. Creatures like the malicious monkey delight in bullying the meek, for they know they will not strike back. However, against the powerful they become servile and humble. Sometimes when the Great One was asleep, the monkey would suddenly leap on his neck. He would swing from the buffalo's horns and ride on his back. He even poked him with a stick. The vile monkey would stand in the way when he was hungry and trying to graze. The Bodhisattva bore all this without anger or agitation, as if the monkey was doing him a favour. This was because the virtuous see such harmful acts towards themselves as an opportunity to practice patience.

One day a Yaksha (or a nature spirit) saw the buffalo being ridden by this rascally monkey. The Yaksha was scandalised by the indignities that the monkey rained down on the Great One. The Yaksha addressed the Bodhisattva

and said: “With your great strength, why do you allow this miserable monkey to humiliate you? Has he purchased you as a slave, or won you in a wager? Or do you fear him for some reason? You can easily rout him with your mighty horns”, the Yaksha continued, “one kick from your powerful hoof and you would send him skyward. Why do you hesitate to rid yourself of this tormentor? When has a villain like this ever been reformed by gentle behaviour? A raging disease is not cured with a mild treatment”.

The Bodhisattva replied in soft words: “I know this monkey is devious and rude. This is the very reason I am patient with him. To act with my great strength against one I could easily squash is hardly forbearance, and no patience is needed in dealing with those who are kind and who are gentle. Only those strong in virtue can tolerate the mistreatment of those who are slaves to their bad behaviour. It is better to be patient with their insults than surrender one’s virtue. The opportunity to practice true patience is not easy to find. Should I not thank this monkey for providing the chance to clear my shortcomings even while he adds to his own?”

“But in this way, you’ll never be free from this persecution”, the Yaksha cried. “Villains will never respect virtue. How can you subdue them without putting your patience aside?”

“Peace and comfort gained by harming others can never lead to true happiness”, the Bodhisattva answered. “My patience towards this monkey may bring him to his

senses. If not, others, with less tolerance, will surely bring him to heel. Thus, he will be forced to mend his ways, and I too will be free from his mischief.

“Well said, well said”, exclaimed the Yaksha. “It’s obvious you have assumed this animal form for a noble purpose”. With that, the Yaksha removed the monkey from the buffalo’s neck and, after giving the Great One a protective charm, the Yaksha vanished.<sup>1</sup>

Patience only exists if there’s an opportunity to show it. That is why the virtuous regard even those who trouble them as useful to their practice. So, I am very inspired and want to learn from the effort of patience that this buffalo exhibited. Peace and comfort gained by harming others can never lead to happiness. Be grateful for the opportunity to practice the effort of patience. And for those of you who might not know, this is what a buffalo looks like.



So, the Buddha said to do no evil, to do no harm, do not create suffering for self and others. The Buddha said to do good, to cultivate loving kindness. The Buddha said to save all beings and to purify your mind. These are the profound Three Pure Precepts.

The first Noble Truth begins with suffering that arises from the inevitability of change and loss. It is helpful for us and others to be present with suffering, to understand its causes and the nature of existence. This provides opportunities to practice which requires patience and equanimity in the face of being disturbed. It means to be willing to be with the suffering produced by your own cultural conditioning and karma. If we perceive how much the Earth and all the things that live in, on and around her are used primarily for human use, food, shelter, recreation, or spiritual development, we can easily see how others can suffer under the thumb of human ignorance and dominance. We all can manifest the path of non-harming and not creating suffering. Easy to say, seemingly complicated in action, speech and mind. In our understanding how deeply all things are conditioned by suffering, we aim not to create suffering and to reduce suffering whenever possible. To cause minimal harm, we must be diligent in our practice, mindfulness and compassion. We need to be flexible and adapt to the conditions and to bring stillness into acceptance, to just let things be, just let them go.

The guideline of ‘do not kill’ or ‘do not harm’ is one barometer for making choices of how to act. Our reference point of the Three Pure Precepts, along with the Bodhisattva

Vows, help all who are suffering or who are in pain. This steady intention provides a grounding point for the long-distance runner, which is exactly what this practice is. We are in it for the long haul. We all need to advocate a policy of kindness, no matter how troubling the situation, take each opportunity to apply the effort of patience.

I read an article published by CNN about a mountain range in Southwest China where thousands of rhododendrons live together by changing the timing of their blooming; this enhances their ability to thrive so closely to one another. There are approximately 270 different species of rhododendron in this rich hotspot of diversity in the glacial, snow-capped peaks and coniferous forests and Alpine meadows. According to the scientific paper, there are 34 species of rhododendron that have evolved and adapted to bloom at different parts of the season, explaining their ability to thrive so close to one another. I think rhododendrons have a kind of wisdom: a knowing that there is a basic need for plants to mate with others of their own. They continue to adapt to the consequences of cross pollination. This is truly brilliant. I think that these plants have got something going there.

This is just one example, and there are myriads of others. One that I recently was introduced to was a three-part documentary made in 2016 that follows the adaptations of the Yellowstone Park due to climate change and the responses that come forth within those who abide in the Park. It's well worth watching. And for me, it was sobering and fascinating to see the flexible acceptance which leads to



changing behaviours both seen as compassionate, intuitional – and I'm sure there's something instinctual. And they were very diligent about their behaviour. It was just amazing to see in the film.

You might have gotten the indication that I kind of like science by now. In the July 2023 Scientific American magazine, Lars Chittka wrote an article regarding bees, and he says in this article that researchers have shown that bees and some other insects are capable of intelligent behaviour that no one thought possible before. Bees, for example, can count, grasp concepts of sameness and difference, learn complex tasks by observing others and know their own body dimensions – a capacity associated with consciousness in humans. They appear to experience both pleasure and pain. I believe the Buddha was well aware of these long-reaching implications that have been brought forth in this article.

For me, the purpose of my life is to find the meaning of existence outside of existence itself. In other words, to simply look within, look inside myself, to discover the meaning. And when I do so, the solution is not so obscure. It basically consists of a knowledge of something I already am, like the rhododendrons, like the wolves, the bison, the beavers and the owls at Yellowstone Park.

We aim for boundless love and kindness, compassion, selflessness and abstain from judgement, criticism and despair when things go a little different than we had planned. So, keep an open, bright heart and be still. And having an open heart sounds lovely and it encompasses all,

so be ready and still if you ask for an open heart. You may be surprised – I have been surprised – by what appears. The true nature of all things lies far beyond discussion of being same or different, transcends talk of being separate or being united. Because it is beyond past, present and future, beyond continuous and discontinuous, beyond physical form, sensation, thought, actions and consciousness.

So how do we respond and adapt to each perfect and complete moment? For me, the starting point is to establish wholesome states of body, mind and speech that are grounded in the Precepts, purified moral discipline and Right View. The observation of the Precepts leads to harmony on many levels: socially, psychologically, karmically and contemplatively. We need to do the best we can, given the options we have at the moment. It's not about perfection, since that's impossible 100% in every moment. So, we do our best in an imperfect situation, and this is actually perfection. It seems to me more and more that it's about engaging non-conceptually with the current direct experience to touch the Truth. This undivided, all-inclusive, perpetual moment of the Eternal is everything. All of us. It's Buddha Nature. It's our job to realise it.

Our very existence causes suffering to other beings. We are all each other's conditions. In the same breath, there are times when these are spectacular, bright and peaceful moments in harmony. Each of us brings our own set of attachments and delusions, our view and karmic tendencies, to every moment. We are human, after all, and most would agree we mess things up or make mistakes from time to time

– I know it’s true for me – and this is not necessarily a problem. A practical implication is that nothing needs to be different from how it is right now for us to be OK. No problem. This understanding can yield a deep relaxation in which ups and downs unfold. Upon closer inspection, in practice, life is not exactly what words may appear to point to, not what I think. But, nonetheless, that’s where I find myself.

The Buddha was a human being who gave teachings, and I’d imagine He gave teachings to Himself, speaking of His own human situation, and gave teachings to us who are in the same predicament that He was in. And I am wondering, did the Buddha see that being a human being is basically the problem and come up with a solution of going beyond being human? The teachings encourage us to liberate ourselves; the Buddha and our teachers can only point the way. Each of us must do the work, do the Buddhist practice. The practice does not seem to be about a personal human need, but rather a way that goes beyond this without solving any of our so-called human problems. They may not get solved. They may or may not be still there. And with time, these perceived problems just may not even appear anymore. They may not be problems. Anything that is experienced is inherently absolutely perfect and comprehensive and applies to all experience. So, be gentle. I encourage you to be gentle, with patience and trust, knowing that with time and practice the Noble Eightfold Path will have its effect. To follow the Noble Eightfold Path is a matter of practice, and to apply it correctly is to understand it. And to understand it, the value of consistent

training with a teacher is beyond measure. It seems to me that practicing patience and the Three Pure Precepts go hand-in-hand.

Impermanence is a constant reminder of our contrived being, and a poignant beacon that life simply keeps on going. Impermanence illuminates loss and newness in this very present moment. It's my understanding that the doctrine of Rebirth holds that any human could be born as an animal, and any animal could be reborn as a human. The Buddha expounded that sentient beings currently living in the animal realm have been our mothers, brothers, sisters, fathers, children and friends in past rebirths. So, I find this a mind-boggling space where we're all interconnected to all things, always. Everybody shares the Buddha Mind. There is no higher. There is no lower. There is no equal. Everything has Buddha Nature and yet not everyone can hear the Truth. What is needed is a profound change of heart and behaviour to really hear. You may study the Teachings and then not make the effort necessary to manifest in your actions what you have learned. From my experience, when we break the Precepts, our response needs to be that we are profoundly disturbed by the Truth. The danger comes when we are callous, uncaring or believe we are doing fine.

Many of you have heard this story, but I'm going to tell it again today. When I first came to the Abbey in the early 90s, it was for the sole purpose of finding a good home for the vegetables from my garden that graced the backyard. While living in LA for six years, my lifestyle did not

promote gardening, but my first year while living in Mount Shasta, the garden produced so many vegetables that I couldn't responsibly care for them all. And I'm quite certain at that time the Cosmic Buddha sent me a flyer from the Abbey because I found there that I had found a home for those precious vegetables. The Abbey accepted food donations as they do today, so, as that summer progressed, I continued to bring vegetables to the Abbey, meditating and getting to know the monks and opening up to the Buddhist Teachings. I was introduced to the Three Pure Precepts, the Ten Precepts, the 48 Lesser Precepts, as well as the guidelines for coming to the Abbey. It was here, at this very spot of the Three Pure Precepts, that I stumbled. At heart, I was already a vegetarian and had yet to figure out how to get enough protein without eating meat. The question that came to me immediately was: If I became a Buddhist, would I be required to believe that a cow, a pig or chicken raised for human consumption were more valuable than a carrot, asparagus or peas raised for human consumption? I kept asking and meditating, and the answer I remember accepting at that time was Buddhists eat vegetables to do the least amount of harm possible. And I am deeply grateful that I kept going, exploring and meditating to find out what this meant for myself. And, oh yes, it's not whether a carrot is superior, equal or inferior to a chicken or a cow. It was my viewpoint I needed to shift. I needed to just change my perspective ever so slightly to looking at the first Pure Precept, to 'do the least harm possible'.

The Buddha said to abstain from all evil, to do our very best in every situation, regardless of how imperfectly we

perceived it. Take a step back and take a fresh look at the solutions available to all of us. “Sentient” or “non-sentient” – they are just words. That is not the deciding factor. Skin colour, eye colour, language, politics, spiritual or sexual orientation. They are not the deciding factor. From my perspective, the challenge for all of us is: how to learn to get along on this planet of billions of animals, 20 quadrillion ants (and, for the record, that’s 20,000 million millions), and numerous other beings, all things with the resources we have while creating the least harm possible.

Last year I had the honour of meeting a professor who is a scientist and eco-biologist at an introductory retreat here at the Abbey. We talked about a number of things, but kept returning, in our own individual ways, to the changes that are presenting themselves to all of us, to all things. So, how do we truly adapt and accept and see things as they truly are? In about three minutes, he taught me, in the language of science, the answer to the matter of the carrot and the cows that I spoke of earlier. It’s called ‘trophic conversion efficiency’ for matter and energy in an ecosystem which is roughly 2% between trophic levels. If I’m understanding this correctly, the simple and straightforward example I was given is this. The first trophic level are plants – sun, air, water, soil. And let’s say, for this example, we have 10,000 pounds of plants. The second trophic level is cows and other vegetable-eating animals. For this example, you have to produce 200 pounds of cow. It will take 10,000 pounds of plants. The third trophic level is humans and other meat-eating animals. To produce four pounds of human it takes 200 pounds of cow. So, you can approximately feed 50

times more humans on a plant-based diet compared to an animal diet. This quickly clarified for me that I am able to create less suffering, using our precious resources and energy more wisely, by being respectful and making wise choices of what I eat.

Today we are talking about continuing to adapt to conditions, re-learning how to be flexible with a joyful heart, creating as little harm as possible. A soft and gentle mind with a kaleidoscopic perspective is in the top drawer of my toolbox. It's really handy and I like to remember to use it whenever I can. To be respectful of all things, our gratitude knows no bounds. To trust that we have everything we need right now, including support and encouragement, is to discover it for ourselves. Due to the uninterrupted true nature of all things, nothing lacks the potential for Buddhahood. This for me is very reassuring. Regardless of what happens, the Dharmakaya will keep on endlessly and it may not be how we see, hear, or think about it. I am grateful to the Buddha for all the Teachings given so generously to us and, as the Diamond Sutra says, the Dharma is like a raft. When we have crossed the stream, we move on. We do not carry the raft with us anymore. We use the Buddhist Teachings to become wise and compassionate, not to use them to trap ourselves in a conceptual imitation of wisdom. And please remember this stream must be crossed again and again, and the Dharma is available and will be available again and again for our use.

So, I am grateful for this dear buffalo's beautiful, enduring example. It seems the effort of patience, in part, is

the enduring effort of letting go. Through meditation, we can find the Truth for ourselves, bring the mind of meditation into every aspect, let go of clinging, which causes suffering, and let compassion and wisdom within our hearts enrich our lives. Thank you.

*Note*

1. <https://www.jewelheart.org/jataka-tales/>



## My Experience of Sangha

Starkeeper Morton

— Stonehaven, Scotland, UK —

*This article first appeared in the May-August 2023 issue of the Portobello Priory Newsletter.*

You must know the ideal; you must accept the actual. Only thus can you help others and yourself.

— Rōshi P.T.N.H. Jiyu-Kennett, *The Wild, White Goose: The Diary of a Female Zen Priest*

I have just completed my 100<sup>th</sup> day meditating every morning. The only space I can find in our busy household is underneath the stairs like a middle-aged meditating version of Harry Potter. It has taken me 27 years of trying to have a daily meditation practice. The fact I am immensely attached to and proud of that milestone is testament to how far I still have to go.

The ability to commit, and sit, in meditation every morning has little to do with me and everything to do with my recent experience of sangha over the past year.

In 2017 I founded a community well-being charity, *The Haven* in Stonehaven, Aberdeenshire. During that time we have had several different meditation traditions hire the space which I was always delighted about. I have gone to them all, with varying degrees of engagement and attendance. I always find it hopeful to just be and learn from like-minded people. Yet these experiences were always transitory. Every meditation venue hire at *The Haven* filled me up but when they left it felt empty again.

Last year the Aberdeenshire Sōtō Zen Meditation Group began holding meditation every Thursday night from 7.30 – 9pm at *The Haven*. Having witnessed numerous attempts for meditation at *The Haven* I observed a different quality in this one. A core handful of people that have been meditating together for over 30 years. What I had identified is the strength and power of sangha.

At *The Haven* one of our values is community, which we define as the power of inclusion and belonging. What the Aberdeenshire Sōtō Zen group embodied through sangha was very aligned to what we value as an organisation.

With my work I spend a lot of time in the wellbeing ‘industry’. I am still taken by surprise at how political, territorial and judgmental it can be. Truthfully, my experiences have made me shy away from wellbeing communities, outside of *The Haven*, and the concept of sangha.

What I appreciated with the Aberdeenshire Sōtō Zen members was their ordinariness. I mean that as the highest compliment. In my time with this sangha I saw how subtle, humble and gentle the members are. These were clearly experienced meditators yet they welcomed people new to meditation as equals. They looked just like everyone else, didn't try to teach anyone, or claim to know anything at all really. How refreshing.

Thursday night with the Aberdeenshire Sōtō Zen Sangha is the highlight of my week. Knowing that there is a dedicated time where I can just sit and meditate with other people has been a huge comfort. In a demanding modern world which I feel has become somewhat flaky and full of expectations, I know I can lean into this committed and strong sangha and find some respite.

Our conversations after meditation are never boring! Some of the discussions include how one meditates with a hangover and how football crowds could benefit from meditation.

There were some elements of Sōtō Zen practice that took me a while to acclimatise to. At first I found the reading of the *Rules for Meditation* before every meditation challenging and verging on cultish. However, my experience of sangha was quite the opposite; no one was trying to convert me or asking me to pay vast sums of money to be there. Now I find the ritual of reading the rules illuminating. How can I read the same words every week and discover new aspects like it was my first time reading it?

It was similar to chanting the *Ancestral Line*. Originally I found it a bit cumbersome, embarrassing to pronounce the words wrong or out of time. Now I find it a beautiful way to honour all those who came before and played a part in me being able to sit and meditate. Part of the power of sangha has been giving me space to come out of my conditioning and change the pre-conceived qualities of my mind.

Looking beyond my first 100 days of daily meditation I am planning to celebrate my first year of meditation this New Year's Eve at Throssel Hole. My intuitive sense to honour this time of year has always been to be quiet, reflective and present. Now I have found a sangha that shares that same intention too.

## Some Thoughts on ‘Guest’ and ‘Host’

Rev. Master Oriana LaChance

— Eugene, Oregon – USA —

I have been thinking about the idea of ‘guest’ and ‘host’ in Buddhism and how it plays out in our daily lives. This is a concept I come across occasionally, and it hasn’t always been clear to me what is being pointed to, so I’ve explored it a bit.

The concept of host and guest is seen as early as the *Surangama Sutra*,<sup>1</sup> when the Buddha tells his disciples that beings have not become fully awake because they are confused by afflictions that are like visitors. He uses the metaphor of an inn where the visitor is the one who comes and goes and the innkeeper is the one who remains—the host.

Visitors are transient feelings, thoughts, ideas, opinions. The host is emptiness, essence, the nature of mind. Some visitors are invited and are kind, charming and a pleasure to have at the inn. Others are not invited and are disruptive and unruly and eat all the food. The 13th century poet, Rumi, writes of this in “The Guest House”.

This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still, treat each guest honorably.  
He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.

Be grateful for whatever comes,  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.<sup>2</sup>

Our thoughts, opinions, feelings—these visitors—arise of themselves and don't hinder Buddha nature—the host. How does this apply to our daily practice? Can we stay awake in the face of all the diverse visitors who come and go? This is our practice when we sit: to be awareness itself; to be both guest and host.

*Dharmakaya*, the original master, pure being, also translates as 'host.' The host is beyond conception, beyond knowing, undivided, and excludes nothing. Guests are

anything understood in relation to something else: I and you, hot and cold, the observer and the observed. Guests stand in opposition to something else. When guests arrive, the opposites tag along. Ideas are guests, thoughts are guests, our opinions are guests. We should be cordial to them, but we don't need to base our response to what is in front of us from the position of the guest. Guests come and go; the host, the original master, is beyond time, always present. Guest and host: form in emptiness, emptiness in form.

In this moment—what we call our experience—both guest and host are present. The I, the you, the tools 'I' work with are present, and the host is here, too. When we meditate, we are resting in this eternal presence. The Buddha's enlightenment is not outside of, or separate from, the guests—our hesitancy, our pride, our fear, our love.

We can put a lot of emphasis on the origin of feeling and bodily sensation, and this can be helpful, but they, too, are guests. Asking "Why?" and "How?" are chasing after understanding. We can become a little more curious about the host. Who is host to all these guests?

In Ben Connelly's lovely book, *Inside the Grass Hut: Living Shitou's Classic Zen Poem*, Connelly writes:

The insight into the origin of the feeling and the experience of the emotions and bodily sensations of anger are helpful, but they are guests. We can let them go and come back to a little curiosity; who is it that is feeling and thinking these things? Who is host

to all the guests? The host, you may recall, is associated with the absolute, with emptiness, with enlightenment. This is a host many of us would really like to entice. . . . If you are trying to entice the host to come and be your guest, it's a guest. If enlightenment is a thing to be chased, it's relative, an idea we've made up about something. Enlightenment, the host, is none of these.

Don't try to entice guests. Ask, instead: who? If what I sense, feel, and understand are guests, if my sense of 'I' is a guest, then who is hosting? Who is the host to all these guests? Don't ask with your mind, and don't spend time on answers. Ask with your heart, ask with your posture, ask with bare awareness.”<sup>3</sup>

\* \* \* \*

Great Master Dōgen approaches the idea of guest and host in another way in his *Guidelines for Studying the Way*.

Dharma turns you and you turn dharma. When you turn dharma you are leading and dharma is following. On the other hand when dharma turns you, dharma is leading and you are following. Buddha-dharma originally has these two modes, but those who are not true heirs have never understood it; unless they are patch-robed monks, they scarcely have heard of it. Without knowing this key, you cannot judge how to study the way. How can you



determine the correct from the mistaken? On the other hand, those practicing Zen and studying the way are always given this key.<sup>4</sup>

The key is the understanding that you are always both guest and host, both turning the Wheel of the Dharma and being turned by the Wheel of the Dharma. To believe that you only do one or the other is to not fully comprehend the true teaching.

Koun Franz of Thousand Harbours Zen expresses it like this:

In any moment, where are you in relation to the Dharma? If you are simply being led, if you have opened up your heart and mind and have become vulnerable enough for the Dharma to turn you, that's significant, but there's no life in that. On the other hand, if you take it upon yourself to turn the Dharma, to be the protagonist, without also being turned, you are very limited in what you can do. Dōgen is describing something very subtle. It is another way of talking about practice-realization, the idea that practice and enlightenment are one and the same.<sup>5</sup>

Huineng, the 6th ancestor, spoke of this when he said, "When the mind is deluded, it is turned by the Dharma blossom; when the mind is enlightened, it turns the Dharma blossom." This turning of the Dharma Blossom is not at some time in the future when we become fully enlightened. It is in each moment as we walk the Buddha Way with all

our imperfections. We—you—are turning the Dharma Blossom.

Dōgen adds to Huineng,

When you see a speck of dust [emptiness], it is not that you do not see the world of phenomena. When you realize the world of phenomena, it is not that you do not realize a speck of dust. When buddhas realize the world of phenomena, they do not keep you from realization. Wholesomeness is manifest in the beginning, middle, and end . . . If you fully practice this, Dharma blossom turns Dharma blossom.<sup>6</sup>

There is no host and no guest, there is just turning.

What does all this mean to us? Buddha is always present so we have endless opportunities to awaken to it. We are all already safe, here. The road to liberation runs through our mundane, bursting-with-guests life whether we know it or not. This is happening no matter how obstructed we see our lives as being. When we lose track of that, the Dharma is continuing to turn. When we occupy our bodies, our lives, our circumstances, we are turning the Dharma. We can see the whole and the particular and the connection of all things, and we are turning the Dharma. It is only in the every-dayness of our lives that we can wake up and see this.

If the Dharma is turning even when we are in delusion, confused, aware of nothing at all, then we are never outside

the Dharma. We cannot walk away from delusion, and the flower of Dharma turns at all times. How do we awaken to this consciously? Look in the middle of your confusion and see the Dharma turning. This is sometimes described as an endless moving stream, residing in an endless moving stream. Guest and host: both are our life, both turned by the Dharma and turning the Dharma.

\* \* \* \*

Zen teacher, Linji (Rinzai, in Japanese) of China challenges us with this:

There are Zen students who are in chains when they go to a teacher, and the teacher adds another chain. The students are delighted, unable to discern one thing from another. This is called ‘a guest looking at a guest.’<sup>7</sup>

We want teachers who will give us something we can grasp, sink our teeth into, who will help catapult us into enlightenment. But that thing we believe we are given is another guest. The host cannot be given to you, as you already are it.

Steve Hagen says this very well in *Buddhism Is Not What You Think*, in an essay entitled, “The Host within the Host.”

If you feel like you’re getting something out of Zen, this is ordinary stuff. It’s bondage, not freedom.

There's nothing to get. You're just acquiring one more chain, one more item that keeps you bound, keeps you dissatisfied and looking around for the next goody. It's what you've always suffered; it's nothing new. . . .

Zen—that is meditation—is simply coming back to just this—being present, noticing that we babble to ourselves, that we tell stories to ourselves, that we try to explain everything. Zen will never say anything to you. If it does, it's only because you're making it up. If you tell yourself, “Oh, that was a good meditation. I really got into something deep there,” it's nonsense. Pure delusion. And if you think, “Oh, my meditation was off, my mind was really disturbed,” it's more delusion. Or if you try to justify your meditation practice by saying, “My day goes so much better when it begins with meditation,” it's all delusion. I never once heard my teacher talk like this. This is just our spinning minds jabbering to themselves.

Linji said, “This is called a guest looking at a guest.” **In other words, we attend not to what we experience directly, but to what we make of it.** [boldface added] Thus we ignore what in Zen we call the host—the actual experience of this moment. We ignore that there's no separation between Reality and ourselves.<sup>8</sup>

When we want something from our meditation, our Buddhist teachers, our sangha, we are inviting in more

guests. Fair enough. Sometimes guests have something to offer. But what about the host? Can we rest in the host and see that it is not only sufficient, but contains everything?

### Notes

1. See website: Buddhism Now (digital journal): <https://buddhismnow.com/2018/09/28/the-host-and-guest-from-the-surangama-sutra/>
2. Barks, Coleman. *The Essential Rumi*. HarperSanFrancisco, a division of HarperCollins Publishers: 1995, p. 109.
3. Connelly, Ben. *Inside the Grass Hut: Living Shitou's Classic Zen Poem*. Wisdom Publications, 2014, pp. 134-35.
4. Tanahashi, ed. *Moon in a Dewdrop*. North Point Press: 1985, p. 40.
5. Franz, Koun. *Do Not Practice with the Idea of Gain*. Thousand Harbours Zen Podcast, Talk 103: Oct. 17, 2018.
6. Tanahashi, ed., *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*, Shambhala: May 14, 2013: pp. 186, 190.
7. Hagen, Steve. *Buddhism Is Not What You Think: Finding Freedom Beyond Beliefs*. HarperCollins Publishers: 1996, p. 88.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90.

## A Close Pass

### A Personal Perspective on the Regional Sangha Meeting Held in Leeds, July 2023

Stephen Rose

— *Cromford, Derbyshire – UK* —

When plotting the route of their explorer spacecraft like the Voyager mission, NASA takes advantage of a close pass of one or more planets to use their gravitational pull to build momentum of the craft. I was reminded of this at the end of the recent Regional Sangha meeting in Leeds, UK when more than 30 people gathered together. The feeling of support, of shared practice and insight gave a wonderful boost.

There is undoubtedly a simple joy in meeting like-minded folks. And as our practice is more of an individual pursuit than a team one, sharing perspectives and practice with ‘fellow travellers’ is important. Sometimes we can feel lonely on our spiritual journey like running a marathon, but we overcome the loneliness of the long distance runner by coming together as a sangha - which is of course one of our three Treasures.

This meeting was particularly poignant as Rev. Saidō, who died earlier this year, had given a Dharma talk on our ceremonial practice at last year’s event. His teaching,

dedication and joyfulness flowed through much of the content of our meeting and the memories of him raised by those present brought meaningfulness and positivity throughout our time together.

Monks from Throssel Hole, Cromford, Telford and Leicester joined the day, together with Rev. Master Haryo. After a period of meditation, we held a ceremony of offering and gratitude when offerings brought by members of the congregation were passed around the gathering; bows were made before receiving and after giving each item; and the offerings ultimately took their place on the altar. We then circumambulated while singing *The Scripture of Great Wisdom* and *Sandōkai*. The offerings were later shared between the visiting monks.

Sitting behind a red box, Rev. Mugō shared her experiences and insights into the life and ways of Rev. Saidō. The red box contained personal treasures that Rev. Mugō had collected together during the task of sorting through Rev. Saidō's belongings, drawing from each item a facet of the man. A picture of resourcefulness, curiosity, inventiveness and dedication became clear. Rev. Mugō emphasised that we should not seek to discard these items rather, recalling a saying by Rev. Master Jiyu, "they should not go lonely" and each of us was invited to take items that 'spoke to us' which had been brought to the meeting by members of the Telford Priory to remember Rev. Saidō.

The Dharma talk given by Rev. Master Haryo (photo overleaf) is available [via this link](#) and is a recommended listen. The stand-out points I recall are the image he gave us of the ocean with waves and foam on the surface and still waters in the deep. He drew an analogy with our feelings

being the waves and foam, subject to constant change and unpredictability and to the deeper, still waters as our ‘real’ life. If we are not mindful we do get dragged around by the slippery and changeable nature of our feelings; we need to recognise them but not get swept away. He also referred to how meditation is portrayed inaccurately by the media as a way to calm your mind in order to feel a certain way, when in fact, as we know, it offers deeper insight into our being. In time we can come to know that our everyday mind is the mind of a Buddha and that there is perfection in the mind that we are born with.



Lunchtime provided more opportunity to connect and reconnect with Sangha friends and the afternoon events split between a walk in the local park to a discussion on how the teaching is passed on. A short meditation followed by tea and questions rounded off the day with grateful thanks to the Leeds Sangha for organising the meeting. Thanks were also passed on to the Jamyang Buddhist Centre where the event was held.

In this closing period, I sensed renewal with people leaving with more fuel in the tank and an eagerness for the next ‘close pass’.



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## News of the Order

### North America

#### Shasta Abbey

— Mount Shasta, CA – USA —

**Funeral.** On July 1<sup>st</sup> we celebrated the funeral of Rev. Master Jishō Perry, the longest-ordained member of the community and the Order. We were pleased to have the participation of many other monks of the Order—Rev. Masters Seikai, Phoebe, Hugh, Leon, and Vivian, plus Rev. Veronica, who was his Transmission disciple—and eight of Rev. Master Jishō’s family. Sixty lay trainees joined us for a full Buddha Hall in chanting Scriptures and installing Rev. Master Jishō’s memorial tablet and ashes in the Founder’s Shrine. We were grateful for the effort everyone made to come.

**Retreats.** In June Rev. Master Daishin offered a week-long retreat on Teachings of the Buddha from the Pali Canon. Each day he offered teachings on topics such as the *Kalama Sutta*; The Fours Means of Embracing Others (the Four Wisdoms); the Five Contemplations (on the inevitable aspects of human life and the law of karma); the Four Noble Truths and Nirvana.

In July we held an Exploring Monastic Life retreat led by Rev. Masters Daishin, Kōdō and Enya plus Rev. Allard. Most of the community participated in talks, discussions, and mentoring the attendees.

Then in August Rev. Master Meian offered a week-long retreat on Shantideva’s *The Way of the Bodhisattva*. Her talks focused on the excellence of bodhichitta; the power of confession and conversion; the strength of faith; the importance of Precepts

and carefulness, patience, vigor, meditation, wisdom, and dedication of merit.

**Visitors.** From July 6<sup>th</sup> to August 3<sup>rd</sup> we were delighted to host a visit of three monastics from Dharma Drum Mountain Monastery in Taiwan. The three monks – Venerables Chang Qi, Yan Jian, and Yan Tsing – came in order to learn how we teach the Dharma to Westerners. We learned a lot about their practice as well, which was surprisingly (to some) very similar to our own. We appreciated how seamlessly they fitted into the life and practice of the community and the offering of assistance they made while here.



On July 15<sup>th</sup> we hosted a visited from the abbot of Dharma Rain Temple in Portland, Oregon, three of their priests, and seven lay trainees. They were making a pilgrimage to various temples on the West Coast they have some connection with. They offered incense at Rev. Master Jiyu's stupa and joined the community for an outdoor meal, evening meditation, and morning service.

—*Rev. Master Oswin*

## Still Flowing Water Hermitage

— *Dutch Flat, California – USA* —

Both Still Flowing Water Hermitage and the Bear River Meditation Group continue well. In June, the meditation group held a Sunday retreat on the theme of 'Meditation and the Emergence of Kindness and Compassion', and we hope to make these retreats a more frequent event now that Covid is settling down. In July Rev. Master Daishin Yalon and Rev. Master Enya visited the group from Shasta Abbey, our first in-person visit from Shasta monks since Covid began. It was a joyous occasion! Rev. Master Daishin was celebrant for a house blessing for members of the meditation group, and this was followed by a very well-attended potluck, again our first since the onset of Covid. The following day both he and Rev. Master Enya led a retreat on 'Spiritual Friendship.' Visits from monks from Shasta Abbey are always cause for celebration.

On 1 August Rev. Vivian flew to the UK, after a brief visit with Rev. Veronica, and spent some time visiting Rev. Master Alicia and Rev. Master Aiden at their temples. She and Rev. Alicia enjoyed walks in the countryside around the small village where she lives, and at Rev. Aiden's she participated in a number of events with the laity. On 12 August Rev. Alicia drove her to Throssel, where she will remain until the end of the Monastic Gathering which takes place there during the second half of

September. She is enjoying her reunion with Dharma sisters and brothers, aunts, and uncles, and more walks in the countryside. It is joyous to train in a monastery with other monks.

— *Rev. Master Vivian*

## Wallowa Buddhist Temple

— *Joseph, Oregon – USA* —

Thanks to an abundance of gentle rain on our slopes this season, summer at the Wallowa Buddhist Temple has stayed green and cool thus far, and our days of smoke from distant wildfires have been relatively mild and few. We continue to offer merit for all those threatened and overcome by fires and floods, in particular for those temples of our Order and all those connected with us who are presently affected.

**Individual Retreats Ongoing:** The temple monks hosted three individual retreat guests this summer: one from our local congregation, one a visiting monastic, and one from Tokyo, Japan. Each one was a joy to be with, and each brought the gifts of ongoing training, growing trust, and true friendship.

**Clearing Space:** Our major work-focus this summer has been to widen and maintain defensible space around the temple buildings. Also, much of this year's forest clean-up has been completed, thanks to help from congregation and neighbors. Now focus can be on ongoing restoration of the forest floor and spacious walking paths, throughout the autumn months.

**People Gather:** We are delighted to welcome back our regular local congregation for our weekly Sunday Morning Retreat. New out-of-town visitors and local folks continue to find their way through the temple door and into the hall for meditation instruction, one by one. What a precious thing it is for us all to

gather, and to be able to open to whatever our coming together may make possible.

**Image of Compassion:** Late August brought the ‘fitting’ of a stunning original Kuan Yin panel which will eventually come to rest over the entrance to the temple’s retreat guest house. This bright new image, engraved and painted in gold on a fir round sealed in a Japanese burned-wood technique, is a collaboration offered by local artists Erica and Tyler, who will permanently install the piece once its background niche is prepared.



**Dharma Offering:** Steady interest continues in our podcast, *Serene Reflections: From the Heart That Seeks the Way*. More talks are posted monthly, and all available episodes can be accessed on most podcast platforms by searching the podcast title, and directly at our temple website here:

<https://wallowabuddhistemple.org/serene-reflections-podcast-guide/>

**Individual Retreats:** One of the main purposes of the Wallowa Buddhist Temple from its beginning over two decades ago has been to offer individual retreats. If you are opening to the possibility of a future retreat here with the temple monks, you are most welcome to contact us directly at:

<https://wallowabuddhisttemple.org>

— *Rev. Master Meidō and Rev. Clairissa*

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## News of the Order

### Europe

#### Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey

— *Northumberland, England – UK* —

**Summer Retreats and Festivals:** Over the summer months we have happily observed retreat attendances returning to close to the numbers we were seeing before the Covid pandemic, after many months of smaller groups being the norm. This is true of both the introductory and week-long retreats. The August sesshin was a particular highlight, this featured Dharma Interviews as well as daily Dharma talks given by the abbot Rev. Master Berwyn.

We have also celebrated the festivals of the Bodhisattvas Samantabhadra and Manjusri.

**Farewell:** We said goodbye in August to our visiting monk, Rev. CheongEon. Her helpfulness and cheerful presence made her six-month stay with us a real pleasure. She treated us several times to the wonders of Korean cuisine, as well as assisting with many other practical duties in a number of monastery departments. We offered our thanks and wished her safe travels as she continues her tour of multiple European temples before her return to her native South Korea next year.



**Wedding:** On 10 August Throssel hosted the wedding of Cliff Edwards and Annie Cowlshaw. This was a delightful occasion – a ceremony which takes place only rarely at Throssel – attended by many of the happy couple’s family and friends, as well as the monks. Rev. Master Mugō made the journey up from Telford Priory to be celebrant, and the local Hexham registrar was also present, which ensured that the marriage is legally recognized.



We offer hearty congratulations to them both, and wish them, in the words of the ceremony, every success “...in their search for Truth through happiness and unhappiness, in pleasure and in pain until a ripe old age, and in offering the merits of their union and all they do to all living things.”

**Woodworking Project:** We are looking for a skilled woodworker who could make an ihai (memorial tablet) for our Founder’s shrine. The example to the right here shows the current design, though this could be modified if necessary. It is approx 13 inches high. The finished item will be painted gold and have the name of a deceased monk printed on it. If you are interested in helping, please email Rev. Kyōsei via [sacristy@throssel.org.uk](mailto:sacristy@throssel.org.uk). Thank you.



**Bursary News:** We continue to receive invaluable help in making Throssel what it is today through generous donations of financial support, food donations, tools, furniture and equipment for our various monastic departments. Home-made cakes, jams and chutneys have been very gratefully received. The



monastery continues to find ways of reducing our expenses, and we have had some very sound advice from lay Sangha members. Our new VoIP telephone system will allow us to save a substantial amount on our bills, as well as providing us with a more reliable phone system. Persistence also paid off with the installation of smart meters on two of our three electricity supplies, so we have contracted a local firm to install more solar PV panels on the roof of our Myrtle Bank building, secure in the knowledge that we will be recompensed for any electricity we export to the grid.

**Garden News:** It has been particularly noticeable this year that Throssel's grounds are turning into something of an ecological oasis, with all the work on our trees coming to fruition, and lots of pollinating flower planting proving attractive to insects.



**Family Gathering:** At the time of writing we are preparing for the regular OBC Monastic Gathering, when we expect 29 monks from North America and mainland Europe as well as the UK, to join the Community for two weeks of discussions, meetings and more informal events. It will be a pleasure to see them all again; although these get-togethers are supposed to happen every two years, this will be the first time we have seen our friends from 'across the pond' in-person since 2019.

— *Rev. Master Roland*

## The Place of Peace Dharma House

— Aberystwyth, Wales —

Over the summer we have welcomed various guests, including Rev. Master Alina. A visit from a monk is always appreciated and we thank her for coming.

Moira, who has trained at The Place of Peace for many years, came from Australia to sit a private retreat, and it was a pleasure to have her here again.



Recently we have been making improvements to our altars with a pair of Guardian Lions on the Meditation Hall altar and some beautiful new cloths, one of which now covers the Garden Room altar.

The Zoom Dharma Meetings continue and have enabled Sangha from afar to take Refuge here.

As the Dharma Reflections talks are now on MP3 files we can add pictures and information which support and enrich the talks. This is especially helpful when talking about iconography. If anyone would like to receive them, please contact Rev. Master Myōhō.

Recently we have received gifts of food, including some delicious home-grown vegetables. Thank you to all who offer

support, in a variety of ways, to the temple. Gratitude is especially offered to John Adams for his patience and invaluable help in working on our accounts.

— *Rev. Master Myōhō*

## Turning Wheel Buddhist Temple

— *Leicester, East Midlands – UK –*

**Visit from Rev. Master Daishin:** It was lovely to be able to welcome Rev. Master Daishin to the temple for a visit in mid-July. This was Rev. Master's first visit to the temple since we moved to the new property, and we had an event on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> July so that members of the local lay Sangha could come and meet him. Rev. Master gave a Dharma talk and answered questions, and then joined us for the bring-and share lunch.

Rev. Alicia from Sitting Buddha Hermitage in Derbyshire visited us for the day, and altogether there were 22 of us in the temple's Meditation Hall for the Dharma Talk. In addition to this there were about 20 people who joined via zoom, so this was certainly the largest event we have had at the temple.



**Leeds Regional Sangha Day:** On Saturday 1st July the Leeds meditation group hosted a Regional Sangha Day at the Jamyang Buddhist Centre in Leeds. Rev. Master Haryo, the Head of the Order, travelled down from Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey,

together with Rev. Sanshin who is the Leeds group monk. Rev. Mugō came up from Telford; Rev. Alicia from Sitting Buddha Hermitage in Derbyshire also travelled up for the day, as did Rev. Aiden. Altogether there were just over 30 of us present.

The day included meditation (photo below), as well as other activities described in the earlier article (on page 62).



**Visit from Rev. Vivian:** It was a pleasure to be able to welcome Rev. Master Vivian Gruenfelder to the temple for a visit in early August. Rev. Vivian is an American monk of our Order and is usually resident at Still Flowing Water Hermitage in California. Rev. Vivian kindly gave a Dharma Talk at the Festival of Great Master Dōgen.



During Rev. Vivian's visit, Rev. Aiden and Rev. Vivian also travelled down to Cambridge to visit Rev. Master Leandra. They were able to spend several hours with her and they all had lunch together at a café close to where she lives.

— *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.

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