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Buddha's Enlightenment Festival Altar: Norwich Zen Buddhist Priory

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Monastic Life

Rev. Master Meian Elbert

— *Shasta Abbey, Mt. Shasta, CA – USA* —

This is a transcript of a Dharma talk given at Shasta Abbey in July 2022.

Today I'm going to talk a little about monastic life, and why a person might want to become a monk. We don't often do this, for a number of reasons. One is that we don't want to give the impression that in order to really practice the Dharma one has to become a monk; that is not the case at all. We have many lay trainees who do exemplary training, better than many monks! I'd like to make that quite clear. It's more a matter of commitment to the practice. Being a monk helps us to keep to this commitment, but it's not essential.

As we know, the Buddha created the Fourfold Sangha: male and female lay trainees and male and female monks. We need all of them, we all support each other. Traditionally, the monks depend on the lay trainees for food and the other necessities of life, and the lay trainees look to the monks for teaching and guidance.

This arrangement is beneficial in many ways: it means the monks need to live a good life, to keep the Precepts and be worthy of the support they receive. If they don't, the lay people stop supporting them and things fall apart. It also frees up the monks to concentrate on their practice because they don't go out to work; they work in the monastery, whether it's physical work, talking to people, giving Dharma talks, or simply doing their practice.

It also means the monks are not cut off from the world; people wouldn't support us if we were. The monastery is a place of refuge for people who want to spend time here, or if they are not able to visit in person, to connect with us in other ways. A lot of people tell us how much it means to them that we are here, even if they can't visit. We try to make the Dharma as accessible as possible, in as many ways as we can.

However, the world is changing. It is becoming increasingly secular, more concerned with material things than with any religion or things of the spirit. Monks in many traditions are becoming an endangered species, especially here in the West. People interested in Buddhism sometimes say, "Who needs monks? We can do it for ourselves; we don't need monks."

There are probably thousands of books about Buddhism, some of them really good and some not so good. There are many Buddhist teachers, far more lay teachers than monastic ones. Many of these teachers do good work and help a lot of people. There is the mindfulness movement, which is a really good thing, but it can get divorced from its

Buddhist roots, it's a self-help thing. There are meditation apps, podcasts, Zoom events, online Dharma talks (including ours) – endless ways of practicing the Dharma and never even seeing a Buddhist monk.

With all of this there is a feeling of trying to make samsara comfortable rather than looking to see what lies beyond it. Trying to have a happier, more comfortable self with all its trappings rather than being willing to relinquish selfishness, which is the basic cause of our suffering.

And with all of this, why would anyone want to become a monk? Because there is a call of the heart in some of us, the vocation, which means 'calling.' Some people have it, most people don't. This does not mean that those who have this call of the heart are any better than anyone else; it's just that some people want to be monks and nothing else will do. Some people want to be doctors or bankers or artists; it doesn't mean they are better or worse than other people.

One reason I am talking about all this is because someone recently said they thought we didn't want more monks, that there was some kind of barrier. We do want more monks. Some of our older monks are getting frail and elderly, a few have died in recent years, and though we have some younger monks we need more if we are to continue into the future. We want to continue; we want to be able to offer the Dharma, and the refuge of the Abbey, to future generations. I also feel that there will always be a few people who have that call of the heart, the call to the monastic life, and we want to keep the door open for them.

It is said that some people are pulled towards the monastic life, that call of the heart, and some are pushed, by suffering. I think that for most of those who become monks there is a bit of both. For some people there has been great trauma or suffering in their life, and they want to find something to help them deal with that suffering. They want to find a deeper refuge than this transient life. For others, it is just that life is not satisfactory, as the Buddha said; the things most people want: love, family life, enough money, a satisfying career – for some people they are hollow, they don't satisfy. "There must be more to life than this! What is the purpose of my life?"

For others again, they are pulled to the monastic life. Maybe something has happened: they may have had an experience of Truth, a glimpse of something a lot bigger and deeper than they usually see. And they are drawn to know it more deeply. You can't recreate an experience of Truth, it doesn't work; but you can accept it as a gift, something to draw you towards your life's true purpose. The wish to let go of the things of the world and find the Truth becomes the most important thing.

For myself, I am more grateful than I can say that I have had the opportunity in this life to be a monk. I can't imagine the sort of person I would be if I was not. I have never been under the delusion that being a monk made me any 'better' than anyone else; I was lucky. The first time I went to Throssel Hole Priory, as it was then, in England, I knew: This is it. After that I no longer had that middle-of-the-night feeling of "What is my life for? What is my purpose?" That

kind of panic that I was missing my life. I had to muster up my courage to ask about being a monk; I thought they would laugh at me. They didn't.

Feeling one is unworthy to be a monk: many of us, even many monks feel like that, and in a way it's not a bad thing. It keeps us humble and willing to learn and change. But we don't want to let it stop us from asking, from trying, if that is what our heart longs to do.

Not everyone is suited to monastic life, in fact few people are. To start with, most people have no desire whatsoever to be a monk; you have to really, really want to do it, because it's not easy. We don't accept everyone who asks; we try to discern what is best for the person. Maybe it's good to let them try it, even if we think it may not work. And sometimes, clearly not. Some people want to be monks and they can't, for reasons of health, or age, or family commitments or other difficulties. Some people have an unrealistic idea of what monastic life is – a way to escape from the world, to get away from their suffering.

Monks are not trying to get away from suffering; we're trying to face it head on and accept it and deal with it. All beings are prone to old age, sickness and death, and they're all right in our face when we look. Monks look. When we look at these things directly they are a lot less frightening than if we keep trying to look away and pretend they are not there. This doesn't mean we're thinking miserably about sickness and death all the time; we're not. We are often more joyful than most people, partly because we don't take things for granted.

Monks are not perfect. We still have greed, anger, selfishness, fear and so on. But we are trying to see them as they arise, and not act on them. We are working on our selfishness, imperfect as we are. Monks don't escape from the world; we're right in it. We try to know what is going on, without getting obsessed with the news and the latest thing. We need to know what people are dealing with, what they are concerned about, what is happening in our world, so we can offer merit and maybe a little advice on how to deal with it. Not to cut ourselves off.

Being a monk is not easy. Being a lay person isn't easy either. But to be a monk is to live in community, with other people, not all of whom may be easy to get along with. But we are all trying to do our best to work on our selfishness and our shortcomings.

Some years ago a little boy saw one of our monks, and asked him what he was. He replied, "I am a monk." The boy asked, "What is a monk?" The monk said, "A monk is someone who tries to be the very best person they can be, and that isn't easy for anybody." A simple, perfect answer that a child can understand. And that is what we are trying to do: to be the very best person we can be. Of course this isn't exclusive to monks: most of us are trying to be the best person we can be, within our own circumstances, which may be hard amid the pressures of life in the world. It's hard to keep to that. For monks it is what we do.

This doesn't mean trying to be perfect, to live up to some ideal. It means paying attention to what we are doing, and

saying, and thinking, and seeing where we are being selfish or greedy or angry. Learning to let go. Working on the self. Community life is really good for this: Rev. Master Jiyu said it was like a rock tumbler: we are all tumbled around by our life together and our sharp edges get worn off. We are all very different, none of us is perfect, and we may not all have chosen each other as friends. But we are here together, doing our best to help each other in our life together as monks. Our community life is a huge blessing. We learn to love each other, and love all beings – or most of them.

Great Master Dōgen calls becoming a monk “leaving home life behind.” We’re not repudiating home life, we’re leaving it behind, looking for something different. We give up many things: family life, a career, many of the distractions and pleasures of lay life. We are celibate: this is a major thing. It’s not just self-sacrifice; it has a positive purpose, both practical and spiritual. I won’t go into it all now, it’s a huge topic on its own.

We have a daily schedule, we don’t just do what we want, eat what we like and when we like, go to bed and get up when we like, and so on. We have rules and we’re expected to keep them. We get called on our ‘stuff’, our anger and unkindness and so on.

All of this helps to wear away at that selfishness, putting ‘me’ first. We put other things first – learning to let go. As Ajahn Chah said, “Let go a little, you get a little peace; let go a lot, you get a lot of peace; let go completely, you get complete peace.” We aim to let go completely. This is the

real renunciation: the letting go of the self. We come into monastic life wanting something, otherwise we wouldn't come into it at all. We gradually learn to let go of the wanting, our self-concern, and we find contentment. We give ourselves to the life.

Monastic life is not easy, it can be really hard sometimes, but it brings peace. And it brings joy. The virtues that we try to practice bring joy: gratitude, acceptance, kindness, willingness, unselfishness, and so on. Of course both monks and lay people try to practice these. For monks it's a constant practice, we're held to it. As I said, monastic life is not for everybody by any means. For those few people who have that call of the heart, who are suited to the life and come to love it, it's a blessing beyond words.

Darkness

Eric Nicholson

— Gateshead, Tyne & Wear – UK —

This article first appeared in the September – December 2023 Portobello Buddhist Priory Newsletter. This version has been edited.

These are a few personal thoughts about ‘darkness’. I am not exploring how concepts of dark and light are used throughout Zen: that is a slightly different topic.

So, let us consider ‘darkness’ while negotiating a forest of somewhat over-used metaphors. We all know, for example, that the lotus has to have its roots in the dark mud. The Dark Night of the Soul, a theological term with a specific meaning, has become common currency to suggest any very dark spiritual or psychological time.

Common phrases abound. ‘In the dark, a dark plot, dark humour’ (which I respond to) and ‘we all have a dark side’. Then there is Dante’s ‘dark wood’. The etymological meaning is of something ‘hidden’ and I can identify with this. I prefer this slant to the common negative or ‘bad’ associations in circulation.

(I did a web search on ‘darkness’ and was intrigued to see an article titled, *Celebrating Darkness*. The gist of it I think was that we can’t rely on our senses in the dark but we can rest in the unknowable. And trust the darkness. I think the Christian classic, *The Cloud of Unknowing* describes and explores this view.)

Buddha Nature was hidden from me for decades. I couldn’t trust that I was worthy or had a ‘spark of the divine’ as it is sometimes expressed. Other people had it but not me.

Everyone seems to prefer lightness to darkness. However, I love looking at the night sky: at double stars, galaxies and nebulae. I complain because the sky isn’t dark enough! It is only a sky free from light pollution that enables us to see some galaxies and faint nebulae. (Is there a metaphor there? The darker the sky, the more fainter objects can be seen.)

In my late teens I identified with a dark view of life, thinking it was truer to reality. Others preferred sweetness and light. It is said that the common denominator to any trauma is loss.

I lost connection with Buddha nature at the boundary of adolescence when I went to boarding school. Institutional abuse resulted in my distrust of adults and various kinds of defensiveness. Looking back more than 60 years it seems I have lived in darkness – in the sense of not seeing my true nature, and being driven by self-concerned thoughts and

feelings (darkness = something hidden). Even in this one-sided, apparently negative view of darkness there was/is something enlightening.

This ‘something hidden’ aspect is worth contemplating. Many of us for example, may ask a monk, “What am I not seeing?”, when discussing a spiritual problem. There is a sense of something in shadow.

As with many others, the pain and suffering through decades of adult life became so severe that I knew I had to do something about it. That’s when I found Throssel. It would be nice to relate that the darkness was replaced by light - - - but I find dark and light alternate. In ordinary language, there are good and bad days. The ‘ideal’ is not to prefer the light to the dark, but “with the ideal comes the actual.” To let go of the envious, ‘dark’ painful feelings we may have towards another person over and over again for example, may be the action of a Buddha, and may be enough in itself. But we can also investigate ‘who’ or what is feeling the hurt. Is there a substantial self there, or is that a fiction? We may see how a particular knot of hurt formed at an early age and that it is not solid and can be released if we truly trust the unknowable Buddha-mind.

This example comes up a lot for me. We can do this ‘leaving alone’ with any painful feeling. Why cultivate this habit? Because the feeling is obscuring our ‘peaceful, unchanging mind’. But we must be careful not to hate the feelings.

Needless to say I don't find any of this easy: leaving painful states 'alone' is easier said than done. Decades of cynicism and aversion leave a long karmic wake.

As the mind is self-concerned and its *modus operandi* is made up of trying to maximize pleasant events and minimize the unpleasant, it is little wonder we can take decades to find any stability, or what Rev. Master Jiyu called 'the third position'.

If ever a suicidal thought surfaced in the future I hope I would have the presence of mind to ask 'Why are you terrorising yourself Eric?' Can I extend compassion even towards such extreme feelings-thoughts?

The Unborn, Uncreated Reality is not something that can be described, let alone grasped, but the more we can realise our habitual self is an elaborate self-creation, the more there is space for Spaciousness to be sensed! 'IT' is always there 'under/behind' the agitated thoughts and feelings. Some people may call it universal Love.

It may be trite to say the blue sky always exists behind dark clouds. But if there was not an 'unborn, uncreated, unconditioned, undying', the metaphorical blue sky, then complete and utter despair would be our lot. I found recently I put into words my personal kōan: 'to live beyond futility' – futility and diffidence having been an undercurrent in my life.

I find now in my late 70s I can trust in the inclusive Unborn/Buddha Mind more. A non-Buddhist may say that is wishful thinking, but I've experienced timeless, expansive moments where the 'small, separate self' has disappeared, so I know the Buddha was only voicing the literal truth in his vast teaching. That's what keeps me going. I hope I've made a friend of darkness.

At the end of our lives we have to go into the seemingly *ultimate* darkness, so it is probably good that we get acquainted with its many manifestations beforehand.

One Bright Pearl

Rev. Master Leandra Robertshaw

— Haslingfield, Cambs – UK —

A transcript of a Dharma talk given during the 2018 August Sesshin at Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey, inspired by re-reading Zen Master Dōgen's fascicle from the Shōbōgenzō: Ikka Myōju (One Bright Pearl).

We all are One Bright Pearl. Please do not doubt this by undermining and devaluing yourself with your rational, judging, assessing mind. Don't let inadequacy knock you off balance. It is not that we alone are the One Bright Pearl. All things in the universe are One Bright Pearl. This pearl is not some **thing** that can be possessed, not some **thing** that can be owned by an individual; it is the manifestation of Buddha Nature. Being the One Bright Pearl doesn't make us special, stand out above others. We all are One Bright Pearl; all things in the universe are One Bright Pearl. Yet, at times when the brilliant light of another calls for our attention and we see they are One Bright Pearl, they may seem to stand out above others.

I invite you individually to look into the deep connectedness of all things and how this connectedness can

be expressed by taking refuge in the Sangha Treasure. During the Renewal of Vows ceremony, we take refuge in the Three Treasures of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and are guided in how best to live in this turbulent world by expressing our Bodhisattva vows. Our lives as Bodhisattvas are guided by our practice. Zazen is central. The Precepts are essential. Finding your own expression in your own authentic voice is fundamental.

Do not copy others. Do not devalue others.

These two Precepts invite us to take refuge in the Three Treasures along with all beings. We live this life alongside others, intertwined with others. Given this, we endeavour to take true refuge which means we look beyond our personal joy and suffering. True refuge cannot be only about us.

Zazen is useless if we approach it with gain-seeking mind. Dōgen illustrates this in *One Bright Pearl*, taking up a set of dialogues between a teacher and a student - Seppō and Gensa. Gensa was a fisherman who loved boating and fishing on the river. One day a golden-scaled fish came to him without his seeking it, and suddenly he had the urge to leave the dusty world. The fish landed itself without being fished, for Gensa was already leading a relaxed and peaceful life without worrying about the results of his efforts, yet he chooses to leave the dusty world.

You too, in your own way, must have chosen to leave the dusty world or you would not be here today. Leaving the dusty world is not restricted to occasions when you are living

in the monastery, rather it is an attitude of body and mind that lives in the world as if in the sky. Don't be deluded or naive; rather, see that all the ten directions are both dusty **and** without a single speck of dust.

Gensa realised the precariousness of the floating world and the preciousness of the Buddha Way so he gave up his boat and went off into the mountains.

Stop and consider for a moment what you have given up in order to truly follow the Buddhadharma.

Gensa went to study with Seppō and after some years decided to go away and see what other teachers might have to offer. I wonder if he was looking for a more well-rounded education? Or was he at odds with his teacher? Or doubting that he could find enlightenment by staying on at Seppō's temple? Was he bored? Was he wanting something fresh and more inspiring? I am asking such questions in case these are the sort of ideas that pull you away from your practice, **just as it is now**, in your daily lives.

As Gensa was walking away he stubbed his toe on a big stone. There was blood everywhere and his toe hurt horribly. He said to himself, "Some say the physical body doesn't exist, so where then is this pain coming from?" He went back to Seppō's temple.

Seppō said, "What's happening, ascetic Gensa?"

Gensa: "The trouble is I can't be fooled. No one can be fooled."

Seppō: “Is there anyone who does not have these words inside them?” [i.e. know this deep down.] “But can others express these words out loud as Gensa did?”

Then Seppō said, “So how come you decided not to leave the temple and further your education?”

Gensa: “Bodhidharma didn’t come to China. Eka didn’t go to India.”¹

Historically speaking Bodhidharma did go to China but Eka didn’t go to India. So perhaps what Gensa was suggesting was that those monks responded to a call rather than making an intellectual or worldly decision. Gensa was hoping to learn from others, but in the end how much can we learn from others? Is it possible to find true satisfaction with secondhand knowledge? Don’t we need to experience things for ourselves? **And**, of course, we **do** learn from others; we are inspired by others.

Gensa came to see the reality of ‘now you have, this is all’. He came to see that there was nothing lacking in living with Seppō. The universe was always offering all that he needed and teaching at every moment (even if that teaching was sometimes painfully direct, like bashing his toe on a rock!) Sometimes people turn away from Sōtō Zen, or try it out in a different temple with a different flavour that they hope will suit them better, and sometimes like Gensa, they return after the detour.

Are any of you willing to say, “I can’t be fooled”?

Gensa went on to say no one can be fooled. Was he right in your case? Perhaps, we are all fooled at times until we stand

on our own true ground. Part of the process of standing on our own true ground seems to be about balance, in the sense of finding our own way to learn from others without copying them. Do you really believe when it comes to rock-bottom that it is you, yourself, and nobody else who is the source of your own delusions and deceptions? Push yourself over this to see if actually you would still like to put the blame on somebody else. Uncomfortable clarity helps us to see that only we have the power to end our delusions, right here and now. Isn't Buddhism about learning to cut through delusion? Probably most of us want to believe that delusion is caused by forces outside our control. Not so! Delusion and deception don't come from outside.

Gensa's 'I can't be fooled' acknowledges that he, and we, can't blame anyone else for anything. This is difficult, isn't it? No loophole, no escape route from taking full responsibility for ourselves.

Gensa became Seppō's heir. After the stubbed-toe episode Gensa never left Seppō. Who is to say whether it is better to stay with a particular teacher or to go around visiting different temples and learning from different teachers? How can we pontificate on this? It is hard enough to know what is good for us to do, let alone attempting to tell others what they should do. Sometimes a trainee leaves the OBC to practice with another Sōtō Zen tradition and yet they keep returning to honour and to express gratitude to their original training place. It can be clear that they have made a beneficial move, both for themselves and for those, as a bodhisattva, they encounter in their 'new' life. And, on the other hand, it may

be useless to travel around if we have already found who the true teacher is for us.

As we recite in *Rules for Meditation*: “It is futile to travel to other dusty countries, thus forsaking your own seat.”

Life and the changes therein are multitudinous. Thus we need to keep sincerely asking, “What is good to do?” This can mean following changes of direction that may feel challenging, and may disturb and puzzle others that know you.

The chapter moves onto Gensa, who now is the master of the temple, saying to his disciples/students:

The entire world in the ten directions is one bright pearl.

A student asked, “How should I understand this?”

Gensa: What do you do with your understanding?

A good question for all of us to engage with. When we think we have finally understood an aspect of practice by penetrating it deeply through diligent and determined zazen, what then do we do with our understanding? Do we try to speak of it to others? If so, for whose benefit - theirs/ ours/ all of us?

When Dōgen speaks of ‘the universe in the ten directions’ – and he also does so frequently in other chapters of the *Shōbōgenzō* – what does he mean? Whatever we come

up with, for example, ‘vast and great’, I suspect he would have said “No, not that!” So we try again.

Inconceivable and all encompassing.

No, not that!

Obvious and disclosed in perfect clarity.

No, not that!

Not obvious and hidden.

No, not that!

If we sit with and don’t push aside Dōgen’s frequent refusal not to get caught in any duality, something opens up in us even, in spite of continuing to feel we don’t understand. Dōgen goes on to point out, in his poetic and paradoxical way, that the truth of non-dualism is essentially inseparable from dualism; it is not its opposite. If non-duality were the opposite of duality, it would be dualistic, whereas non-duality is real because it flows into duality. Each informs the other in the impossibility of their separation. Thus coming and going, living and dying are expressions of everyday life. The One Bright Pearl is beyond life and death in terms of coming and going, so it is real life and real death in terms of coming and going. The past days have left and present starts from here. Who can see the ten directions as moment following moment, and who can talk about the world in the ten direction as solid and stable?

So can the ten directions be described as a state of total stillness? No and Yes. Personally, I see in myself and others the ceaseless process of pursuing things to make them into self and pursuing the self to make it into things. When

emotions arise, wisdom is pushed aside. Because we chase the self and make it into things, the entire world in the ten directions is ceaseless. Yet, at times during zazen we may fall into the depth of total stillness. So here again there is no dualism between different states. It is the whole universe causing things to accord with ourselves and ourselves according with things. Even when our emotions and our intellect separate us from the real universe, and we feel that separation; even then, that sense of separation is also part of reality. Our body-and-mind of each present moment is One Bright Pearl. It isn't that there are, or are not, miscellaneous things, *bits and pieces* of the entire world of the ten directions. It is just that they are all One Bright Pearl.

By not having any feature and flowing endlessly, the One Bright Pearl can take on any feature according with circumstances, while simultaneously it is sweeping along without stopping for an instant. This is a way of saying that impermanence never stops, even for an instant; it has no feature and is always manifesting in accordance with differing circumstances. In asking how the One Bright Pearl might be described and then saying, "No! not that". Dōgen is telling us that the One Bright Pearl IS the world in the ten directions, not something that is IN the world of the ten directions.

We should always give a pearl to a close friend. (there is a story in the *Lotus Sūtra* of a man who sewed a valuable pearl inside the clothes of a dear friend who was drunk.) When you are drunk, i.e. deluded, there is a close friend who will give the pearl to you; and you as well must give the pearl to a close friend.

Although, you may say, “I am not a bright pearl” you should not doubt. Such doubt comes from limited views. However, limited views are merely limited views. There is nothing to despise or beat yourself up about. We all have limited views at times. In not condemning them we see them with the bright clarity of the pearl and the whole universe in the ten directions reveals the bright pearl’s infinite colours and shades. How lovely! Even our mistakes are part of the perfection of the universe. Everything is enlightened, even delusion. We must try endlessly to penetrate this mystery.

We fan ourselves (i.e. sit in zazen) even though the air is ever present. This refers to the last section of Dōgen’s *Genjōkōan*. However we assess our training to be going – whether brilliantly or failing hopelessly – it is still the One Bright Pearl. How can we not love the bright pearl? When a body-and-mind has already become a bright pearl, thereafter the body-and-mind is not personal. Then there is no worrying about whether we are a bright pearl or not a bright pearl. What arises and passes is not a substantial self. We are no longer gathering and binding weeds to trap ourselves.

When you clarify that the body-and-mind are the bright pearl, you understand the body-and-mind is not the self. Who then is there to be concerned about whether or not appearing and disappearing are the bright pearl? Even if you are concerned, that doesn’t mean you are not the bright pearl. You have come to see that your real, true nature is impersonal, and empty of any substance that appears and disappears. What results is that you are not bothered anymore about if you are, or are not, the bright pearl. Besides our daily lives, with their

ups and downs, there is nothing else called the One Bright Pearl. In the midst of always changing reality, we can wholeheartedly decide to cultivate the practice of One Bright Pearl together with all beings, rather than deciding to follow blindly our desires and run away from our fears.

As Dōgen says in the *Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki*, “Without exception everyone is a vessel of the Buddha-Dharma.”² Never think you are not a vessel.

Notes

- ¹. Tanahashi, Kazuaki – translator: *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dogen's Shobo Genzo*. Shambhala Publications, 2013.
- ². *Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki*, Shohaku Okumura & Tom Wright, translator. Sōtōshū Shumochō 1988. Ch. 4-12, p. 155.

How It Is To Become Old

Clea Holdridge

— *Ashland, Oregon – USA* —

I am alive! and I love my old age. When I was younger I felt so much confusion and hesitation, so many doubts and fears, and I felt vulnerable. There was so much I didn't understand. I was a foreigner in this country and didn't speak English. I was a single mother with four small children to care for. And that, I can tell you honestly, was the greatest training I had ever gone through. It made me begin to think seriously of my intentions (though I didn't call them intentions at that time). Before then, I was only thinking of what I wanted to do with my life. Now I wanted to take good care of my children and give them a supportive environment so they could become good human beings—give them a lot of love and a good education. And I started from that. It was a difficult time to say the least. I started to feel a responsibility based on the love I felt for these children who were my life then. Then it seemed life began to cooperate with me. My children weren't a burden for me, they became my reason to live and my inspiration. We found wonderful friends who were willing to help us muddle together and grow up together.

When my brother was 15-18 months old and I was about seven, we were all playing in a pool at our grandparents' farm. I was playing and splashing when all of a sudden, I saw this little head bobbing in the water and realized it was my brother drowning. I stretched myself to the max, holding onto a rail to hold myself and grabbed him by the hair to pull him out of the water and hand him to my mother who was white as a sheet with a look of dread on her face. I had the thought, "I am not alive for me alone."

Years later, I remembered that feeling on the night I had my first child, a son. I had spent eight hours in labor pains that were unimaginable for me at the time. The next morning, as I lay resting, the thought came into my mind, clear and concise, "You were not born for yourself alone." I didn't understand it at the time but that thought has come back to me at various stages of my life.

Recently during a meditation this same thought came up and I just sat with it for a long time, just sitting without drawing any definite significance from it but it became very familiar to me. My life became harmonious. I started to pay attention to ordinary life, everyday kind of things like working, cooking, meditating, or reading and I started appreciating being alive. And feeling grateful.

I felt touched by situations and people. They brought a clarity to me. It felt like an expansion or that the person is me or part of me. I was talking with my brother who lives in Brazil. He's 88 years old. We've been in touch via the internet. He was telling me what was going on in his life and

all of a sudden, he stopped talking because he was overwhelmed with pain. All I could do was to send him love and merit, knowing he was living for his wife—to love and take care of her. She lost her memory and has suffered with disabilities for many years. I felt expansive, as if we were sharing “LIFE.” There was a lot of love there, which is a great way to alleviate suffering anywhere.

There have been so many circumstances in my life which point to the fact that, “we are not isolated Beings.” We are all part of LIFE, we are interconnected.

When I had small children, I was always amazed when I noticed their spontaneous ways of expressing their caring, showing affection or a feeling of protection. If they saw me crying, they put their little hands on my face and asked me, “Mama, why are you crying?” and they hugged me. When one of their siblings was having a difficult time, they definitely felt it was their responsibility to make it better.

Why is it then that we have this capacity, but instead become isolated, not caring for others, competitive, jealous, envious, and we don’t care about others’ suffering? Of course this is not a general rule—there are caring people all over the world and I am grateful for all they do, bless them.

I feel that the fundamental dysfunction of mind is this split between ‘I’ and ‘other.’ We falsely grasp the ‘I’ with an attachment and the “other with the basis of aversion, envy, competition. This duality presents or becomes a veil over our

feelings of love and compassion, equality, and joy, hidden from our awareness.

The result of this duality is that we want to pursue happiness for ourselves instead of wishing for the happiness for all beings. We aspire for the end of our own suffering instead of rejoicing in the happiness of others.

The power of grace of all the Bodhisattvas and the Buddha-nature, after long practice and effort, lead us to perceive that our own mind is endowed with love, compassion, equanimity and joy. We start wishing for a better world, well-being for all, concern for animals, the planet and in a way, a change for how things are, including ourselves. We feel a sense of responsibility for the generations to come, think of ways to benefit the planet for future generations. We want to protect the earth, as its elements are what sustains our LIFE.

My intention is to learn skillful means so I can teach others to live by love, compassion, joy and equanimity for the sake of all beings. May all enter the Dharma to purify the mind and become established in the Truth of Oneness.

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

Stillness

Rev. Master Vivian Gruenenfelder

— *Still Flowing Water Hermitage, Dutch Flat, CA – USA* —

A transcript of a Dharma talk given during meditation at Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey in 2019.

I invite us please to listen to this talk by allowing ourselves to drop into Stillness as a stone drops to the bottom of a deep, clear, still pool and settles. Drop off the intellect. Don't try to understand. Just let the words pass through you as they arise and drop away.

Some years ago, while at Throssel for a six-month stay, I visited one of the affiliated meditation groups. During a discussion I was asked to choose one word which best encapsulates the Buddha's Teaching. My mind ricocheted, wondering what one word could possibly best convey the entire richness of what the Buddha had to say. I surprised myself when I settled on Stillness. Reflecting on this question in the following days, I decided that Nonduality was a much better choice. More recently, I have come back to Stillness. I am discovering that everything else the Buddha taught derives from the practice of Stillness. In this article I hope to convey to you some of why that is so.

It seems more reasonable, when asked the question I was asked, to say something about suffering, or suffering's end, or about Enlightenment or Nirvana, about the Four Noble Truths, or the Noble Eightfold Path, or about Emptiness, or about Wisdom or Compassion, or about meditation or the Precepts. Why Stillness?

First, because Stillness is the womb of Nonduality, of Enlightenment itself, the medium in which Nonduality is nourished and thrives. It gives birth to Enlightenment, and then nourishes it, grows it up healthy, matures it.

Second, because Stillness is our meditation practice.

Third, because Stillness is what we become as our practice deepens.

What do I mean by Stillness? It is not necessarily an absence of noise or of speaking; nor is it necessarily an absence of motion or of activity. This is very important. Let me try to convey what I am thinking of as Stillness by talking a bit about what supports it.

Stillness is supported by solitude, silence, and simplicity. These three are touted in most, if not all, religions, as necessary for deep practice, and for deep Communion – for the mystical experience. It is delusion to think we can circumvent them if we yearn for anything more than intellectual understanding. They are very hard to find in the modern world.

Solitude: This is, of course, about being alone. Not lonely, but alone. Physically alone, without other human beings around. Deeper than that, it does not depend on being alone, but on being deeply rooted in our own hearts, in the center of our being, being fully present to ourselves. It is standing in who we are, and staying rooted there; taking our own seat, and not being shoved off by circumstance, by what others think or by what the world demands. Here in retreat we can experience solitude even though we are surrounded by others. Even so, it is important to spend some time, a little time each day if possible, alone, with no one else around, and without phones, voicemail, email, TV, social media, movies, computers, etc. Solitude creates space, and makes silence possible. Within solitude we discover silence.

Silence: Absolute silence is actually impossible. In the quietest of circumstances there is still some sound, and even silence has a sound. What is important for spiritual depth is a silence of the human voice and human-made noise. It's curious, isn't it? Birds singing, the wind sighing in the trees, rain tapping on the roof; these seem to be what silence is, don't they?

There is a story about Mother Teresa that I love. A reporter asked her what she says when she prays to God. "Nothing," she responded, "I listen." The reporter asked the logical question, "What does God say to you?" And Mother Teresa said, "Nothing. He listens." This evokes an image of listening listening to listening listening to listening, and so on ad infinitum, like an object reflected in two facing mirrors. Silence is this sort of listening.

In silence we can hear what is within, the voice from the still center of our being. This voice can be very subtle, and we often miss it, because we cover it over with noise and busy-ness. But this is the voice of God, of the Unborn, of that which is greater than the small, self-absorbed self.

The hara, our spiritual center, located somewhere in the torso, is infinitely spacious. It is in this space that solitude and silence gather. When we are confronted with the sacred, awe and silence are our natural response. Dwelling within the hara, we live in the midst of all life as sacred, all that exists as sacred. Our respect, gratitude, and joy know no bounds.

Simplicity: Living a life of simplicity means that there is less clutter, physically, mentally, psychologically, and spiritually. Less busy-ness. Less to be concerned about. Less to take care of. Less wanting. Less attachment. We learn what we can drop off. Simplicity is a practice of letting go. It is a practice of contentment. We have more time for quiet, for solitude, for meditation. It is also kind to the environment.

Simplicity supports solitude and silence, and the three together create conditions conducive to Stillness; they embody Stillness, and Stillness embodies them. I might add that time spent in and with nature is also highly conducive to the cultivation of Stillness. For this reason it is especially important that we treat our natural environment with love and respect.

What is Stillness like? It is vastly, overwhelmingly, spacious, a spaciousness that completely takes us over, so that

no self remains within it. This spaciousness is a natural outcome of solitude, silence, and simplicity. As spacious, it is unbounded, unlimited, unobstructed, and, it is eternal. Because it is spacious, it can hold anything within itself; it can hold everything within itself, everything at once. The boundaries between inside and outside drop off, and we know from experience that all that exists is within us, and that we are in all that exists, that we and all that is are interpenetrating, flowing into and out of each other. It is not stagnant; it flows and it shimmers. It is perfect equanimity. This experience is the felt experience, in our own bodies, of Nonduality, or of Emptiness, Shunyata, the wisdom of *The Scripture of Great Wisdom*. It is completely inclusive. Within Stillness, nothing is divided, nothing insufficient. It is a place, a way of being, of no distress, no matter what may be present. Here is the end of suffering; here is Enlightenment.

Why does Stillness matter? It matters because it is the only path into deep listening, and deep hearing. It is our mainline, an open pipe, to the Unborn, our direct access into Love, without attachment, into the Source of who we are, our True Nature, into the Truth. Without it we can't see what is here, and what is here is what is True. It is Original Mind, original clear, bright awareness. To be aware, to be **awake**, we must be Still.

It is the crucible for all mystical experience. In the spaciousness of the hara we come into direct contact with the ineffable, with what Rev. Master Myōhō calls 'the Great Mystery.' 'Ineffable' is a word that means 'too sacred to be uttered.'

Stillness is Ceaseless Prayer. In Christianity, Ceaseless Prayer is words that are repeated all the time, so that one is never not praying. In Buddhism, Ceaseless Prayer has no words, needs no words. It is simply turning toward Stillness in every moment. What we know there cannot be uttered. This is the Great Mystery.

Stillness has inherent value. We sit within it not to get anything from it, but for its own sake. When we sit within it, it does its work on us. I am reminded of the line from *The Litany of the Great Compassionate One*, “Do, do the work within my heart.” We can’t make this work happen, but it transforms us — in spite of ourselves. We need ask nothing of it.

Stillness is our deepest refuge. The Japanese characters for ‘refuge’ mean, ‘to return to and rely upon.’ This place of Stillness within, which is as accessible as our own breath, is a safe harbor that we can return to and rely upon at any time. Perhaps we should speak, not of Stillness as a noun, a place, but as an action, as a practice, ‘Stilling,’ in the same way that we practice taking refuge. We can entrust ourselves to Stilling completely. We can just ‘let it be,’ as the song says, let things be, which is Stillness itself.

And when we live in Stillness, we die in Stillness. No difference.



Stillness, or Stilling, is a definition of meditation practice. The two are completely congruent. They embody each other.

What do we do when we meditate? First of all, we sit down in a particular posture, a posture that has the characteristics of being upright, stable, open, and relaxed. The Japanese word, ‘shikantaza,’ means ‘just sitting.’ This is the whole of our practice. We just sit. We sit down, and we don’t do anything else. Since the posture is the whole of the practice, all we need do is place ourselves in it, maintain it, and let the meditation do us.

We don’t move, so we are sitting still, being still, already inhabiting Stillness. My Master once said, “In one sense, ‘sit still’ is the answer to every question asked in spiritual guidance. And yet, it is good to offer more.” Any spiritual question we ask can be responded to with the instruction to sit still, and this is what is indeed the important thing, and the ‘solution’ to our problems. But of course it is good for a teacher to expand on that, and offer something more helpful and skillful. So they might refer to all the other Teachings of the Buddha: suffering, its cause, its end, and the way to its end, etc. The Precepts and the Paramitas, our whole box of tools that help beyond just sitting.

But why is just sitting so crucial? When we sit down, we still ourselves so that we can be with what is. That is all, and this is revolutionary, because usually we are trying to escape what is. Just this is it! What is here, right now, is our only concern. We are totally with what is, just this. With our whole body, mind, spirit, psyche, we ask, “What is this?” Nothing more. Having asked, knowing what is here, the ‘just this,’ we do nothing. We are still. We don’t move, either

externally or internally. We don't react, we don't fix, we don't try to change anything, we don't make it better. This is all-acceptance, that well-touted key to the Gateless Gate.

Just sitting here, with our whole body, our whole mind, our whole spirit, our whole heart, fully engaged, experiencing 'just this,' we can't help but know, from experience, in our bodies, the reality of impermanence and the reality that there is no separate, fixed, unchanging self. That is, we experience, directly with our bodies, what Emptiness is, Shunyata. We can say, then, that zazen is Emptiness, wisdom, prajna, this clear seeing that is the nature of our minds and which is direct access into Nonduality.

To say it differently, when we sit in zazen, we are just being what is, just this. We become all this is, right here, right now. Whatever distinction there is between subject and object drops away and there is no difference, no differentiation. This self which is not a solid, separately existing thing, is seen in connection to all that is, like a jewel on Indra's Net. We see clearly that we are suffused by all of Reality, and that we in turn suffuse all of Reality. No separation, undivided. This is what Nonduality is. Stillness is to sit in its center. We could say that Stillness is the medium for Nonduality, like air for humans, water for fish, space for the universe.

Nonduality is a word we use in Buddhism to denote something other than the opposites. As you know, in *Rules for Meditation* Dōgen writes that "when the opposites arise the Buddha Mind is lost." Opposites are things like short and tall, hot and cold, light and dark, subject and object. This last

one, subject and object, is perhaps the quintessential opposite. When we see in this way, we see things as separate and divided, ourselves as separate and divided and, hence, lonely. The Buddha taught that this is the fundamental delusion. When we sit in zazen there is fundamental unity, there is only 'just this.' There is only connection. This is what Nonduality is. It can be said that Nonduality transcends the opposites, but I think it is more accurate to say that it encompasses them. Nonduality holds all things within itself. This is the fundamental act of religion (or spirituality, if you are afraid of that word), to hold contradiction, and, larger than that, to hold all things without exception.

Rev. Master Jiyu gets to the point here when she says, "All is One and all is different at the same time, and when we realize that, we are Enlightenment itself." 'All is one' and 'all is different' logically contradict each other. And, it's not just that both are true but that both are true at the same time. This must be obvious to us all. You are not the person sitting next to you, and you are not separate from, divided from, different from, the person sitting next to you.

To cite a more mundane example of how we can be caught in the contradictions of the opposites: We have a Precept that says, "Do not kill." We know that it is wrong to kill, that it causes suffering. But we've just run over a racoon (or maybe I should say rabbit for European readers) and it isn't dead. It's near death and in agony. Do we leave it there in the road to suffer, or do we run over it again to put it out of its misery, and then move it respectfully to the side of the road? It may be that the latter choice keeps the Precept better

than the former. Or, let's say we have been sexually abused. Since, according to our understanding of Emptiness, there is no doer who does the deed, no deed, and no one to feel the fruit, there is no one to be harmed. And yet, if this has happened to you, you know that you are harmed, and even that that harm is not confined to you but affects those close to you as well. This person who is harmed needs kind, compassionate attention, needs help to heal. From this point of view we could say that Emptiness and compassion, the two sides of our Zen practice, contradict each other. Yet both are necessary, and both must be held together. We can't opt for one and drop the other.

Rev. Master Jiyu called this 'holding together' the 'Third Position'. We might, along with the Buddha, call it the Middle Way. 'Third Position' is another way of saying 'meditation.' It is not the midpoint between two opposites. It is holding them both at once. For Dōgen, the most vexing opposite, the one at the center of his own kōan, was training and Enlightenment. As you know, he asked, with a certain amount of anguish, "If we are already Enlightened, already Buddha, why do we have to train?" This is the question which opens *Rules for Meditation*. He answered the question when he realized deeply and profoundly that training IS Enlightenment. Training is being Buddha. I find it equally important to flip these sentences to say, "Enlightenment is training. Being Buddha is to train." This is why Dōgen writes, in another part of the *Shōbōgenzō*, that training is ceaseless. We can't stop being Buddha, can we? once we know what it means to be Buddha. To recognize that we are

Buddha, and yet imperfect, need training, and to be and do both at once is the Third Position, and we take up this position whenever we sit down in zazen posture.

In his commentary on *The Scripture of Great Wisdom*, Shohaku Okumura quotes Pingala, a third or fourth century Indian scholar and writer on Buddhist thought:

Pingala's conclusion is that "unless one sees the Buddha's peaceful dharma by extinguishing views, we see being and nonbeing."¹

Being and nonbeing are a way of talking about existence and non existence, a very classic kind of opposite that is found throughout Buddhist teaching, and also in the early Mahayana scriptures. Okumura again:

The Buddha's peaceful dharma is reality itself free of all dichotomies. This reality is blissful and precious.

'Peaceful Dharma free of all dichotomies' is actually what Nonduality is. We might think that much of life isn't particularly blissful. You can sit here in meditation and be in a lot of pain. We experience physical pains in all kinds of ways and some of it's chronic for some of us, and this can be a very difficult and not very blissful thing to train with. We have problems, terrible things can happen to us. Life can be pretty awful at times. Not to be too pessimistic about it. But no matter what, there is an aspect of bliss when we can just be with what is, close to it, intimate with what is right here.

It's very hard to do this. But I promise you that it is true. When we can be with what is, somewhere in there is an aspect of bliss. Okumura continues:

We don't usually see reality itself but only our preconceptions: things we like or dislike, something useful or useless, something desirable or undesirable.

I might add that it is our preconceptions which are not blissful.

We divide reality into categories, running after things we desire and trying to avoid those we detest. Our life becomes a matter of chasing and escaping. That is our usual way of life.

Dividing reality into categories is to discriminate. Reading the above brings to mind for me a very strong sense of what suffering is, and in what way we are not free – chasing and escaping.

In this kind of life there is no stable foundation, no peace, because we are always escaping from or chasing after something. There's no time to rest, to just calm down and be right here. Letting go of thought in zazen for ten minutes or for a day or for five days is very precious. The blissful Dharma, true reality, is revealed when we let go and become free from our fixed views.

I would add that this is the whole point of zazen: to be free of our fixed views, and that this is how Nonduality

becomes a lived experience, something we know for ourselves, rather than another concept or fixed view.

I described earlier how Stillness does not mean no movement or no action. Stillness does not stand against activity. That would be to set up yet another duality. Once again, we must hold apparent opposites together, each on the palm of one open hand – two open hands, at once. However, it is very important to be clear and honest with ourselves. We must be willing to admit to ourselves when we are using activity to avoid Stillness, because sometimes Stillness scares us, or seems boring, or ... you fill in the blank. Activity can be a way of blinding ourselves, keeping us from seeing what it is that we are really up to. It can be a way to define ourselves through our work, or what we offer to others, or some product we make, or some identity we think we have to have, which gives us, in our own eyes, value. We must be clear when we are doing this, and return to Stillness — and then do the activity from within the Stillness. Does this activity cause no harm? Is it good to do? Can I remain Still while I do it? If I am Still while doing it, how does that change the outcome, the effect it has on others?

Sitting still in zazen is the holding of these contradictions, the holding of all the disparate aspects of who we are, in one whole. This is Nonduality. We could also say that it is the Buddhist teaching of Totality. Nothing is left out. It is sufficient as it is. Dōgen teaches us that zazen and Enlightenment are one. This living within Nonduality is Enlightenment itself. When we sit, we manifest Stillness, Nonduality, and Enlightenment all at once. Stillness,

Meditation, and Nonduality are three ways of looking at the very same thing; Enlightenment itself.

Over the years of sitting in meditation and bringing the mind of meditation into our daily life, Stillness deepens. It becomes who we are. We turn to it, settle into it, reflexively, like a good habit. From within it, all the rest of our living pours forth like a fruitful fountain. Let us not forget it. We can return to it always, rely upon it always. This is our life of ceaseless practice, boundless Enlightenment.

Note

- [1.](#) Okumura, Shohaku. *Living by Vow*, Wisdom Publications, 2012. p. 162.

Liberating Morality

Rev. Master Jishin Kinson

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

This is a transcript of a Dharma talk given following the Festival of Great Master Dōgen at Throssel in October.

To celebrate Eihei Dōgen today, the talk is going to be about morality... That probably sounds terribly dry for a celebration(!) but I'm going to concentrate on the underlay of good and bad; right and wrong, which help navigate our choices and actions; and we'll have the wisdom of Dōgen in this area. I'm using translations of Dōgen by Tanahashi and Hee-Jin Kim, and some of Kim's commentary.

But first, I hope any newcomers here already know that Buddhism teaches refraining from causing harm and doing everything that is good. There is no such thing as a genuine form of Buddhism without – or beyond – this.

Let's start by moving forward through the origination of morality; the early origins of moral concepts and behaviour,

because it throws light on the complexity of our adult approach.

It began with our parents bringing us up. We first learned what was acceptable and what was not acceptable. We learned about “yes” and “no” and later on (maybe about aged 4 or 5 years), we got the reasons for the good things to do, and the reasons for the things we did which were *not* acceptable. We developed restraint. We learned to consider others.

Now, such a foundation came to us with degrees of emotion and feeling content. As babies and then wild young children, restraint and being good or bad was emotion-bound for us, and complicated by our desires and social motives. I think you’d agree that our right/wrong sentiments through into adulthood have retained emotional colour. We feel strongly about what we see as good or what we see as bad. We aren’t neutral when we express our views in these areas. Moral expression often comes with heat!

As a Zen practitioner, quietly observing what your own mind does, you will have been surprised – shocked even – to notice just how active and all-involved this right/wrong sensibility is. We habitually view circumstance and other people’s behaviour in terms of right and wrong; at best, it’s done absentmindedly. And at our worst, it comes out as seething judgement.

Dōgen had strong words to say about this – even for the Japanese culture of the 1200s. In *Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki*, he says:

A student of the way must abandon (this kind of) human sentiment. Most people are being dragged about by discriminating good from evil, distinguishing right from wrong...and then grasping at right things and discarding so-called wrong things.¹

He said, “being dragged about” and I would add ‘being driven by obscure, emotional content’. This is constrictive! Now, do we want that? Of course not!

Dōgen goes on to say something like: “To enter the Buddha way, let go of the mind that holds dear your body and worries. Refrain from making ready judgements based on your view of good and bad.”

“Good and bad”; “right and wrong” are not absolutes. We often bandy them about as labels. Nothing is wholly good or wholly bad – there is always a complex and moving matrix. Quoting Hee-Jin Kim from his book, *Eihei Dōgen, Mystical Realist*:

Good and evil are temporary, having no self-identifiable nature of their own. They are not solid entities. Like phenomena, good and evil come and go in the impermanent scheme of things. They are relative values and so we must take care when discerning what is truly good or discarding what is bad.²

In *Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki*, Dōgen says:

What is truly good; what is truly bad is difficult to

determine. In my case, I sometimes write poetry and prose. Some people praise me, saying it is extraordinary. And some criticize me for doing such things as a monk, who has left everything to study the way. Ultimately, what shall we take as good and abandon as evil? It is very difficult to discern clearly what is good and what is bad.

And, we need to engage good circumstance; support good circumstance and make good choices. The best way forward, including here in the monastery, is to look openly at what is really going on, seeking to see and know, and not jump into the stricture of right, or the stricture of wrong. We need to cut through emotional content by just looking and knowing. This is the way to sow the seeds of liberation for us all and for everyone else. What's good really does help everyone.

Moving on, we're at the point of looking at the mystical/transcendental side of Buddhist morality. There is a radical side to the Buddhist Precepts. They are referred to as 'Liberators'; also as the 'Activity of Buddhas'. To fully encounter the Precepts as liberators, we must be prepared to open up beyond assessing and discerning and thinking through – we have to want to move on beyond habitual forms. It tends to come along with an exquisite trust.

In *Shōbōgenzō*, Dōgen expressed the fundamentally Real and mystical nature of the Precepts. The place to look is the chapter on the Three Pure Precepts – *Shoaku Makusa*. The Three Pure Precepts we know as:

Refrain from all evil,
Do everything good,
Purify one's own mind.

The action of that pure mind is to help liberate all sentient beings – which is the Bodhisattva's activity.

In Tanahashi's translation of the *Shōbōgenzō*, he discards the terms 'good' and 'evil', and has the Pure Precepts as:

Refrain from unwholesome action.
Do wholesome action.
Purify your own mind. ³

The first Pure Precept: refrain from evil. From Hee-Jin Kim's translation:

Evil is not an entity that acts on things. Not to commit any evil (any harm) is the direct expression of supreme enlightenment itself. Where evil is not committed, the power of spiritual discipline is realised at once.

In other words, the power is realised by you, the moment you 'cease from'. That effect cannot be explained, only known. Refraining from evil is in accord with your Buddha Nature, and what is felt is freedom and purity. This is far beyond the contrivance of morality of the worldly mind. This power is beyond moral sentiment.

Also, from Kim:

Of course all humans can fail and feel guilty. This is always going to be a human propensity; we must live with our vulnerability. We can see the results of our acts but we cannot alter the causing and effecting.

This is quite humbling, really.

Confession is an essential part of enlightenment. The regular Renewal of Vows ceremony we have at Throssel, includes the confession verse:

All the evil committed by me is caused by
beginningless greed, hate and delusion.
All the evil is committed by our body speech and
mind;
I now confess everything wholeheartedly.

This serves to support us in ongoing practice. We are long-term becoming Buddha!

A ‘realized’ person is still subject to the universal law of causality. Evil deeds cause evil consequences and good deeds cause good consequences. This maybe a bit cryptic, but this law is deeply personal and there are no exceptions.

The second Pure Precept: “Do everything good.” Again from Kim’s translation:

Good is not an entity that acts on things. To do everything good transcends ought. [i.e. transcends

‘ought to do’!] Good deeds done for the sake of acquiring good results is not really the activity of True Nature. Rather, doing good comes out of True Nature and is done for its OWN SAKE.

Doing good for its own sake explains its immediacy. What is experienced in the action is freedom and purity. “There is only fidelity to True Nature”.

Tanahashi’s version, on wholesome action, is as follows:

There is no wholesome action waiting for someone to practice it. Wholesome action is just do. At the very moment of doing, True Nature is it. Doing is not for the sake of knowing it or discerning it as good. Wholesome action is just do. Wholesome action arrives at the place of Buddha Nature where all wholesome action is done faster than a magnet drawing iron.

These moments of wholesome doing are the fulfilled moments of moral and spiritual freedom and purity. These moments are experienced as freedom and purity.

The ‘do’ and the ‘refrain from’ of these first two Pure Precepts is liberating, and the actions to follow are liberated actions.

The third Pure Precept: “Purify your own mind.” This is my own understanding of it, at the moment:

To purify one's mind is like a follow-on from the first two. It is underlining the need now to practice further towards the completion of PURITY. That is, in order for REFRAINING and DOING to keep their PURE function, the mind must be free of an attachment to them. To have REFRAIN FROM ever-present and ready in the mind as a mode of conduct is not quite it. There is no need to meet all circumstances in readiness for REFRAIN FROM. Likewise, with DO: there is no need to deliberately meet circumstances in readiness to step forward. In the beginning we do this, of course. It is well-intentioned and comes from enthusiasm with new-found practice, but without due care, they become the new moral strictures and then judgement of self and others seeps in. Where is liberation then?

A way to practice the third Pure Precept would be to remain open towards the immediacy of REFRAINING or the immediacy of DO. In other words, allow them to arise just for their own sake – really, out of emptiness and freedom; freedom and purity. What you relied on, if you like, is shifting away from conceptual attachments.

At this level of the Precepts, morality is not a contrivance of the ordinary mind, and is not based on accumulated sentiment; in this sense it is pure. As Dōgen says, “The pure action coming forth is the actualisation of the fundamental point.” This is exquisite and takes us further into the fathomless knowing. It is enough; expect nothing more.

As Kim points out, there will always be something of a tension in us between the everyday approach with reliance on a rational morality, and spiritual transcendence and purity and action coming from there. We must live with the Law of Causation and with human nature. We have rational morality but we should not let it usurp spiritual transcendence and purity, and the action which comes from them.

Notes

1. *Shōbōgenzō-Zuimonki: Sayings of Eihei Dogen Zenji* recorded by Kōun Ejō. Translated by Shohaku Okumura. Kyōtō Sōtō Zen Center, 1987.
2. Hee-Jin Kim, *Eihei Dōgen, Mystical Realist*, Wisdom Publications, 2000.
3. Tanahashi, Kazuaki, translator: *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dogen's Shobo Genzo*. Shambhala Publications, 2013.

On Retreat

Teresa Dorey

— Jersey, Channel Islands – UK —

Based on a conversation between the author and Rev. Master Olwen Crookall-Greening in November 2023.

I spent three months as a lay resident at Throssel Hole in the Autumn of 2023, and decided to write about the experience, in the hope that others who may be interested can come to appreciate some of the benefits of an extended retreat in a monastic setting.

After yet another birthday, careful consideration and the knowledge that I could take my pension early, I completed my final work commitments and handovers. The last ten years of my life had mostly been spent looking after elderly and chronically ill people, and the last year and a half of that was spent working within a hospital clinic supporting a consultant surgeon. Having taken the Precepts ten years ago and adjusted my employment away from being a means of maximising my income and towards living the Precept ‘do good for others’, my job had become my wholehearted Buddhist practice.

During that time I had lost track of my meditation practice in the process of becoming busier and busier. I knew

I needed the structure of Throssel's monastic routine to sit, rest and restore myself in the heart of the practice that I've been doing for the last twenty years. So that deeper need was what motivated me to head up to Throssel.

Possibly because of my age, the theme of impermanence and the fact that this is the last quarter or third of my life that I'm heading into, was also something that I felt I needed to sit with: to decide how I wanted to move forward within that impermanence, and within that towards a more sustained depth and continuity of practice. Going into the meditation hall we always pass the calligraphy that reminds us that 'This fleeting body reveals the light'; this calligraphy made an impression on me many years ago and the teaching has always stayed with me.

One of the best things about being at Throssel for a retreat longer than just a week or a weekend is the range of different opportunities to develop our training as Buddhists that the monks offer, which means working closely with the monks in their different monastic areas and really getting to see how they express their Preceptual practice in their work. The basic premise of the daily work offered is that work is approached as an additional form of meditation, so we are encouraged to work in silence, then come together to talk during breaks. As the mind quietens down and really starts to settle there is more opportunity to observe one's own mental habits, reflect on the needs driving these, and allow space for loosening – possibly even letting go of – what is limiting us.

The monastery kitchen was my training ground for much of the three months. Within the training offered is the

invitation to let go of one's opinions about how things 'should' be done, and one's preferences, i.e. other things one would rather be doing. Holding on to strong opinions is a closed approach, and being invited to practice letting go of these has been the uncomfortable nitty gritty training of softening the hard edges of the 'self' I think of as me. I've come up against areas in which my resistance is resilient, and being asked to do the same task that triggers this resistance again and again, and the sheer persistence with this has helped me to see my mind start to soften into a more flexible approach which operates on a different level that is beyond a reaction. So actually just letting go and getting on with what is needed is liberating, and a more fluid way of being. Although the letting go aspect of training yields positive results in the moment, in my experience the more ongoing underlying loosening of the 'habitual, defined self' is a more uncomfortable experience, and cumulatively seemed to be behind a residual feeling of something like a hard shell being 'broken'. It takes faith to stay with the process rather than back off.

It has been useful to change gear and go into retreat mode from time to time during the long stay, in particular the week-long Segaki retreat. Within the sesshin schedule, having so much meditation felt like a gift and the silence too was very welcome. I did feel a lot calmer, and a sense of joy came with it too – even though the theme was how we create our own suffering by clinging on to things. So for me there was sadness, and at the same time there was also a different level of calm acceptance and relief. Also the collective practice of being part of a sangha gathering together to practice as one

group, just all meditating together, or even silently drinking tea together which we did each day, has its own solid strength and somehow consolidates my faith in the sangha jewel.

I think that in sesshin we feel ourselves quite gently being stripped back in certain ways. And usually around day four a sense of sadness emerges as well as a letting go, and there are usually tears involved. This most likely has to do with my holding on to the painful and difficult things which busy work and family life naturally produces, and which then builds up in layers as there isn't time to fully process them. And then if you have time to just sit silently in front of a wall, eventually everything that needs to surface will surface, as it is given time. At this point you can just be with it, and it is often quite painful – you might cry, and that's fine. Then it does seem to dissolve, even if it's a slow process, but it goes, so then there is that feeling of stepping back and letting go, and the lightness that's behind that is often noticeable at the end of the sesshin.

Having gone deeper within the Segaki sesshin I knew I needed to continue to sit with the theme of impermanence. I spent time working and meditating in the graveyards at the Abbey. It was a privilege to be asked to do gardening work in the monks' and pets' graveyards, even just to be able to sit within the peace and wilderness of the cemetery next to the pines and absorb the natural aging and symbolism of the various stupas. Although I'd been to the Abbey many times on retreat, I had never realised that the door of the Sange Shrine next to the waterfall was always open, and over this longer stay I've been a frequent visitor. The sound of a large

volume of cascading water is beautiful, but can also quite overwhelming after heavy rain. I wondered if anybody else had been in the shrine and felt that as they listened and absorbed the sound of the rushing water and became one with the sound – which is quite a strong experience; it's just flowing through at great speed – and this is just it: your life too is passing quickly away, make the most of it. That's what the teachings tell us to do really.

There is such a strong routine in the daily life at the monastery, which is all geared towards practice. And that is a great structure, a balance between meditation, work of different types, ceremonial and rest and renewal time in which one can walk in the grounds or in the surrounding countryside. Without the choices available in life outside of a monastic setting there is the opportunity to plunge into the depths of training more. You don't have so much decision-making to do, and there isn't the clutter of lots of different inputs like television, radio, media etc., so the mind is less pulled in all directions. Unencumbered, the mind is more open to experiencing the energy of just being. If occasionally I get into a bit of a lull, I know I can rely on the kitchen work to nudge me out of this as it requires swift adaptability, careful scrutiny, attention to detail and the ability to let go and move on at speed.

Observing and working alongside the monks helps one to build more faith in the Preceptual side of the practice, as one can see the fruits of this in action, especially with the skilfull communication. There are a lot of different things that go into that: creating a harmonious environment, mindful

practice and a lot of careful consideration as well – that produces a really great community atmosphere, when you really feel the harmony that's here. Witnessing the way the women in the kitchen work with each other using such loving and considerate speech especially when dealing with difficult situations is quite moving at times, and inspiring to see mature practice in action.

It also should be said that the opportunity to be with, and practice with, other lay residents outside of retreat time has also been great as you can get to know each other more within the parts of the schedule that encourage more sangha connection, and spiritual friendships are of course an important part of life for many of us.

Most days the lay residents have a cup of tea at four pm with a monk, and there is the opportunity to ask any questions that might be arising, and on Tuesdays there is a class which involves a Dharma talk given to lay residents and local lay sangha often attend too. At times I've requested one-to-one sanzen if I've come up against something that needs to be discussed in more detail, and have really felt the benefit of delving into issues with the help of a senior monk.

One of the most memorable teachings I received during the retreat came from an encounter with one of the novice monks. I am quite arachnophobic, and had asked a novice if he could remove an enormous spider from the area that I needed to clean. He picked up the spider with his bare hands with so much love and affection and placed it safely on the shelf in the cloister so that it was safe, adding it would suffer

from the cold and die if it was put outside. I was completely taken aback by this level of loving kindness towards the spider. I felt I fully understood the vow to ‘help all living things’ which I say each time I put on my wagesa.

I’m extremely grateful for the opportunity I was given to do the retreat, and to all the monks at the Abbey who continue to provide this opportunity for lay people to deepen their training as Buddhists.

News of the Order

Europe

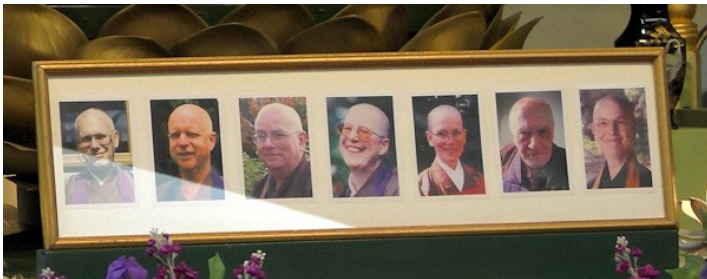
Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey

— *Northumberland, England – UK* —

OBC Gathering: The Monastic conference in September went very well. Monks from the USA, The Netherlands, Latvia and Germany made the journey from their home temples to spend a couple of weeks here, engaging in discussions plus more informal events.



We also held a ceremony to remember all the monks – seven in all – who have died since we last met together. This was a poignant reminder of the transience of life, and helped us to appreciate each other's support and companionship on the path. We live-streamed the memorial, enabling all worldwide Order monastics to join us.



Retreats: The Segaki week in October was well-attended, as was the Lay Ministers' retreat the following month. Rev. Master Haryo, and lay ministry advisor Rev. Master Mugō who travelled up from Telford Priory, led the retreat which included some sessions on Zoom, so that more people could participate.

We also held a half-day Zoom retreat led by Rev. Caitlin. These are still popular with lay trainees who may be too far away to travel to Throssel for a residential stay. To this end we have scheduled six such online retreats in our calendar for 2024.

Solar Panels: We are glad to announce that we installed another 12 solar photovoltaic panels this October at Throssel, following on from the 24 panels installed in February. The new ones are on the Myrtle Bank extension facing South West, and are already generating between 6 and 15 kW/h a day, even with the shorter Autumn-Winter days. The 24 panels installed in February have generated over 4,000 kW/h of electricity, which is roughly what we estimated, allowing for the very cloudy July and August we had this year. We also had smart meters installed this Summer and Autumn. This means we will be paid for any power exported which is surplus to our own needs.



Ceremonies: For the first time for many years, we held a Festival of Remembrance in November. This seemed particularly appropriate as our awareness of the suffering caused by armed conflict has been raised by recent world events. We made bows and chanted Scriptures, offering the merit to all those killed in war. In recent months we have also commemorated the life and Teaching of both our Founder Rev. Master Jiyu and Great Master Dōgen, and also celebrated the occasion of the Buddha's Enlightenment.

Group Visit: In what is becoming a regular occurrence, the Teeside and Newcastle Meditation Groups came to the monastery for a day retreat with Rev. Master Adelin – also in November. We welcome such visits. Do let the guest department know if your group would like to come for a day's practice at Throssel.

— *Rev. Master Roland*

Norwich Zen Buddhist Priory

— *Norwich, England – UK* —

Our Summer Party, which took place on Sunday 18th June was very well-attended. It was held in the lovely garden and grounds in North Norfolk that are the usual setting for this event. As always, this event enabled us as a Sangha to gather in a relaxed and informal setting to chat and to appreciate the delicious food that was offered for the bring-and-share vegetarian buffet. Particular thanks go to those who hosted the party and provided lifts.



It was a pleasure to welcome Rev. Alicia, the resident monk at Sitting Buddha Hermitage in Cromford, Derbyshire, who stayed for a few days in early July. She is now a trustee of our charity and she used the time to



familiarise herself with the property, which she hadn't visited before, and its surroundings. She was also able to meet various members of the Sangha, several of whom she has known for years. In addition, it was a lovely opportunity for us two monks to chat and catch up with each other.

Later in July, a major project was carried out when the trees on the property had to be chopped down, because they were either dying or situated too close to the house (the one in the back garden was in danger of falling onto the house). The work went very smoothly, although it was noisy and messy while it was happening, and it was all finished in a day and a half. It was amazing how well the contractors cleared up afterwards. The transformation to the front of the Priory was really noticeable. The common room, which was a dingy, cave-like space, has become much brighter, with a wonderful view to the river.



On Sunday 5th November, we celebrated our tenth anniversary, with a festival ceremony to express our gratitude to Reverend Master Jiyu-Kennett, the Founder of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives. Afterwards, we enjoyed coffee and stollen, with a Dharma talk and discussion on a passage from *The Wild, White Goose* in which Rev. Master Jiyu

spoke about the importance of training together with others, which seemed very appropriate teaching for the Priory and its Sangha.

A big “thank you” to the Sangha members who helped with moving boxes and items of furniture from London to Norwich in the autumn. A special thank you also to the person who has been doing all the Priory’s DIY and maintenance jobs for the past couple of years and who has now retired from that – the Priory is a much safer, smarter-looking and more user-friendly place because of the hard work and expertise (as well as patience and good humour) that he has offered.

Thank you to the garden group, not just for their tireless work throughout the summer, which has seen the garden bursting with colour to an extent that we haven’t seen before, but also for their enthusiastic ideas for working with the new environment that has emerged now that the trees have been removed. Particular gratitude goes to the members of the group who replaced a couple of garden steps that were damaged during the tree-felling.

Thank you to everyone who helps and supports the Priory and its Prior in all sorts of ways – the Priory is what it is today, ten years on from being founded, because of the ongoing training and help offered by the Sangha.

— *Rev. Master Leoma*

The Place of Peace Dharma House

— *Aberystwyth, Wales – UK* —

The hedges have been cut back for the winter and we have had our first wild storms, where wind off the sea roars around the building. Despite that, there are daisies and primula in bloom, and the thousands of starlings have returned from their annual migration, with some visiting the temple garden.

On October 8th Rev. Master Myōhō joined monks and laity at Telford Buddhist Priory, when Reverend Master Saidō's ashes were interred in a beautiful stupa he had made, and were also

scattered beneath the roots of a newly-planted apple tree. The merit of his training will bless the temple for many years to come.

David Barlass kindly drove her to Telford, and gratitude is also offered to Karen Richards for assistance in various ways.

This autumn we had a simple Segaki Ceremony, with offerings made to all those who had died, and to those who feel trapped in a state of distress. The emphasis was upon silent contemplation and what it means to offer the food of the Dharma.

November 6th marked the 27th anniversary of the death, and entry into Parinirvana, of our Founder, Reverend Master Jiyu-Kennett, which we celebrated on the 11th. Sangha from the North East, Huddersfield and Australia joined by Zoom. A talk was offered on Reverend Master Jiyu's unshakeable faith, and how she taught from personal experience.

A temple is more than one person, and this time we thank Steffan Jones for gladly giving his time and expertise with computer matters. Always willing to help, and endlessly patient, it is so very helpful to have someone to call upon when needed. Thank you.

Gratitude is also offered to those who continue to support the life of faith in this temple with donations and expertise in different areas.

More people are taking the monthly Dharma Reflections talks, which are sent out as MP3 files. These are available to any who would like to have them; if you would, then please contact Rev. Master Myōhō at placeofpeacewalesinfo@gmail.com.

— *Rev. Master Myōhō*

Dharmazuflucht Schwarzwald

— Gutach, Black Forest – Germany —

Segaki retreat and Lay Ordination: This year, we had our week-long Segaki retreat at the end of October and into the first days of November. Three lay ministers, Andreas, Irene and Benjamin, participated in it, as well as Dunja, who received lay ordination towards the end of the retreat. Dunja, who is a grammar school teacher, has trained with us for quite some time, regularly attends retreats and has been very generously supporting our temple for years. Below is a photo taken after Dunja's lay ordination.



Changes in our charity: Due to the passing of Reverend Master Saidō, who was one of the main trustees for the charitable organization that constitutes the legal structure of our temple, we had to make a change in our board of directors. From now on, Rev. Clementia will be fulfilling Reverend Master Saidō's function. Ever since the time when our charity was founded, Reverend Master Saidō had helped us in so many ways, both practically and with advising us on many issues, and we are deeply grateful to him for all his help.

Ute Heim representing the OBC at the EBU: Reverend Master Saidō used to be the representative of the OBC at the European Buddhist Union (EBU), a large organization where many

of the European national Buddhist unions and groups are united. Our congregation member and lay minister Ute Heim will forthwith be representing our Order in the EBU. We are very grateful to her for taking on this role.

Change from oil to pellet heating: As we had announced in the summer issue of *The Journal*, we decided to change from oil heating to a wood-pellet heating system, given that the government is giving us a subsidy of 50% towards the costs of the conversion. The pellets we use are produced from wood chips and waste wood from our Black Forest area. Even with the government grant, the costs of changing over to a pellet heater were quite high, and we could never have afforded it without the very generous donations of our congregation. A big thank you to everyone who supported us financially with this!



Congregation members looking after our temple: While we were both attending the order-wide meeting at Throssel, three of our congregation members, Anja, Susan and Karola, took turns to look after our temple and Micia cat. We are very grateful to them for this, especially since some of the very noisy work necessary for converting to the wood-pellet system happened during that time.

— Rev. Master Fuden and Rev. Clementia

News of the Order

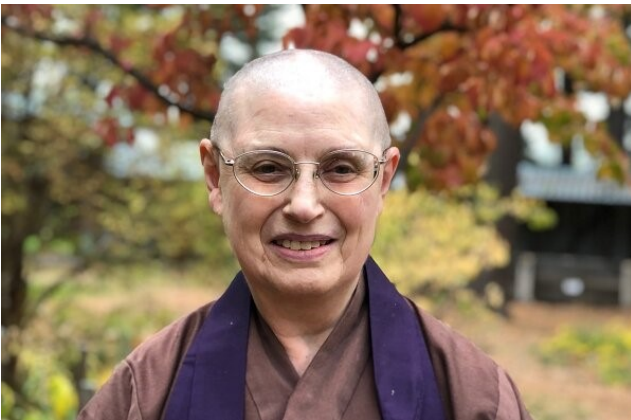
North America

— Mount Shasta, California – USA —

Misfortune: A wildfire caused by a lightning strike engulfed our Fugen Forest Hermitage in late August. Thankfully, most structures escaped damage, and only some infrastructure, such as water lines, will need to be replaced.

OBC Gathering at Throssel: Six monks traveled to Throssel Hole Abbey in late September for the two-week Order gathering: Rev. Masters Meian, Daishin, and Astor and Reverends Valora, Trahearn, and Vera. The rest of the community joined in on Zoom meetings and listened individually to recordings of other meetings. We thank Throssel for hosting the gathering and Rev. Master Haryo for all his work in making the gathering inclusive and a success.

Ordination Anniversary: In late September we were also happy to celebrate the 50th ordination anniversary of Rev. Master Shikō Rom. We are grateful for her many years of training and appreciated a Dharma talk she offered on “Faith and Perseverance.”



Funeral: On October 7th we held a funeral for Zuikō Hill Swann, aged 79, a former community member and long-time teacher at the Shasta Abbey School at Kannon Dell in the 1970s and 1980s. Zuikō had a significant impact on her students, who included many children of congregation members. After leaving Shasta Abbey in 1996, Zuikō trained in Vermont and Plum Village in France under the guidance of Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh. She had spent the last years of her life in Friday Harbor, Washington. The funeral was attended by her children and grandchildren, as well as by local congregation and several former students. A tea was held afterwards.

Segaki: The community offered its annual Feeding of the Hungry Ghosts retreat later in October. We welcomed over 25 lay retreatants, as well as Rev. Shuji Mintzmeyer, who leads Sōtō Zen Buddhist groups in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Manhattan, Kansas. The retreat was also offered online. Following the retreat, the Vimalakirti Hall (Guest House) closed for a month to allow the installation of a new heating system.

New Tractor: We welcomed the delivery of a new Kubota tractor on October 12th, which replaces our John Deere tractor (“the green machine”), which has served us faithfully for many years, even though the demands on it exceeded its capacity.



— Rev. Master Oswin

Redding Zen Buddhist Priory

— Redding, CA – USA —

Thanks to the generous efforts of many sangha members, the Redding Zen Buddhist Priory library is now open! Volunteers have organized, shelved, and cataloged over 1,000 books and are continuing this effort with the future goal of activating a cloud-based circulation system. Sangha members can now browse the collection at <https://www.librarycat.org/lib/ReddingZenPriory>. Local members are now able to check out books using a simple in/out sheet at the Priory. As an added bonus for non-local sangha, we are cataloging e-books available in PDF format. To view all available e-books (no checkout required!), search for “ebook” in the search bar.

Rev. Helen participated in the Shasta Interfaith Thanksgiving Service on November 19, offering Great Master Dōgen's teaching on gratitude from the *Shushōgi*. The service included lovely choral music as well as expressions of gratitude from a range of faith traditions including Islam, Judaism, Native American, Baha'i, Christian, Sikh, Friends, Christian Science, and Latter-Day Saints. It was attended by nearly 150 folks.

The Redding Zen Sangha celebrated two house blessings this fall. One was for Roxanna Kahrel and *Metta House*. The other was for Doug and Cheryl Council and *Peaceful Refuge*.

— Rev. Master Helen

Still Flowing Water Hermitage

— Meadow Vista, CA – USA —

Like many other monks of the Order, I was able to attend the Monastic Gathering held at Throssel during the second half of September. I had the good fortune of being able to leave the States for the UK at the beginning of August, and upon arrival traveled to Turning Wheel Buddhist Temple for a visit with Rev. Aiden and his congregation. I spent a few days there, joining in the activities,

even giving a Dharma talk, and he and I were able to drive to Haslingfield, near Cambridge, to spend a glorious day with Rev. Master Leandra. It was truly a joy to see her and have some time for food and conversation. I continued on from Rev. Aiden's to Sitting Buddha Hermitage for a visit with Rev. Alicia. We had a couple of splendid days wandering the countryside around her little village, exploring the village, enjoying a cafe or two, and, again, much fine conversation. In mid-August, Rev. Alicia drove me up to Throssel, where I remained until leaving the UK at the beginning of October. I was delighted to be able to spend time there, joining in the monks' practice and helping out a little in the kitchen. Living by myself as I do, it is always a joy to practice together in community, and to visit with all the monks.

The Monastic Gathering was marked, I thought, by harmony – all of us talking together in a spirit of friendship and cooperation. In addition to our meetings, it was good to see old friends and have a chance for walks and tea. The two outing days provided welcome rest and renewal. I look forward to a return to Throssel in another four years for the next set of meetings.

Back here in the US, Still Flowing Water Hermitage continues on with its various activities as autumn darkens into winter and snow begins to settle in.

— *Rev. Master Vivian*

Wallowa Buddhist Temple

— *Joseph, Oregon – USA* —

Autumn at the Wallowa Buddhist Temple has been a gentle transition from mild summer into approaching winter. We are appreciating this pleasant seasonal weather here on our mountainside.

Throssel Gathering: In late September Rev. Meidō travelled to the UK to attend the Order's monastic gathering at

Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey. What a precious opportunity to reconnect and be together with so many dear monks!

Individual Retreats: In mid-October we were joined by Ed from Sandpoint, Idaho, and Clyde from Kaslo, British Columbia, Canada. After hoping for several years to make the trip, these two good friends and longtime practitioners finally were able to travel here together for a five-day retreat. During their stay, they drew on their carpentry and engineering skills to repair a damaged exterior wooden deck, kindly offering the materials needed, and making it possible to hold outdoor ceremonies on the deck again. We are grateful for all their help and quiet presence, and for the week training together as a sangha.

The following week, our friend Cynthia came to the area from nearby Washington State for two days, joining us for meditation, morning service, and meals together, and offering hours of priceless in-person tutorials for Rev. Clairissa in website administration. We offer our deep gratitude to Cynthia for her ongoing help and guidance maintaining our online platform as a Dharma offering.

Seeing More People Again: Throughout the fall, the temple monks welcomed an increasing number of visitors through our doors. The newly curious have been getting in touch to inquire, then coming for instruction, then joining us to sit. Congregation gather weekly for Sunday Morning Retreats. Many whom we have not seen in years are dropping by for tea and talk as before. Much that often was taken for granted before the pandemic is now deeply valued: to sit together with others, to share a meal, to talk in person by the woodstove on a chilly day. We are grateful, too, to remain in contact with many at a distance who continue to find ways to connect.

Segaki: On October 22nd, the temple hosted our traditional Segaki ceremony and potluck. For the first time at the Wallowa Buddhist Temple the Segaki altar was set up inside the meditation hall rather than outdoors. From each potluck offering, a sample was added to the abundant altar for the hungry ghosts to partake. All

eighteen people present assisted and participated enthusiastically before, during, and after the formal ceremony itself. Then what a convivial meal we shared afterward, with an abundance of creative homemade dishes and desserts!

Working Meditation: The focus of projects this fall has been to winterize the grounds and buildings, including processing firewood which is our main source of winter heating. Kind friends have helped with bucking piles of logs for firewood and gathering kindling from the forest floor, both of which also help with wildfire fuels reduction. It has been a pleasure to work together under the more open forest canopy, with autumn sunlight now shining down through the branches of the recently-released old-growth grove.

Image of Compassion Installed: A bright image of a lovely seated Kuan Yin pouring out the waters of Compassion now greets and watches over all who enter and stay in our retreat guest house. This original work was lovingly engraved and painted by hand in



gold on a fir round sealed in Shou Sugi Ban (or Yakisugi), a Japanese burned-wood technique. The piece is a collaborative offering by local artists Erica and Tyler, who consulted with the monks in their creative process, and also prepared the wall above the guest house entrance and installed the panel with great care.

— Rev. Master Meidō and Rev. Clairissa

Lions Gate Buddhist Priory

— Lytton, British Columbia – Canada —

After two years of fire, floods, and pandemic restrictions, we were happy to welcome back visitors in May. Many people came from Alberta, Ontario, and various parts of British Columbia. We hosted a large group for our Wesak Festival ceremony on May 21 in Mandala Hall, our meditation/ceremony hall. It was really a joyful time, and a big feast was enjoyed by everyone afterwards at Bodhidharma Hall.

This summer and fall we have been busy on many projects: We have cut, split and piled many cords of firewood from the massive tree which fell a couple of years ago. John has been redoing our kitchen, a long overdue project. And Mike has constructed a brick pathway to our outhouse, which will greatly improve safety.

On Sept. 10, we held a memorial service to mark the second-year anniversary of Mogi Wong's death. Mogi, who died at age 95, was a strong supporter and dear friend of the Priory. She had been present at the ordination of Rev. Master Jiyu in 1962 in Malacca, Malaysia.

In October, we were visited by a group of 15 Buddhist female monks and five lay people from Dakinava Monastery situated in Mission, BC, a suburb of Vancouver. The abbess and followers enjoyed tea at Bodhidharma Hall, where they questioned us about

our practice. One of the nuns translated for the abbess, who did not speak English. Afterwards, we went to Mandala Hall and offered bows to the Buddha and mutual bows to each other. It was a really lovely visit, and we are grateful for all the food and other offerings they brought.

On Sunday morning, December 3, Mike Summers, a recent lay resident, was admitted into the community as a postulant. We congratulate Mike on taking this step, and wish him success in his future monastic life.



We intend to offer a schedule of retreats next year, as we were doing in pre-pandemic/pre-fire years. We will be sending out our schedule in the new year.

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: <https://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/>

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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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