



The Journal of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives

*Serving Members and Friends
of the Order Worldwide*

Volume 39 Number 1
2567 B.E. (Spring 2024)
ISSN 0891-1177

Copyright © 2024 Order of Buddhist Contemplatives
All rights reserved



Tian Tan Buddha, Hong Kong; photo by Jason Cooper

Spring 2024 Issue

Editor: Rev. Roland

Proofreading: Thanks to Gina Bovan, Eldridge Buultjens,
Rev. Chandra Ellis, Chris Hughes, Susan Johnstone, Eric
Nicholson, Stephen Rose and Eric Xuereb.

CONTENTS:

<u>I, Not I, and Beyond</u>	4
<i>Rev. Master Daishin Morgan</i>	
<u>The Homing Instinct</u>	11
<i>Rev. Master Myōhō Harris</i>	
<u>Uji</u>	13
<i>Gill James</i>	
<u>Make of Yourself a Light</u>	26
<i>Rev. Master Scholastica Hicks</i>	
<u>Here Born We Clutch at Things</u>	38
<i>Rev. Master Phoebe van Woerden</i>	
<u>Fishing With A Straight Needle</u>	42
<i>Rev. Master Aiden Hall</i>	
<u>Right Effort Can Be No Effort At All</u>	49
<i>Rev. Kōjō Bailey</i>	
<u>The Light That Stays With Us</u>	54
<i>Rev. Master Fuden Nessi</i>	
<u>News: USA & Canada</u>	63
<u>News: Europe</u>	70
<u>Further information</u>	74

I, Not I, and Beyond

Rev. Master Daishin Morgan

— *The Hermitage – Wales* —

At the heart of religious life is a kōan. How, as an individual, we can realize that which is greater than ourselves? Although we are individuals, when we define ourselves as such, we leave out the most important dimension of existence. And if we cling to being an individual, we make it impossible to realize our true nature. But should we try to dismiss or ignore our individuality, then in doing so, we lose the basis of compassion, love and wisdom.

When questioned about the reality of the self, the Buddha refused to say that the self exists, and he also refused to say that the self does not exist. When pressed further, he explained that he taught the middle way between such extreme views. He pointed out that what we take to be our identity has no real basis of its own. We, like everything else in the universe, are the result of a myriad conditions and the whole universe is a network of inter-connected conditions. This network has no centre. There is no first cause from which everything springs, and no essence manifesting itself as this and that. There is nothing to grasp. And yet here we apparently are. The identity to which we cling is a notion

created in our own mind. If we look deeply, without clinging to a self image, we find some intimations of true reality. If we can see past our fear and desires, there is a vast freedom and sufficiency that is unimaginable while we insist on our self-made world. It does not exist in the sense of being another thing ‘we’ can relate to. It is utterly all-encompassing.

In his doctrine of dependent origination, the Buddha describes how, out of ignorance of this true nature, we define ourselves as an isolated self. Ultimately, this is the cause of suffering. This false sense of self is the self that we think we know. We need to see how this all comes about.

We modern humans tend to think of ourselves as the owners of our body and mind. It is as though ‘I’ am a little being who is living inside myself. He/she/they are the one who is happy or sad, who likes things or dislikes them, who gets offended or is compassionate and loving. In short, they are one who we think we are, the self that experiences the world. The world is understood as something that happens to this person. We do not notice that thinking and believing like this divides us from everything and everyone else. It even divides us from body and mind. We believe we are the one who is inside looking out but this sense of ourselves is only our projection.

Knowing the world through the senses, we tend to assume that there must always be someone inside who is experiencing all that input. We take this person to be our soul or our essence. This feeling of being ‘me’ is often felt quite

viscerally, but the more I define myself, the greater is that separation. To define ourselves is to isolate ourselves. That isolation is not how things really are, but having invested ourselves in it, it feels very real to us. Feeling this isolation we are inclined to grasp at whatever seems like it might make a connection with us. We grasp at whatever might fill the gap. The more we believe in this false sense of ourselves, the more needy we become.

It is this ‘self’ that the Buddha would not confirm as real. However, it is not the case that there is no self in any way at all. Plainly that is not true, and so the Buddha would not deny the self either. The middle way that he taught is between the extremes. We do not need to imagine a self (“I exist”) nor do we need to deny it (“I don’t exist”). The point is to just see. That requires a profound letting go of our projected self. Such letting go turns out to be true nature, constantly revealing itself.

If we really were an inner self, divided from the world, then that inner self would be independent of our experiences. That inner experiencer would necessarily have to be present before any event that ‘we’ experience. It would be uncaused. To put that another way, in order to be the experiencer, the inner self or soul would have to be unaffected by change. It would be frozen, unmoved, in contrast to the changes it experienced. Such a view is known in Buddhism as eternalism, because if such an inner essence or soul really did exist then it would be eternal. Yes, all of that really follows when we think “I exist”.

At this point you may be thinking, “Hang on a minute, I’m not assuming that I am eternal, I know I will die, I know I am subject to change, I just feel that there is a real me inside who knows this.” This is how most of us feel before we really question what it is to be the one who experiences.

The Buddha often spoke about the self in a conventional sense. He recognised that something appears to be born and dies; acts in certain ways and experiences the consequences of those actions. He then spoke of emptiness, describing how, when we look, the self we imagine ourselves to be, is nowhere to be found. The Buddha then pointed to the true nature, that which is utterly beyond conception. We cannot truthfully say that true nature exists, nor that it does not exist – we cannot accurately say anything about it at all. We are at once human beings and utterly ungraspable.

The opposite view to eternalism is annihilationism, which is the view that the self does not exist. This is just as problematic as eternalism. When people encounter the Buddha’s teaching on the emptiness of self they sometimes misunderstand and think he is simply denying the self. He is not. He declined to either affirm or deny the self. When we seek to affirm, we impose a self. When we seek to deny, we have to first assume the very self we seek to deny. Affirmation and denial end up implying each other. True reality that the Buddha points to is not contained by any category. This is a difficult thought to hold because we are so used to thinking dualistically – something must either exist or not. Also, to us, if someone declines to affirm our self-image, we are inclined

to feel that we are being denied. But the whole point is that our self-image, and what we really are, are not the same thing at all. Whatever we do, we cannot grasp true nature, or co-opt it as ourselves.

In our apparent isolation, we cling to our conception of ourselves, because it seems to be all we have. Indeed, such conceptions are all that the little person inside can have. He/she/they are an imaginary figure who is in turn imagining a world. To see the emptiness of this conceptual dream is vital. When we do not invent a self, then everything reveals the truth, and that truth goes on revealing itself endlessly.

The Buddha described how someone with true wisdom looks at the world – they do not categorize it into ‘exists’ or ‘does not exist’. They just see. Nothing is separated, because the world is not really divided up by our categories. This is right view, and it arises when we let go of the mental activity of self-making. Zazen really helps. The instructions for zazen are the epitome of the middle way. “Neither try to think, nor try not to think, just sit.” If we are making the little person inside – then we need to see that taking place. To just see takes us beyond the opposites of “I exist” or “I don’t exist”. We do not need to come to a conclusion, nor do we need to condemn ourselves, we need just to see.

Most of the thoughts that we get entangled with come down to fear or desire. We do not need to grasp at anything, and yet we believe we do. What happens when we neither make a self, nor reject a self, but just sit? For all of us, there

are those moments when we are not self-making, when our thoughts fall away and the mind is peaceful. Such experiences do not amount to enlightenment, but they do show that when, for whatever reason, we let go of making ourselves, things are fine – more than fine – there is a peace of such depth we cannot hope to describe it.

Even when there is right view, we will still need to form images of ourselves and the world. We need images in order to remember anything. What is food, what is dangerous, what is love? We need memories – and therefore images – in order to navigate our world. Any conscious being relies on mental images. The problems come because we do not recognize these images for what they are and take them as real in a way they are not. We typically do not notice that we are forever making the world we experience.

To see this, we need to recognize the difference between just seeing and the making of mental images. It requires a commitment to zazen. When we sit, there is often a procession of thoughts centred around ‘me’. Even if I am thinking about others, it is often about others in relation to me. Perhaps we justify ourselves to ourselves and make a case for our defence. What we are doing with all these thoughts is continually making and remaking a sense of ourselves. There is no need to judge it, it is enough to see it.

There is a difference between the mental objects we form in our minds and our direct experience of the senses. To just see, is different to seeing this and that. To divide the world

into this and that is not to just see. In just seeing there are no categories. When we are seeing this and that, we have already made a world. To just see does not make a world. It does not need to make a world; there is no grasping for a world when we just see. When there is no grasping, our mental images are just mental images and recognised as such. There is no need to deny them. Just seeing, is seeing without grasping.

To refrain from making ourselves in our own minds takes a lot of practice. We fear that we will be swallowed by a void of nonexistence if we don't keep making ourselves. We need to see that does not happen. Sitting in zazen you can know this. The Buddha tells us that one with correct wisdom has no need to make a world around a self that either exists or does not exist. There is that which is free, even free of being itself.

There are some wonderful views here in Wales. Standing before such a view it sometimes feels like I am at a performance of the most beautiful music with a friend who just cannot stop talking. This self-talk typically arises when I am disturbed or upset. To let it go is to let myself go. Silence is profound, but we cannot cling to silence either. There is another kind of action that goes beyond speech and silence. To let go of self-making is to be free to live and express true nature.

The Homing Instinct

Rev. Master Myōhō Harris

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

Whilst watching a wildlife programme, I was touched by the effort salmon were making to return to the part of the river where they had been born. Swimming up waterfalls and over shallow rapids, whilst bears tried to catch and eat them; swimming against the current, because of an instinct that called to them. It reminded me of when Shakyamuni placed his golden bowl upon the fast-flowing river Neranjara, and said that if it could float upstream, against the current (the pull of karma and distraction), then he knew he could realise the truth.

Looking into it, I found that many aquatic creatures, like turtles, dolphins, and frogs have what is called ‘the natal homing instinct’. A little frog will travel as far as four miles to return to the pond where they were born. That’s a long way for a frog. Birds will migrate thousands of miles, often through, and to, places they have never been before. In training, we do the same thing. We step off the map of our ‘known world’, and have to overcome many challenging situations. We risk everything to follow that instinct, that call

to ‘return unto the source’, and, like the frogs and salmon and birds, we can get there, we can do it.

We, too have a built in longing to return to our ‘home’, to the source of all existence. An instinct calls to us, to know what it is we are, and to find something we feel has been lost along the way. We will have to swim against the force of ingrained habits that pull us into old patterns of thinking, acting and speaking which, if indulged, will take us further away from that ‘home’, that returning. We will have to resist the delusive lure of endless distractions, and the corrosiveness of self doubt, that can persuade us we cannot follow that call. We will have to risk much along the way, taking steps into an unknown, burning bridges behind us, going on through the darkness and the light, trusting ourselves when others may doubt us; never giving up.

The salmon kept going, even whilst some of them were being caught and eaten, they never deviated from their course, they kept true to the call within them. Rev Master Jiyu said, many times, that it was better to die trying, than not to try. What an example those fish are to we humans. Dōgen said if even animals can show gratitude, then surely people can do the same. If the fish can swim against the pull of the current, returning unto the place they came from, so can we.

Uji

Gill James, Lay Minister, O.B.C.

— Brackenthwaite, Cumbria – UK —

A transcript of a talk given during a meditation period at the Segaki retreat at Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey in October 2019.

Today, I invite you all to sit together with me and all beings, forget time as we conventionally know it and enter Dōgen’s world of timelessness.

Please do not doubt that you are sitting with all beings in all worlds. Dōgen says: “Reflect now whether any being or any world is left out of the present moment”. It is just not possible. Not only are you sitting with all beings – *you are* all beings. When I sit, *I* am the Universe. When you sit, you are the Universe! I am not referring to the I of the ego here. This is the *I* that Shakyamuni referred to when he said “*I* was, am and will be enlightened instantaneously with the Universe and all sentient beings.” This is the *I* that *Uji* is about.

So much of our daily life is ruled by time. Our days are planned according to the clock. Even here at the monastery

we follow a schedule largely dictated by the clock. It's not surprising therefore that we have come to believe that time is real but actually it has no substance. It is just a measurement that we use for convenience. It helps us organise our day, work together, socialise together but it has no substance.

It is not surprising since time is so important to us that we think it a real substantial thing that stands by itself. We see time as linear, sequential, irreversible and something separate from and independent of events in it. We see time as passing us by. We think of ourselves as being born, living and dying in a stream of time that flows from past to present to future but Dōgen says that this is not the only way to view time. Dōgen constantly encourages us to go beyond our usual understanding of time and see real time. Real time is the harmony of the 24 hours of everyday life and the source of the 24 hours which is timelessness.

Time and its relation to us and all beings is expressed in many of Dōgen's writings but his main treatise on time is *Uji*. *Uji* is translated as being-time or sometimes existence-time and is basically about no-self, impermanence and totality. Obviously, we cannot discuss the whole scripture here in one sitting so I have selected some pieces which have helped me, particularly in relation to the death of a much-loved being. It seems appropriate at this time of Segaki to share them with you. I hope it will encourage you to look at the scripture again.

Uji starts with a verse:

An ancient Buddha said:
For the time being stand on top of the highest peak.
For the time being proceed along the bottom of the
 deepest ocean.
For the time being three heads and eight arms.
For the time being an eight or sixteen foot body.
For the time being a staff or a whisk.
For the time being a pillar or a lantern.
For the time being the sons of Zhang and Li
For the time being the earth and sky¹

The three heads and eight arms refers to an asura or demon. The eight or sixteen foot body refers to a Buddha. The staff and whisk are implements of the zen master – special things. The pillar and lantern are everyday things. The sons of Zhang and Li are the common people.

Do not think that Dōgen means what we conventionally think of as ‘for the time being’, i.e. ‘for a time’ or ‘for now’.

To clarify his use of the phrase Dōgen continues: “For the time-being here means time itself is being and all being is time.”¹

Basically this verse states that everything is time-being. All that exists is time-being and *Uji* is each of these events.

Dōgen is saying that whatever happens or ‘is’ is not *in* time but *is* time.

All of the things mentioned in the verse, i.e. three heads and eight arms, an eight or sixteen-foot buddha, a staff, a whisk etc are all what we call dharma positions. A dharma position is a moment, thing or event of being-time that is also definable as transient and impermanent. A person is a dharma position.

Since nothing ever stays the same and all things are in flux due to their interactive, interpenetrating nature, it would be impossible to say that a dharma position or moment of being-time begins here and ends there. Dharma positions are not finite in this sense, nor are they sequential way stations along a continuum of past present and future. A dharma position has a past, present and future but is freed from being defined by them. Each dharma position is particular and independent.

Dōgen expresses this clearly in *Genjōkōan* where he compares life and death to firewood and ash:

Firewood becomes ash. Ash cannot become firewood again. However we should not view ash as after and firewood as before. We should know that firewood dwells in the dharma position of firewood and has its own before and after. Although before and after exist, past and future are cut off. Ash stays in the position of ash with its own before and after. As

firewood never becomes firewood again after it has burned to ash, there is no return to living after a person dies.²

Each statement is true and equally important to our understanding of a dharma position or being-time. We do have a past and a future but we are not bound by a fossilised past or future. We can use our past experiences and future desires as tools for discernment, thus we can respond to the moment unobstructed by motivations that may hinder a skilful response.

Seen from our usual point of view, an acorn sprouts and grows gradually over a period of time until it becomes a big tree. When firewood is needed, the tree is cut down, split into pieces, stacked and dried. When the pieces are dry, we call them firewood and when we burn the firewood it becomes ash. We think of human life and death in the same way. I was a baby, I grew up into a teenager then became an adult. I will live as an adult for some time and then continue to get older and older until I finally die.

We think of time as a stream that flows like a river from the beginningless past to the endless future. We think that individuals are born and appear in the stream and later die and disappear from the stream. We think that the stream of time has been flowing before my birth and will continue after my death. This is not the true nature of life and death.

Time is being and being is time. According to Dōgen, a tree, firewood, ash and all things have their own time or

dharma position. At each dharma position, the thing or being has its own past and future. The dharma position of a tree has its own past as a seed and its own future as firewood. The dharma position of firewood has its own past as a tree and its own future as ash. The dharma position of ash has its own past as firewood and its future as something else – perhaps scattered on the garden to help things grow.

The dharma positions of tree, firewood and ash are all independent of one another.

A dharma position holds all being-time, i.e. a being's time and time's being in this very moment. This is the complete non-duality of things, existence and time.

Since a dharma position is interconnecting, interpenetrating, impermanent and fleeting, it functions within the context of all other dharma positions. In concert, these dharmas practice together and make the world.

Katagiri offers a beautiful description in his book *Each Moment is the Universe*. He says:

Time seems to be separate from beings but actually there is no separation. From moment to moment all things exist together as a completely independent moment of time. When the moment begins, all sentient beings appear as particular beings in the stream of time and seem to have their own separate existences. When the moment ceases, all sentient

beings disappear but they do not go away; they are interconnected smoothly and quietly in timelessness.³

Dōgen says:

The way the self arrays itself is the form of the entire world. See each thing in this entire world as a moment of time. Things do not hinder one another, just as moments do not hinder one another. The way-seeking mind arises in this moment. A way-seeking moment arises in this mind. It is the same with practice and with attaining the way. Thus the self setting itself out in array sees itself. This is the understanding that self is time.¹

The egoless self sets itself in array and brings forth the world moment-to-moment.

Setting the self out in array constitutes the mode of being-of-self in the world. Dōgen uses the parable of a boat to exemplify this mode of being. He says:

Birth is just like riding in a boat. You raise the sails and you steer. Although you maneuver the sail and the pole, the boat gives you a ride, and without the boat you couldn't ride. But you ride in the boat, and your riding makes the boat what it is. Investigate a moment such as this. At just such a moment, there is nothing but the world of the boat. The sky, the water, and the shore are all the boat's world, which is not the same as

a world that is not the boat's. Thus, you make birth what it is, you make birth your birth.⁴

Here Dōgen likens the self to riding in a boat. The life of the boat is the self that rides in it. The man makes the boat what it is; without him it would just be a piece of wood floating downstream, without direction. Likewise, without the boat, the boatman is unrealised. In this case the boat is absolutely crucial to his existence.

Not only are the man and boat mutually interdependent but the heavens, the water and the shore all belong inextricably to the total situation. If we study assiduously this very time, as Dōgen says, there is nothing but the world of the boat. The world of the boat is the boat's time, which is not the same as the time that is not of the boat. Of course this is not the only situation in the world but in this situation, the totality is present with nothing left out.

Setting the self out in array allows each being and each thing to become manifest in the entire world as time's occurrence at every moment. Since everything is impermanent, there is no substance therefore no thing or being obstructs any other being and every moment is a total manifestation of the entire world.

Katagiri says:

All beings in the Universe appear and disappear in a moment. The term impermanence expresses the

functioning of a moment or the appearance and disappearance of all beings as a moment. It means that all life is transient, constantly appearing and disappearing, constantly changing. You are transient, I am transient and Buddha is transient. Everything is transient. Wherever you may go, transiency follows you. Transiency is the naked nature of time.⁵

I'd like to talk a bit about "things do not hinder one another." Sometimes the word 'obstruct' is used and perhaps it is better.

We talked during tea the other day about delusion and sitting with it rather than trying to get rid of it. I quoted Dōgen with regard to it sometimes being the three-headed, eight-armed demon presencing and other times the Buddha, but both exist together. They do not obstruct each other – delusion and enlightenment do not obstruct each other. Also, delusion does not *become* enlightenment. Both are present at the same time.

Similarly, life does not *become* death.

Dōgen continues:

Know that in this way there are myriads of forms and hundreds of grasses (things) throughout the entire earth and yet each grass and each form itself is the entire earth. The study of this is the beginning of practice.¹

In this way he refers again to setting the self out in array to form the entire world. Each thing is contained in every other thing. Each thing is both itself and the entire world. It does not represent the whole world or is a symbol of the whole world. Looked at by the way-seeking mind, it **is** the whole world.

Perhaps it is better explained in *Genjōkōan* where Dōgen says:

To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be experienced by myriad dharmas. To be experienced by the myriad dharmas is to let our own body and mind and the body and mind of the external world drop away.²

Practising with the self-of-the whole world is the beginning of Buddhist practice.

When you are at this place, there is just one grass, there is just one form; there is understanding of form and no-understanding of form; there is understanding of grass and no-understanding of grass.¹

This place is the place of ‘suchness’ or truth, when the self practises in concert with the whole world and all dharmas are seen and realised in their true aspect as being-times. Understanding and not understanding this both belong to man’s discrimination; they are separate but equally manifestations of being-time.

Since there is nothing but just this moment, the time-being is all the time there is. Grass-being, form being are both time.¹

There is only the immediate present in which all time and being is encompassed. This is true of me, you and all dharmas.

Each moment is all being, is the entire world. Reflect now whether any being or any world is left out of the present moment.¹

This is Dōgen wanting us to make the truth of being-time our own realisation. Without this realisation, being-time is a hollow phrase and we are cut off from the whole world and all time.

Katagiri says:

In the human world, we see things as separate from us. In Buddha's world, all things come together and melt into one. So, very naturally, when we set ourselves out in array in Buddha's world, we can see all other beings. Then we know that we have to live with others in peace and harmony because we are intimately related with no gap between. This is Buddha's world.⁶

I would like to describe a personal experience of being—time:

Several years ago, I was caring for a very sick dog. Shep had a neurological condition which, with the help of my brilliant vet, we had managed for about three years before he started to deteriorate quite rapidly. I won't go into detail but basically he was suffering and in pain. Normally I would not consider euthanasia but one day as we sat in the garden he looked at me as though begging me to let him go. I phoned my vet and explained the situation whereupon he came straight out to see Shep. He knows well my views on euthanasia and therefore realised that Shep must be extremely ill if I was considering this.

When the vet arrived, he asked me to let him sit in the garden and observe Shep for a while to determine his pain level. We sat in the garden for about 20 minutes and then he said "I think Shep is in pain and it would be best to end his life. I could take him in and open him up but it would just be euthanasia by surgery. He is too weak to survive."

It was a lovely sunny day so we decided that it would be best to give him the injection in the garden. I sat holding Shep telling him how much he was loved whilst the vet gave him the injection. After the injection, the vet stroked him too. As Shep gently slipped away, a great peace and stillness seemed to descend upon us all. The light seemed to change to a golden glow. It was as though we all dissolved and were held in timelessness. There was no time here – just "this" – nothing outside of the moment.

It's interesting that it was not only me who felt this. My vet who has no formal religious practice experienced it too. We must have sat in silence for about 10 minutes then he asked quite simply "What happened? I've never experienced a death like that before."

All came together as one in timelessness.

Zazen is a direct experience of being-time. When we meditate, fully presencing ourselves, we are experiencing our life as gapless intimacy.

When you truly sit, where is time? Where are you? Life and death really do not exist here. There is just *this*.

Notes

- [1.](#) *The Treasury of the True Dharma Eye; Zen Master Dogen's Shobo Genzo*. The Time Being. Kazuaki Tanahashi, ed. Shambhala Publications, Inc. 2012, p. 104-111.
- [2.](#) Okumura, Shohaku, *Realising Genjokoan: The Key to Dogen's Shobogenzo*. Wisdom Publications, 2010, p. 2.
- [3.](#) Katagiri, Dainin, *Each Moment is the Universe; Zen and the Way of Being Time*. Shambhala Publications Inc., 2007, p. 73.
- [4.](#) *The Treasury of the True Dharma Eye; Zen Master Dogen's Shobo Genzo*. Undivided Activity. Kazuaki Tanahashi, ed. Shambhala Publications, Inc. 2012, p.526.
- [5.](#) Katagiri, Dainin, *Each Moment is the Universe; Zen and the Way of Being Time*, p. 4.
- [6.](#) Katagiri, Dainin, *Each Moment is the Universe; Zen and the Way of Being Time*, p. 100.

Make of Yourself a Light

Rev. Master Scholastica Hicks

— *Shasta Abbey, California – USA* —

This is an edited transcript of a Dharma talk given at Shasta Abbey in June 2022 to commemorate Memorial Day.

Last Sunday, we concluded our Jukai Retreat. It's always inspiring for me to see new people coming and taking the Precepts. I had the honour to give the second talk during the retreat, which was just after they had formally taken Lay Ordination, and I talked about the Light of the Precepts. And part of that came out of all the references that I've come across about the Precepts being our guiding light.

There's a verse in our closing ceremony that goes, "The light of the Buddha is increasing in brilliance and the wheel of the Dharma is always turning." And I asked myself, "Now, how does that happen? Does it happen by itself? Can we just stand there and watch it getting lighter, or is there something we need to do?" The combination of that question plus all of the ceremonies of Jukai and taking of the Precepts just called out to me – we're the one that causes that increase in brilliance. And it seems so obvious, right? How can I not have

thought of this before? The light of the Buddha will always be there but we're the ones that cause it to increase in brilliance. And it seemed to me that it was through meditation and vowing to take the Precepts, to keep the Precepts, vowing to make them our blood and bones – that's what increases the brilliance of the Buddha.

Then the thought came up, "What comes after taking the Precepts?" Well, I talked a lot about what happened for me as a layperson, when I took the Precepts back in 1986 and I asked myself again, "Well, what happens now? It's been a long time since I've taken the Precepts. I've had the good fortune to be a monastic, to be Rev. Master Jiyu's disciple, so what is there now for me?" And one of the thoughts that came up is that we have to be able to re-arrange our life, if we're going to follow the light of the Precepts.

I found it especially interesting to be giving a talk about the light of the Precepts as we commemorate Memorial Day, considering the situation in our world today. Memorial Day came about after the Civil War. So we've been remembering those who have died in battle for many, many years and when I was growing up, I thought that those who died in battle were soldiers who had volunteered out of the goodness of their heart to do what seemed to be the good thing to do. But of course, at least in my memory since the Vietnam War, and certainly right now, there are hundreds, if not thousands of people just like you and me – not soldiers, not in the military – children and adults who are dying every day as a result of war. So it reaffirmed for me that there are two ways to go.

One is total despair. “Will we ever change? Will the world ever change?” I may not be able to do anything living in the monastery here in Mount Shasta to actually help what’s going on in Ukraine; however I can look toward the teaching that we have as Buddhists and ask, “Am I putting my whole heart and soul into my meditation? Am I putting my whole heart and soul, every day, into keeping the Precepts?” So that’s what I’d like to talk a little bit about today.

The ‘light’ is our practice. It’s our everyday practice and we can increase that light, or we can decrease it, depending on how we lead our daily life. I think that sometimes my life is like a revolving door. I go in at the beginning of the day, with the intention of coming out in the evening, having done such and such, yet all I seem to have done is go around and around and there doesn’t seem to be an out – I’m just kind of circling around. And then there are the swinging doors, which are more straightforward, I think. You just kind of go in, make an effort and come out on the other side. And what came up for me is the thought that it’s up to us whether we want to have our day be a revolving door, or a swinging door. Do we want to just repeat all the mistakes that we’ve made and all the good intentions that don’t come to fruition? Or do we want to say, “Wait, let me ask for help here. Let me make gasshō; let me say the Three Homages, and let me look at what I’m doing right now.”

I think the Precepts are helpful in this regard, because they can really ground us; they can provide a centering and widening of our perspective. So I think Precepts are an

excellent antidote for our karmic propensities, because that's what the Precepts do. They look at our karma and say, "Oh, you're breaking this Precept again. Why are you doing this? Do you want to continue this?" For myself, after all these years, why am I still criticising? Why am I still judging? Well, maybe I do it because I'm so good at it, you know, I've been doing it for so long(!) But somehow, I think I want to go deeper than that. And when I was looking through Rev. Master Leandra's book, *Birth and Death*, in the chapter called *Practice and Keeping the Precepts*, I thought she really answers the question, "What's the karmic connection of our keeping the Precepts?" so I'm going to read two paragraphs to you:

There are threads of behaviour that have become deeply ingrained between self and other, deeply ingrained over the years of training together. Slowly, slowly these threads can untangle, but due to 'habit energy' they can loop around again and again. If we're not really on the ball spiritually, we can stumble over the loops. A wise master recently described them as imps. We each have our own particular imps, our own particular samsaric feedback loops.

I read this particularly thinking about my continued habit of criticising others; not accepting others; speaking ill of others. It's appalling to realise that I've been practicing for years and years, and I'm still breaking these Precepts every day. And I can think back to being in the world 30 years ago, the way I responded to my family and my friends and my co-

workers, so this is not something that's just come up for me as a monastic. This has been with me a long time. She continues:

Accepting this, there is a sadness that arises in me, which is both personal and not personal. I bow in gratitude as the sadness arises, as I'm being offered the opportunity to take responsibility for all the mistakes I have made, and continue to make, in spite of what seems to be my longing to do better.

Sound familiar?

Surely to not blame myself, circumstances or other people is a pathway of growth and maturation, surely it leads to a deepening insight into the samsaric web I am weaving through my feelings, thoughts and actions. Surely thus I see more clearly the karmic consequences that ripple out endlessly.

Our kōans keep revealing themselves again and again, which alerts us to the realisation that they are not yet totally converted.

That's a really optimistic statement, because when my mistakes come up, when I think, "Oh my goodness, why am I doing this again?" I can bow in gratitude that it's coming up, that I recognise it, and I have the choice of continuing or changing it. She continues:

As Rev. Master Jiyu said, the highest kōans are the Precepts. Our attempts to live a moral life in a world such as this one is what makes the kōan appear naturally in daily life. The Precepts are more than morality. Rather, they are a doorway to profound religious understanding. They help us find the light of Buddha that is always increasing in brilliance, and not to kill it in ourselves or others. When we can refrain from killing Buddha in all the little acts of daily life, goodness will take care of itself. There is a generosity of response that does not depend on rules and regulations. We forget the small self and its self-centred focus on what it feels it needs. Perhaps what the small self feels is what it wants, rather than what it needs.¹

I found that very encouraging, and helpful. And so out of that question “What comes after the Precepts?” I try to ask myself frequently throughout the day, “Am I doing what needs to be done?” And when I shine a light on this question, it often reveals that what I’m doing is what I want to do. Not necessarily what is good to do. And this has been a real revelation for me.

A few weeks ago Rev. Master Daishin gave a lovely Sunday Dharma talk on confidence, humility, and fearlessness. And remembering his teaching has aided my approach to putting the Precepts foremost in my life and being willing to ask, “Am I doing what’s good to do? Am I doing what I need to do?” And I realised that confidence for me is

confidence both in my own ability to change my thoughts and behaviour, and also my confidence in the sense that, “This is the way to go – this is a good path to follow.”

People have been following the Precepts for years and years and years. And all I need to do is look around and listen to or read the news and see the consequences of breaking the Precepts. And while my breakage of the Precepts may not be as horrendous as what’s going on today, but still, I am sometimes killing the Buddha. I am sometimes defaming the Buddha. I am sometimes demeaning the Three Treasures. So, it’s not for me to compare the havoc that I cause and the havoc that’s being caused by others. It’s for me to have compassion for whoever is causing the horrors, and for those who are enduring the horrors, and to have the humility to ask, “What can I do about my own self?” Also I need to have the humility to ask for help from other members of the Sangha; from the Dharma that I read, and from the teachings that I received from Rev. Master Jiyu.

The third aspect that Rev. Master Daishin talked about was fearlessness which is not something that I associate with myself – although I’ve certainly done some crazy things in my life that some people would say were fearless, and other people would say were totally bizarre. But I think we have to put aside the image that we have of ourselves, we have to put aside the identity that most of us have nurtured for a good number of years, and we have to not worry about the fear that comes up, but be confident that we’re going to have the

courage that comes out of our practice to do what needs to be done.

To promote our practice of the Precepts we need to think about re-arranging our life. “Am I giving enough time, enough effort and enough love to my practice of the Precepts?” I recently decided to start re-reading some of the teachings that I have found helpful. I often go back to Reverend Master Jiyu’s teachings in *Roar of the Tigress, Vol. One*. And during Jukai I wondered what she has to say about the Precepts, particularly about the Precepts that I find myself still working on: being proud of myself, devaluing others and speaking against others. This is a paragraph where she talks about that:

I used to love gossip at one time, and I can remember that I decided the one [Precept] I was going to start with was talking about others. And I discovered that for three days I didn’t say a word, which showed me how much wasted breath I’ve been coming out with. And then I started thinking about how to talk to people and about what was truly useful conversation. So you start from the known and you work to the unknown. And by keeping one Precept, you end up keeping a whole lot and you end up knowing the Eternal and that’s really what you’re out to do.²

I also went back to another book that’s been helpful to me, titled *Invoking Reality* by the late John Daido Looi which is all about the Precepts. It’s a very small book, but it’s also a

very large book. Here's a paragraph in his chapter on the moral and ethical teachings of Zen.

We live in a time period of considerable moral crisis, with an erosion of values and a fragmentation of meaning prevalent throughout the fabric of society. The crisis impacts on us personally, as a nation, and as a planet. The injuries that we inflict on each other, and on our environment can only be healed by sound moral and ethical commitment. And that doesn't mean being puritanical. It doesn't mean being moralistic. These Precepts have a vitality that is unique in the great religions, they are alive, not fixed. They function broadly and deeply, taking into account the intricacies and subtleties of conditions encountered. There is so much to learn. The Precepts are incredibly profound. Don't take them lightly. They are direct. They are subtle. They are bottomless, please use them. Press up against them, push them, see where they take you. Make them your own. They are no small thing by any measure. They nourish, they heal, and they give life to the Buddha.³

And the life that they give to the Buddha is the light that increases in brilliance – the light that is our responsibility. I find reminders to be helpful and when I was thinking, “How can I do better, how can I do better at keeping the Precepts?”

I happened across a book that I had gotten not too long ago. It's by Jon J. Muth. He's an illustrator and author of

several books on Zen. This one is titled *Zen Happiness*.⁴ Well, we may not usually think of happiness along with Zen, but I was curious to see what he had to say. And these were twelve meditations that he had adapted from some of the traditional Buddhist writings. And I'm going to read you six of them.

"Be someone you want to be around." I immediately thought "right on"...that says it all, doesn't it? ... about my criticism, my judgement, my anger. And for me, "Be someone you want to be around" speaks of all-acceptance, of just accepting whatever situation we're in. It doesn't mean approving of it; it doesn't mean, "Oh, this doesn't need to change." It just means accepting it. But I really liked "Be someone you want to be around" and I'm going to work on that one, as I hope to on all of these.

Secondly, he said, "What we do now is what matters most." And I thought to myself, you know Dōgen so often says, "Life is transient. Train as urgently as you would if your hair was on fire" and yet I find myself putting off something that needs to be done. Neglecting to say "Thank you" or writing a letter to someone. I'm so far behind in my correspondence with prison inmates, it's embarrassing. And that's one of the things I'm going to start doing today. So what we do now, right in this moment, is what matters most.

The third thing Jon Muth says is "What we think, we can become." That works both ways: if we have positive thoughts, that's what is going to come out. And if we have negative thoughts, that's what's going to come out. And our thoughts

translate into our speech and behaviour. This is nothing new, we all know this right? So remember, “What we think is what we can become.”

His fourth little reminder is, “Be kind to yourself; whatever you do today, let it be enough.” I thought, how many of us have either grown up as children and teenagers or in our workplaces in our career, thinking we always have to do a little more? Well, in one sense, that’s good. Rev. Master Jiyu said, “Do the best you can, and if you can do a little better, do it.” But let us be accepting and content with what we do. Let it be enough, and stop judging ourselves. And I think for me, this is where forgiveness comes in. Can I forgive myself for not being perfect? I mean, my mother wanted me to be perfect when I was very, very young, and I wanted to be perfect as I grew older, and I think somewhere in me there is a need to be a perfect monk. But of course I’m not, and I can’t ever be perfect. Can I forgive myself for not being perfect? Can you forgive *yourself* for not being perfect? (Although actually, we are all perfect just as we are.)

And then, next to last, he says, “You, as much as anyone in the universe, deserve your love and respect.” So of course I don’t know what goes on in your mind... I often don’t know what goes on in my mind! But I don’t think of myself as deserving love and respect and yet, as I look deeper, as I go deeper into the Precepts, as I become more willing to look at my own mind, I realise that if I don’t love and respect myself it’s going to be very difficult to love and respect other people. And that’s what I ultimately want to do – to be able to accept

everyone for who they are, and to love and respect my sister and brother monks, each of you and everyone, everywhere.

In closing, Muth writes, “May all beings have happy minds.” And I thought that’s like the *Metta Verse* isn’t it? You know, “May all beings be happy. May all beings be peaceful. May all beings be well”, but I never quite thought of it that way. May all beings have happy minds. So to offer merit, not only for ourselves – to offer ourselves love and respect – but to offer merit for those near and those far; even when we don’t understand what they’re doing. And I realised that we can feel that empathy with every single person in the world, if we wish to offer love and respect to everyone, if our major wish is “May all beings have happy minds.”

Let us take refuge in the Buddha,
Let us take refuge in the Dharma,
Let us take refuge in the Sangha.

* * *

Notes

1. Robertshaw, Rev. Master Leandra, *Birth and Death*. Throssel Hole Press, 2022, pp. 60-61.
2. Jiyu-Kennett, Rev. Master P.T.N.H., *Roar of the Tigress, Vol. One*. Tuttle Publishing, 2000, p. 134.
3. Looi, John Daidō, *Invoking Reality: Moral and Ethical Teachings of Zen*. Shambhala, 2007, pp.6-7.
4. Muth, Jon J., *Zen Happiness*. Scholastic Press, New York, 2019.

Here Born We Clutch at Things

Rev. Master Phoebe van Woerden

— *Pine Mountain Buddhist Temple, Santa Paula – California* —

Originally published on the Pine Mountain Buddhist Temple website.

Since the old Zen Writings were done in times when people were much closer to nature than we in our urbanized society are, it makes sense that some of the images we find there come to life when we spend time in the great outdoors. Recently I had my little tent set up on a beautiful mountainside, not far from a rushing creek, and surrounded by aspen and pine trees. The path to my tent led through a flowering meadow, into a wooded area, and in the midst of that was what I called a forest charnel ground, where a stand of pine trees had been blown over in a storm a long time ago. The trees were well into decay, bigger branches lying around like skeleton bones, and the trunks overgrown with moss and lichens, but still recognizable as trunks. The place was very quiet and dark and lovely: after the picture postcard beauty of the surrounding mountain views, a perfect reminder that death is an essential part of life and no less beautiful.

One thing in particular struck me: when the trees fell over they did not break—being healthy and strong—but they

toppled over so that their root ball came out of the ground. Over the years the rain and gravity washed out the dirt and grit from in between the roots, but larger rocks were still sitting there, held in place by old dead roots. An impressive sight.

“Here born we clutch at things...”¹; that made me think of how when we are born we find ourselves in a family and society that are like the soil for our new baby roots to grow in. The soil can be anything from very nourishing to pretty poor and full of gravel and rocks, or even at times what seems to be no more than simply a crack in a rock. Most people experience a mixture, and growing up we develop a healthy sense of self by accepting and integrating these values or rebelling against them. Because these ideas and values are there from the start, it can be difficult to recognize them as something we believe as opposed to something that is really true. Like everyone else, I found myself in a family and society with all kinds of customs and values firmly in place, but even as a very young child I asked a lot of questions. Most of the time, in my memory, the answer would be: “because I say so”, or “don’t think about that, just go ahead and do as you are told.” Noncompliance was met with seriously unpleasant consequences, so I learned to weave my childhood roots around those rocks, and actually found they gave me stability and something to hold, and in the meantime working my way in between and around those rocks made my roots stronger.

One of the questions I struggled with was to do with eating meat: as a very young child I played in the back yard with chickens and rabbits that later that day would be dinner. My refusal to eat my friends was met with strong words and even punishment, and eventually I gave in and ate what I was given. As a teenager I tried again but now there were long and painful arguments, which ended in: “you have to give a good example to your siblings (of eating what is offered), and even: “but it is so good, and good for you”. Not until I had left home and lived on my own was I able to follow my initial reluctance to eat meat, but interestingly, it turned out that by now my ‘roots’ had grown around this ‘rock’ and I had developed a taste for some kinds of meat and a habit of eating it. So it took a few years and some serious soul searching before I completely let go of meat-eating.

Another large rock I picked up along the way was the belief in Original Sin. The very kind nuns at my school taught us that at the very core of our being there is a big black sin and only through various practices (which I forget) can that be forgiven. And all the time we are on the verge of falling back. I had been a Buddhist monk for almost two years when I found I was holding back in my meditation. It was subtle at first and then became a clear block, and caused me much pain. Why was I afraid to go deeper? It took a while before I realized that deep down, even though I did not think I was still subscribing to being a Catholic, I still ‘knew’ that if I would go deep into my own heart I would find this rotten core.....and I did not want to go there. So then, I did what the Buddha and my teacher recommended: slowly and bravely I sat still with my

fear and opened my eyes to see what was really there. All I found was a loving peaceful sense of being completely accepted, instead of the opposite which I had believed for so long.

Once we begin the long and difficult ‘unwinding’ of ourselves in the process of deepening meditation and training, from time to time we find that we are holding on to an idea about life or our self, or an opinion or standard, that is causing us pain. Seeing the suffering and how we cause it is the beginning of wanting to let go of it, and it turns out that often this is easier said than done. I have had standards of training for myself that were just about, or really impossible, to meet, and to admit to myself that I was the one who invented those was a slightly embarrassing and very freeing thing to do. It can seem to be life-threatening to let go of such a standard because the belief that, if we are not keeping a tight grip on our potential for greed, aversion and delusion, we will end up behaving badly can be very strong. Only a lot of gentle encouragement and experimenting with loosening up just a little will help develop the trust in our own good heart and the power of transformation that the meditation and Precepts give us. Just as the trees, long after they are dead and long after they get any benefit from holding on to their roots are still doing so from sheer habit—the roots have grown that way and will only let go once they are thoroughly decomposed—so we too find old habits have a lot of strength.

Note

1. *Sandōkai*, from *The Liturgy of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives for the Laity*, Shasta Abbey Press, Mt. Shasta, 1987.

Fishing With A Straight Needle

Rev. Master Aiden Hall

— *Turning Wheel Buddhist Temple, Leicester – UK* —

This article was first published on the Turning Wheel Buddhist Temple website.

In Buddhism we don't try to convert people, or persuade them that they ought to practise. The motivation to engage with Buddhist practice has to come from each of us individually, and no-one else can give that to us. This story is a metaphor for how Buddhism is passed on to other people, both from the perspective of the teacher and of the student.

The story is from the foreword to a book of teaching by the Japanese Rinzai monk Sokei-an Sasaki (1882-1945) who first came to the US in 1906 and ended up living in New York from the early 1920s until his death. He was the first Zen master to settle permanently in America.

For forty years a fisherman in China used a straight needle to fish with. Of course, people found that rather odd, and asked him why he didn't just use

a regular bent hook like everyone else, as he might catch a few more fish that way! When he was asked this, the fisherman replied, “You can catch ordinary fish with a bent hook, but I will catch a great fish with my straight needle.”

Who knows what people made of that? The fisherman, however, wasn’t concerned with what they thought. He still just kept on fishing with a straight needle, and word got around, as word often does get around of people who are doing ‘interesting’, different things. He gradually became quite famous in the region he lived in, not just in the neighbouring villages, but even in the bigger towns and cities, where most people had heard about this fisherman out on the coast who was sitting there fishing with a straight needle.

As the years and decades went by his fame grew and grew, just by word of mouth. Eventually, after about forty years, his story came to the ear of the Emperor, who was intrigued by the story and decided to pay him a visit. The Emperor wanted to see this ‘fool of a fisherman’ for himself.

When the Emperor finally managed to track down the fisherman, and find out exactly where he was, he sat down next to him and asked him what he expected to catch, fishing with this straight needle. The fisherman turned to the Emperor and said, “Emperor, I have caught you!” ¹

This is a really nice story, and appearing as it does in an introduction to a book of Buddhist teaching, it is a metaphor for the fact that we ourselves must bring ourselves to Buddhist practice. We come voluntarily — no-one is trying to get us on a hook, or reel us in. It's important to realise that the metaphor isn't actually about fish willingly impaling themselves on a straight needle, it's about the relationship of the Emperor to the fisherman.

The fisherman hasn't contacted the Emperor, or asked anyone else to contact the Emperor. All he has been doing is this apparently stupid thing of fishing with a straight needle. It's neither here nor there whether it's actually a really stupid thing or a clever thing; it is the fisherman's practice and he is just getting on and doing it, and isn't trying to entice or attract the Emperor or anyone else.

Word of him fishing with a straight needle just gradually gets around. Maybe lots of people went along to see him, but probably the vast majority just heard about it and laughed, and didn't bother going to see him.

But when the Emperor heard about it, he made time in his busy schedule to go and see the fisherman for himself. And that's how it is for us; we have to make time for Buddhist practice in our life. The Buddha isn't trying to reel us in. We don't try to convert people; we each have to come to it for

ourselves.

In Sokei-an's introduction, after relating the story he comments:

If you have no experience in fishing with the straight needle, you cannot understand this story. Simply, I am holding my arms on my breast. Like that fisherman with the straight needle, I fish for you good fishes. I do not circulate letters. I do not advertise. I do not ask you to come. I do not ask you to stay. I do not entertain you. You come, and I am living my own life.

That's how it is with Buddhist practice; we don't try to convert anyone else and we don't try to convince anyone else. Buddhism spreads just by us doing our practice, just as in the story the fisherman is just fishing with a straight needle, not trying to catch anything.

If it took 40 years for the Emperor to come along and see the fisherman, you could certainly ask the fisherman, "Was it really worth it – sitting out in the wind and rain for 40 years, just to have a two-minute conversation with an Emperor?" But the fisherman could answer, "Well I was just doing my own practice. I was going to do it anyway, and actually I didn't have any expectations of anyone coming along to see me, whether or not they were an Emperor." And that is how it is with our Buddhist practice too.

You could argue that the fisherman actually did have an

expectation, as he said, “but I will catch a great fish with my straight needle”, but that phrase just has to be in the story in order to set up the punchline. If the fisherman was always wondering whether the Emperor was just about to turn up then he wouldn’t have been able to keep going for forty years. And perhaps what the Emperor represents is that, after all these years of practice, the fisherman sees things clearly and understands the Life of Buddha. The meeting with the Emperor can at the same time represent both ‘people coming to find out about the practice’, and also ‘the fisherman himself meeting Buddha’.

Similarly, when Sokei-an says, “Like that fisherman with the straight needle, I fish for you good fishes”, that can’t mean ‘in order to catch you’, because the whole point of the straight needle is that there is no intention to catch. ‘For you good fishes’ must mean ‘for the benefit of you good fishes’, and as he can’t know who those good fish are, it is actually ‘for the benefit of all beings’, including himself. This is the Bodhisattva vow in action: “I wish to unfold the Buddha’s teaching, that I may help all living things.”

When Sokei-an says, “If you have no experience in fishing with the straight needle, you cannot understand this story”, this doesn’t mean that we have to be a Buddhist teacher to understand it, we just need to have had the experience of coming to Buddhist practice of our own volition, just as the Emperor came to the fisherman. If we have been in the position of a trainee then we will be able to understand, because we know what it is like to not be ‘hooked and reeled in’, but to willingly bring ourselves. It’s our own

volition, our own wish. It's us who want to practice, and no-one is trying to convince us of that.

In terms of religion or spiritual practice, if people are trying to convince us of things, then that is often a warning sign; it's generally better to find someone who is just doing their own practice rather than trying to attract followers. Of course our Buddhist practice isn't 'just doing our own thing' in the sense of being based on our own views and opinions, it is the Buddha's practice. And even the Buddha said that it wasn't 'his own thing'; it was a timeless truth that he had found, not something he had invented.

He just got on with his practice, and people heard about it and were interested, and came along to join in. That's how Buddhism has carried on for 2,500 years.

There is also a story from the time of the Buddha which relates to this story, as it addresses the question of "what about all those that didn't come along?". One day someone came to see the Buddha and asked him, "Is your teaching for everyone? Can it benefit everyone?" The Buddha didn't answer the question, which must have seemed strange to the visitor, but afterwards the Buddha's disciple Ananda explained to the visitor why the Buddha hadn't answered; it is because the Buddha's practice is to offer the teaching to anyone who comes along and is interested. Those who don't come along are not his concern; it is up to them what they do, but if they don't choose to engage with the teaching then the Buddha isn't in a position to offer the teaching to them, and he doesn't try to force it on them. This is the Buddha's

offering to all those who don't come along, as it allows each person the time and space to come to it for themselves; they are not forced to engage at a time when perhaps they won't really understand or connect with it.

* * *

The story is a very important metaphor for us bringing ourselves to Buddhist practice. We come to practice because that is what we want to do, not because we are being enticed or hooked or reeled in. Even though it is a very short story, this is an important teaching to reflect on; to realise that we must bring ourselves to practice, and that our practice is always our own responsibility.

Whether teachers are present or absent, whether teachers are saying good and helpful things or not, it is always down to us to do the practice. And if we are doing the practice then we will hear the teaching, because the teaching is always there to be heard in the world around us, if we are paying attention. We must bring ourselves and engage with it.

Note

- [1.](#) Sasaki, Sokei-an, *Zen Pivots: Lectures on Buddhism and Zen*. (Mary Farkas, Robert Lopez, eds.) Shambhala, 1998, foreword.

Right Effort Can Be No Effort At All

Rev. Kōjō Bailey

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

What does it mean to make right effort in our practice? You probably know some of the Buddha's own advice on this. He tells us: it is like the strings on an instrument. If they are too slack, they will be out of tune when we try to play. Too tight, though, and they are liable to break. To make music, strings need to be not too loose, and not too tight, but at just the right tension in between.¹

This is precious teaching and I'm going to look at it a bit below. But I'm also going to introduce another approach, rooted in Sōtō Zen practice, in which it can be said that right effort is no effort at all.

The Buddha gave the teaching about tuning the strings to a monk called Sona, who had been practising relentlessly: doing walking meditation until his feet were blistered and bleeding, chanting without sleep until his voice was sore. Finding that all this hard work wasn't getting him anywhere, Sona had started to think that he may as well give up practice entirely, when the Buddha, who heard the strain in Sona's voice, intervened. Using the metaphor of the instrument's

strings, he advised Sona to know his capacities and not do himself harm by overreaching them.

In a way the teaching is straightforward. In practice, it is important not to underdo it. When we slack – by skipping meditation periods, say, or by letting ourselves off the hook of the precepts – consistent practice habits may stall and they can be difficult to restart. And we may feel regret, both right away and in the longer term.

It is just as important not to overdo it. Pushing ourselves too hard – by doubling the time we sit on the cushion, to make up for the meditation periods we skipped, or by tying ourselves up in knots trying to scrutinise our speech for rightness – will lead to exhaustion and discouragement. If we don't recognise that we're overdoing it, we can think that there is a problem with our practice of the Buddhadharma, or with the Buddhadharma itself.

Either way, we obstruct for ourselves the fruits of practice.

It's fortuitous for us that Sona's story illustrates in particular the problem of overexertion. Even if not so many of us are fanatic enough to chant all night, or would have energy enough even if we wanted to, we come from a culture where effort is easily understood in terms of hard or difficult work, and it can be seen as morally virtuous to work without regard for our own wellbeing. The flip side is that guilt is attached to easing up. To put it coarsely, it can feel as if the

message is: if you're not overdoing it, you're not doing enough. With this in the background, it's easy to think we are not giving enough to practice, just because the string is not yet tight enough to break.

But the Buddha's message is different. For one thing, it doesn't have a moral subtext, it's straightforwardly practical teaching. And it's not concerned with ideals, but instead with concrete situations. We are asked to be aware of the real state of our effort as it is right now, and discern for ourselves: is this string too tight, too loose, just fine? Then we adjust as needed.

There is another way to think about right effort, which is not so much about how much we do, but more about how we do it. It has to do with the strain that the Buddha observed in Sona, and the harm that he warned Sona against. What had brought that strain about? Had Sona been eager to show his devotion, or hoped to impress? Had he set himself a target and become fixed on reaching it? Of course we can't know. But when there is strain in our action, the harm we are in danger of is more than just becoming wearied. It is the harm we do ourselves when we repeat, and thereby strengthen, the karmic habits that so easily drive us.

To consider right effort in this way in everyday life means reflecting: what is giving rise to my activity, and am I being driven? In my actions of body, speech and mind, is there a harshness, an insistence, a ratcheting up or resisting? Do I detect the workings of aversion and grasping? As with Sona,

my outward activity is not always a guide to what's going on. Doubling the time I spend on the cushion may simply be a needed and helpful adjusting of the string, but it can also come from grasping (greed for polishing my image) or aversion (a wish to punish). It's not always obvious what exactly is driving us, but fortunately it doesn't matter one bit. It's when our action is driven at all that we know something isn't quite right.

So what is right, in the realm of effort?

When an instrument's string is too loose or too tight we adjust it the other way, and the ability to do this is useful, indeed necessary, for our effort in practice. But being driven by one thing isn't remedied by being driven by any other. Instead, we need to surrender momentum completely. Staying unmoved within the grip of desires, holding our ground amidst our own angers, we can know the still point and find that action does come forth from that. We will still feel the momentum, often powerfully. But when we let it be, without letting it drive our activity, it ceases to be harmful to us and instead we become beneficial to it because we bring an end, however small, to this particular iteration of the karmic habit. In the words of Great Master Dōgen,

When the Buddha does all, and you follow that doing effortlessly and without worrying about it, you gain freedom from suffering and become, yourself, Buddha.²

Seen this way, right effort isn't something we need to generate, it isn't something 'I' can do. It is something we give way to – or rather, it is the giving way itself. This is the surrendering of momentum. Action does arise from it, but unlike tuning a string we are not calculating how much activity in which direction is needed. Rather we are allowing our activity, our effort, to come from a different place. We do not know what the outcome could be – and it may be that we retune a string. Practising effort in this way takes more willingness than will, and paradoxically enough it may well involve hard work – it's effortless in the sense that 'I' am not trying, but it's not necessarily easy. It can take practice to recognise the momentum, let alone withstand it. And yet: right effort can be no effort at all.

Notes

1. Paraphrased, see *Sona Sutta: Anguttara Nikaya 6.55*.
2. Great Master Dōgen, *Shōji*. Rev. Jiyu-Kennett, trans., in *Zen is Eternal Life*. Shasta Abbey Press, 1999, p.197.

The Light That Stays With Us

Rev. Master Fuden Nessi

— *Dharmazuflucht Schwarzwald, Gutach – Germany* —

If the intention to find the True Refuge in our heart is uppermost for us in life, if this is what really matters for us, we will keep recognizing it, now and in the future. Even if at times we wholly lose sight of it, it will be there again for us.

On many occasions in the past, when life was difficult for me and I was struggling, in the end I would become aware with deep gratitude that the unchanging, unborn Refuge is always here for us, and that we become aware of it time and time again, if only we make the effort to turn towards it.

I would then sometimes wish and pray that beings who find themselves in a state of much deeper suffering than I have ever experienced may recognize it too, for this is bound to call forth in us a deep trust in existence, and in the Goodness that is at the heart of it.

All things in life are transient, the eternal Refuge is not. In time we come to realize that many aspects of our life that we have based ourselves on and perhaps clung to quite strongly, are in fact provisional, and cannot be a lasting refuge

for us. Some of these facets of life may indeed be a very precious part of our human existence and help us to fulfill what is asked of us in life. If we treat them as our ultimate refuge and desperately cling to them though, we turn them into something that is likely to create suffering, and not just for ourselves. A clear example of this can be human relationships.

When instead we keep taking refuge in Buddha within our heart, and when this is our foundation for approaching what we are given in life and for fulfilling our responsibilities, we actually value what brings us joy and fulfillment even more. At the same time, we are also more able to bow to whatever life brings us, even if it is something difficult that goes against what we would like. Being able to bow to adversity is a jewel in our spiritual life.

What comes forth in us then, is an unconditional “Yes” towards what is here right now, however it may look. Something in us then knows that all is well, however desolate our current circumstances in life are, and however difficult our inner life may be at the time. I perceive this original “Yes” towards what is here for us now as one of the really important gateways into the Dharma. When it is there, then Buddha can teach us. Life can teach us. Our fellow beings can teach us.

What mostly obscures and covers up the “Yes” that manifests out of the original purity of our heart, is our insistence that life, including our inner life, should be as we wish it to be. And as a result of this, our turning away from

and rejecting what is not in accord with how we would like things to be. This often happens in subtle ways that we don't necessarily recognize easily.

The True Refuge I've been referring to can at times manifest like a little light, figuratively speaking, that we become aware of when we turn within, and that shines through what at first seems only like a hindrance. Reverend Master Jiyu told us that we can find this little light of our true nature even in the greatest darkness, when we sincerely look for it. We cannot generate it by our will, but we can reach out to it and ask for its help and guidance.

There are times in our life when we completely lose sight of it – times when our whole inner horizon seems to be filled with confusion and distraught feelings that may be there as a reaction to the difficulties we encounter in life. Even at such times though, we can make the effort to orient ourselves towards Buddha in our heart. The intention to do this is in itself very precious.

Sometimes people who were in a very difficult situation and inner state – for example when what used to bring them deep fulfillment in their life had all of a sudden fallen away and wasn't there anymore for them – told me that, when they turned their gaze inward in the middle of their distress and really asked for help, very unexpectedly this little light was suddenly there again, together with a fundamental trust in existence.

I myself can remember when in difficult times in my life, I would go to meditation in the evening in a state of deep exhaustion, and at first there would only be fear and helplessness in me because of the desolate inner landscape. Despite this, I would persevere and entrust myself as best as I could to the meditation, even though my inner world continued to be very barren. All of a sudden, and sometimes only towards the end of the meditation period, the little light would be there again and shine through the distress, almost in an incomprehensible way. Each time when this happens, it is a confirmation of what matters most to us in life.

On such occasions, I would sometimes think of the line in *The Litany of the Great Compassionate One*, where it says “O Great Victor, I hold on, hold on!”, and of how important it is to persevere when we feel lost and helpless, and not to give up or give in to looking down. The more often our heart recognizes what shines through our confusion and feelings of helplessness, the more we become familiar with that which shines through. And although our difficulties may still be there, they become much less threatening.

Coming back to the “Yes” of the heart to whatever is given to us in life right now, when this pure “Yes” is allowed to manifest, it also makes it possible to recognize any shadows that may have formed in our mind at times when we were confused, and to see them for what they are. When we are suffering and our inner life is very desolate, it can happen that something gets in there and tries to convince us that there are specific things about ourselves that make it impossible for

us to live up to what is being asked of us in spiritual training and in life. That we are just not good enough.

It's very important that we look through these shadows, and recognize them for what they really are, delusive images that have formed in our mind. If we keep believing what they portray, we're likely to go down a road that leads to considerably more suffering. But if this open and unconditional "Yes" has awoken in us, the deceptive nature of these illusive mental constructs can be recognized, and we can offer them up in faith. In the end, to use a slightly adapted quote from the *Lotus Sutra*, such mental constructs and feelings are like frost that melts when the sun of open-hearted, pure seeing shines on them.

When we recognize that these and other shadows that may have formed in our mind don't have the reality that we have attributed to them, there can then often also be repentance in us. For example, repentance for all the times in the past when we have believed in these shadows and other deluded views, and for our actions of body, speech and mind that resulted from that. This repentance is something very positive, that just sees with an open heart and regrets any harm that has been done, without any self-accusation. It enables us to look up again, to trust our precious intention to give our best in life, and to move forward.

The "Yes" of the heart towards what is here for us right now, has not just an effect on our own inner life though. It also has a definitive impact on the way we perceive and relate

to our fellow human beings. It opens our heart to them and makes us see their suffering in a more empathic way, rather than viewing them critically because of the difficulties they are going through, that may have annoyed us beforehand.

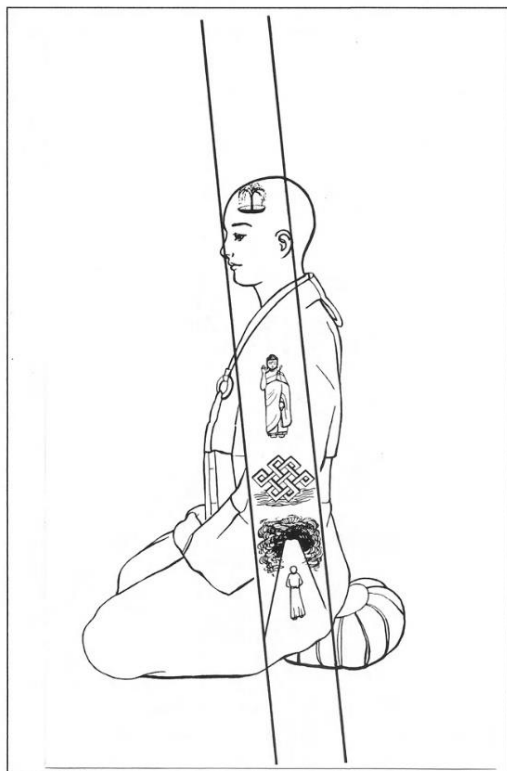
So, something in us recognizes that approaching our own suffering and adversities in life with an open heart is not done just for our own sake, but in the end for other beings as well. Heart-wishes for the well-being of others can arise in a natural way in us then, also for those beings who right now are going through states of great suffering.

Where such wishes of the heart can lead, is expressed in vows that some of the Mahayana scriptures have formulated in a straightforward yet profound way, as for example in *The Sutra of Golden Light*, where it says (slightly paraphrased here): “For those who are without refuge, support and help, may I become their support, their help and their friend”.

The various aspects of spiritual training that I have tried to address here, are for me very much contained in what Reverend Master Jiyu wrote in her commentary on the five columns in her book *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*.¹

What she has taught us in the chapters on the five columns of light goes so much deeper, and is much broader than the few aspects I have tried to outline here. But because the teaching on the five columns has always been so important for my training, I will set what I have written here within the context of Reverend Master’s teaching on the five columns.

Below is a graphic illustration of the five columns. The fifth column, the column that vertically traverses the illustration, contains within itself the other four columns, represented here by four images, or symbols. In my understanding, the fifth column represents all of our spiritual life and its true Source.



The image at the very bottom of the illustration, shows a being who looks up towards a black cloud. A shaft of light shines down through a tiny hole in the cloud. This describes for me our constant effort to look towards the eternal Refuge, to ask for its teaching, and the intention to keep our going for

refuge to Buddha within the heart, foremost in our life. In this way, the Light of our true nature can start to shine through the clouds of confusion.

Immediately above this image is a symbol depicting a misty cloud containing the knot of eternity and refers to Sange, or repentance. When we do Sange, we are washed clean of delusion. While the process of repentance goes much further than the aspects that I have mentioned in this article, it can also include the understanding that the shadows that have formed in our mind don't have the solid reality we have given them, and the offering up of them, as well as any mistakes we may have made in the past as a result of these delusive views. Repentance helps us to recognize that in truth nothing is separate from Eternal Love, depicted here as the Knot of Eternity.

Above this is a drawing of a Buddha, representing our True Refuge, the source of the ultimate help that we receive in life. When we follow its guidance, the causes of our suffering are healed. All the aspects of the Dharma come from this place, including the Buddhist Precepts. It is the place from which the "Yes" of the heart originates. Orienting ourselves towards Buddha within our heart brings us deep trust and acceptance of what is given to us in life.

The last symbol at the very top of the illustration is a fountain. Reverend Master Jiyu has given us a profound description of the spiritual fountain of Love that is inherent in our True Nature. As I've tried to outline in this article, the

fountain for me also expresses that, when we keep taking refuge in Buddha and aligning our actions with the Dharma, the merit of this will flow out like a fountain in time. This also includes offering the merit of our spiritual effort to all beings. May we become a true friend for them.

Notes

- [1.](#) P.T.N.H. Jiyu-Kennett, *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom, or How a Zen Buddhist Prepares for Death*, Plate LX: The Fifth Column – The Buddha Within, page 150. Shasta Abbey Press, 1977.

News of the Order

North America

Shasta Abbey

— *Mount Shasta, California – USA* —

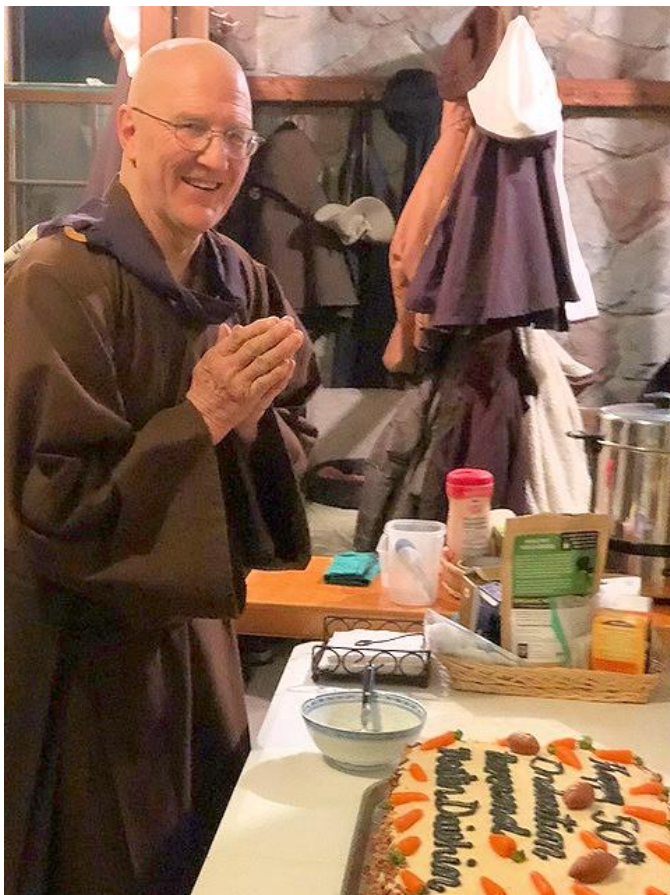
Postulants. The community welcomed two new postulants over the winter. Nancine McDonald entered on November 28th and Trinity Treat on January 9th. Nancine was a member of the Eugene Priory in Eugene, Oregon; Trinity was a lay minister and resident at the Portland Priory in Portland, Oregon. It has been heartening to have new residents among us.

Celebrations and Ceremonies. On February 8 we celebrated a Renewal of Wedding Vows for Gwen Frishkoff and Allan Malony of Eugene, Oregon. It was their 25th wedding



anniversary. Rev. Valeria was the celebrant, and the ceremony was held in the Avalokiteshwara Shrine, attended by many community members.

On February 11 at an evening tea we celebrated Rev. Master Daishin Yalon's 50th ordination anniversary, which occurred on February 10. We are grateful for his many years of wisdom, practice, and teaching.



Monastic Guests. Over the winter we were delighted to have two additional monks joining in the life of the community: Rev. Master Aurelian Giles, a senior monk in residence at Lions Gate

Buddhist Priory near Lytton, British Columbia; and Rev. Kalden Wangmo, a Tibetan Vajrayana nun who began her monastic training here at the monastery as Rev. Berenice.

— *Rev. Master Oswin*

Redding Zen Buddhist Priory

— *Redding, California – USA –*

Rev. Helen's total hip replacement surgery was successfully performed on February 5. The surgery was more complicated than expected so the recovery was a bit more complicated as well. But she's now building strength and stamina as she recovers. Rev. Helen would like to thank all who have helped, encouraged, and offered merit during her surgery and recovery. In particular she wants to thank the Redding Zen Priory Sangha for all the ways they supported her and continued to offer the Dharma as she recovers.

Rev. Helen, Rev. Kalden, and Megan Conn gave Haven Humane Society Blessing on February 2, blessing the nearly 200 dogs, cats, and bunnies currently resident in the Shasta County Animal Shelter.

— *Rev. Master Helen*

Still Flowing Water Hermitage

— *Meadow Vista, California – USA –*

As I write, we are facing our first blizzard of the 2023/24 winter. It is amazing that it didn't come until March. The daffodils are already blooming!

I spent most of February in India! A very kind donor offered to take me to visit the Buddhist Holy Sites. We spent several days in Bodhgaya, where the Buddha was enlightened under the Bodhi Tree, before going on to Rajgir and Vulture Peak, Nalanda, Vaishali, where the first women were ordained by the Buddha, and Kushinagar, where the Buddha died. We ended with Varanasi,

from which we were able to spend a day in Sarnath, where the Buddha first turned the Wheel of the Law. It was a very powerful experience to travel the roads that the Buddha so often walked, and to be in the very places where such significant events in his life occurred. The devotion of the many pilgrims we encountered was inspiring, and a fine reminder of how precious the teachings of the Buddha are to so many people.

Of course, it was also fascinating to be in India, a country of so much color and complexity, and such good food too. The trip transpired with no glitches, and we returned home in late February renewed in our sense of walking the Buddha Way – always on pilgrimage as we continue our training.

Otherwise, life at Still Flowing Water Hermitage goes on as before. I am deeply grateful for all the offerings that come our way that make this possible.

— *Rev. Master Vivian*

Wallowa Buddhist Temple

— *Joseph, Oregon – USA* —

Winter weather at the Wallowa Buddhist Temple has shifted unpredictably from warmer-than-usual weeks to windy snow-and-ice storms to teeth-chattering temperatures. Experiencing these fluctuations has served as an ongoing reminder of how quickly conditions may change in life.

Ceremonial: With our main altar decorations twinkling with light, teachings on the Buddha's Enlightenment were offered throughout the dark days of December. For the first seven days of the month, monks joined in an observance of Buddha's Enlightenment together with an individual retreat guest.

New Year's Eve was celebrated by Rev. Master Meidō revolving the *Scripture of Great Wisdom* at an afternoon ceremony that allowed those attending to return home safely before dark on icy roads. On New Year's Day we held an Open Temple for

congregation, friends, and neighbors to come by to ring the temple bell and welcome in the coming year with sparkling fruit juice.

Community dinners: Both monks have enjoyed participating in a weekly winter friendship dinner put on at our local Methodist church by a rotation of local non-profits, where we have had the opportunity to meet people from a wide variety of faith traditions in our community, and to ‘build connections’ locally together with an assortment of organizations, groups, and individuals joining in as diners, volunteers, cooks, and sponsors. We’re glad for the vegetarian options so carefully prepared.

Many hands: This winter has brought a handful of helpers coming by to assist monks with basic chores around the temple, such as recycling, snow shoveling, and stacking firewood. We are grateful for the many hands, and for the joy of doing working meditation together.

Open February: The temple remained open in February, when the monks usually have rest and retreat. This year it seemed good to continue our regular weekly schedule and to welcome a local individual retreat guest for three days. We were quietly astonished at the steady stream of friends, neighbors, and visitors who came through the temple door. We have been hearing from quite a number of friends further afield, as well, by letter, email and by phone.

Introductory Day Retreat: In response to interest from several people who began sitting regularly with us during the past year, a day-long retreat was offered March 2nd as an immersive introduction to our tradition. The group of five from our local congregation joined in a schedule reflecting the variety of forms of meditation in daily life: formal sitting, basic ceremonial, working meditation, spiritual reading, mindful rest, practicing together with others, and following the Precepts. This included learning the mealtime ceremony as we partook of three formal meals in the meditation hall.

Because it is not always possible (especially for those with young children) to make the nearly 600-mile journey to the monastery, this short retreat helped us all by bringing the monastery here for a day. The retreatants are now well-prepared to attend any coming retreats at the monastery, and to continue to deepen their own practice of Serene Reflection Meditation.

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

Rev. Master Meidō and Rev. Clairissa

Lions Gate Buddhist Priory

— Lytton, British Columbia – Canada —

During the first full week of December, we held our winter retreat. Rev. Master Kōten offered daily Dharma talks and discussions on various aspects of spiritual training in everyday life. The retreat ended with the Festival Ceremony of the Buddha's Enlightenment.

On New Year's Eve the community and several congregation members celebrated the New Year Festival with meditation and a ceremony at Mandala Hall, during which Rev. Master Kōten revolved *The Scripture of Great Wisdom*. Afterwards everyone went to Bodhidharma Hall and enjoyed festive snacks.

This winter we organised and cleaned the library and constructed a handrail on the outhouse steps. Ongoing work includes constructing new trails, the kitchen remodelling project, and road maintenance.

Rev. Master Aurelian was away for a couple of months visiting Shasta Abbey, where he trained with the monastic Sangha until mid-February. His stay was restful and he is grateful for his time there and for the hospitality of the community.

We continue to offer Zoom Dharma discussions meetings on Thursday evenings and Saturday afternoons. If you are interested in receiving notifications and a link to the meetings please contact us at lionsgatebuddhistpriory@gmail.com

— Rev. Master Aurelian

News of the Order

Europe

Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey

— Northumberland, England — UK —

The New Year Retreat was well-attended, the highlights being two ceremonies – one held late on December 31st when we gave thanks for the opportunity to train in the last twelve months, and ask for help in the coming year; the other was the annual celebration of our Founder Rev. Master Jiyu’s birthday. It was especially poignant this time as it was exactly 100 years since she was born. Our profound gratitude, as ever, is offered to her for her life of training.



The Winter Sangha Retreat began soon afterwards. Rev. Master Daishin was spending a few weeks with us and generously gave some Dharma talks for the Community whilst he was here. A few of the monks tested positive for Covid early in the month, but nobody’s symptoms were serious, and the outbreak was contained such that no lay trainees were affected. This was fortunate because a sizeable group were in residence – as is traditional during this retreat, helping with the cooking and cleaning whilst the monks take time to rest and recharge. Our thanks go to Isobel, St. John, Jenny, Teresa, Pam, Julia, Pete, Colin, Julie, Dave, Julius, Alex, Joan, Fred, Andy, Tony, Willem and Mark.

School Visit: We had the pleasure of receiving a visit from Whitfield C of E Primary School recently. 20 children aged between 4 and 11 came with three teachers to explore what we do as a monastic community. Rev. Kyōsei and Rev Chandra greeted the group and described how Throssel began, and also what our values are: why we practise meditation and live a Preceptual life. The tour started in the dining hall and the children were interested in how we used our bowl sets and our mealtime ceremonial.

In the Ceremony Hall the children were delighted to see all the various altars & shrines and asked a number of questions about the relevance of the forms and iconography. They enthusiastically offered incense during a ceremony, and after a short period of sitting and walking meditation they had a tour of the kitchen and common room. To bring the morning to a close the party visited the animal cemetery before everyone made their way back to the coach which was waiting for them. The monks waved goodbye to the smiling children and teachers who responded with a gasshō.

Head of the Order: We bade farewell to Rev. Master Haryo in late February, as his year-long stay came to an end. We very much appreciate both the kind advice and guidance he gave whilst he was in residence, as well as his practical help. We wished him a safe journey back to the USA and hope to see him again before too long.



Tree Work: In February we hired a local tree surgeon to take down two large ash trees which grew on the edge of our property, overlooking the hairpin bend on the road in the cleugh. Over the

last two years, both trees had begun to show signs of ash dieback disease, but we had hoped they would resist it. They had been put under additional stress over 2023 due to it being too wet and warm, and unfortunately they succumbed to the disease.

Some of the wood was cut up for fuel, to be used in our new log-burning stove in the meeting room, or given to our neighbours. The remaining wood is being left in situ, providing ideal habitat for wildlife.



Quakers Visit: In March a small group from Hexham Quaker Meeting came to join us for an evening of shared practice and talking together. Some had been before and two were here for the first time. For this latest in a series of regular exchanges, we showed them one or two things we find helpful with physical posture while sitting, and followed this with a period of meditation in the Ceremony Hall. After this, we talked some more over tea and biscuits; it was a light and pleasant evening.

Upcoming: At the time of writing, Rev. Myōren Swallow is about to begin her term as head novice. This is a necessary step in the life of a monk – an important stage in training, involving taking on more responsibility. We wish Rev. Myōren well in this role. We are also looking forward to holding a *Poetry and Practice* weekend retreat at the monastery soon. We will publish a report about this in the next issue.

— Rev. Master Roland

Reading Buddhist Priory

— *Reading, England – UK* —

Reading Priory closes: Rev. Gareth has decided, after much thought and reflection, that the time has come for him to retire from the position of prior. As we are not able to provide a monk to continue in this role, we are regrettably closing the Priory, and the trustees are now winding up the charity and selling the property. Rev. Gareth will be stepping back towards the end of March, and is still running some events. Lay congregation are continuing the online practice they have already established, almost daily, together. From now on visits from a monk from Throssel will include day retreats for the Reading/London groups, as well as regular residential 3-day weekend retreats in the central south, and Throssel monks will be generally available to support and enable Sangha events in the south.

Rev. Master Saidō was the first prior when Reading Buddhist Priory started 34 years ago, followed by a number of monks from Throssel over the years. We are grateful, not just for the congregation's ongoing generosity financially, in enabling the temple building and monk to be sustained, but also for all whose training, generous practical help, wise counsel, and friendship supported the life of the Sangha and the various priors over the years. The assets of Reading Priory will go to support similar OBC temples, and also to help enable southern Sangha events to continue in the future.

— *Rev. Masters Olwen & Leoma and Rev. Gareth (Trustees)*

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/>

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

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

As Buddhism grows in the West, we wish to share the Buddha's Teaching through our *Journal*; we also share our experience of practicing the Buddha's Way, thus encouraging and supporting each other's training. Lastly, *The Journal* helps to keep friends and members informed of activities and events.

The views expressed in these pages are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the Order as a whole.

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

To receive a notification via email when a new issue of *The Journal* is available for download, go to: <https://journal.obcon.org/e-newsletter-sign-up>