

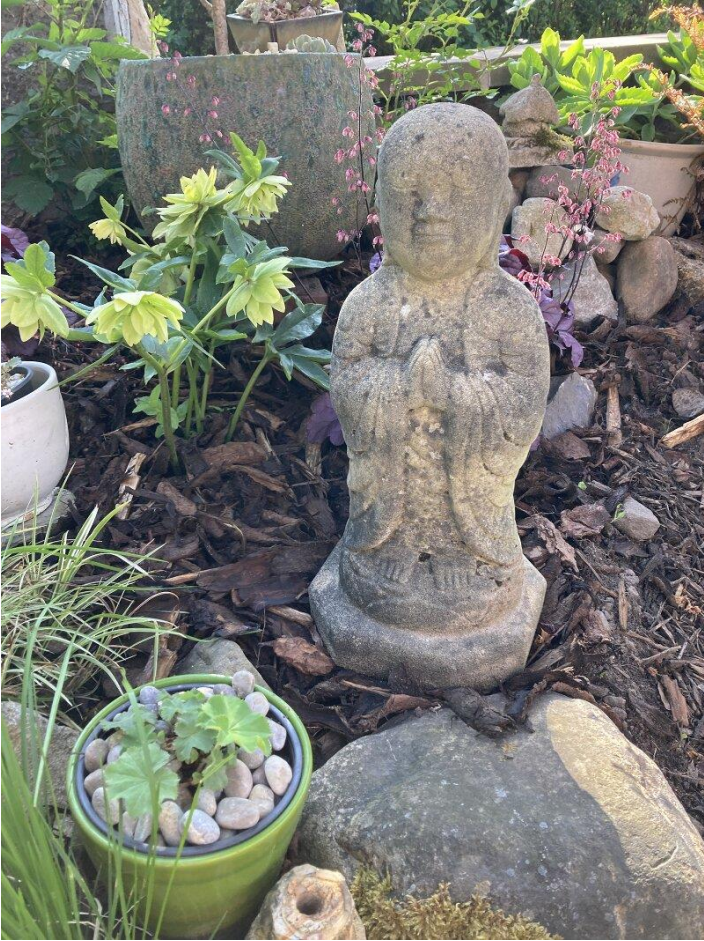


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Jizō Garden at Telford Buddhist Priory

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Some Thoughts After 50 Years

Rev. Master Daishin Yalon

— *Shasta Abbey, California – USA* —

An edited transcript of a talk given at Shasta in March 2024.

Last month I celebrated my 50th ordination anniversary as a monk. I don't mention this because I think it was a big deal, a great accomplishment or anything like that. I'm glad I stuck with my vocation, and it's not always been easy, to be totally honest with you. Time has gone by quickly; it seems like yesterday that my long hair and beard were shaved and I was ordained by Rev. Master Jiyu.

I feel fortunate that Rev. Master Jiyu was willing to teach me, and that the community has been willing to put up with me. That's how I kind of look at those 50 years – I'm lucky. It was what I wanted to do as a very young person, and the adventure continues.

We don't present someone who has been a monk for 50 years with a gold watch to mark the occasion (or silver, or whatever it should be). I was given a beautiful card and a gift certificate from the community. I think it's the first gift certificate I've received in my life. I was sent cards by friends

and disciples and I was given some statues – I like statues; I usually put them out at the Hermitage, in some nice place. And I was also taken out for a Thai lunch.

Oh yeah, and I got hearing aids the other day. And they honestly are really expensive(!) And they take some time to adjust to. So if I'm not audible, or I'm too loud, let me know, because I feel like I have an ocean in one ear. And in the other ear I don't know what's going on! And I didn't think I had any hearing problems until I took a hearing test, but that's the way it goes.

I had an opportunity to go to Latvia and Lithuania after our Monastic Gathering at Throssel. We met with meditation groups in both countries. I think it was in Latvia that someone asked me what advice I might have after years of training. My first reaction is usually, "Oh, I don't know." But instead I replied that anyone who wants to do this training can do it. If we apply ourselves to the practice, keep at it daily, we will succeed, and we will know the peace and happiness of Buddha. Buddhist practice is for ordinary people, like you and me. Not a lot of us are the Buddha, the Dalai Lama, or Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett, we're just ordinary people. And that's who it's for. In Japan, Sōtō Zen is referred to as 'Farmer Zen' and it's for hard-working, ordinary people. I really like that; that really attracted me to Sōtō Zen.

Around my 50th ordination anniversary I was also asked by lay practitioners and monks, what wisdom I might have to pass on. Again, I kind of thought, "Okay, maybe I have some

wisdom there somewhere.” One of the things I said was that our training is only as good as it is in the present moment. It’s only as good as it is today, right now. In other words, we have to keep at the practice no matter how long we have been training. Training continues to be dynamic and challenging – at least it has been for me. The Buddha trained to his dying day, as did Rev. Master Jiyu. They never thought they were fully accomplished and all finished – they knew that there was more to do.

There is a resting place in the heart that we find when we train, when we make great effort in training. Training does get easier. I really struggled initially; being a monk was a very different way of life. I was 23 years old, and I had a lot to learn. I had somewhat, as a lay practitioner, learned that suffering was optional, which was actually a deep understanding for me – knowing that I didn’t have to suffer. But it was obvious when I came to the monastery that there was a lot more I needed to do in my practice. And that was challenging. The experience of years of practice builds a strong foundation to be rooted in; there’s no doubt about that. Faith and confidence grow strong with years of practice. Along the way, we make mistakes and we learn from our mistakes. And hopefully we don’t make them again. Everything is teaching us. Training, if done properly, will always challenge us. Training is done with other people. How could it *not* be challenging? The type of training we do is done every day with other people, and they’re all around you – and that’s not a problem.

We have to keep at the training of awareness, mindfulness, compassion, kindness and generosity. Wisdom comes from keeping at these things in our daily practice. That's wisdom, kindness, generosity, compassion, patience. Training stretches us to be able to do more than we think we can do. Training for me has never been 'one and done'. As Rev. Master Jiyu put it in *The Scripture of Great Wisdom*: "O Buddha going, going, going on beyond and ... always becoming Buddha."¹ We're always becoming Buddha.

I think with years of training, there is an ease and naturalness that comes to our practice. That happens when people do something for a long time. It comes for a monk if you're comfortable in your own skin and in your robe. And I want to say here too that I think one of the nice benefits of training is you begin to like yourself. A lot of people don't like themselves. We enjoy the training, and still we have to be on guard – not jumpy or anxious but just keeping our awareness up.

We don't graduate from keeping the Precepts, that's essential. The Buddha said the Precepts were the same for him as for us. In fact, with the Precepts, we take them on an ever-deepening level. We greet each new day with appreciation, joy and gratitude for another opportunity to follow the Buddha's teachings. It's kind of like *Groundhog Day* – we keep getting opportunities to get it right.

To another group of people who asked me for advice for some perspective on training as a Buddhist monk for 50 years,

I replied, “Continue to work on your practice of not being selfish.” If we are honest with ourselves, we know it’s a human tendency to be self-centred and sometimes downright selfish. It’s not that we don’t need to take care of ourselves, and in some circumstances, protect and maybe even defend ourselves. Sometimes selfishness is necessary – if we constantly gave away everything we had, we’d end up giving away things we need, and then we’d become a burden for other people because we’d have nothing, and you need some things to be able to survive as a human being. If we ran around helping people, working hard all the time, never taking time to eat, exercise and rest properly, we would get sick and again we’d be a burden for others. We have to find a balance – a balance of giving and receiving, activity and stillness.

Selfishness is when thoughts of I, me and mine are the primary motivation for our lives. When we hold so tightly to ‘I, me and mine’ that it puts us out of balance with other beings, that’s a problem. If we’re not careful, we then create divisions, barriers and walls between us and others. Mental divisions and barriers can develop into physical walls. We create a mind that is jealous, petty, hurtful, and vengeful. And it can go beyond that to violent because we’re defending something, and then we think others are to be feared, disrespected and kept at a safe distance. Humankind has fought countless battles and wars because of the grasping and pushing away mentality of I, me and mine. And as we know, this continues in the 21st century. You’d think we would have learned by now, but we tend to not study history so we don’t see how things unfold, and then we just keep doing it again.

In Buddhism, we talk about letting go of the self. Sometimes this is called ‘no self’; no separate self (or not-self or some other things – whatever works for us is a good phrase). And regardless of how we look at ‘no self’, we can’t deny that there’s a person here, a personality. There is something here, not a nothing. We are not trying, through training, to annihilate the self – that’s a big misunderstanding about Buddhism. We’re just finding its proper place and expression.

To be honest, I find this a little confusing, so an easy way for me to understand these concepts is the simple phrase, “Don’t be selfish.” Rev. Master Jiyu used to say that when you first come to training, we train for self, and after a while, that changes to ‘training for self and other’. As we progress further, we train just for training’s sake. It’s just a very natural process. And I think it’s one of the benefits of staying at something. In *The Scripture of the Buddha’s Last Teachings* the Buddha says, “The teaching that to spiritually benefit yourself by training benefits others contains all.”²

To help others – this is something we can do. To help others we also have to be always training ourselves. Because if we don’t train ourselves, and we’re just trying to fix everything and do everything, it’s not going to be as well-rounded as if it would be if we were training ourselves too. It’s not selfish to take time out of your daily routine to do some meditation, or study the teachings of the Buddhas and Ancestors, or just to have some quiet time. If you’re a parent, and it’s your meditation time and all of a sudden your baby is

crying, then taking care of your baby is your form of meditation right then. It would not be a good thing to say, “Oh no, it’s my time to meditate, so I’ll just let the child cry.” Of course not. To not be selfish is to be fluid, and move with the causes and conditions of our lives. Sometimes I miss a meditation or a service because of something that needs doing. It just kind of comes with the responsibility. The thing is not to be doing that frequently. That’s where the problem arises. Because then we would get out of balance.

I think the best teachings that I have received in my life come from the example of other people living their everyday life. Just living it by the Precepts, from meditation, following the Buddha’s teachings. This to me, is not fancy or verbose, it’s practical, clear and down-to-earth. Just keeping the Precepts and doing what needs to be done in our daily lives actually changes our world for the better. It really does.

I want to read from a book, *More Than Mindfulness: Widening The Field of Practice*, which I got from Abhayagiri Monastery down towards Ukiah, it’s in Strawberry Valley or something like that. And the article I’m going to read from is by Ajahn Pasanno who just had his 50th anniversary too, so we’re very close in age and ordination. I have great respect for him. I just want to read a few paragraphs from this article that he entitled, *Don’t Be Selfish*.

The other day I was thinking about an occasion years ago when I was still living in Thailand. It’s a story I’ve told from time to time but it’s a story that

stuck with me. It was when I went to pay respects to Ajahn Buddhadasa.

Ajahn Chah (who was Ajahn Pasanno's teacher) and Ajahn Buddhadasa were two very famous Buddhist teachers in Thailand at the time Ajahn Pasanno was there, though they've both died now.

I had been to visit and pay respects quite a few times, but this happened on my last visit. He was quite old at the time; he was over 80, and his health was starting to decline. I had noticed over the years that he tended to pick up a theme and explore it for an extended period. He would speak on it from different angles. He was very skilled as a teacher, so I asked him, "Now that you're reaching the last part of your life, what theme are you teaching now?" He just laughed and said, "Oh, I'm not teaching much at all these days. I just keep telling people, 'Don't be selfish.'" That really struck me. Once you start unpacking that teaching, you start reflecting on it and implementing it. You realise that it covers everything. It covers whatever aspect of the Buddha's teaching and whatever aspect of life that you apply it to. "Don't be selfish." Being able to make it explicit in the mind, so that one keeps reminding oneself how to live like that. If we really want to be free from suffering and to awaken to truth, then we can't be selfish. We can't be bringing selfish concerns or selfish perspectives. The Dharma goes one way and selfishness goes the other way. They go in opposite directions.

This theme is a very big feature in Ajahn Chah's training and the way that he set up his monastery. That sense of going against the stream of any kind of selfishness. On a practical, social level, in how we live as human beings, there's always an encouragement to see how we can help with everything. There is an encouragement to be present at everything that the community is doing.

So their formal practice has a lot of similarities to ours. When you live in a community, you're around people all day long and do things together.

There was that sense of stepping back from selfishness. Selfishness plays itself out in so many ways. There is your normal assumption of selflessness, which is around greed and self-concern, but there's also that self-orientation, that self-protection and self-cherishing. Living together really helps to go against that very ordinary human tendency of selfishness. By sharing community, we share everything in common. There is so much selflessness just on a social level, amidst the pandemic, and in the conflicts that have been occurring in America for the past decades. ³

(Ajahn Pasanno must have given this talk during the Covid pandemic.)

Rev. Master Jiyu set up a practice at Shasta Abbey for monks and lay practitioners of community life, in which we train ourselves and help each other. We built a lot of what is

Shasta Abbey – the rock houses were here, but we built mostly everything else. And we didn't know that much about building(!) We got better over time, though. Over the years people have really given of themselves. And when people walk in the gate here, they sense something – peacefulness.

We're having people come in and do some remodelling on our property at the moment, a couple who run an electrical business came in, and the woman said she suffers from anxiety, but she said she came in the gate and all of a sudden she felt relieved. I don't know how, but I think it must be the result of all the training of people who have come here over the years. It's not just the monks, it's not just the people who have stayed. It's the training of all the people who have come here and given of themselves, and not been selfish. We had very little at first here, we had a roof over our heads but we didn't necessarily have heating. But we were young, you know; we survived. Some of us went out to work to support the monastery at times. Rev. Master Jiyu used to take trips to the Bay Area so she could teach at UC Berkeley, and she received money for that which she brought back to support the monastery. While in the Bay Area she would stop by the Parisian bakery for donated bread. It was one of the big French bread bakers in the Bay Area – it was in San Francisco at the time; probably doesn't exist anymore. Rev. Master would bring back all these day-old loaves of French bread. If you keep French bread in a paper bag it doesn't go mouldy, and we made bread pudding, and maybe some dressing, and it was great – we had bread. Yes, we were

poor, but you know, some other people were a lot poorer than us.

The daily schedule here is such that we practice together, and that we offer a service to each other, to the community. It's just something we do in monastic life. We're not just doing our own thing. We're all in the kitchen each day after lunch and the medicine meal cleaning up. I've heard some people describe kitchen clean-up as a dance because you get all those people in there, and to not run into somebody who's carrying the knives to be put away after being dried takes some skill. Occasionally we bang into each other. But usually the choreography is good. And when we have a big retreat here you get even more people in there, and yet after they do it for a day, it goes very smoothly. Or it's like the setting up in the hall for morning service, which has many nuances. But by the second day of an introductory retreat, people know what they're doing better than I do.

So as we age, how we contribute in the community changes a bit, but we can always contribute. When Rev. Master Jiyu talked about Kohō Zenji in Japan, she said he would say, "As long as I can raise one finger. I can be of help." He was wheelchair-bound in the later part of his life. But he felt that he could do *something*. And Rev. Master Jiyu used to talk to us about the old monks in China, how they would be the first ones in the meditation hall every morning. They'd been doing that for years. You know what happens after a while, if we do something that has a routine, when it's time for meditation, you just go to meditation. You don't have

to get into a big argument in your head, it's just time for meditation.

Rev. Master Jiyu was so generous to beings. She had this enormous heart; she was willing to help and teach us young hippies here. Because sometimes we were a bit 'out there'(!) And occasionally, we'd come up with some project which wasn't going to work, but she couldn't convince us, so she just let us do it. And it didn't work – and we learned from that.

And the thing about Rev. Master Jiyu was that although she was so generous, had such a big heart and was such a great teacher, she had really poor health. Really, not good. And her physical strength was limited. But what she did, within that, is unbelievable. I had the good fortune to meet her when I was in my early twenties. She was like a breath of fresh air in all the confusion of the time. She was knowledgeable: wise, kind and compassionate and she didn't rub it in your face. Because in those days, you know – late 60s, early 70s – people did something for a month and they thought they were an authority. But she had done serious training, and she wasn't trying to be the big authority. She was trying to help and offer people the Dharma. She also could be very tough, and just give it to you straight on. Rev. Master Meian and myself always talk about how grateful we are for that. Rev. Master Jiyu's teaching and her everyday example changed my life.

Through the years of my monastic training, I sometimes come to a place of not quite knowing how I'm going to proceed. I just don't know what the right answer is, or

necessarily what to do. Believe it or not, life in a monastery can sometimes be complex, and definitely challenging. I remember years ago being on the phone with some company and the person somehow figured out that I was from a monastery, and she said, “Oh, it must be so peaceful there.” Well, it just turned out that day there was all kinds of stuff going on. It wasn’t that it wasn’t peaceful, but there was just a lot happening.

So, a number of times when I found myself at this crossroads of not knowing what to do, the quiet mantra arises. “Don’t be selfish with your life.” This is simple and solid advice. If studied and followed, it will help carry you and all beings to the other shore, and you’ll find freedom from suffering. What more could we ask for?

Notes

- [1.](#) *The Liturgy of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives for the Laity*. Shasta Abbey Press, 1990.
- [2.](#) *Buddhist Writings On Meditation And Daily Practice: The Serene Reflection Meditation Tradition*. Translator Reverend Hubert Nearman, OBC. Shasta Abbey Press, 1993. p. 259.
- [3.](#) *More Than Mindfulness: Widening The Field of Practice*. Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery, 2023. p. 93.

WHAT NEXT?

Rev. Master Leandra Robertshaw

— *The Garden House, Haslingfield, Cambridgeshire – UK* —

How do I fully live life until I die? Having retired from being Abbot at a Sōtō Zen monastery, and now living in a small village near Cambridge in the UK, there is the wish to live brightly until I die, but I find at times I am overwhelmed by loneliness and sadness. The village folk are friendly, and my beloved daughter and grandson live not far away in another village. So why does it feel as if I am not fulfilling my life in what are the last years of my life? Might it be that having a notion, a concept, of how the end of life should unfold is setting up expectations, and I should rather simply accept how life is? There are times when I wish I were already dead.

These thoughts of dying have been in a sense ‘sitting on my shoulder’, and it is only in the last few days of a recent monks’ sesshin which I attended at Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey that they have been there in my face. I sit with my death: not fearful, not expecting answers. However, there are questions about how to die in the best way possible considering those who seem to love me.

There is a fear of losing my mental capacities. Yes, as I struggle with all the new things I have to learn as I have to do stuff I have not done for years; such as my own cooking, shopping, cleaning, clothes washing, it is a strain on my reserves of energy. Also, living in a different part of the country, things like how the GP's surgery works here, how I get repeat prescriptions, find an NHS dentist etc. etc. weary and dispirit me. Am I up to it? Perhaps I am too old to have made this change! Then there are financial worries and sleepless nights, wondering if I can really afford to live in this Garden House.

Within all this turmoil, I have found the following book most helpful: *Living Is Dying: How to Prepare for Death, Dying and Beyond* by Tibetan teacher Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse. In the preface, there is this quote, "Death exists, not as the opposite but as a part of life."¹

I have to acknowledge, at least to myself, that I hope to die peacefully in my sleep, though I realize that my death may be more challenging than that. Is it wise to share this thought with others? I do not want to make them anxious about their own death! Everything that happens to us in life and death depends on causes and conditions. This can be difficult to accept, as we humans do so want to believe that we are in control. Our focus is so often on ourselves, and not so much on engaging with others with compassion and wisdom. I have come to see that these last years of my life would certainly be more fulfilling if I devoted them to discovering how all

human beings can go beyond both birth and death, and sharing what I learn with others.

Jakusho Kwong, in *Mind Sky: Zen Teaching on Living and Dying*, wrote:

Loss is important in Zen
Usually people try to avoid it at all costs.
Surrender the self by working with loss.
Participate in your loss.
No need to invite it; simply acknowledge it.
You must lose or surrender something to be here.
Let go of your ideas about yourself. Then you
become vividly present.²

He continues with this quote by Chogyam Trungpa, who said: “We don’t have to worry about death because everyone is successful at it.”

Thus we are encouraged to become brave enough to face all the fears we have buried inside. Instead of doing that, we usually bluff ourselves that we are too busy. So very, very busy we forget to ask, “What is the most important thing? What is the great matter?” When it comes to witnessing death, there is no duality. It is always near. No-one knows how long we will live. We have to wake up and be fully aware.

Given this, the question seems to be: “How best to live as fully and engaged with others as possible, rather than distracting myself by details of daily life which do not perhaps need as much attention as I imagine?” Is the fear of loneliness

taking me to places it is better to avoid? As I think this thought, it helps to just know that I am thinking it. Just watch.

Is it true that each person's karma is quite different, so each person's experience of death will be unique? I have to acknowledge, at least to myself, that I keep being nudged to question all Buddhist doctrine. This is scary, as I have nowhere to stand, nothing to rely on, not even others I have admired and trained with. Why was I drawn to Buddhism in the first place? What seems to be needed is go let of ideas about who or what I am, thus allowing me to be vividly present and to face all fears buried inside.

Notes

1. Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse, *Living Is Dying: How to Prepare for Death, Dying and Beyond*. Shambhala Publications, 2020.
2. Jakusho Kwong-Rōshi, *Mind Sky Zen Teaching on Living and Dying*. Wisdom Publications, 2022.

The Buddhist CEO

Thane Lawrie

— Newtonhill, Aberdeenshire – UK —

This is an extract from a novel called The Buddhist CEO which was published in 2022 and written by a member of the lay Sangha, Thane Lawrie. The main character Hamish, is a deeply committed Buddhist; the story details the struggles of practising in the workplace and as a householder, and is loosely based on Thane's own life and career. Several chapters are set at Throssel Hole Abbey. All names in the book are changed, for reasons of privacy.

The story below is part of chapter 7 in the book, and describes Hamish attending the Segaki retreat as he searches for a peaceful antidote to his stressful life. More details about the book follow the article.

CHAPTER 7

Segaki

Breathing in, breathing out
Moving forward, moving back,
Living, dying, coming, going—
Like two arrows meeting in flight,
In the midst of nothingness
Is the road that goes directly
to my true home.

— Gesshu Sōkō (*Death Poem*)

Seven years into my CEO journey, I felt jaded. Despite making positive changes to the company, on every level I felt underappreciated and frustrated.

Those staffing issues never seemed to end. I was continually disappointed and surprised by senior and junior colleagues' conduct and behavior. Is it too much to expect people to be positive and kind to each other? I began to think it was. Did I really want to do this anymore?

I hadn't felt this burnt-out before. I needed a break and some inspiration. I looked at my holiday calendar and could see I still had a lot of holidays to take. I knew what I needed to do, and that was to head to my spiritual home, Throssel Hole. I checked their website to see if they were hosting any organized retreats in October, and thankfully they were holding a week-long retreat called *Segaki*. I had always wanted to attend Segaki, although I had never made it down in the twenty years I'd been practicing. But this was going to be the year.

Segaki is a Japanese word that means "feeding the hungry ghosts." In Buddhism, hungry ghosts can mean a few things. Gakis are often depicted in Buddhist imagery of the six realms as beings with large bellies and long, thin snouts for mouths. It is said that these beings died in confusion, and although they are hungry for the truth and for peace, they cannot consume the Dharma or any form of sustenance due to their long, thin snouts. The snouts represent their ignorance and lack of understanding of how to nourish themselves spiritually. Because of this, they cannot hear or understand true spiritual teaching, and they remain hungry and confused.

The gaki, as well as representing a being who has died in confusion, can also represent confusion in this life. Sometimes we try to consume experiences or material objects, but no matter how much we consume, we never seem to satisfy our hunger for peace and contentment. With the way I was feeling about work, I could certainly identify with a gaki.

I phoned the monastery and spoke with the guest department, who gave me more details about the retreat. Essentially it was going to be sesshin, intensive meditation, focusing on our thoughts and feelings about death, culminating in a beautiful ceremony for the hungry ghosts. I signed up there and then, and I only had four weeks to wait.

I needed silence and peace. I finished work on Wednesday, which gave me a couple of days to relax and to spend time with my wife Beth before I headed for the sesshin. Saturday soon arrived, and it was time to leave. Beth got up early with me, and we ate a cooked breakfast together before I departed. Beth kissed me goodbye.

“You deserve this retreat, Hamish; you really do. Make the most of it.”

I always feel a bit awkward heading off to Throssel on my own without Beth, but she makes it easy. She knows how much the place means to me. I left at 9 a.m. on the Saturday and drove slowly and mindfully down the A90, heading for Edinburgh, which marked the halfway point on my journey. From Edinburgh I headed for Jedburgh in the Scottish Borders. I stopped at the town of Lauder, about twenty-five

miles south of Edinburgh, and took part in what has become an Aberdeen meditation group tradition. This tradition was started by one of our long-standing members, Martin McLean. Everyone stops for a break on their way to Throssel at the Flat Cat Gallery in Lauder. Martin told me this before I first traveled down to Throssel, and I've kept the tradition ever since.

The Flat Cat serves up beautiful food. Its walls are adorned with art from local artists, much of which depicts landscapes and birds, which I love. I sat by the window and let the world drift by for thirty minutes or so. I felt my CEO life slowly dropping away and Throssel's presence drawing ever closer. It sometimes felt like Throssel called out to me, as if it knew when I needed to go. I felt it calling once again.

After finishing my lunch, I browsed through the shop, and my eyes were drawn to a necklace—a silver chain with a circular pendant, which had an intricate tree in the center of it. I was sure Beth would like it.

It had taken me about two hours and forty-five minutes to drive to Lauder, and I had about as long still to go. I enjoyed the drive through the Borders and then headed into Northumberland in Northern England. The North of England has a unique beauty. The mountains are not as high, wild, or rugged as Scotland's, but those rolling, undulating, heather- and fern-covered hills, barren and foreboding, welcomed me.

I arrived at 3 p.m. after about six hours driving and was met by Reverend Claire and Reverend Hubert. They both

gave me a warm welcome, and it felt great to be back in the presence of the monks once again. After exchanging pleasantries, I was shown to my room and told that the retreat would start with a medicine meal at 6 p.m., and I had free time until then.

Most trainees sleep in the meditation hall, but there are about twenty rooms for guests as well. I had felt so tired and drained that I asked the monks if I could have a room to myself.

The room was small with a single bed, wardrobe, small chest of drawers, table with chair, a kettle, and a selection of tea bags. There was a simple white cup and a comfy chair by the window. The Zen tradition emphasizes keeping life minimal. This room was comfortable, tidy, and warm, but it was certainly humble and austere by modern Western standards.

In the far corner was a small altar with a statue of the great and compassionate Bodhisattva Avalokiteshwara. This Bodhisattva is often depicted in female form and stands in her robes, holding a water vase from which she pours forth the waters of compassion on all beings that call for her help. There was also a candle, water bowl, and an artificial plant. The candle illuminates the altar and signifies the light of the Buddhist teachings, the water bowl signifies the purity of the teachings, and the plant represents all living things. I used the matches on the bedside cabinet to light the candle and bowed to the altar, making an offering of the candle to the

Bodhisattva. It is said that Avalokiteshwara is the Bodhisattva of Great Compassion who hears the suffering and cries of the world. I asked her to hear my cries and to help me find peace this week.

I then decided to go for a walk in the monastery grounds. Throssel sits on a very steep slope with a spread of about 500 feet of elevation between the bottom of their grounds to the top. I walked slowly up to the very top where I found a stone seat, and although it was cold, I sat for thirty minutes and took it all in. The roofs of the various monastery buildings protruded from the tall trees below, and all around were the rolling hills of the Pennines. There was no wind, and the world was quiet, not a sound.

Quite unexpectedly, a tear rolled down my cheek. I let the tears flow for a minute or two. Enjoying the moment, the peace, I sensed that I felt ready to let go of something. I had a strong impression that my dog Fudge was with me. Is he one of the reasons for me coming to Segaki? I wondered.

I'm not one to get too excited by tales of mystical experiences, but meditating for twenty-plus years has taught me that occasionally strange things do happen. Amongst other strange incidents, I've had moments of release where it feels that something heavy has left me. Discussing these with the monks, I was always told that they'd had similar encounters, but the key was to just be in the moment with them and move on and not get caught up; this would only encourage clinging to the experience.

However, one other meditation experience that stuck out for me over the years also related to Fudge.

My parents brought my brother and me up to have a deep respect and love of nature. We were an outdoors family, always hiking in the hills and fishing as children. We spent family holidays in Assynt, in the Northwest Highlands of Scotland, where we would camp or caravan in far-flung, remote places like Achiltibuie and Clachtoll. I developed a deep love of nature as a child, and today I still hike and birdwatch. My dad and grandpa were both peaceful men who respected nature deeply, but interestingly, they both had a strong dislike of dogs. As I grew older, this seemed rather incongruous to me. Why did they dislike dogs so much when they were such nature and animal lovers?

This dislike of dogs had passed to me. When Beth first met me, she was amazed at how dogs reacted to me when we walked together. I could be minding my own business in the park, and a dog would run up to me out of nowhere and start barking aggressively. I was never outwardly cruel or hurtful to dogs; I just didn't like them, and somehow, they knew.

A few months after I began meditating seriously, I started seeing an image of a dog in my mind, feeling its presence when I meditated. At first, I thought it was my mind playing tricks on me. But the dog remained present for several years, and I realized that I wasn't imagining this; the dog was trying to tell me something.

One day I told Beth that I felt we were meant to have a dog. She was, of course, surprised to hear me of all people say I wanted a dog. Eventually the kids reached a certain age where they too started to ask for one. Beth had grown up with dogs and was keen to get one. We discovered that a local farm bred pedigree working cocker spaniels, and we were fortunate enough to be given the first choice from a recent litter.

One dog stood out to us all. There was this beautiful, dark-brown puppy sitting in the middle of his four siblings, who were all black with a little white. I knelt and lifted him out of the litter and held him up so Beth and the boys could see him. He was ridiculously cute. On closer inspection we could see that he was not completely brown; he had white on his chest and a small white patch on his nose. The boys looked at him, delight in their eyes, and said in unison, "I want that one." Beth and I both smiled; it was decided. This little dog was going to become the latest member of our family. We had to wait a few weeks to pick him up, but it was not long before we took him home. We all fell in love with this beautiful creature, and the boys named him Fudge. They were eleven when we got him.

Fudge became the centre of many of our weekends. The working cocker spaniel is bred to be a gun dog spending long days out in the hills, so it is hardy and full of stamina and energy. Fudge liked nothing better than to go on long walks. The longer, the better. We took him up hills and mountains and marvelled at his energy as he sped off like lightning to chase after birds and rabbits. He never seemed to tire, and we all loved his company. He rarely barked, was great with

strangers, and was very obedient. He would sit, lie down, roll over, and stop when commanded. He was simply the perfect dog.

My relationship with dogs changed instantly. When I walked Fudge, other dogs didn't look at me anymore. When I was out walking on my own and came upon a dog, they didn't bark at me or act aggressively. At the same time, dogs stopped appearing in my meditation. I can't explain this rationally; it was like something had left me, and I had a strong intuition that I'd cleansed a karmic inheritance related to dogs. I wanted to find out more about why my dad and grandpa had developed this dislike of dogs in the first place.

I asked my dad about the origin of this aversion, especially considering his clear love for Fudge. He explained that he'd never really thought about it before but that his dad had always been very wary and dismissive of dogs. I asked why, and my dad suggested that I speak to my grandma about it. My grandfather had died six years before we got Fudge, but my grandma was still alive and in good health. Though I often went round to see her, I hadn't been in months; work got in the way. But today I wanted to ask about my grandfather.

I was always slightly nervous speaking to her about my grandpa, in case it upset her. They'd been deeply in love and enjoyed a sixty-year marriage together, and she still missed him deeply. When I arrived at her house and rang the bell, I was met by a beaming smile and a huge hug and kiss on the

cheek. This was a smile that I'd loved all my life, and I still delighted in being in her presence.

She was small, about five foot two, and very thin but not frail. Her beaming face was kind and friendly, and a youthfulness shone through her sparkling blue eyes. As I expected, a plate of cakes and biscuits awaited me, and she shuffled off into the kitchen and came back into the room with a pot of tea, which would be served in fine china cups. We sat sipping our tea, and she asked me how I was getting on, how Beth and the boys were, and how work was going. Once she'd finished telling me all her news, she asked, "But what brings you round, Hamish? I haven't seen you in a while."

"This might seem like a strange question, but I've been wondering about why me, Dad, and Grandpa all have, or in my case had, a dislike of dogs." My grandma looked a bit surprised, and I could tell she was intrigued. "My goodness, Hamish, what on earth got you thinking about that?" she laughed. I explained my story about the dog appearing in meditation and how dogs used to act aggressively towards me and how this had stopped now that I had my own dog.

My grandma knew that I was a Buddhist, and she was quite supportive of this. She had her own Christian faith but was interested in any story that had a spiritual dimension. She was fascinated with my theory about some sort of karmic link between me, Dad, Grandpa, and dogs. I explained that when we got Fudge, it was almost like this link was cleansed, and whatever this thing was with dogs, I had let go of it for good. Did she know why Grandpa had such a dislike for dogs?

“Ah yes, now, that’s true. Your grandpa did not like dogs. Now I hear you say it out loud, I suppose it does seem odd.” Her smile extended at the edges as she thought of the man she loved, but there was also sadness in her eyes. “He loved birds, just like you. He could name them all, and he loved plants and trees, and he would have walked in the hills every day of his life had he not had to work.” She took a deep breath. “But I think I can enlighten you as to where this dislike of dogs came from.” I sat upright, eager to hear the story she was about to tell.

“You know your grandpa George fought in the Second World War and he served as a soldier in the Gordon Highlanders regiment?” I nodded. “Well, he fought in a famous and terrible battle at St. Valery in Northern France in 1940. It was a terrible and brutal battle that he rarely spoke of.” Her voice broke as she recalled these events, and a tear ran down her cheek. She touched my hand and smiled. “Hamish, I want to tell you this story as it makes me proud of him. He came through a lot, and I admire him for it. War is upsetting, but that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t speak about it.” I sat back and listened.

“He went off to join the army at age nineteen. He had no choice; all able-bodied men were conscripted.” “How did he feel about that? It must have been awful,” I said.

“It was a strange time for us both. We had only met about a year before, in the summer of 1938, and we fell deeply in love, and life seemed wonderful, but then there was talk of war with Hitler.” Her voice broke again, and tears flowed

down her cheeks. She paused for a moment. “I haven’t talked about these things for some time, Hamish. It’s amazing how strong the memories still are. I remember those days as if they only happened yesterday.”

She continued, “I remember when Chamberlain, the British prime minister, announced to the nation that we were entering war against Hitler. I sat round the radio with my family, listening intently, and my heart sank when I heard Chamberlain say that all able-bodied men between the age of eighteen and forty-one were to be conscripted into the army within the next few months. I thought of George and wondered how he was feeling about the news. We met later that evening and cried together at the thought of being parted.”

My poor grandma was truly upset now, and I felt uncomfortable, so I offered to make tea. As I made a pot, Grandma dried her eyes and visited the bathroom. I felt awful for putting her through this, but she seemed determined to continue, and I was riveted by her story. We finished our tea and cake, and she looked refreshed and composed and keen to continue her moving story.

“My George was such a quiet, kind, and peaceful man, I just could not imagine him fighting. He would do anything he could to avoid a fight, and here he was, going off to war. It just seemed incredible and unfair. We had a life to lead and dreams for the future, and now the prime minister was telling me that the man I loved was being taken from me to go and

fight a war that had nothing to do with me or George. It was awful, truly awful.

“At the time, though, there was a strong sense of patriotism and that going to fight was doing the right thing for the country. I suppose we would call it propaganda now, but lots of messages on billboards and in newspapers were telling young people how brave they were to go to war and that they would be heroes. Although your grandfather was scared, he got caught up in this nonsense about being a hero and doing the right thing for Britain. I went along with this as I didn’t want to dent his spirits before he left me.” Tears streamed down her cheeks again as she said, “I didn’t know if I would ever see him again, and I wanted us to part on good terms.”

There was a long pause before she continued. “We got married three weeks before he left for the war. When the day came, off he went. Little did I know then that the only thing I would hear of him for the next five years would be a letter, smuggled out by the Red Cross, I received from him in 1942, saying he was still alive and that he thought of me every day. Then, in 1945, at the end of the war, I didn’t know if he was dead or alive until I heard a knock at the door, and there he stood in his army uniform. If memory serves me right, I fainted when I saw him.

“He told me about his time in the war over the first few weeks after he returned. It was like he needed to get his story out. Once it was out, though, he rarely spoke about it ever again.

“George told me something of the fight at St. Valery. Fourteen thousand Gordon Highlanders were ordered to defend the town to let other British troops retreat to Dunkirk from the advancing German army. Fighting raged for several days until the Gordon Highlanders were overrun and had to surrender. Of the fourteen thousand troops, only ten thousand still stood at the end of the battle. He told me that all the troops were rounded up and taken down to the beach. He was then taken to Poland as a prisoner of war, to a camp, I think it was called a stalag, near the city of Lodz, where he was forced to build roads for the next five years.

“This is where he encountered dogs. As he was marched to Poland, he had to walk a lot of the way, and was only put into trucks or buses for parts of the journey. As the soldiers marched, he told me that they were constantly marshalled by guards, who all had Alsatian dogs. These dogs would bark at them, and if someone got tired and started to lag, the dogs would bite their legs. George said there was no respite from these dogs, and they were always watching and looking for weakness.

“Once he arrived in Poland and was put to work building roads, they were set to work at 6am and they worked until about 6 or 7pm before they were bussed back again to camp. George said that guards stood by all day, watching them as they worked, and most of them had these fierce Alsatian dogs. As soon as someone paused or stopped for a break, the guard would approach with his dog, and it would snap and bite the prisoner. He said all the prisoners hated these dogs.”

Grandma finished her story, and we both sat in silence. Her eyes were red from crying, and I felt a tear in my eye too. We let the pause continue comfortably for a while, sipping our tea and composing ourselves. Eventually she broke the silence.

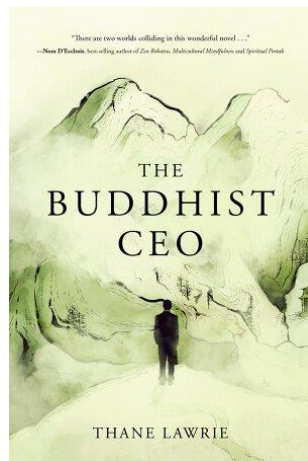
“Hamish, that’s all I can tell you about your grandpa just now, but I’m fascinated by your question and this connection to dogs you think has been passed down to you. You said that you thought it had left you now?”

“Yes,” I replied. “Good. Well, I hope it’s helped my George in some way too,” she said. I thought of this conversation as I sat at the top of the monastery grounds, but I grew cold and headed back down to the monastery...

* * *

The chapter continues with Hamish joining the Segaki retreat, and finding his mind beginning to quieten. He reconnects with his practice on a level he has not experienced for some time. He questions his life – especially work; how did he get into the position of being a CEO, with all the stress that comes with it? Deep down he realises his strongest wish is to practice the Dharma.

The *Buddhist CEO* is available from thanelawrie.com or directly from Amazon, Blackwells online or Waterstones online, or from Barnes and Noble in the US.



On and On and On Forever

Julia Langley, Lay Minister OBC

— *Dumfriesshire, Scotland – UK* —

This title may be taken as sounding rather weary, dreary and depressed, or as a statement of positive basic Buddhist training. Both are true for me, and I will continue this training forever. It may not match up with my ideal of being wholehearted, but it will continue. I'm never impressed by articles written as if saying, "There we are, that's sorted", because I find everything so very not sorted and there's no point in pretending that it is. But I can let go of bitterness and anger – that I *can* do. The tightness of those things is my pain and vice versa.

Six months ago I moved house. Six hard and frightened months when I have taken refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha with all my heart. I managed to up my half-hour sittings from one to two a day, and attended our meditation group which was a big support. I went to the Abbey less than usual, and missed being on retreat there, but always felt the monks' kindness and sympathy behind me.

When people have asked if I am settling in, I have said "No". But maybe now I am starting to settle in; I had a house blessing ceremony and now have a Buddhist name for my flat. I loved my old house, the garden and the housemates. When

I realised it had to end, I was clinging to them fiercely. I think I am still clinging to them. This grief comes and goes, making some days long.

Sometime during one of the covid lockdowns one of my housemates wrote us a letter saying that she did not want to live with us forever. My other housemate and I had assumed we *would* live there forever, and unfortunately we did not have the money to buy out the other housemate. Then it became both of my housemates who were moving, and both of them fell ill and the house had to be sold. I realised that the house had to go on the market as quickly as possible – winter was coming and houses do not sell in winter. I think my years of meditation allowed me to make this total change from, “No, I refuse to move”, to “Okay I will move now”. I knew it had to be done, it could not wait.

The housemates brought in furniture removals and moved out, and we found agents for selling the house. I had to clean and paint the house which was horribly hard work. This badly hurt my back and my resentment boiled up of course. The house was on the market at the beginning of September 2022; our agent was kind and helpful and I kept up the house-tidying and the meditation during the period when people were coming for a viewing. At times I stopped showing people around the house, because they obviously didn't love the house as much as I did and that upset me. The agent kindly did these viewings for free.

This went on and on, I slept less and less, and my anxiety grew more and more. In January 2023 we had an offer while

I was at the Abbey helping in the kitchen for the Winter Sangha Retreat, and we housemates ran around frantically, but then the offer was withdrawn. Then there was more tidying for people coming to view and more days of just getting up in the morning and keeping up my meditation. I was also working out if I would have enough money to buy somewhere which would enable me to stay living in lovely Castle Douglas. Incredibly our house had doubled in value and the way we housemates were sharing meant that with my savings and two small loans I would have just enough. I put in an offer for a flat with an attic and garden just over the road but sadly lost it because our house did not sell quickly enough.

Within my panic and distress I think I managed to stay calm and sensible enough – thanks to my practice – to look at what would happen if the house was sold and I had nowhere to live. I asked a friend if I could stay in his house if I had nowhere else, and he very kindly said yes. I thought of paying to put my goods into storage, and I started putting gardening equipment into my neighbour's shed which they kindly agreed to. People were very generous with me in my troubles and I stayed aware enough to take them up on their offers. Without meditation and the Precepts to guide me I would have been overwhelmed by anxiety.

Although the removal van had been in, there was a vast amount of wood and other things to move out of the garden shed. A couple of friends appreciated receiving the wood for their stove. My poor housemate was a big collector, and he

died before he could move all his stuff. He became very ill at the end of 2022, with two blood diseases, and died in March 2023. I did a great deal of crying and gnashing of teeth at his funeral. His partner is still crying.

A few years ago I was given a beautiful mala of amethyst and crystal beads with a little double vajra joining the string. I have quite a few malas but have not worn them much until now. I vaguely thought that the vajra is a thunderbolt symbol and I looked it up in *The Shambala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen*. What a wonderful surprise to read the description:

In Buddhism it is not a weapon but a symbol of the indestructible, for this reason it is translated as ‘diamond’ or ‘adamantine’.... Here it stands for true reality, emptiness (*shūnyatā*), the being or essence of everything existing. This emptiness is indestructible like diamond, i.e. imperishable and unborn or uncreated. The spotless purity and translucency of the diamond symbolises the perfect spotlessness of emptiness, untainted by all the appearances that arise out of it.... This emptiness, however, is not different from things, from all phenomena. it is one and identical with them.¹

Isn't that joyous! The vajra hangs round my neck to remind me. This 'little me' shudders and fears – so what! My meditation teaches me to keep going.

During the year of moving I stopped growing vegetables and instead sowed wild flowers, and the strawberries and

raspberries in the garden were prolific and delicious. We had two offers for the house so we got the price we wanted after the agent had been advising us to lower it because it was taking so long to sell. It took a year. We were very lucky, although there were complications and more stops and starts. We kept wondering, “Will the buyer change his mind...?”

And at the same time I was viewing a flat and two houses. The houses were ugly and in less-than-ideal locations. This flat has plenty of light and tall ceilings. My eldest son said I should not have a first floor flat with stairs in which to grow old and infirm. “He has a point”, I thought, when I had my seventy-seventh birthday at the end of September. But the stairs are shallow and wide, with a strong bannister to hang on to. My other sons, my daughter-in-law and a friend liked it, and I liked it even more on the second visit. And somehow I was going to move out of our house and into the flat on the same day, 30th August, with the help of my sons. It worked, although one son had to go back home to the Czech Republic and come back in a month. It happened with the help of expensive and efficient removals, my sons and good friends. All my boxes, bookshelves and tables and chairs were all over the place in the new flat, which was in a big red sandstone house built in 1860.

I was feeling really feeble after the move, which was probably not helped by becoming an insulin-using diabetic a couple of years ago. It seemed there was such a lot to manage for my body – no let up. And there was nowhere to keep my electric bike – the shed was too small – so I would have to pay for a new shed to be built. Six months later and the bike

is in its fine new home of green metal sheeting, with a golden finial over the door and a handmade hook to hold the door open, all costing £1,400. Yes, my meditation is still saying, “Just keep going.”

My two sons came to stay a month after the move and set about some D.I.Y., and making garden beds out of planks I had bought from my previous neighbours’ old fences, and bags of compost which were all carried by the removals people. My cheerful sons put up the little greenhouse, and dug and paved round the old garden shed to stop water pooling.

A dreadful thing happened, however: My son living in the Czech Republic badly injured his eye while he was here. He might have lost his eye, but it is healing well now after six months and soon he will get a new lens. It has been very difficult for him being unable to work or drive. His father, sister, brother and nephew have just been over there to cheer him on, with success, I think.

Will I make a garden here? Will I have the equanimity and strength to stay the course? The beds are covered in compost, seaweed and cardboard hopefully rotting down the turf to make soil for vegetables, raspberries, shrubs and flowers. There are pots with plants in them from the old house. When the sun is out, I feel a twinkle of the old gardening urge and I am stronger now. Blackbirds have been digging up a bit of the mulch on the beds as they always do. Two trees have been cut down, with the cost of the work being shared by my very kind neighbour who had to have the holly

tree cut down because it was too near her house, so now the sunlight shining from the west in the afternoon is unhindered.

Will I make a life alone? I sent cards to my neighbours at Christmas time and joined a choir. Sparrows enjoy the bird food in the tray stuck to my bedroom window, and I enjoy watching them. The other Buddhist in town invites me out to coffee nearly every week, and I think he has stopped trying to convert me to his type of Buddhism(!) I'm cycling over to visit a friend in a village where I once lived. It is actually nice living in the middle of town over a charity shop with a view of the hills *Scree* and *Ben Gairn*. "Just keep going." And will I find ever find out what 'settling in' means...?

I am so grateful for my fifty years of training with the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives and so grateful for my twenty years with my housemates. My meditation and training are allowing my heart to soften from the rigid resentment I felt when I thought I was losing so much. And my practice continues to teach me to keep going on and on.

Note

1. Fischer-Schreiber, Ingrid; Ehrhard, Franz-Karl & Diener, Michael S.: *The Shambala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen*, (Michael H. Kohn, trans.) Shambala, Boston, 1991. P. 241.

Repetitions

Rev. Master Seikai Luebke

— *Pine Mountain Buddhist Temple, Santa Paula, CA – USA* —

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What is human life if not hundreds and thousands of little cycles that repeat continuously? Our planet spins on its axis, one revolution of which we call a day, divided into the light half of daylight and the night half of darkness. Our planet also orbits its star, one revolution of which we call a year. Our moon makes one trip around the planet every 29.5 days, a month. It has been estimated that this has been going on for something like 3½ billion years, an almost unfathomable number. By comparison, a human life of 80 years is nothing.

Within our brief lives, if we did live for 80 years, that would amount to 29,220 cycles of light and darkness. We take a day and arbitrarily divide it up into 24 hours, and an hour into 60 minutes—1,440 minutes total. Most of those minutes are spent doing the same things, over and over, that we did in the previous several thousand. However much we may long for life to be novel and exciting, the fact is that it is composed almost entirely of cycles which we've experienced already

thousands of times. If we are constantly wishing for something else to happen and are bored with the endless repetition of cycles, we will be deeply unhappy.

What this means is that in order not to feel suffocated and bored by the endless repetitions of our lives, we have to pay closer attention to our cycles and look for the subtle variations that exist within them. No two days are identical. They undoubtedly follow a predictable pattern, but within the pattern lots of different things can and do happen. I suspect that people who are bored, and find it necessary to do intensely entertaining things, are not really paying attention to life as it is without the externally induced excitement. Motorcyclists, for instance, often say that the sheer speed of riding, of being so close to the possibility of dying, makes them feel fully alive. But can we feel fully alive living an ordinary daily life?

Within a day of 1,440 minutes, we breathe approximately 20,000 times at an average of about 14 breaths per minute. The heart, meanwhile, is beating at about five times that rate, meaning that just to stay alive, the bare-boned irreducible cycles of our existence involve 20,000 breaths and 100,000 heart beats in a day. We may be only vaguely aware of any of them. Contemplating that this is what lies at the root of our existence ought to give us a renewed appreciation for the ongoing miracle of human life. We aren't really in control of the natural functions of the human body, meaning that they are, in essence, a gift. What we do with this priceless gift, of course, determines whether we will live in gratitude for it, or be struggling against what we can't control, always wanting more.

To one degree or another we all feel some level of alienation from the natural world. Most people live in cities and spend little if any time in natural surroundings or wilderness. There is a movement gaining traction right now called ‘forest bathing’, which is to spend a period of time in a forest environment, simply taking it in: the air, the birds, the tranquility. This is said to be an antidote for the stresses of modern life, including alienation from nature, from feeling that we are not a part of it or of an integrated whole of life forms. I would think that taking a nature break, or some form of being outdoors in trees, shrubs, grass and flowers, would be essential for basic human mental and emotional health.

But I also think that we can take it back one whole step from that, which is to just breathe. Mindful breathing is an important aspect of Buddhist meditation practice, and of Yogic disciplines because it is really the most basic cycle of our existence; without it we die in a matter of minutes. We cannot live without breathing: the wise human makes a virtue of necessity and uses breathing as the doorway into being in touch with yourself as you truly are. Given that we spend way too much time wrapped up in what is going on in our brains, we need to find a way out of this particular cyclical pattern, that of being lost in distracted thinking about one thing after another, one feeling, one mood, one memory, one annoyance, one fear after another. Are humans meant to be this way, lost in thought? I don’t think so.

One critical distinction to be made here regards whether feeling fully alive necessarily means feeling good or excited. If we make this assumption, then we have a problem because

nobody feels good or excited all the time; at best those feelings happen on occasion. However, the other possibility to consider is that we might be able to feel fully alive no matter what we are feeling, which is to say that even if you are having a bad day—or perhaps even a bad week, a bad year or a bad life—you can still, within that, be fully alive with it. The challenge is to fully accept whatever we experience, and acceptance doesn't seem to come naturally. It is something we have to practice, and for me the practice starts with just breathing.

Meditation isn't any more complicated than just sitting and breathing in and out. We tend to make it much more complicated because we think meditation should be something in particular, such as peaceful or blissful. I used to have to remind myself over and over to “just sit with what is, right here and now.” So, I learned to just sit with breathing, and I learned to regard whatever else arose in my mind as just the background noise of being alive.

Sitting or lying down and just breathing is my go-to practice no matter what I happen to be feeling on any given day. We sit in meditation formally every morning; after that I usually sit in my reclining chair. If I am tired or working on letting go of some very deep-rooted fatigue, I breathe deeply using this mantra: “Pure energy of the universe I breathe in, fatigue and frustration I breathe out.” This is quite effective. It puts my body and mind together as a whole and directly heals what I typically experience as my core difficulty. If you are plagued by stress, which so many people are, you could think, “Pure energy I breathe in, stress I breathe out.”

A day is the basic cycle of living in which we need to attend to whatever makes it possible to live a sane and happy life. I don't ever go a day without meditation or breathing practice. I don't ever go a day without walking my dog, usually three times. Most days I spend at least a little bit of time in the garden. Every day we interact with other people, at work or at home with family members, almost anywhere we go. Once again acceptance is the primary challenge, just accepting people as they are, even if we find them annoying or abrasive. And if you have an unpleasant, stressful social interaction, probably the most helpful thing to do right in that moment is to take a deep breath. Breathing deeply is simply relaxing. A big sigh is probably our innate, automatic response to moments of anxiety or frustration—the body intuitively knows what to do. You are collecting up a bit of energy to face whatever the difficulty happens to be.

Most people have a good idea what things they really ought to be doing. It isn't as if we are completely unaware that we really should get enough exercise; that it would be better if we ate less food which is really cholesterol-laden, sweet or full of strange-sounding chemical additives; that we should get a good amount of sleep at night, and so on. I have taught a lot of people how to meditate, or taught people who have some experience of it but say they can't seem to stick with the practice. Usually because their minds are too unruly—it is too hard. The underlying issue here is that we need to put knowledge into practice, and it's so easy to put it off. We're too busy; we just don't have enough time. But actually, from my own experience, I can say for certain that time is not the problem: the problem is with grasping the will.

1440 minutes is a lot of minutes, and if we are truly determined to set aside five or ten of them for sitting quietly, we can do it. And it doesn't matter that the mind is unruly because no matter what the mind does, you can still sit down and breathe deeply and exhale. Having taken one breath you can easily do two. And three. Once you make a determined effort, grasping the will it takes to just sit there, pretty soon it becomes apparent that there is plenty of time for it, but we tend to create excuses for why it can't be done. This seems to be a universal human problem.

There is an old saying in Zen Buddhism, going back at least to Great Master Dōgen: “The secret of life is will; words are its key.” First we need to be inspired by something. Interestingly, the word inspire literally means ‘to breathe in.’ On a spiritual level, we need to breathe, just as we need to breathe in air continuously. Often it is just the right combination of words which inspires us, but it can also be a good example on the part of a virtuous person; either way, we have a moment of realizing that “Oh, yes! This is a noble and worthy thing to do, and I'd like to give it my time and attention.” I believe it is a function of the universe—or perhaps you could say the Buddha Nature in all things—that it provides us with inspiration at times when we are in need of it. I couldn't possibly count all the times in my life as a monk in which some little piece of teaching sparked off something in me, serving as motivation to undertake what I know in my heart I needed to do. Almost always, the undertaking is a big challenge. Cleaning up the mountain of my karma has always been the primary task: I've never been able to avoid or get around it somehow, I have to reassert my

willingness, again and again, to face it, embrace it, and purify it.

This requires grasping the will—and willingness. On one level this isn't any different from going to the gym and lifting weights. You set the machine for a weight that you can reasonably lift and then perform however many repetitions the training requires. On a deeper level, the spiritual level, it seems that we always need a measure of willingness just to get in there and take the next step. So often we think we can't do something because it's too daunting, or we have tried and failed already so many times. On the other hand, it is the willingness itself, the honest attempt, that makes all the difference. And if you persist, the weight seems to lighten more and more over time, same as in the gym. Success depends on not giving in to apathy or despair, but just taking one step—one repetition. The oft-repeated saying is true: "The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step". And, throughout those thousand miles, we keep propelling ourselves forward with one tiny bit of inspiration and will at a time.

Over time this process, which is by nature repetitive, becomes more 'second nature'. You spend far less time thinking about it, or entertaining notions of giving up, or wondering why it doesn't go any faster. Life is a stream which keeps changing, sometimes fast, sometimes slow; sometimes murky, sometimes clear. Feeling fully alive isn't so much about going fast or being thrilled, which confines us to such a small part of the whole cycle. It is more about seeing all aspects of your life as intrinsically equal, all of it worthy of

the same care and attention, all of it worthy of loving kindness.

I once asked my Zen teacher what was the relationship between love and will. The question arose because at that point, grasping the will was something I could do but, although people talked about love, I felt like I didn't understand its role in training. I have no memory of what her answer was. But the mere fact of my searching for an answer, that I was looking for a deeper integration of two things that seemed distinct at the time, opened a door to realizing the answer for myself. Eventually it became clear that love, or loving kindness, was essential for practicing without selfishness. It was what made it possible to embrace things as they are as opposed to what I wanted them to be. It is so easy to go along with a very subtle agenda of what we want, almost always some kind of idealism about the best way for things to be, the best way for people to be. Just seeing that agenda isn't easy, but we are sure to run up against it eventually and have to make a choice of whether we're ready to let go of it or not.

When they are in harmony, love and will make a great combination. It is mostly a matter of having the key of life turned just enough that we see this is true and make the conscious choice to exercise them. After a while the very repetitiveness, the little bit of effort, becomes our friend, and, "We've done this before—we know we can do it again."

A Report on Throssel's Poetry and Practice Retreat, March 2024

Annie Harrison

— *Hexham, Northumberland – UK* —

About twenty participants came to Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey for the second Poetry and Practice Weekend Retreat in March. We gathered for our first session in the common room on the Friday, where we discussed our hopes and expectations for the retreat. The focus of the weekend was the practice of writing and reading as ‘potential paths of awareness’, as discussed in the essay, *The Zen of Jane Hirshfield*¹ (an interview by Noelle Oxenhandler), which had been distributed beforehand. There would be two workshops, with opportunities for practice and reflection within the Throssel daily schedule.

Our facilitators, Kathleen Madigan and Alex Reed, were clear there would be no expectation of producing polished poems, nor any pressure to share our writing. A wide selection of contemporary poetry books was made available to browse over the weekend, and for me, it was a particular pleasure to discover the work of unfamiliar poets during our rest periods.

Kathleen's workshop on Saturday began with a discussion on the flexibility of forms such as haiku and haibun and its echoes in the work of the imagist poets. We read Chinese poems in translation: *Egrets* by Tu Mu (9th C) and *One Heart* by contemporary poet Li Young Lee. Kathleen then invited us to respond to our first prompt; a 'free write' reflecting on Bashō's death poem:

Sick on the journey
my dreams wander
over withered fields

Our second prompt was *The Red Wheelbarrow*² by William Carlos Williams:

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens

Finally, after reading a poem by Izumi Shikibu (10th C):

It is true,
the wind blows terribly here –
but moonlight
also leaks between the roof planks
of this ruined house

we set to with the final prompt: ‘there is...but also there is’. Again, we were invited to share these early drafts.

Our session with Alex began with a group discussion about ambiguity in poetry through a reading of Jane Hirshfield’s poem, *You Go to Sleep in One Room and Wake in Another*.³ This was followed by a few minutes of free writing, beginning with the phrase, ‘Today I am’. We went on to discuss Joe Brainard’s experimental memoir: a list of moments from his childhood and youth prefixed with the phrase ‘I remember’. This was the model for our next piece of writing, which several participants shared with the group.

Alex’s final prompt followed a brief discussion of how the musician John Cage used techniques such as the *I Ching* to generate randomness and chance in his work. Similarly, British polymath Brian Eno has developed *Oblique Strategies*, a card-based method for promoting creativity. With this approach in mind, we were given a random choice of a single line of poetry picked from an envelope to stimulate our final piece of writing.

During tea with Rev. Master Berwyn on Sunday, many of us shared drafts of work from the weekend, or other poems we brought from home. During the retreat, I was reminded

how reading and writing poetry, as with meditation, brings home both a challenging intimacy and attention to our human connectedness.

As Jane Hirshfield says:

Intimacy arises by the permeability inside your own life. We're here, we're in these bodies, we're in these minds, we're in these hearts, we're in these spirits. You walk through the world on your own two feet, with your own tongue and your own eyes.⁴

Deep gratitude to Rev. Master Berwyn and also our generous facilitators Alex Reed and Kathleen Madigan for their guidance and encouragement.

* * *

Supplemental: Some contributions offered at the Poetry and Practice retreat March 2024. (All copyright of the author.)

Crow

wiping
the hill's
face

welcome!

black as
was
my hair

Ibnat Ibn as-Sakkān

English version by Mark Rowan, based on a Spanish translation of the Arabic original by Teresa Garulo, in Diwan de las poetisas de Al-Ándalus (Poesía Hiperión), Madrid 1986.

Awaken

if I were to walk now
to the river's edge
sit
and touch my toe
to the cold water's surface
it would send small circles
radiating
like radio waves
both on the water
and also in my heart
the same would happen
if you walked by
unexpectedly
and I looked up surprised
..... and delighted
or the temple bell rang

crisp and clear
penetrating the swirling fog of discontent
there are myriad ways
of calling me home
the eternal beckoning
the invitation without end

Kate Bevan Baker

The Pure Land is Within*

For Reverend Master Saidō Kennaway

Life

his new-year bell
rings through suburbia's
brittle air

explaining
bodhisattvas and a city's
sewage system

Death

bright
in the cold wind: first
almond blossom

Memorial

from the stupa's
incense bowl: a cloud
of all our offerings

freshly planted
apple tree its roots growing through
the master's ashes

dandelion seeds
waiting
for the wind

Fred Schofield.

With love and in gasshō

(First published in the [Jade Mountains blog](#))

*In June 2022 Reverend Master Saidō gave a talk at a Regional Sangha Day retreat in Leeds. He kept coming back to this phrase.

Notes

- <https://www.lionsroar.com/zen-jane-hirshfield/>
- The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams, Volume I, 1909-1939*, Christopher MacGowan, ed. New Directions, 1938.
- Hirshfield, Jane, *Ledger: Poems*. Bloodaxe, New York; 2020. p. 25.
- <https://agnionline.bu.edu/conversation/zen-and-the-art-of-poetry-an-interview-with-jane-hirshfield/>

News of the Order

Europe

Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey

— *Northumberland, England – UK* —

Jukai: Ten lay trainees came to receive lay ordination from Rev. Master Berwyn at this annual retreat. Our congratulations go to Dave Bearman, Violet Brand, Michelle Clarke, Milan Joshi, Karl



O'Hare, Simon Parry, Andrew Scott, Jesus Villar, Cathy Welch and David Wilson on taking the Precepts and becoming disciples of the Buddha. The photo here shows the early stages of the Ketchimyaku ceremony, in which the Precepts Master sets off unannounced, carrying their begging bowl, whilst those who are willing to follow join the procession, thus showing their willingness to go wherever their training takes them.

This year's **Wesak** was attended by a large number of people, many of whom also enjoyed the activities of the Friends and Family Weekend on the previous day. Sessions for youngsters which included origami, stone painting (pictured here) and Frisbee Golf proved to be highlights, as did the lunchtime barbecue. Rev. Master Jishin was celebrant for the Festival Ceremony, and she also gave a Dharma talk afterwards – complete with an impressive visual teaching aid.



(A video of the talk is [on Throssel's website.](#))



We were delighted to receive a visit from former abbot Rev. Master Daishin who came for a ten-day stay in April-May. This coincided with the 50th anniversary of his monastic ordination which warranted a celebration. Thus a delicious meal was prepared by the kitchen monks plus volunteers, and monks and lay residents alike were treated to a most enjoyable sociable feast. Four former Throssel

monks travelled up especially for the occasion: Rev. Masters Favian, Aiden, Leandra and Leoma – very welcome visitors.

Rev. Master Leandra stayed for a while longer in order to join the Community for our Spring monks' sesshin. This time of quiet and stillness was, as always, very valuable for us, providing spiritual renewal and refreshment.

We held a 'Poetry and Practice' weekend retreat at the end of March. Please see the article on [page 51](#) for a full report.

In the last couple of months, two junior members of the monastic Sangha, Rev. Kanshin and Rev. Myōren, have decided their future training would be best carried out as lay trainees, so they departed the temple in April and May respectively. We wish them well, and look forward to seeing them attend retreats at Throssel in future, as is their intention.

Retreatants planning to come to Throssel soon are advised that we are now using the new 'gender neutral' wording for several daily Scriptures which was approved at the September 2023 OBC Monastic Gathering. The booklets in the ceremony hall have been replaced by updated versions, so the (few, small) changes are easy to adapt to. Copies of the booklets are also available [to buy in our shop](#).

— *Rev. Master Roland*

The Place of Peace Dharma House

— *Aberystwyth, Wales – UK* —

May: On the 5th offerings of gratitude were made for all that Wesak means, and how that meaning is constantly revealing itself throughout a lifetime of training.



Retreats: It was good to welcome Moira Pagan, who came from Australia for a private retreat. Fair weather enabled a tidy up of the front garden, and the rear garden Kanzeon statue was cleaned.

We continue with our regular Dharma meetings and have offered spiritual counselling, conducted via Zoom, with individual trainees who live further afield. Being able to see, as well as speak to each other, is welcomed.

New Computer: So that Rev. Master Myōhō can continue to offer the *Dharma Reflections* talks on the best equipment, we recently received the gift of a new, state-of-the-art computer, along with a mouse, Bluetooth headphones, lapel mic and Yeti free-standing mic, and an external drive for recording CDs. Steve Roberts, from the Newcastle Group, kindly suggested making this offering and organized a collection from lay trainees, who donated extremely generously. He also sourced all of the items, taking care that they were suitable for recording Dharma talks, and other temple needs.

Steffan Jones, our local computer expert, who offers his time so gladly, installed and updated all the programs we use and transferred data from the old computer, ensuring that Rev. Myōhō knew how to use it, and the new equipment. Thank you to everyone who was involved in this offering, which is used daily.

Dharma Reflections Talks: These monthly talks are sent out by email as MP3s, which provides the opportunity to include written Dharma, pictures of iconography and other items. The talks are a freely-given offering. We do not sell the Dharma. Many who take them choose to make donations to the temple, which is appreciated, but that is not in any way a requirement. If you would

like to receive these talks, please contact Rev. Master Myōhō at placeofpeacewalesinfo@gmail.com.

Work and Maintenance: Earlier in the year wild storms blew down several fence panels in the rear garden and they have been replaced with new composite ones. It is a shared fence and our neighbour, Steve Simkins, kindly organised it all and installed the new panels.

Rev. Myōhō finished making, and painting, our kitchen shrine for Lord Skanda, the Lord of argument and disease, who guards the kitchen stove. A battery-operated light illuminates the statue from above, so it can be on all night.

Donations: Thank you to everyone who helps to support the temple in a variety of ways. We are grateful to John Adams for his invaluable assistance with our accounts and to Gordon Jones who offers help on a regular basis.



— Rev. Master Myōhō

Norwich Zen Buddhist Priory

— Norwich, England – UK —

The winter and spring have been punctuated by major festivals and ceremonies of the Buddhist calendar: the Festival of the Buddha's Enlightenment in December; the New Year Ceremony; and Wesak, the Festival of the Buddha's Birth, in May. These were all opportunities to come together to express our gratitude for the practice and being able to live a life rooted in meditation and the Precepts, which leads us towards the end of suffering.

The heavy rain in early January had an impact on the River Wensum, which flows a short distance from the front door of the Priory. The river breached its banks in many places along its route and flooded adjacent fields and meadows, including those near the Priory. Our property was never threatened but the scene from the house was altered for a few days.



It was a pleasure to welcome Rev. Master Olwen to the Priory for a short stay in February. She was helping Rev. Gareth transport some furniture from the Reading Priory to a house in Norwich, so she took the opportunity to visit. This was her first time at the Priory since it moved to its current location, so it was lovely to show her around and to have a good chat.

Improvements to garden: The ongoing hard work of the garden group and a generous donation have enabled us to enhance the back garden this spring. A weeping crab apple tree has been planted in place of the large sycamore that had to be chopped down last year. Tubs of acers and bamboo now hide what were bare areas of fence.

The main project recently has been the erecting of a gazebo to cover most of the patio area. The gazebo was put together by an enthusiastic, persevering and very patient team of Sangha

members, who worked their way through the far-from-clear instruction leaflet and negotiated some challenging U-turns en route to the finished item. Several person hours' work were entailed, but the resulting structure will provide some much-needed shade during the summer. It has turned the patio into an inviting and useable space for relaxing when we have gatherings. My thanks to everybody who helped with this task, especially the two 'project managers' who were fine examples of steadily taking one step at a time.



Thanks: Besides the big “thank you” to the garden group and everybody involved with the gazebo project, my gratitude goes to those who have helped recently with the end-of-year bookkeeping and accounts, as well as with the work to upgrade the computers used for the Priory’s online meetings. Thanks also to everyone who enabled me to have a week of retreat and renewal time in March, including the people who offered the accommodation and transport, as well as the Sangha members who ensured that Priory events continued in my absence.

— *Rev. Master Leoma*

Telford Buddhist Priory

— Telford, Shropshire – UK —

Rev. Mugō, monk in residence, continues to welcome new people, and returning long-time sangha, to the regular schedule of meetings on Wednesday, Friday evenings and Sunday mornings. Members of the Birmingham Meditation Group come for day retreats, and the London, Reading and Milton Keynes groups connect via Zoom with an in-person visit from time-to-time. Sangha members looking towards the Priory are far-flung, and much of Rev. Mugō's day is spent connecting via email, phone and in one-to-one Zoom meetings. Starting with a trickle there is now a steady flow of overnight visitors, both lay and monastic; it is good to be able to welcome them into the life of the Priory. Their contributions are so valuable. On the last Sunday of each month it has become a regular feature to hold a Festival Ceremony followed by a community lunch and sometimes, weather permitting, garden work! The Priory hosted a weekend retreat for four people at the beginning of May which coincided with Wesak celebrations (altar pictured here).



On Sunday May 26th we held the Festival Ceremony for Jizō Bodhisattva. There is a [short video on the Temple website](#) showing a recently-donated Japanese-style garden statue of Jizō being placed in the ‘pond garden’ beside the house, this is now known as the *Jizō Garden*. Rev. M. Saidō, with others, developed this area

some years ago but it had become overgrown. People have worked to restore it and it is now complete (as much as a garden is ever ‘finished’!) Many thanks to all those who have contributed over the months to its ‘makeover’ and donated towards plants. Members of the Birmingham Meditation Group have offered much to the restoration of the grounds generally, and will take part in the formal dedication of the *Jizō Garden* and statue in early August during their next day retreat.

The annual round of ceremonies and events this past year, since Rev. Master Saidō died on March 3rd, 2023, has been punctuated frequently with events connected to Rev. Saidō. The last one will be the dedication of the *Jizō Garden* in his memory. There is quite a collection of videos on our website under the heading [Remembering Rev. Saidō](#) starting with his entering the ceremony hall, hours after his death, in his coffin. As executor of his estate, I am delighted to say my work was completed on May 1st. That concludes the final distribution of his personal items to relatives and finding ‘homes’ for items the Priory couldn’t use, such as a bicycle, musical instruments, very many religious books and statues etc. It has been a protracted business which it has been

my privilege to undertake, occupying me fairly fully since March 2023.

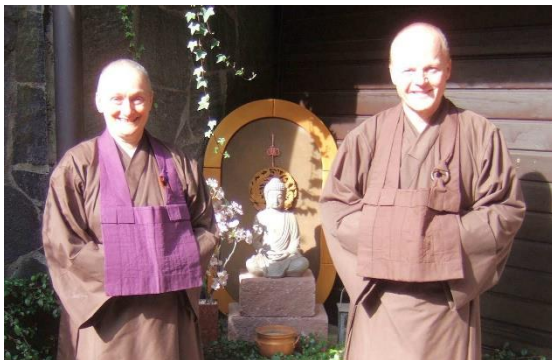


In early spring the ‘lower garden’ lawn was planted with five bare-root stock heritage fruit trees; our orchard trees now number seven. They all are doing well, and the two mature apple trees, planted in November, one of which has Rev. Saidō’s ashes interred around its roots, have set fruit. The lower garden is now a wildlife-friendly sanctuary, with a mown path just around its perimeter.

— Rev. Master Mugō

Dharmazuflucht Schwarzwald — Gutach (Black Forest) – Germany —

Reverend Sanshin's visit: In March, we had the great pleasure of having Rev. Sanshin come from Throssel for a stay with us. It's always so good and helpful to have fellow monks on retreat in our temple.



Lay Ordination: In April, congregation member Ann Katrin received Lay Ordination at the end of a retreat. We congratulate Ann Katrin and wish her all well in her future training. Below is a picture from 2018 taken at the end of our Segaki retreat, with her standing in the middle between the two of us, Lay Minister Ute Heim, and our dear Dharma-brother Rev. Master Saidō, who passed away last year.



Wesak: In early May, we had our yearly spring Sangha-retreat, with four of our Lay Ministers attending. On the last day of the retreat, we had our Wesak ceremony, the festival at which we celebrate the birth and life of Shakyamuni Buddha.



New Meditation Group: We are very pleased that Lay Minister Irene Mueller-Harvey has now started to have regular meditation evenings for interested people in the small town where she lives, that is not too far from where our temple is located. The group meets in a former priory house right next to the local catholic church, to meditate together and listen to audio Dharma talks. Irene already came to the temple with several members of the group who regularly attend the meditation evenings.

EBU Podcast: In May, Rev. Clementia was invited to speak on the theme of living a contemplative life, in a podcast of the European Buddhist Union (EBU). Since all the podcasts of the EBU are in English, Lay Minister Ute Heim, who represents the order in the EBU, kindly assisted Rev. Clementia in the background, in case she needed help in finding how to express things in English. For those interested, the podcast can be found [via this link](#).

— Rev. Master Fuden and Rev. Clementia

News of the Order

North America

Shasta Abbey

— Mount Shasta, California – USA —

Ten Precepts Meeting. The monastery's annual Ten Precepts Meeting Retreat (Jukai) was held March 24-31. Eleven trainees received the Precepts for the first time: Thomas Barnhill, Morgainne Ben-Ami, Richard Cook, Gayle DeWindt, Renate Funke, Johnny Hendricks, Daniel Jennings, Barbara Mastman, Carol McPheters, David Merrifield, and Kevin Southard.

This year's abbots were Rev. Master Meian, Rev. Master Daishin, and Rev. Master Margaret. We congratulate all the new Buddhists (in Sōtō Zen, receiving the Precepts is how one formally becomes a Buddhist) and look forward to training with them and other retreatants in upholding the Buddhist Precepts together.



Community. On February 28 we welcomed back Rev. Master Haryo from his year's stay at Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey in the UK. On March 3 we celebrated his 52nd ordination anniversary at an evening tea.

On April 23 we welcomed Rev. Owyn Summers from Lions Gate Buddhist Priory in British Columbia for an extended stay while he applies for a Canadian visa. Rev. Owyn is a disciple of Rev. Master Kōten Benson and is a familiar face, having spent two periods of postulancy here at Shasta Abbey. We are glad to have him back here training as an ordained novice monk.

On May 5 two new Teachers of Buddhism were recognized and certified: Rev. Trahearn Platt and Rev. Vera Giordano. Rev. Trehearn is a disciple of Rev. Master Meian Elbert and Rev. Vera is a disciple of Rev. Master Kōdō Kay. Both have been training at the monastery for ten years, a minimum qualification for becoming a Teacher in our Order. We congratulate them both and are appreciative of their many contributions to our community life.



Monastic Guests. Over the spring months we enjoyed training with several monks from other temples: Rev. Jisen Coghlan of the Boise, Idaho Zen Center (for our spring monastic retreat); Rev. Master Vivian Guenenfelder of Still Flowing Water Hermitage (for an introductory retreat); and Rev. Master Leon Kackman of the Portland Buddhist Priory (for the Lay Ministers' Retreat). The participation of other monks always enriches our practice.

Memorial. On April 19 we celebrated a memorial for Teishin (Vicki) Houdyshell, a former monk who trained at the monastery during the 1980s. She subsequently taught a school for children out of her home in Los Osos, California, and led a meditation group there for a period of time. Her memorial was attended by a number of her family and former students, all of whom were touched by the time offered and care exhibited by the community in honoring Teishin. She had a significant impact on all who knew her.

Lay Ministers' Retreat. For the first time since the Covid pandemic, we held a retreat for lay ministers of the Order May 15-19. Thirteen lay ministers participated. This year's retreat was led by Rev. Master Leon Kackman, the North America Lay Ministry Chaplain. He was assisted by Abbey residents Rev. Master Daishin Yalon, our Vice-Abbot; Rev. Master Oswin, the executive secretary of the Order; and Rev. Master Margaret, our Prior and lay minister liaison for the monastery.

The retreat combined a balance of discussions, meditation and time for personal practice. The lay ministers sat with the monks for morning service and led the meditation periods, meals, and mid-day service. The retreat ended with a joyous celebration of Wesak by over 50 guests, a Dharma talk on compassion by our Abbess Rev. Master Meian, a ringing in of the Buddhist New Year on the temple's great bell, and a lively social tea.

— *Rev. Master Oswin*

Redding Zen Buddhist Priory

— *Redding, California – USA* —

We congratulate sangha member Barbara Mastman on taking the Precepts at Jukai at Shasta Abbey in March, 2024. We wish her all the best as she has taken this significant step in her training.

Rev. Helen and Jeannine Gillan met with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Institute World Religion Series students on April 25, 2024, presenting an overview of Buddhism and an exploration of our Sōtō Zen practice. The nearly 20 students in attendance were very attentive and asked many interesting questions.

Rev. Helen and Sydney Williams offered the ceremonies of 49 days for Sydney's father Robert Frederick Williams (February 2, 1951 – May 3, 2024) who had died unexpectedly.

Rev. Helen continues to recover slowly from hip replacement surgery which was complicated by a fractured femur. She's walking with a cane, driving to physical therapy, and is slowly rebuilding the life of the Priory. Her doctor, however, says it will be at least September before she's walking more easily.

— *Rev. Master Helen*

Wallowa Buddhist Temple

— *Joseph, Oregon – USA* —

Spring weather has been gloriously variable at our 4400-foot elevation in the foothills of the Eagle Cap Wilderness. Though Wesak is often postponed here until June due to our mountain climate, we decided to attempt a Wesak celebration in late May this year. A brief skiff of snow during the week preceding had us wondering whether we had been overly optimistic, then the sun shone through beautifully just in time for the actual day.

Ceremonial: On May 26th Rev. Master Meidō was celebrant for a well-attended and joyous warm spring Wesak festival ceremony, followed by a friendly potluck meal and open temple afternoon. In addition to our local congregation, friends came from Seattle, Walla Walla, and La Grande to join in the happy day.



Monthly Day Retreat: These last four months, we have held a Day Retreat each first-Saturday of the month, which we plan to continue. In April and March, the schedule was an immersive introduction to our tradition. Each time, throughout the day a 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.

In May and June our Day Retreat format shifted to a simpler and more open ‘Day of Serene Reflection’ with seated meditation

beginning every hour on the hour, then walking meditation, then a break during which participants could come and go as they wished, ending with Mid-Day Service in the afternoon to close the retreat.

Guests: In mid-March we welcomed our friend Ty from La Grande for a two-day individual weekend retreat. Other guests and visitors this spring have come from near and far, for tea or a meal, for a drop-in tour and to meet the monks for the first time, or for meditation instruction. We also find we are offering one-to-one spiritual counseling fairly frequently these days, both in person and over the phone, and we're always glad to hear from our far-away friends.

Blessing: In response to a request from our county's wellness center, Rev. Clairissa offered a Buddhist blessing for their yearly fundraiser dinner at the historic Wallowa Lake Lodge. Both monks attended. We enjoyed seeing many friends from the community as well as making some new ones, and appreciated the healthy vegetarian meal option available for anyone who wished.

Podcast: We continue to upload episodes to our podcast, *Serene Reflections: From the Heart that Seeks the Way*. There are now over ninety Dharma talks available for listening or download on the [Serene Reflections Podcast](#) page of our website, or by subscription via a number of popular podcast apps.

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 via our website, at: <https://wallowabuddhisttemple.org>

— Rev. Master Meidō and Rev. Clairissa

Lions Gate Buddhist Priory

— Lytton, British Columbia – Canada —

Rev. Master Kōten ordained Mike Summers as a novice monk on March 17, giving him the name Hōun Owyn (pronounced O win), meaning *True Friend of the Dharma Cloud*. Reverend Master Aurelian and Rev. Valeria (who traveled from Shasta Abbey to be at the ceremony) assisted, and Rev. Owyn's mother, father, and sister came from Portland, Oregon to attend. We were joined by several others from the local community and further afield. It was a beautiful ceremony in Mandala Hall on a bright and unusually warm day.



We sincerely congratulate Rev. Owyn and wish him success in his monastic life. A video recording of the ceremony is on our YouTube channel. Here is the link to the channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@lionsgatebuddhistpriory5032>

Soon afterwards Rev. Owyn, a US citizen, had to leave Canada, as his application for an extended visa was denied. He is presently training at Shasta Abbey. With the help of our local Member of Parliament and his staff, we have been given valuable advice as to what we can do to remedy the situation, and we will be doing so soon.

We had the Annual General Meeting of the Priory Society on Saturday, May 18. It was well attended both in person and via Zoom. Rev. Master Aurelian presented the financial documents for approval and answered questions regarding our financial situation, which is stable at the moment.

The next day, Sunday May 19, we celebrated Wesak with a ceremony at Mandala Hall. Several people attended and poured water over the baby Buddha as we circumambulated during the Scripture recitation. Rev. Master Kōten offered a short Dharma Talk on the meaning of Wesak, then we all retired to Bodhidharma Hall for a festive meal.

On a weekend in late May Rev. Master Aurelian visited both meditation groups on Vancouver Island, the Vancouver Island Zen Sangha in Victoria, and the Mid-Island Meditation Group which meets in Nanaimo and Hilliers, BC. It was good to see everyone, in particular the folks in Victoria whom we haven't been able to visit for two years.

On the morning of May 15, our dear friend Lewis Dog passed away on our front porch at the age of 17 years. He had been slowly declining for the past year and a half. The last week he became much weaker, and a few days before he passed he stopped drinking and eating and became unable to lift himself up. Rev. Masters Kōten and Aurelian were with him, and his death was very peaceful. We buried the body with the animal funeral ceremony



later that afternoon on a knoll just above Bodhidharma Hall, on part of the route that he walked every morning on his ‘rounds’. Lewis was a gentle, kind and loving friend and we miss him.

We continue to offer Dharma Talks and discussions via Zoom on Thursday evenings at 7:30 am PDT and Saturdays at 2:00 pm. If you would like to be informed of these talks, please contact us at lionsgatebuddhistpriory@gmail.com We would be happy to send you the link.

— *Rev. Master Aurelian*

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 eight priories and twenty-two meditation groups.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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