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Outdoor Altar at Dharmazuflucht, Germany

## Summer 2022 Issue

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## Death

Rev. Master Leandra Robertshaw

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

*This article is one of the chapters from a new book written by Rev. Master Leandra which was published recently. More information about the book follows the article, on page 16.*

I find more and more often returning to the question of birth and death—small wonder perhaps, now that I am in my mid 80s and have a long life behind me.



It is a paradox that the more we take on board and are in touch with our responses to even the smallest changes in our environment (both external and internal), the more we also come across our internal stability which is not stirred by conditions. That stability is the Unborn, the fundamental nature of being. It is beyond pain, for here there is no suffering, (as it says in *The Scripture of Great Wisdom*). Alertness to the transient brings together awareness and memory. The French philosopher Simone Weil in her book; *Waiting for God*<sup>1</sup>, said that it is the power of attention that points to eternity. She said that if we pay attention closely enough we will come to know the transcendent, for it lies in

the centre of the human heart and mind. She wanted to appreciate, understand and weep with the suffering of the world.

So each morning, as I awake to a new day, I see myself as somehow a new person in spite of there being nothing fundamentally different: my arthritic legs are still arthritic, but there are subtle changes too and it feels right to not go down the path of wondering why the pain is more or less intense than on other mornings. If I were to do that, my whole being would be narrowed and confined to the perception of pain. Then I would be a person looking for a remedy rather than one accepting circumstances as they are at that moment.

We are going to die. We are always dying. Death is now as each moment passes irrevocably.

So what then is a reliable refuge? This question takes me to a depth I will never be able to fathom. It takes me to the question, “What am I?” This is a depth I must explore quickly, for (as it says in *Rules for Meditation*); “life passes as swiftly as a flash of lightning”. There is an urgency to this.

When we have been practising wholeheartedly for decades, it is not surprising that our awareness and scrutiny lead us to engage with the onset of old age, disease and our inevitable death. A fine trainee I know was once on the verge of moving from his current house to another one that could be adapted for his increasing frailty and ill health. He wrote the following; “I have found a buyer for this house but

haven't found one to move to. So I know where I am leaving from, but not where I am going to."

Taking his predicament more deeply, the trainee had looked into the meaning of the word 'dwell', which though it does mean to live in a place, can also mean to live in a particular way, and in addition could mean to remain for a time. This had brought up for him the thought of living in whatever house for the time being, and of dwelling in this body/mind for the time being. This life, he had realised, and this "I" is just for the time being.

For me this brought to mind Dōgen's expression that reality manifests itself for the time being as an ordinary person, a paraphrase from the chapter called *Uji*, or *Being-Time*, from the *Shōbōgenzō*.<sup>2</sup> Everything is in this moment. Awakened practice can only happen in this present moment. As Dōgen also taught in this chapter; "Although the Dharma might seem as if it were somewhere else far away, it is the time right now".

I was and continue to be grateful for the time spent training with the writer, grateful for the years we have been practising together even though I live in a monastery and he lives the householder's life. What in particular resonates for me is that both of us in our own ways are sensing what remains to be done as we approach the end of life and are deepening our trust in what is, without having an idea of what's next.

This sense of trusting reminds me of another member of our congregation, called Brian who came to be in a hospice towards the end of his life. I am reminded of his

‘excitement’, that he would soon have the opportunity of dying and would ‘know’ what death is, and what comes next.

The final stages of Brian’s death though were hard to witness. He was in immense pain; he tore out the tubes infiltrating his body, he rattled the cage of his bed. In the midst of witnessing this, I turned to a poem by the American poet Mary Oliver, called; *When Death Comes*.<sup>3</sup> It ends thus; “I don’t want to end up simply having visited this world.”

My sense that Brian had not simply visited this world was reinforced at his funeral in Gateshead. The chapel was packed with his mates who worked for the company where Brian was foreman. So many men indeed that the majority were not able to get into the chapel itself, but stood outside.



When the time comes to die we can take nothing with us. If we can truly acknowledge this we can cease from causing ourselves unnecessary suffering by desperately trying to hold on to anything—even the sense of what we are.

Are you afraid of dying?

If you are, is that partly because you don’t know what will happen after you die?

Here are a few possibilities:

Energy is neither created nor destroyed. Just as the elements of our body: carbon, nitrogen and calcium, passed

through countless material forms before our birth, so too will they be recycled when we die, to become part of building many new forms, from plants to people. In the same way psychic energy (relating to, or denoting faculties or phenomena that are apparently inexplicable by natural laws) is also recycled. Phenomena relating to the soul, mind or spirit, such as anger; compassion; confusion and clarity will all continue on and be part of a new constructed self.

Once we accept the fact that body, heart, and mind are inseparable, we can become free of the struggle to make the mind, spirit, or soul remain active after the body stops working. Everything is interconnected, and after death no part of us stays as it was. You may go to heaven, paradise, or hell, or be reborn into this world with the deepest, unknowable part of yourself, but it is extremely unlikely that any part of your body or mind will be brought with you as it now is. This realization may initially cause a great deal of angst. However, we all need to start with the acceptance of its truth. Only after we fully face, take up our abode in, and make peace with the existential reality, can we become liberated. As it says in *The Scripture of Great Wisdom*; “For here there is no suffering ... In the mind of the Bosatsu who is truly one with Wisdom Great the obstacles dissolve.”

With the constant updates in the media about the number of coronavirus deaths and with the constant updates too about the rise, then fall, then rise again of infections as new variants appear, we cannot avoid thinking about death. It does not help in the face of this to cling to doctrines or to the soothing words of others. They don’t ultimately cut the mustard. Instead, we must, as it were jump out of bed as soon as the alarm clock rings. Don’t just lie there. How else,

but with such a bright willingness can you even face death, which always comes?

Am I afraid?

I used to hope it was merely the process of dying that frightened me. Once in a Dharma Interview, (where monks speak privately with their Abbot), I was invited to call death to be there in front of me, rather than lurking behind my shoulder. What excellent advice that was, because following it allowed me to be at one with my death, to truly look death in the face and thus to begin to realise that death is not an object separate from myself—death outside me, so to speak, and me inside. Instead, life and death are one reality: as I took my first living breath, it was, at the same time the first breath of dying. We are all dying all the time.

“If I say I am not afraid of dying, am I deluding myself?” This is a question it behoves me to keep asking. Yet these days when I do ask myself this question, it doesn’t feel like I am deluded when I answer myself, that I am not afraid of dying. After all, I do know other aspects of fear, so I do know what it is to be afraid.

Even so, though I do know that I can be at one with ordinary fears, I do need also to take on board the possibility that fear of death is the ultimate fear; one that is too big or too opaque for me to be easily at one with. Nobody else can take away this concern for me. So what’s to be done? My response is to investigate with all the integrity I have at my disposal, with all the longing to know reality. To explore

what it is to be a human being who is both a lonely individual and at the same time inextricably the whole world, utterly connected with everything else. It seems worth all of us asking ourselves what we wish for in life given the personal being we see ourselves as, and also asking what we wish for our world from which we cannot separate ourselves. It is delusion to think there can be any separation.

Scrutinize carefully—don't try to dodge your moral, preceptual nature that shrivels when, for instance, you say that which is untrue. This is for your sake as much as for the sake of others. Don't let yourself get away with fudging things in the hope that it will make them easier to accept. Unless we kill ourselves death is not a decision we make, therefore let us decide to live life as fully engaged as we can by being open to everything, able to hold everything in a spacious stillness, a radiant calmness. We are thus learning to cradle both the immense sorrow and the wondrousness of life, cradle both at the same time. We are learning to be with pain and pleasure, joy and sorrow, with hearts fully open. Hearts that are intact even when it feels they have been irreparably broken.

How about in old age approaching our inevitable death with a youthful curiosity as well as with courage and a willingness to keep growing? This will require attentiveness and working with our hardwired emotions; seeing from moment to moment that we always have a choice to react more intelligently and kindly to others, and to resist hurting them because of our confusion and self-centredness. We may still be at the stage of aspiring bodhisattvas, (beings

who help others), yet it is important to acknowledge that our aspiration to be of service remains unwavering in spite of the mistakes we make. It helps to cut off any desire to justify our selfish behaviour immediately we become aware of an unskilful habitual response.

“Do we have a mountain of karma to clear up before we die, in order not to be reborn?” Here is a question some ask. We do undoubtedly have to deal with what we have done. We are responsible for cleaning up the karma we received at birth, and if we work at this we will pass on a welcome gift to future beings. Surely, it is deeply saddening to know we have been continuing acts of body, speech and mind time after time, even though they make us ashamed and lead us to suffer as much as the suffering they have inflicted on those we have hurt. Yet, with sincere practice the landscape can change and the task of cleansing is never over for we see at deeper and deeper levels the harm we have been doing to ourselves and to others. We peel off yet another skin of the onion.

We take responsibility for all the mistakes we have made, rather than slithering away and hoping to excuse ourselves by blaming others or blaming unfortunate circumstances that we try to insist were not of our making. This will be an amazingly beautiful process of growth and maturation. We are uncovering insight into the samsaric web we have been weaving through our thoughts and actions and the ensuing karmic consequences, both good and bad, that have endlessly rippled out. This spiritual maturation is a background from which compassion flows naturally.



## HOW TO DEAL WITH THE LOSS OF A DEARLY BELOVED BEING

Penetrate the loss, express it as eloquently as you are able and then let go. Don't deny death and grief, allow them to flow through you. There is for all of us unimaginable loss ahead including the possible end of human life on earth. How will we bear the grief ahead, will we allow grief to make it harder to act? We may want to find a 'cure' for grief. Rather, allow the possibility that grief too is a Buddha. It can be a wonderful teacher. We are invited to be stained by grief, made holy by grief. Know that grief is a form of love and then as we go on without our beloved, love isn't diminished. We are transformed by our loss. A genuine love acknowledges our debt to our beloved and we can be alone with dignity.

We are all coming to realise what life and death are. The understanding of today is not the understanding of tomorrow and yet nothing is missing in the understanding of today. Without fail, this coming to realise assists us in being with what, in *The Scripture of Great Wisdom*, is described thus; "all things...are neither born nor do they wholly die". I had a profound sense of this on the first anniversary of the death of a fellow monk, particularly of the words 'nor do they wholly die', as for me she had not wholly died, her presence continued, and continues to be vividly here, now. Our disagreements, though sometimes forcibly expressed, had never divided us. I recalled recently, for example that at one point she had been certain that a particular person

should not be ordained as a monk. Eventually that person was ordained, but then later chose to leave. Their time here as part of the novitiate was not a mistake as I know that it has helped them to find another way of offering to others. So it turns out that neither my fellow monk, nor I was completely right nor completely wrong. I find myself wishing we could discuss this again. Yet there is no need to, for in a mysterious way we keep up the conversation.

Some of what we say about birth and death can lose its punch if we recite something so regularly that we hardly notice what we are saying. For example, the shaving verse monks recite each week:

Now as we are being shaved, let us pray that we may  
leave behind worldly desires for eternity; After all,  
neither birth nor death exist.

Such a verse has a tremendous power, yet from frequent repetition we can fail to see it.

The wave and water analogy that is often used in Buddhism has helped me to see there are two dimensions to life and we touch both. In the historical dimension there are certificates for birth and death—this is the wave that has a beginning and an end. However, in the dimension of immediacy, the flowing world of water, there is no beginning and no end. As our great spiritual ancestor, Nagyaarajyuna said in a work called *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*:<sup>4</sup>

Before something is born, did it exist?  
Something already present can't be born.  
To be born means from nothing you became  
something, from no one you became someone.  
But nothing can be born from nothing.

I have tried reciting these words as if working with a kōan, so that whenever during a day I recall them, I say them to myself without expecting a comprehensible answer.

I continue to long to understand birth and death completely and that longing is taken to my sitting place, for on my cushion there is a deep trust in the efficacy of zazen to solve the riddle of the no-birth of all things. To find a calm peace in the midst of thoughts such as these is the demonstration that life is a continuum. In this very moment now anything can happen. While it is the case that to speak of happening implies duration, what is required is to carefully observe what changes, as duration unfolds. We can become more alert to one thought ending and another not yet begun and rest in that space which could be described as the unchanging heart of this very moment.

Although I am often uneasy when I talk about the present moment, I also sense that dropping the notion of the present moment altogether is avoiding what is important. For now, the conclusion I am stuck with is that the present moment holds the recent past together with the immediate future. I think I am suggesting that maybe we discover more about being a human being by dropping any concern of defining the present moment, or for that matter of defining any concept. Rather the direction of concern might more

profitably be engagement with a deeper awareness of the consequences of living one way rather than another.

Nirvana seems to me at present to mean extinction, extinction, extinction. Extinction of all notions and concepts; such as birth/death, being/non-being, coming/going. Nirvana is the ultimate dimension of life; a state of coolness, of peace, of joy, of profound serenity. It is not a state you attain after you die for you can reach it right now. As Dōgen says in the chapter called *Gyōji*, or *Continuous Practice*, from the *Shōbōgenzō*:<sup>2</sup>

On the great road of Buddha ancestors there is always unsurpassable practice, continuous and sustained. It forms the circle of the way and is never cut off. Between aspiration, practice, enlightenment and nirvana there is not a moment's gap; continuous practice is the circle of the way.

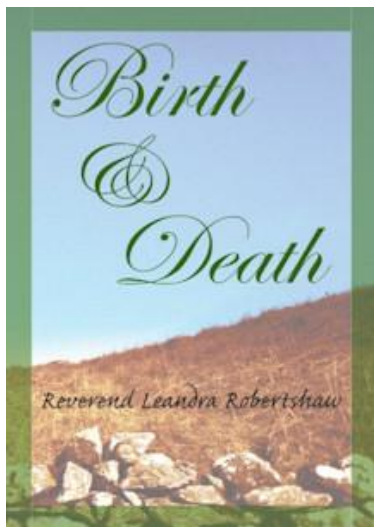
In the *Avatamsaka Sutra* we are assured that in touching one moment with deep awareness, we touch all moments. If you can live one moment deeply that moment contains all the past and all the future. Touching nirvana frees us from many worries; things that upset us no longer feel that important and a day later we can look back in some puzzlement at how stressed we allowed ourselves to become.

I remind myself that I never know anything with unwavering certainty. Acknowledging this pushes me further off balance and into unknown territory. Then great joy arises because it is evident that life and death are always sufficient and my befuddlement is no hindrance. As we step

into the unknown the door to death opens. Let us step through it with curiosity instead of fear.

### Notes

1. Weil, Simone, *Waiting for God*, Routledge, 2021.
2. Taaahashi, Kazuaki, *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dogen's Shobo Genzo*. Shambala, 2013.
3. Oliver, Mary, *Devotions: The Selected Poems of Mary Oliver*, Penguin Books, 2020.
4. Kerzin, Barry, *Nāgārjuna's Wisdom: A Practitioner's Guide to the Middle Way*, Wisdom Publications, 2019.



*Birth & Death* is a 116 page book written by Rev. Master Leandra which was published in March 2022.

It comprises ten chapters on many aspects of Buddhist practice, including Consciousness, Learning from All Living Things, and Enlightenment ... Awakening.

Copies are available to purchase from the bookshop at Throssel Hole, and also via <https://www.lulu.com> - search for 'Leandra Robertshaw'.

Direct link: <https://is.gd/rd8uds>

## Bodhidharma's *Outline of Practice* (Part One)

Rev. Master Leon Kackman

— *Portland Buddhist Priory, Oregon – USA* —

*This article was originally published, in serialized form, in the Portland Buddhist Priory Newsletter.' It will appear in the Journal in two parts, the second one will follow in the next issue.*

One of my favorite short pieces of Zen Buddhist Teaching is Bodhidharma's *Outline of Practice*. In his opening comment to his translation of this work, D.T. Suzuki says "As long as Zen appeals to one's direct experience, abstraction is too inane for the mind of a master." In the study of the Zen literature, there is an ongoing process of coming to see how what is talked about applies directly to our life of practice and is not just something exotic and mysterious. Of course, there is a pitfall here: the hazard of taking something which points to a profound truth that we do not yet fully understand, and trivializing it.

With the effort to both keep from getting mired in abstraction and keep from trivializing (bringing the teaching down to my level), I thought it would be helpful to dig into this work.

I will quote Red Pine's translation from *The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma*<sup>1</sup> for most of this.

## **To Enter by Reason**

Bodhidharma starts with:

Many roads lead to the Path, but basically there are only two: reason and practice. To enter by reason means to realize the essence through instruction and to believe that all living things share the same true nature, which isn't apparent because it's shrouded by sensation and delusion.

The "Path" here is the living Path of Zen practice; the living practice of meditation in action, not just on our cushion. Zen practice is a thing to be lived out in our day-to-day lives and isn't just a nice thing to think about. To "enter by reason" then, is something a little different from what we usually expect from reason, expect from 'what our thinking mind produces'. To enter by reason is the process of awakening to the life of practice, to our own deeper life, by applying the meditation of the Buddhadharma, the moment-by-moment mind of meditation, to our actual life.

To "believe\* that all living things share the same true nature" is to live in faith that there is something bigger going

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\* I might have used the phrase, as other translators do, "to have faith" here, since to have faith is a little more flexible and does not require proof.

on in this life; there is a bigger compassionate mind that permeates and embraces all beings, all of existence. We come to know this directly through the life of meditation. Because we get distracted by sensations and our accumulated confusion, we don't yet see this bigger mind.

Those who turn from delusion back to reality, who meditate on walls, the absence of self and other, the oneness of mortal and sage, and who remain unmoved even by scriptures are in complete and unspoken agreement with reason. Without moving, without effort, they enter, we say, by reason.

“Meditating on walls” is, we say, the facing of the self: there is nowhere to hide. We sit quietly and look at what is there, not fighting with the ‘wall’ in front of us, just sitting quietly with it, with whatever arises. Facing and accepting the self is to let it be there; the mind of Zazen lets whatever arises be there, neither grasping after nor pushing away. This is not necessarily particularly comfortable, but, as we sit still, we might notice that the self, the ‘whatever arises’ also shifts and changes; our relationship to it changes; it passes away.

The meditating on the “absence of self and other, the oneness of mortal and sage” is the letting go of our dualistic preoccupations from moment to moment; just noticing and dropping them without trying to think about or analyze them, just dropping them. The entry by reason takes a fair bit of internal study in the sense of alertness. We have to learn to pay attention to what we are holding onto and how to drop it. This is not just the study we do on our own:

perhaps unnoticed here is the one who gives the instruction. Bodhidharma had a teacher, the woman Prajnatarā. She not only explained the formal aspect of the Dharma to him, but also helped him to see what his dualistic preoccupations were; she helped him to see how he got distracted by sensations and what his accumulated delusions were – accumulated delusions is another name for dualistic preoccupations. In turn, Bodhidharma had students who he helped in the same way; Bodhidharma continues to offer his instruction to us, even now.

Those who live from the mind of Zazen “are in complete and unspoken agreement” with this special kind of “reason.” Living from the mind of Zazen isn’t just doing formal meditation once or twice or ten times a day. It is letting go of, turning from, dropping the activity of mind throughout the day. And, it is just getting on and living wholeheartedly the ordinary life that is right in front of us today.

Bodhidharma’s *Outline of Practice* starts by saying that we can either enter the Dharma by “reason” or “practice.” I described earlier the entry by reason and what that might mean. Entry by “reason” is more like entry by ‘just letting go of everything’, by giving oneself wholeheartedly over to the mind of Zazen. D.T. Suzuki’s translation concludes this section with:

He will not then be a slave to words, for he is in silent communion with the Reason itself, free from conceptual discrimination; he is serene and not-acting. This is called Entrance by Reason.<sup>2</sup>

Before we move on to the next section, I want to point out what “not-acting” means, since it relates to the mind of meditation and not necessarily directly to action in the world. “Not-acting”, in the sense of meditation, refers to the activity the mind undertakes to either push away or grasp after some thing or sensation or thought. Keizan says that in meditation there is “no need to activate body, no need to activate mind.” When we grasp or push away, we are activating the mind or body: we can learn, through practicing the Buddhadharma, to find this serene place of “not activating” body or mind, the place of “not-acting”.

### **To Enter by Practice**

As we begin to look at the next section, it is useful to note that these two means of entry are not really separate and to note that they intertwine with each other. The next section begins with (and, again, I am using the Red Pine translation):

To enter by practice refers to four all-inclusive practices: Suffering injustice, adapting to conditions, seeking nothing, and practicing the Dharma.

First, suffering injustice. When those who search for the Path encounter adversity, they should think to themselves, “In Countless ages gone by, I’ve turned from the essential to the trivial and wandered through all manner of existence, often angry without cause and guilty of numberless transgressions. Now, though I do no wrong, I’m punished by my past. Neither gods nor men can foresee when an evil deed will bear its fruit. I accept it with an open heart and

without complaint of injustice.” The sutras say “when you meet with adversity don’t be upset because it makes sense.” With such understanding you’re in harmony with reason. And by suffering injustice you enter the Path.

We enter the life of the Dharma “by practice” when we study our minds and try our best to adhere to these four practices. There is a verse that encapsulates these four practices from a hymn we sing at the festival ceremony in memory of Bodhidharma that goes:

Acceptance of suffering  
Sitting unmoved  
The seeking of nothing  
Enlightenment proved

These four practices correspond to the Buddha’s four noble truths: the truth that suffering exists; the truth that there is a cause of suffering; the truth that there is a cessation of suffering; and the truth that there is a way, a means, to take steps to find the cessation of suffering.

### **Suffering Injustice: the Acceptance of Suffering**

So, the first practice: “suffering injustice”. Suffering injustice, or the “acceptance of suffering”, is a very difficult thing to practice on the ground, in an instance-by-instance way, in our actual life. It is one thing to accept that there is suffering ‘out there’ in a general way, but when it comes right down to it, when we ourselves are in the midst of specific suffering, it is another matter to accept, “with an

open heart and without complaint”, the suffering that we are experiencing. Bodhidharma’s advice for “those [of us] who search for the Path”, when we encounter adversity, is to accept responsibility for it: this is not usually our first reaction. Instead of thinking, ‘this adversity “makes sense”’, we think ‘this must be someone else’s fault; I am a good person, or at least a not very bad person, so that other person over there, if they would just be kinder or wiser or more skillful, then my life would be OK.’

Before I continue, I want to emphasize that taking responsibility, in the way that the Dharma teaches and that Bodhidharma is talking about, is not about blaming or judging ourselves. I will cover this in more detail later, but I wanted to say this at this point to highlight that there is a different way of understanding taking responsibility in the realm of Dharma practice.

The reality is, as long as we are in this world, we will only encounter other limited human beings. These other human beings, no matter how enlightened they are or what fine characteristics they have, cannot take away or prevent our suffering; they cannot prevent or take away the consequences of our choices. Also, they cannot do the work of finding enlightenment for us; if we want to know what the Buddha knew, for ourselves, we will have to go there on our own. “The Buddhas do but point the way.”

This practice of suffering injustice is very difficult and, for myself, it often takes at least a few tries to get to it; it is difficult, but it can be done.

While this teaching is pretty simple (if there is suffering in me, I can take responsibility for it, I can accept it), there are some obstacles to it, and people of our era have a very difficult time with it. One obstacle to taking on this practice is that we are trained by worldly influences to look outside of ourselves for the source of our suffering. When we hear this teaching about “suffering injustice”, we jump to the conclusion that having this attitude (that we can take responsibility for our suffering and its cause within us) means that other people’s wrong actions are then somehow justified and we should somehow capitulate to their wrong actions. We can think that we are being told that it is the victim’s fault; this is not it at all.

I look at this teaching as if it were just for me, as if it were the medicine only for what is going on in my own mind. The matter of the wrongness or rightness of another person’s actions and how to respond to them is a different question; from the point of view of Dharma practice, an important but secondary question. Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett taught that Buddhism is a religion for spiritual adults, for people who take responsibility for their own suffering. At some point, we might need – it might be essential – for us to ask the question, ‘how do I respond to the harmful actions of another person?’ This first step of taking responsibility for our own suffering, helps immeasurably in clarifying this other question: right now, “how can I accept... with an open heart and without complaint of injustice” the suffering that is arising in me? Far from enfeebling me, this acceptance of my own responsibility is profoundly empowering and makes clear that my peace of mind is not dependent on another person’s delusion or enlightenment. Taking responsibility

may actually lead us to the necessity of speaking out, and gives us the grounding to do so effectively.

Another thing that can get in the way of our practicing the acceptance of suffering is that sometimes something happens to us that is not the direct result of a mistake that we have made. Taking responsibility in this kind of case is simply to continue the training of our mind and to do the work needed to let go of duality and practice compassion; taking responsibility in this kind of case is to accept that in this world, sometimes bad things happen and we may not see the reason why. Training the mind in this way does not stand in the way of taking steps to hold another accountable if that avenue is open to us and seems good; taking responsibility just cuts the entangling tie between us and another person who has caused us harm.

One thing that is very important to remember when training our minds to take responsibility is that Buddhism and the Buddha have no interest in judging us. When we make a mistake, subtle or coarse, on the spiritual level, we feel the consequences of it; what we feel will vary depending on what we have done, but we will feel it. If we don't feel it now, we will feel it later. It is said that the law of cause and effect on the spiritual level has no law-giver. That we receive negative consequences for negative actions is not the result of some other being's judgement, it is just the law of cause and effect. This is equally true of positive actions, and thus we can freely give compassion, forgiveness, kindness and forbearance even to those who have not 'earned' it from some worldly point of view.

This is true for every being in existence.

One of the things that we might feel is a sense of shame for doing a thing that we sort of knew better than to do. Maybe a little bit of this shame is warranted or normal, but we all too often turn it into a feeling of judged guilt and a sense that our mistake is evidence that there is something fundamentally wrong with us. This extra judging is like pouring salt on a wound and is another level of mistake that we can learn to not do. This extra shame and judging can also get in the way of our practicing the “acceptance of suffering”.

When we are plagued by this extra suffering caused by being judged, either by our own selves or by someone else, being accepted by another is such a relief, that we can think that suffering will stop when we stop the judging (mostly, we think, when we get others to stop judging us). Of course, if we were to stop judging each other, a lot of suffering would go away, but there is still the matter of accepting the consequences of the thing that started us down the path of judging. There are many things in life that, through our pettiness and ignorance, we judge ourselves and others for, that are completely irrelevant to our spiritual peace: it matters not one whit what color, sex, sexual orientation, weight, level of intelligence, state of health, or whole host of other characteristics we might have are, and, to our great relief and the relief of others, we can just let go of judging those things.

But our suffering does not stop here with this judging or not judging. The Buddhadharma invites us to look into our lives more deeply to see how we are acting now, and have acted in the past, on greed, hatred and ignorance –

including the ignorance of getting entangled in the discriminative or judgmental mind. When we take refuge in the Three Treasures, we are, in effect asking them: how do I create suffering and how can I stop it? Because we are configured as we are, with the kind of minds that we have, the answer to that question will often arise as something like “do this, not that.” Practice acceptance, don’t be judgmental. Take responsibility, don’t blame others for our suffering. Practice letting go and giving, don’t insist on getting your own way without considering the effects. Practice loving-kindness, don’t be angry. It doesn’t really work to just practice the positive things if we do not recognize that we are also doing the negative things. We need to recognize the negative things and stop doing them.

Because of this ‘do this, not that’ quality, when our friends and loved ones, or the sangha and our teachers, or just life itself, points out to us that we are pursuing actions, thoughts or behavior that create suffering, we can feel judged and this can be deeply painful. Sadly, it seems to be the case that if one of our characteristic habits of mind is the habit of being harshly critical of others, then this feeling of being judged can be profoundly amplified (I know this from bitter personal experience.)

When we try to accept suffering, we can feel a kind of discouragement or despair: we see that we have some suffering but do not yet see what we can do to work with it, what we can do to change it. We might even believe that we can do nothing about it, because we have ‘always been this way’.

But by taking Bodhidharma's advice to "accept [suffering] because it makes sense", and wholeheartedly taking refuge in the mind of meditation, we put ourselves into the best possible place to apply the other aspects of the Buddhadharma which in turn helps us to make sense of the suffering. We can let go of fear or despair in the confidence that the Buddhadharma is a reliable help for us. We don't have to despair because the "acceptance of suffering" is a means of entering the path, the path to dealing with our suffering in a real way.

### **Adapting to Conditions**

The next section, the second of the four practices, begins with (from the Red Pine translation):

Second, adapting to conditions. As mortals, we're ruled by conditions, not by ourselves. All the suffering and joy we experience depend on conditions. If we should be blessed by some great reward, such as fame or fortune, it's the fruit of a seed planted by us in the past. When conditions change, it ends. Why delight in its existence? But while success and failure depend on conditions, the mind neither waxes nor wanes. Those who remain unmoved by the wind of joy silently follow the Path.

Again, from our verse encapsulating the four practices:

Acceptance of suffering  
Sitting unmoved  
The seeking of nothing  
Enlightenment proved

We might say that our entry into this second practice is “Sitting unmoved”. “Sitting unmoved”, in this context, is the bringing the mind of meditation into every activity. Rev. Master Jiyu would describe the mind of meditation or, one who was practicing this mind of meditation, as being like a spinning top which is very active on the outside but is still at the center.

We engage in our ordinary lives with the appearance of an ordinary person, even while working on sitting still in all things. (It is possible!)

In his work *A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life*<sup>3</sup> the Indian monk Shantideva (c685-763 CE) poses an interesting question:

Where would I possibly find enough leather  
With which to cover the surface of the earth?

And answers it with:

But (wearing) leather just on the soles of my shoes.  
Is equivalent to covering the earth with it.

Although we can become quite skillful in handling many areas that we are familiar with, we can't possibly predict or control every condition we might encounter in our lives. But we can learn to meet each situation from the mind of meditation. And we can learn to convert the obstacles we carry around in our own minds and hearts; the obstacles to taking refuge in the mind of meditation.

“Sitting unmoved” is like giving ourselves a sturdy pair of shoes with which to dance through the many obstacles and changes life presents to us. “Adapting” our minds “to conditions”, is the conversion, the bringing to peace all of the diverse sufferings we carry around with us by applying the mind of meditation and the Buddhadharma to our lives; this is like stitching up the holes that appear in our sturdy shoes.

This process of healing our inner suffering is how we learn to “remain unmoved by the wind of joy” and “silently follow the Path”.

### **Seeking Nothing**

The next section, the third of the four practices, is as follows (from the Red Pine translation):

Third, seeking nothing. People of this world are deluded. They’re always longing for something – always, in a word, seeking. But the wise wake up. They choose reason over custom. They fix their minds on the sublime and let their bodies change with the seasons. All phenomena are empty. They contain nothing worth desiring. Calamity forever alternates with Prosperity. To dwell in the three realms is to dwell in a burning house. To have a body is to suffer. Does anyone with a body know peace? Those who understand this detach themselves from all that exists and stop imagining or seeking anything. The sutras say, “To seek is to suffer. To seek nothing is bliss.” When you seek nothing, you’re on the Path.

Maybe you could think that practicing the Dharma is seeking something and I suppose that it is. With Bodhidharma's Dharma practice we are seeking to end the problem of seeking; the seeking of Bodhidharma's Dharma practice is the seeking to end craving, thirst, *tanha*, as in the second noble truth. We feel that there is something missing and we long for the feeling of wholeness, so we look high and low; we look in our bodily sensations; we look in the pleasures of the mind (e.g. that great feeling we get after solving a problem); we look in relationships; we look all over but at best, we only find a temporary solution and we are never at rest in our hearts.

“People of this world are deluded.” One of our fundamental delusions is that there is something missing in us and this missing thing needs to be completed by some experience from outside of us: a better job; a better relationship; a better car; a better house, garden, neighborhood. You fill in the blank. We believe unquestioningly in this feeling (it doesn't even occur to us to question it) so we “seek”.

“But the wise wake up.” We begin to wake up when we begin to have a thought like ‘there must be something other than this constant hunger.’ This is what we might call disillusionment (*nibbidā* in Sanskrit); the beginning of dropping our illusions about ourselves and the world. Often this disillusionment follows on from great suffering and can produce despair and cynicism, especially if we do not see a way of coming to know that ‘something other’. The

Buddhadharma is one of the ways to find and live from that ‘something other’.

One of my teachers says that it is as if we go around in our life with an empty wheelbarrow, and when we approach some experience or person or thing, we are expecting to get something to fill our barrow. But with practice, we are actually asked to empty the barrow. We are asked to let go of the things in our barrow. This teaching is so counter-intuitive to our usual way of being that it can seem frightening and incomprehensible. We can practice Buddhism for a long time before we realize that what we are being asked to do (actually asked by our own heart) is to stop seeking to fill our wheelbarrow and instead be willing to give up the things in our barrow; we can practice for a long time before we realize that emptying is what the Buddhas around us are doing. The realization that practice is about letting go, which comes from sitting quietly in the depths of our own question, is the beginning of “waking up”.

*To be continued...*

#### *Notes*

1. Pine, Red, translator: *The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma*, North Point Press, New York, 1987.
2. Suzuki, D.T., *Manual of Zen Buddhism*, Rider & Co, London 1950, p74.
3. Shantideva, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life*, Batchelor, Stephen – Translator; LTWA; 6th Revised edition, 1999.

## Stepping Up

Rev. Valora Midtdal

— *Shasta Abbey, California – USA* —

*This is the transcription of a Dharma talk given in February 2022.*

This is a Dharma talk about aspiration and deepening our practice, in short it's a talk about stepping up. This is not meant to make anyone feel that somehow they're not doing enough in their practice. As you know, we primarily give these talks for ourselves, with the hope that it also might benefit others.

I wanted to give a talk where I explore what it means to deepen our practice, even if we're just beginning, and talk about some practical ways that we can step up.

There is a call to training that resounds over and over. And it's up to us to answer the call when we hear it. We have all heard the call to training because it has brought us here. Some things in life remind us of this call. When we hear about selfless acts, people helping others in perilous situations, something resonates in our heart, and reminds us of the selfless giving of ourselves to benefit others.

I remember last summer reading in the news about a man who'd gone to the beach with his family, and he just

happened to look out into the water, which wasn't just any old lake, it was one of the Great Lakes, Lake Ontario. Well he saw a pair of flailing arms. And without a second thought, this man swam out to save the girl, and also three other members of the same family. So four members of one family were simultaneously drowning, and this one person was able to save them all. It was just a remarkable story, he was a remarkable person. It so happens that this man was training to join the local fire department. And when we hear stories like this, the selflessness and the bravery of this man, it tugs at something – the wish to help beings.

I was quite taken with this story because first, it points to the innate goodness of people, and our wish to help others. Second, when we hear about such selflessness, it inspires us, it makes us want to do better in the mostly ordinary interactions we have with beings in everyday life. I think to myself, “right, I can let go of those crabby thoughts that arise when mud gets tracked into the dining hall, or whatever else”, because this is just small potatoes in training.

No matter where we are in our practice, whether we're just starting out, or we're a grizzled veteran, the opportunities to step up never cease. Let's start by talking about meditation. For anyone wanting to deepen their practice, taking an honest look at our meditation is a really good first step. If someone is new to the practice, and new to meditation in particular, and maybe struggling a bit, I would ask them first if they've settled on one practice. Have they given this meditation a reasonable shot? Or do they like to

skip around, keeping their eyes open some days when sitting, do visualization or mantra practices on other days? Because I think that this is an important question.

If we want to step up, if we want to deepen our practice, we have to give the meditation in one tradition a decent shot. I once heard a monk address this question of multiple practices, and they used the analogy of drilling for water. If we try one practice, then another and then another, we never get down into the dirt very far. We have to be willing to stick with just one practice if we want to find water.

When we can find a meditation practice that resonates, and a Sangha we can commit to, we begin to lay the ground work. And every day that we practice this meditation, whether we think we're doing it or not, it strengthens that foundation, layer by layer by layer.

If we can find one practice that really resonates with us, and give it everything we have, even if we can only sit for a few minutes each day, it will become part of us, a part of our everyday life, not something that we just do on weekends. Because when the practice, and the meditation becomes a part of us, it becomes our foundation that we can lean on day in and day out. And this is the important point here – if we do the groundwork, if we lay a firm foundation of meditation, we will come to know there is something there that we can trust, that we can lean into time and time again when things are tough.

If we've been doing the practice for a while, if we want to deepen our practice, I think we need to be honest with ourselves by looking at our meditation practice. Do we sit consistently? Do we sit every day, even if it's just for a few minutes? If we sit for five minutes, can we occasionally sit for 10 minutes? Or how about a short sitting in the morning and the evening? I'm not suggesting that we all should be sitting for hours in the morning and the evening, but rather just to honestly look at our meditation and see if there's some room to grow, an opportunity to step up. Only we can make that assessment of ourselves.

Another way that we can step up in our training and deepen our meditation in everyday life is by actively bringing our meditation into our day-to-day activities. I think that there are so many untapped opportunities to bring our meditation into what we do. There is a simple joy that springs up when we fully do one thing at a time. More and more these days, the tendency is to multitask. We cook dinner and listen to our favourite album. We go for a run with our ear buds in. We might wash the dishes and stream something at the same time. We get in the car and turn on music or the radio. I'm not saying that we should never multitask. But if we only ever multitask in our day-to-day activities, we're missing an opportunity to bring our meditation into what we're doing.

The question of how we step up in our training can have so many facets. And one of the things that can be so difficult in training, is this feeling that we 'don't know'. We might feel that we're not an authority on the practice, and so we question our meditation, we question our effort, maybe even the strength of our aspiration for The Way. So we look

in books, maybe many, many books, or we listen to Dharma talk after Dharma talk, in search of some answer to our question. Or perhaps we simply don't share our experience of training during Dharma discussions or find that we're unable to ask questions.

I remember when I was first starting out here as a lay resident at the temple, before I was ordained, I was petrified to answer questions during Dharma discussions, even if I was simply speaking from my experience, because I was convinced that someone else knew better. In Dharma discussions, it can be so easy to hold back. We might think, "oh, I'll let somebody else answer this". Or we think that our experience isn't relevant, or that we aren't particularly wise, or haven't been training for long enough to "know". Stepping up means that sometimes we have to own up to what we know. This can be deeply uncomfortable, but if we want to deepen our practice, we have to be willing sometimes to take a leap, and own up to our own experiences. This doesn't mean of course bragging about spiritual experiences, but being willing to share something that might help beings, if that moment arises.

To benefit others with our training, sometimes we simply have to let go of the judgments that arise regarding the value of what we have to offer. During Dharma discussions, we can benefit many beings by being willing to ask a question that we think is a simple question, or by sharing our experience of training on a particular topic. We just don't know how our question or comment can benefit others. So just consider that sometimes it is worth taking that leap of faith.

Stepping up doesn't mean we're constantly striving to improve our practice. It also doesn't mean that we must go all out to achieve something, to realize enlightenment. I think that Rev. Master Jiyu used to refer to this as 'storming heaven'. Unknowingly, we may also have an idea that finding The Truth means finding the 'right' teacher, or receiving some esoteric teaching or instructions from another – the idea that we need something from another in order to be spiritually complete or whole. Stepping up, or deepening our practice means that we must learn to respond from that place of innate fullness instead of a place of lack. It's trusting that fundamentally we have everything we need, and doing the best we can to keep to the Precepts, to help beings as well as ourselves. This doesn't mean that we don't go for Refuge to the Sangha, because this is a vital aspect of our practice. But rather, we trust what called us to the practice in the first place, we trust that we have the Buddha Nature and that we didn't somehow miss out.

There is this lovely poem from the *Denkōroku*, *The Record of the Transmission of the Light*<sup>1</sup>, from Chapter 39, on Great Master Tōzan Ryōkai. The poem goes:

Truly I should not seek for the Truth from others, for then it will be far from me. Now I am going alone, everywhere I am able to meet HIM. HE is ME now, I am not HIM; When we understand this we are instantaneously with the TRUTH.

The use of 'him' and 'he' in this poem could just as easily be thought of as 'Buddha Nature', or 'That which is', or 'the Unborn', really any word that your prefer.

There can be a kind of constant looking outside of ourselves that some of us engage in at certain points in training. It's doubting we can meditate, and looking to others for confirmation. It's not owning up to what we know when our experience of training can be helpful. It can be as I mentioned previously, listening to multiple Dharma talks a day. There is a restlessness, a seeking, a constant searching that never seems to be quelled. This is why Great Master Dōgen says in *Rules for Meditation*:

[Why] travel to other dusty countries, thus forsaking your own seat? If your first step is false, you will immediately stumble. Already you are in possession of the vital attributes of a human being. Do not waste time with this and that. You can possess the authority of Buddha.

There is so much that we can get caught up in, so many detours that can lead us away from knowing that 'authority of Buddha' that Dōgen speaks of. Sometimes the detour that we get caught up in is simply doubting our ability to do the practice, thinking the practice is too hard, or thinking somehow that it's something out of our reach. Stepping up here is simply trusting, over and over again that we have what we need, all the while just doing the day-to-day practice as best we can. It always comes back to meditation and keeping the Precepts.

Speaking of Precepts; if we've been under the impression that taking or keeping the Precepts is something that is out of our reach, I would like to say from the

perspective of someone who is always stumbling with the Precepts and recommitting herself to them, that the Precepts are for us. And even if we think that we're not at a point in our training where we can or should take the Precepts, we can still have a practice that includes the Precepts.

In our tradition we say that the Precepts are the 'Conduct of Buddhas', they show us how to create less suffering for ourselves and for others. The Precepts are compassion in action. So whether we're new to the keeping of Precepts or we've taken them a long time ago, stepping up in our practice can be as simple as reading the Precepts or reading about the Precepts every week. It could be taking one Precept that we're having difficulty with, and keeping it in mind, as best we can throughout the day. There are so many ways that we can make the Buddha's teachings a regular part of our day. In reality it comes down to us.

We can have Temple Rules, condo rules, traffic rules, codes of conduct in society, or the sixteen Great Precepts and the forty-eight Less Grave Precepts, or any other aspect of training that we aspire to. But in the end, as Great Master Tōzan Ryōkai's poem says, "now I am going alone". It is up to us. Whether we wear our seatbelt when the highway patrol isn't around, or we nourish jealousy and hatred even if we don't say anything to others, or whether we foster the little irritations that arise on a daily basis; no one can do the work for us.

When I was a novice monk, and I'd leave something where it shouldn't have been, a sign would appear courtesy of the Head Novice that read, "please remove". Now that I

no longer live in the meditation hall and that I have a room, it's up to me whether I leave my socks all over the floor. And it sounds so simple, "it's up to us", of course it's up to us. I say this because stepping up means that we have to put in the work ourselves, no one can do that for us.

Nowadays, no one is there to pester me about my socks. And when it comes down to it, no one can meditate for us, or ask the questions that really matter to us. Whether someone treats me with the utmost kindness or with disdain, I can't control what comes out of their mouth, but I can work on how I respond. The more we can deepen our practice and live in accord with that which is greater than ourselves, the less suffering we create for ourselves and for other beings. Whether we're just starting out in the practice, or we've been at it for forty years, there is always the opportunity to step up, there is always the opportunity to do the thing that our heart wants, but makes us uncomfortable. As it says in the *Shushōgi*, "...for they, in the past, were as we are now, and we will be as they in the future."

#### *Notes*

1. Keizan Jōkin, Great Master, *Denkōroku The Record of the Transmission of the Light* ; Translator Rev. Hubert Nearman, 2003, Shasta Abbey Press, Mount Shasta, California.

## The Map To Where I Live

Mia Livingston

— London, UK - and Mill Valley, CA – USA —

I found myself standing once again amidst an overflow of cardboard moving boxes and possessions, when the lay Sangha blog *Dew On The Grass*'s new monthly theme caught my attention: 'The Map To Where I Live'<sup>1</sup>. I was nearly fifty, and yet had never in my life had a permanent address; what was 'home' for me?

My parents loved to travel, and created the chance to do it with their work. (They had both gone from working class roots to building careers in development economics and science.) My siblings and I travelled with them. As a result I grew up moving between countries, and even continents, every few years.

Maybe this sounds like an incredible way to grow up; I don't know. In retrospect I think I was lucky, though at the time, of course, it was all I knew. On the one hand, I was jealous of children who never moved or travelled; they seemed to have a lot more friends and confidence than I did. I felt insecure and anguished from never having the chance to attach to people and places outside of my small nuclear family. On the rare occasions that I did make a connection, I would soon be forced to leave them behind, and most likely never saw them again.

On the other hand I got to explore the world like a very small social anthropologist, living literally side-by-side with people of every age, class, and from nearly every corner of the world. I was endlessly curious about their lives, drives, 'loves' and 'hates'; all the ways in which we humans are different from each other, and in which ways we are the same.

I adored where I lived aged eleven for almost three years, in Zimbabwe. This was in the 1980s after Independence when many Zimbabweans said that their country felt more safe, strong, free and full of possibility than it had before. It seemed a perfect environment for a young pre-teen.

When my parents' work contract ended I desperately tried to stay on my own, by asking a close friend's missionary family to adopt me. My parents were understandably not willing to let me go however, and I braced myself for another repeat of what I thought of as grey and angst-ridden Swedish suburbia. Sweden was my family's 'default country': most of us had been born there, and our passports and my father's work HQ were based there.

A year or so later, my family was set to move to Indonesia on a new work contract. But at the last minute when we were already on our way, the contract fell through. I'd already been enrolled in school but my parents had to work elsewhere, and I ended up living on my own in Jakarta aged only fifteen.

Living alone so young, not only for the first time but also in a completely new culture, came as a shock. Just as I had done in Zimbabwe, though, I fell in love with the country, the school, my new friends and adventures. At the end of the school year, again I was not able to find a way to stay, and again I was told to return to Swedish suburbia; where I despondently stumbled my way through the remaining years of secondary school.

By the time I graduated I felt exhausted, lonely, and out of sync with my peers. I was eighteen but had already struggled to live on my own for three years, as well as having attended nine schools, in four education systems, on three continents. I hadn't even begun my adult life; but I knew down to my bones what love and loss were.

Looking back I can count how by that time, I had loved and lost four times. Not in the romantic or familial sense that people usually mean when they use that phrase; rather I had lost the sense of somewhere to call 'home': somewhere to belong; familiarities that I'd slowly built, with continuity of friendships, interests, and relative safety. A comfortable-enough place to eat dinner at night, and to sleep. Somewhere to be happy, or comforted when I was sad.

Humans tend to naturally and mostly unconsciously build attachments to the place where they find themselves. As a toddler, I naturally attached to wherever I lived. As a teen, however, I found far greater belonging and joy in Zimbabwe and Indonesia, than in what others called my home country. I realised that to some extent, we can make changes and choices that influence where (and who) we

attach to. It is complicated of course; but we are not necessarily obliged to live with our existing attachments, especially if they don't hold a sense of safety, joy, or connection for us.

I moved to London to study at university, reasoning that a degree in Development Studies<sup>2</sup> would allow me to work in the places that I loved. Unfortunately I learned that engineering would have been far more useful, and I was not an engineer. Nor was I cut out for the other jobs in demand where I wanted to live—English teaching, business, medicine, politics, and missionary work. I was drawn to psychology, the arts, and journalism. With the exception of war reporting, these careers typically required years of slow growth: building a work portfolio in a small hometown as my parents had done, and then maybe by your 40s working your way ‘up and out’: towards promotions and expertise that afford you more choices for where to live, if you can and wish.

I tried it. I wanted so badly the traditional and sensible approach to work. But by the age of 29, despite my best attempts, I was no closer to the sense of connection that I yearned for. Instead I had battled recurring clinical depression to the point of suicidal ideation. I felt unable to bear any longer the shadow of alienation that followed me around, and yearned for a place—any place—that felt like home.

With a sense of urgency, I tried turning the puzzle the other way around. ‘Maybe I should save up and move to somewhere I love first’, I wondered, ‘and THEN try to find a local job once I’m there.’ It was risky; I would have to leave behind my job, friends, fiancé, and the house he’d

bought (that I had never felt at home in). My life was in my hands, though; I felt that I had no choice.

For almost a whole joyful and adventurous year, I found work as a magazine and newspaper columnist in Thailand—another country that I had always felt a natural resonance with. Because of my lack of relevant work experience however, I was not able to secure a long-term work and residence permit. I had to return to the UK, and ended up living for the next eleven years in the same situation as perhaps most: in a good-enough place that would have me, doing good-enough work when I could get it.

As a Zen Buddhist I kept trying to be wholeheartedly present and to do my best: to practise zazen; to accept wherever I already found myself; to in a sense ‘choose’ my situation, even though it seemed more as if the situation had chosen me. For some time, I succeeded at fooling myself into believing that I had attained a state of wholehearted acceptance. But an uneasy resentment simmered below the surface. I could not force my heart into acceptance, any more than I could ‘push an elephant through the eye of a needle’<sup>3</sup>.

Depression kept showing up at my door, an old ghost that I could not fight. My teacher at Throssel said ‘Ok. If it’s depression showing up—then accept depression.’ While I had studied Buddhist practice, this idea was so counter-intuitive and yet deceptively simple that I had not thought of it. Practising it during zazen immediately gave me a welcome relief from the pain; until I got used to it and the relief levelled off, an underlying anguish returning again. I practised and practised, but no matter how many layers it

felt like I sloughed off—no matter how many ‘breakthroughs’ it felt like I had—there the pain and anguish still were. I seemed to be made of the stuff.

As many in the Sangha have asked before me, ‘How long? How much longer of this?’ A question which of course cannot be answered. I found just enough faith to keep going by observing monks who had gone through the same thing, and who appeared to have emerged on another more peaceful shore. I would like to say to them, and to everyone who keeps going no matter what: thank you for saving my life. This is the Sangha Treasure.

At times the practitioner will not feel as if she has any faith, and those whom I know (myself included) would snort with laughter at the suggestion that they are setting any kind of example. The thing is that sometimes the best we can do, is to do nothing more than stay alive for just one more day. The pain of that for some of us takes as much if not more strength and courage, as any of the heroic acts in the history books.

I kept going in this way, until one ordinary day—when it appeared that everything around me had quietly but radically changed. I felt like a full-grown butterfly looking with surprise back at the discarded tatters of a cocoon. *Was that really me?* Sometimes change is simultaneously seismic and gentle. Nothing (and yet everything) had changed. I might as well have been flung into a parallel galaxy or been taken over by an alien life form, for all the familiarity that my daily habits still held.

The surface remained the exact same as before: I had the same name, address, and appearance in the mirror; the

same flat that I struggled to pay the rent for; the same cheap-but-nice throw pillows that I had treated myself to, the old desk, the kitchen utensils. But somehow, all these things and identifiers had become void of the personal significance that they had previously held. They no longer felt familiar; I could no longer take them for granted. At the same time I could see that at their core, along with all other things—somehow beyond material form—my life, and all the people and things in it, had transformed into treasures: precious beyond doubt.

I hadn't taken drugs. By which circuitous route then, I wondered, had I arrived in this brand new place? Maybe it was pure chance. Or maybe everything we do, even if it is only to stay alive another day, adds up; even as we despair that our efforts and existence do not seem worthwhile. I had not been successful at choosing the big life-changing things like work, home and family, so I had resigned myself to chipping away at doing my best in the tiny and apparently insignificant day-to-day choices that I did have: my thoughts, words and actions, as they are taught in the Precepts. I don't hold proof of cause and effect; all I know is that one day, without my doing anything differently, life had completely and irrevocably changed.

The phrase that sparked this essay was 'The Map To Where I Live'. Like a nurse seeking a vein from which to tap blood, I had spent my life seeking a map that would lead me to the river of life itself. A few times I had been lucky to fall into that river, finding myself fully and happily submerged. Equally randomly though, I'd been flung out into unforgiving desert. I spent years feeling lost and trying to trace my way back. The trouble is, that there is no way back. If there's anything, it is not a linear path so much as a

spiral: a gradual upward climb as if towards a sun.

And yet what I saw on that 'new' day, was not exactly new. If you're climbing a mountain and the vegetation gradually changes, there will still be a singular moment in which you notice that everything changed. Looking back, I see now how familiar challenges return again and again in other forms; harder or softer than before. And as long as the challenges don't kill us, the best we can do is to keep trying. Within this work, imperceptibly, is something akin to progress; which is the opposite of the way back. If the shape of life is a spiral, even the smallest and most insignificant effort leads home: to the place that I'd been trying so hard to return to, this whole time. 'Home' for me was not a place on a map after all, but a state of heart over time.

### *Notes*

1. A short version of this essay was first published on <https://dewonthegrass.net> (May 2022).
2. An interdisciplinary social science focussed on the alleviation of poverty.
3. The metaphor of an elephant being pushed through the eye of a needle occurs in the Talmud (Berakhot 55b; Baba Metzia 38b).

## The Way-Seeking Mind

Rev. Master Aurelian Giles

— Lytton, British Columbia – Canada —

*This is a transcription of a talk given at Lions Gate Buddhist Priory in November 2021.*

Rev. Master Jiyu said, several times, some version of the following: “If you’re going to sit in front of a wall and practice meditation, you run the risk of being grabbed by the Cosmic Buddha.” There is a lot in that short statement. People come to meditation practice and to Buddhism for a lot of different reasons; and probably not everyone is looking for the full enlightenment of a Buddha. It may be that they just want to feel a little bit better, become a bit happier, or become calmer.

In my case, I was a very young man living and working in a small town in rural Alberta, quite lonely, and I would go to the bar every night and drink beer and go to my room and fall asleep, sometimes pass out, and then wake up and go to work in the morning. I came across an article in a *Reader’s Digest* about how to meditate. This would be 1973 or 1974, I was 19 or 20 years old. And there was a lot of discussion about meditation at that time. There were all kinds of different practices. Some were probably not very good; the

people who were teaching them may have had motives of fame and gain rather than handing on and teaching a tradition.

The article that I read told about how to meditate using a mantra, and it largely dealt with the physiological benefits of doing so. The writer was a professor in Harvard, who did studies that proved that meditation calmed people down, lowered their blood pressure, made them calmer; he proved this through measurable means. He tested their brain waves and things like that.

So I thought, “Oh. Wow. Okay.” I was actually deeply unhappy. I didn’t realise how unhappy I was at the time. So I tried it out. The instructions were that one needed to carry it out on several days in a row before feeling any benefits. I did this every night when I got back from work. And I remember the third or fourth night, I got back from work, had some supper, and went to the bar. I was sitting there, and everything seemed clearer to me, and I felt different. I felt calm. And I didn’t even want to finish drinking my beer. I think I might have even left the bar without finishing it, which was unbelievable to me. That was the beginning of my search. I didn’t realise at the time that I was on a search.

Great Master Dōgen and other teachers have talked about what Dōgen called “arousing the Way-seeking mind”. This is also called Bodhicitta in Sanskrit. It means the heart or the mind that seeks the Way. The heart of a Bodhisattva.

As I said, I didn’t realise I was on a journey to try to become a Bodhisattva; I just wanted to feel better. Lama Yeshe gave a talk about that, and he said that if you are just

practicing to feel a bit better then you are not going to get very much out of it. But that is where I started.

I'd like to read what Great Master Dōgen said. This is from a book called *Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki*<sup>1</sup>, translated by a monk named Shohaku Okumura. Someone asked Dōgen the following question:

Although many years have passed since aspiring to learn the Way, I have not yet had any realisation. Many of the ancient teachers have said that the Way does not depend on intelligence or wisdom. Therefore, I don't think we should demean ourselves because of our inferior capacity. Is there something about this that has been handed down in the tradition that I should keep in mind?

Dōgen starts off by saying that the questioner is right about "not relying on intelligence, talent, quick-wittedness, or wisdom in learning the Way." Then he says, "However, it is wrong to mistakenly encourage a person to become blind, deaf, or ignorant." In other words, if we are going to start on the path, we should allow for the possibility that we might find what we are looking for. This is what Rev. Master Jiyu was saying.

Great Master Dōgen goes on to say this: "I believe this. It depends only on whether one's aspiration is firmly determined or not. A person who arouses true aspiration and studies as hard as his capacity allows will not fail to attain the Way." My teacher, Rev. Master Kōten, has put it this way: "If you are the type of person who is looking for this sort of thing, you are the type of person who will find it."

Great Master Dōgen goes on to say, “We have to be careful to concentrate on and directly carry out the following practice: first of all, just maintain the aspiration to earnestly seek.” He then gives examples, saying that if a person is single-mindedly focused on something, then all their efforts are going to be towards achieving that thing. He says:

In the same way, if the aspiration to seek the way is earnest enough, when you practice shikan-taza [Serene Reflection Meditation], or study the kōans, or meet your Teacher, though the aim is high, you will hit the mark. Though it is deep, you will fish it out. Next, to arouse such an aspiration, think deeply in your heart of the impermanence of the world.

This is something he talks about over and over again in his writings. He says that seeing into impermanence completely is enlightenment itself.

It is not a matter of meditating using some provisional method of contemplation. It is not a matter of fabricating in our heads that which does truly not really exist. Impermanence is truly the reality right in front of our eyes. We need not wait from some teaching from others, proof from some passage of scripture, or some principle. Born in the morning, dead in the evening. A person we saw yesterday is no longer here today. These are the facts we see with our eyes and hear with our ears. This is what we see and hear about others. Applying this to our own bodies, and thinking of the reality of all things, though we expect to live for 70 or 80 years,

we die when we must die. During our lifetime, though we may see the reality of sorrow, pleasure, love of our families, and hatred of our enemies, these are not really worthy matters. We could spend time letting go of them. In reality, it is only today or even this moment that we can thus think of worldly affairs or of the Buddha Way. Therefore, in such an unpredictable world, it is extremely foolish to waste time worrying about various ways of earning a living in order to postpone one's death, uncertain as it is, to say nothing of plotting evil against others.

Sometimes, I think people can find the teachings of Buddhism kind of depressing, or make them feel despair. But that is when we are looking at it from our own selfish point of view. The reality, as he said, is that everything is impermanent; impermanence is right before us at this very moment. And this impermanence is emptiness, and this emptiness is Great Compassion itself.

Let us 'fast forward' a few years later in my life. I had realised that I wanted to study Buddhism; or at least, I was drawn to it. I didn't really want to study anything. I was very mixed up by this time. Forget about going to the bar every night for a beer. I was in the throes of an alcohol and drug habit. Yet, I was still drawn to meditation and Buddhism. There was a meditation group in Vancouver that was associated with Shasta Abbey, and Lions Gate Buddhist Priory emerged out of that group. The group would host meditation weekends every month or so. A monk would travel up from the Abbey and teach. There would be quite a lot of meditation through the day. I would really look

forward to going to these retreats, not so much to hear what the monk had to say, but rather I looked forward to the meditation because I would leave with that same feeling of clarity and calmness that I had experienced years ago. I was grasping after those feelings. I was very selfish in my motivations. And the feelings of calmness and clarity would disperse very quickly, because I would return to my old habits. And I thought that somehow I could do that: use the meditation to feel calm and continue with my other habits.

Lama Yeshe, a Tibetan teacher, put it this way in the last series of public talks that he gave shortly before his death in 1984:

Without bodhicitta, nothing works. And most of all, your meditation doesn't work, and realisations don't come.

Why is bodhicitta necessary for success in meditation? Because of selfish grasping. If you have a good meditation but don't have bodhicitta, you will grasp at any little experience of bliss: "Me, me; I want more, I want more." Then the good experience disappears completely... "Me, me, I'm miserable, I want to be happy. Therefore I'll meditate." It doesn't work that way. For some reason good meditation and its results—peacefulness, satisfaction and bliss—just don't come.<sup>2</sup>

I don't want to go into a whole autobiography, let's just say that things evolved. And here I am, a monk. Who would have thought?

There is something else I want to say about this. I had been grabbed by the Cosmic Buddha the very first time I sat down to meditate; I just didn't realise it. Something within me had given rise to seeking true freedom from suffering. I didn't know this at the time. I was still floundering around, thinking I could just continue to stomp my way through life and be completely irresponsible and have the benefits of Buddhism. Nevertheless, something in me had been awakened.

I will tell this story about myself, because it's important. The day I quit drinking, I had gone out at 11 o'clock in the morning with friends, and we were bar-hopping all day. I was drinking all day and getting drunker as the day wore on. But I couldn't find that 'thing' that I was looking for when I drank, which was to get oblivious to the suffering that I felt. That was why I drank. And it was, quite literally, as if there was a being sitting on my shoulder watching me. Not judging, just watching. And I could not turn away from that being, which was my own awareness. I could not turn away from my own awareness of what I was doing, how silly I was, thinking I was sophisticated and grown up, when I was acting like a fool. That night I went home to my house, about midnight, and what happened was that I heard an interior voice that said, "If you continue to do this, you are going to die." At that time, my father, who was a very desperate alcoholic, had about two years left to live; he was drinking himself into his grave. What that voice said was, "If you continue to do this, you will end up like him, and you will die." And I didn't want to die. I broke down, and basically, it was the way it says in the *Litany of the Great Compassionate One*, "All, all is defilement, earth,

earth.” That is what I felt. It was all defiled. And I cried out. “To Indra the creator I cry.” I cried out in my heart. And Great Compassion answered.

I would like to be able to say it was a clear path up the mountain after that, but it wasn’t. It was very, very difficult. That was the last time I drank. But it wasn’t easy. Because I had to look at the wreckage of my life and all my karmic wake. If I looked behind me I would see that I had cut a swathe of destruction. And I had to do something about that.

I’m really, really grateful that I was able to discover Buddhism, because it saved my life. And what I want to say is, we should not judge ourselves. If we think we are a really horrible trainee; if we think of all the things we haven’t done or have done which we then decide makes it impossible for us to achieve the Way, we shouldn’t do that, we shouldn’t think that way. Because you are here, you have come here because you are earnestly seeking. You may not know it or feel it, but Bodhicitta has been awakened in you. And the promise, as it is said, is true: “If you are the person who looks for these things, then you are the person who will find them.” And you never know. You might be a moment away from becoming a fully enlightened Buddha.

I remember Rev. Master Kōten said to me once, “You should never look down on a person who is passed out drunk in the gutter. They might be doing really deep Bodhisattva practice. Don’t judge yourself, and don’t judge others.”

When I was a new monk, there was someone who was coming to the Priory who was painfully sincere. And it sort

of bothered me, and I said to Rev. Master Kōten, “Don’t you think it’s just a bit much?” And he said, “Just ignore that. Ignore that thought going through your head. That person is deeply sincere. And that is what you need to see.” And that was a very helpful piece of advice.

What I am talking about might be called, in other traditions, the “awakening of faith.” And if you think you don’t have any faith, well, you are here. So you must have some sort of faith. As Rev. Master Jiyu said, “We all of us believe that when the sun goes down, it will come up in the morning. But there is no proof of that. We just have faith that it will.”

There is an old joke. A pastor is preaching to his flock. “Brothers and sisters, you have come here to pray for rain. Well, I ask you: where are your umbrellas?”

Homage to all the Buddhas in all worlds.  
Homage to all the Bodhisattvas in all worlds.  
Homage to *The Scripture of Great Wisdom*.

### Notes

1. Okumura, Shohaku, translator: *Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki*, (Wisdom Publications, 2022) pp 92-94.
2. Yeshe, Lama Thubten: *The Enlightened Experience, Collected Teachings: Volume 3*, (Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive, Boston, 2020) p. 50.

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## News of the Order

### UK and Europe

#### Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey

— *Northumberland, England – UK* —

**Retreats:** We are pleased that our retreats have been attended by increasing numbers of people this Spring since the threat from the Covid pandemic eased. Amongst the events we



have held was, for the first time since 2019, the Family Weekend, which saw a pleasing number of children and their parents enjoying various activities like Frisbee golf, origami and a brief meditation session. The traditional barbecue was also held on the Hall of Pure Offerings lawn on the Saturday evening.

One of the youngsters who attended wrote the following: “My favourite thing was pouring water on the baby Buddha. I thought it was cool and incredibly kind of the monks to allow outsiders to participate in the ceremony! And my other favourite thing was stacking wood in the garden, because Rev. Wilfrid gave me a piece of wood to keep.” Jethro, age 11 (London, UK).



**Wesak:** On the Sunday we held the Festival of the Buddha's Birth which was also well attended. It was a joy to have a good number of lay trainees in the hall for this ceremony, after the monks having been alone at this occasion for the last two years.



This gradual re-opening has also enabled us to plan a celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Throssel's existence, to take place in late June, and invite unlimited numbers to attend. A report of this event will feature in the next *Journal*.

**Monastic news:** We congratulate Rev. Kōjō Bailey who received Dharma Transmission from Rev. Master Daishin Morgan at the Hermitage in Wales in April. We wish her well as she continues in monastic life wearing the mokuran of the transmitted monk.



We are also pleased to welcome Rev. Caitlin Clark from Great Ocean Dharma Refuge. She arrived just before Wesak, and expects to stay at Throssel for the foreseeable future. She is already proving to be a very valuable addition to our team in the kitchen.

**Sesshin:** The monks enjoyed our usual two-week closed period after Wesak, which included a sesshin retreat, followed by a few days of rest and renewal.

**Full Fibre broadband:** Our grateful thanks go to the volunteers in the local ‘Broadband for the Allen Valleys’ trust (B4AV) who gave their time and expertise to connect us to hyperfast broadband. Because of their efforts we have been able to get a very good fibre-to-the-premises service that will be essential in allowing us to have a good VOIP (voice over internet) phone system once British Telecom withdraw their landlines. It will also make it much easier for us to share talks and events live with our congregation.



**Solar Power:** We have contracted a local firm to install 24 Solar photo-voltaic panels to go on our zendō roof, providing us with about 9500KW hours of electricity a year. This is partly to minimise our impact on the environment by installing renewable energy facilities, and also in response to rapidly rising fuel and energy costs. As well as providing electricity, the panels will heat hot water for showers in the summer. Also, we have installed two electric vehicle charging points at Throssel. One allows an eight-hour charge and the other five hours. We hope this will be useful for our guests who are switching to plug-in hybrid or full electric vehicles.

— *Rev. Masters Berwyn and Roland*

## Great Ocean Dharma Refuge

— Pembrokeshire – Wales —

In early May, after having spent a fruitful period of eight months at Great Ocean Dharma Refuge since returning from her stay at Shasta Abbey, Reverend Caitlin travelled to Throssel Hole to continue her extended period of training in one of our larger



Abbeys. We thank Rev. Master Roland for travelling down to help with transportation and we wish Rev. Caitlin every continuing success.

Spring brought a renewal of nature and wildlife around the Temple (although sadly this year the house martins have not returned) - and of course the pleasure of retreat guests. Many thanks are especially offered to Sam Nason who scaled the big ladder to mend a broken slate and fix a hole in one of the house finials. A woodpecker had enjoyed excavating it!

For more information about retreat opportunities at Great Ocean, we welcome you as always to write or phone.



— Rev. Master Mokugen

## Norwich Zen Buddhist Priory

— Norwich, England – UK —

**Recent events:** We came together as a Sangha on 6th March for a Compassion Vigil. We offered the merit of the ceremony for all those people who have been killed and whose

lives have been affected by war and conflict across the world, particularly those beings suffering because of the war in Ukraine. The Scriptures that we chanted gave expression to our wish for peace, compassion and benevolence in the world. The readings reminded us that we put that wish into practice through continuing with our training, so that we work on letting go of our own selfishness.

It was a great pleasure to welcome Rev. Master Mokugen to the Priory for a brief visit one afternoon in March. Rev. Master Mokugen had a tour of the Priory and offered incense at the main altar. Then she joined the garden group (who were working at the Priory at the time) for tea and a chat, which rounded off the visit nicely.

On 10th April, we held a lay ordination ceremony for Kiran Evetts. It is always a special occasion when someone formally commits themselves to live by the Precepts and expresses their wish to become a Buddhist. We as a Sangha came together (both at the Priory and online) to welcome Kiran into the family of Buddha



and to recommit ourselves to a life of meditation and keeping the Precepts. We congratulate Kiran and wish him well with his ongoing training.

We celebrated Wesak, the Festival of the Buddha's Birth on 8th May. This joyous occasion was particularly notable for having the largest gathering of Sangha members since the pandemic began, the most people that we have hosted at the new Priory.

This gave a lovely sense that the life of the Priory was returning to normal. We used the full extent of our meditation room, part of which is usually screened off, for the first time and this space, together with the sun shining through the patio doors, was uplifting for the meditation and the ceremony, as well as for our get-together afterwards over coffee and biscuits for the Dharma talk and discussion.



**Thanks:** Several people have been offering their help and expertise to the Priory in recent months: ongoing repairs and maintenance work, including painting, putting up shelves and fixing skirting boards; computer and IT upgrades, including improving our Zoom meetings; cleaning and other housework; gardening and other outdoor maintenance; book-keeping and accounting; producing our Wesak cards; providing a place of retreat for me in Wells-next-the-Sea for a week; and keeping the Priory running when I had to be away. A big thank you to those people and to everyone who supports the Priory in any way.

— *Rev. Master Leoma*

## The Place of Peace Dharma House

— Aberystwyth, Wales – UK —

This May we have celebrated Wesak (The Birth of the Buddha) twice, once via Zoom and once with guests here, at the temple. We welcomed Moira Pagan, who lives in Australia, and who came for a retreat. Heather Walters baked lotus biscuits for the temple altar and also sent them to those taking part in the Zoom ceremony.



The Wesak Altar at The Place of Peace Dharma House

This year a traditional white elephant was added to our Wesak altar. It has taken a while to find one that was the right scale. This splendid statue was originally plain beige and Rev. Myōhō painted and decorated him.



Moirra Pagan ladles water over the Baby Buddha



Our new Wesak elephant

As well as regular Zoom Dharma Meetings, we have been visited by Sangha from Durham. It is good to have people here in person again. We look forward to seeing those who are booked in for future visits.

The monthly Dharma Reflections talks are now sent out as mp3 files. If anyone would like to receive them, please let Rev Master Myōhō know.

We offer gratitude for gifts of food, toiletries, sacristy items, help from the neighbour who repaired our fence, and to Steffan Jones for computer lessons. And to all who continue to support the temple.

We hope this finds you all well, and send our good wishes and gratitude for your continued support.

— *Rev. Master Myōhō*

Reading Buddhist Priory

— *Reading, England – UK* —

**Festivals and Ceremonies:** On 6<sup>th</sup> March we celebrated the Kanzeon Festival, and on the 8<sup>th</sup> May, we held Wesak. We were

fortunate to have lovely weather for Wesak, and were able to enjoy a bring-and-share lunch in the garden. The festival day was made especially joyous by Jafer bringing along his and Danielle's young daughter Verity, who was lively and engaged with the ceremony. In keeping with the special meaning of Wesak in relation to children, Reverend Gareth gave Verity a gift of a Kanzeon necklace as part of the ceremony.

**Classes:** As a group we have been enjoying listening to some of Reverend Master Kōten's recent talks (on the Lions Gate Buddhist Priory website) on Reverend Master Jiyu's life, with special reference to her early life, in addition to that which appears in *The Wild, White Goose*.

**Visits:** Over the last few months Reverend Gareth has twice been invited by the Chair of West Berkshire's local SACRE (Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education\*) to talk, on panels of mixed faith, to secondary schools in West Berkshire. His first visit, in the early part of the year, was to an audience of around 400-500 mixed age pupils at a school in Thatcham. His latest visit, in April, was to a school in Newbury where he was part of a panel comprising a member of the Islamic Faith, a Baptist Minister, and a Humanist. Each gave short answers to pre-prepared questions on different aspects of belief to an audience of about 200 older students, in order to help widen their understanding and experience of faith before they were due to leave school for the wider world. Reverend Gareth reported back that there was positive local media coverage, and that both events were well received. As a follow up, he has been invited to have an educational video made at the Priory which will then appear on the SACRE website.

*\*A Government partnership initiative bringing together members of local faith communities, teachers and local authorities in order for faiths to have an input into the content of religious education and collective worship.*

— Gina Bovan

## Turning Wheel Buddhist Temple

— *Leicester, East Midlands – UK* —

**Celebrating the Festival of the Buddha's Birth:** The highlight of our calendar in May is always Wesak, the Festival of the Buddha's Birth, and after two years of online-only celebrations it was lovely to be able to welcome people to the temple again for Wesak this year. There were ten people here in person plus 14 online from across the Midlands and beyond.

We started the morning with a meditation period, followed by the festival itself and then a Dharma talk and discussion. Rev. Aiden was celebrant for the festival, which took place in our newly redecorated Meditation Hall. This is the first Wesak that we have held since the room was remodelled during the building work.

After the Dharma Talk we had a bring-and-share feast followed by a social afternoon. It was nice to have good enough weather to be able to sit outside for lunch, and also during the afternoon. We finished the day with a meditation period in the Meditation Hall, followed by tea and biscuits on the lawn.

Thank you to everyone for making it such a successful day.

**Redecorating our rooms following the building work:** We continue to work on redecorating our rooms following last year's building work. Last Autumn the entrance hall was finished, together with the adjacent WCs, and the carpet and vinyl flooring fitted. Since then the upstairs shower rooms have been finished off, and work is currently underway to redecorate and fit out our new utility room.

The next room to be decorated after that will be the downstairs shower room, followed by the two bedrooms in our new 'Guest Wing'. This is in what used to be the garage, and once these rooms are complete we will once again be able to have guests stay for overnight visits.

**Offering of Merit Ceremony:** In the last couple of months we have been holding an Offering of Merit Ceremony after morning meditation on Saturdays. This is an opportunity to offer the merit of our practice to all those who are in difficult circumstances throughout the world, and in particular to all those who are suffering as a result of the war in Ukraine; all those who have been killed, all those who are injured, all those who have been made homeless and all those who are grieving.

— *Rev. Master Aiden*

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**Dharmazuflucht Schwarzwald**  
— *Gutach (Black Forest) – Germany* —

It was a joy to welcome again several congregation members for our week-long spring retreat this year, which we held at the beginning of May. On the last day of the retreat, we celebrated Wesak together.



We scheduled in other small retreats for the coming months, and a variety of congregation members will be staying with us outside of the retreat times. In July, Rev. Clementia will be going to Wales to spend three weeks with Rev. Master

Mokugen at Great Ocean Dharma Refuge. She has not been able to go much anywhere in the last four years, due to a sequence of operations she needed to undergo, and later on due to the pandemic. We are very grateful to Rev. Master Mokugen that she can now spend a bit of time with her.

The regular online Dharma-meetings for those in our congregation who wish to attend are continuing, though we decided to have a break over the summer months, as many in our congregation would probably not be able to attend, given the summer holidays.

We had some glorious spring weather in the Black Forest, and took the opportunity to clear a lot of the small bushes on the steep slope behind and on the side of our temple, so that the forest doesn't gradually move closer and closer down towards the temple. Our gratitude goes to lay ministers Susan and Benjamin, who spent some time with us in May and did a lot of work in the garden and on our property.



The view of the Temple from the North ...



...and from the South

A journalist from a Black Forest newspaper came for an interview in May, as she is doing a series of articles on people from the various nationalities living in Gutach. Apparently, there are citizens from 38 nations living in our small town/village, including some refugees. As I am the only Swiss citizen living here, she wanted to write an article on my life story, on how our temple ended up in Gutach, and on what we offer at the Dharmazuflucht. She had already written an article on us when we first got here, and has been very respectful towards us.

— *Rev. Master Fuden*

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## News of the Order

### USA & Canada

#### Shasta Abbey

— *Mount Shasta, CA – USA* —

Spring and early summer were busy times for the monastery. One event was the Friends of Shasta Abbey work day, to which a number of lay people responded in joining the



community for working meditation and lunch afterwards outdoors. In addition to a number of tree-felling and firewood projects, both here and at Compassionate Friend Hermitage, we

also celebrated memorials for Don Penner, who knew Rev. Master Jiyu in Japan, on April 9th and for Rosemary Dyke on April 30th. Rosemary had been a long-time lay minister in Mount Shasta and was especially renowned for her love of animals and her rescue work of abandoned ones. She died April 20th, 2020, but we had to wait until the Covid pandemic wound down before we could do a public memorial. Many of her friends and the community joined together in front of the Kshtigarbha Shrine near the Vimalakirti Hall (Guest House) to honor Rosemary and wish her well.



The monks held their week-long spring retreat April 20-26, with Rev. Master Meian lecturing on Dōgen's *108 Gates to What*

*the Dharma Illumines*. Then on May 15th we celebrated Wesak, our first big public festival since we closed to guests two years ago at the start of the Covid pandemic. 15-20 guests joined us for the ceremony, ringing the temple bell, and a festive tea outside afterwards.



Rev. Master Haryo offered the Dharma talk, which can be accessed via the link below:

[https://shastaabbey.org/blog/mixed\\_audio\\_post/talk-at-wesak/](https://shastaabbey.org/blog/mixed_audio_post/talk-at-wesak/)

**Jukai:** From May 22nd till May 29th we observed the ceremonies of Jukai, Opening the Gate of the Precepts, another major event that had been postponed for two years due to the pandemic. We had nearly 30 lay guests plus two priors present for the activities. 20 people took the Precepts for the first time: Ariane ‘Doc’ Alexander, Ty Gavin Bowen, Elisavets Lyubomirova Bozmarova, Claude Douglas Council, Jr., Ted Ross Cumming, Gwen Alexandra Frishkoff, Corinne Joyce Gelfan, Philippa Margaret Garrick Hajdu, Ralph Eric Helske, Scott Wood Johnson, Andrea Dawn Mascorro, Jillian Mary Morrissey, Daniel Graham Patterson, Erica Diane Reininger, Lee Earl Shoop, Kelli Wainscoat, Bethany Michelle Waller, Carol Lynn West, Justin Robert Zalesny, and Sydney Elizabeth Williams. We were grateful to finally administer the Precepts to these persons, many

of whom had been waiting a long time to take them. We were also grateful to the other lay trainees who helped us with set-up, organization, and all the behind-the-scenes work that Jukai always entails.



**Another new master:** On April 17th Rev. Master Daishin Yalon recognized Rev. Enya Sapp as a Master of the Order. Rev. Enya was ordained in April of 2006 as a disciple of Rev. Master Daishin and has been of invaluable assistance to him in Extern Sacristy ever since. We congratulate Rev. Master Enya and wish her well in her continued training.

—Rev. Master Oswin

## Redding Zen Buddhist Priory

— Redding, CA – USA —

Congratulations on taking the Precepts at the Ceremony of Lay Ordination at Shasta Abbey on May 24, 2022, go to Redding Sangha Members Doug Council, Justin Zalesny, Sidney Williams, Scott Johnson, and Lee Shoop. They are pictured overleaf in front of Rev. Master Jiyu Kennett's Stupa at the Abbey. We wish them well as they take this significant step in their training.



Also, below, is the Redding Sangha represented at the Ceremony of Lay Ordination at Shasta Abbey including Susan Place, Kathleen Coates, Rev. Helen, Doug Council, Roxanna Zalesny, Justin Zalesny, Sidney Williams, Lee Shoop and Julie Hunter, Gary Solberg, Jeannine Gillan, and Alice Ratcliff.



Redding Zen celebrated Wesak in person and on Zoom at the Priory on May 8. It was the first time we've celebrated a Sunday ceremony in person since the start of the COVID lockdowns.

Since the start of the year, in our weekly Tuesday and Thursday on-line Zoom classes, we held a sixteen-week class on the Precepts, and twelve-week classes on Great Master Dōgen's *Gakudo Yojinshu* and on his *Tenzo Kyōkun*. The rich discussions underscore the relevance of Dōgen's teaching in our present time.

Rev. Helen continues to meet once a month via Zoom with the Sangha in Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada, to discuss aspects of training and practice. She and Sangha member Panda Jerry offered a Zoom presentation on April 27 for Hospice Northwest Thunder Bay on *Ways We Can Support our Animal Friends (and Ourselves) in their Dying and After Their Death*. Panda is a Pet Groomer and a Hospice Northwest Grief Support Volunteer.

— Rev. Helen

## Still Flowing Water Hermitage

—Meadow Vista, CA – USA—

Still Flowing Water Hermitage has a new home! On 15 April we moved from the beautiful cottage we had been occupying on the land of two Lay Ministers of the Order, into a small older house twenty miles toward the Sierra Nevada Mountains from where we had been. We are now in the tiny village of Dutch Flat, California, population 183. The house (pictured overleaf) has three bedrooms so we now have a meditation room and a guest room (which also functions as an office). It is quite wonderful to have space that we can use in this way, and it enables us to begin offering retreats to individuals as well as periods of meditation to four to six people.



This move is the next step in the creation of the Hermitage. The house is not secluded (though the village of Dutch Flat is) and it is our hope that eventually we can move to a property that offers even more solitude and silence. For now, we are very happy to be settled here. The photo below is our main altar.



Still Flowing Water Hermitage now has a website, albeit rudimentary: [www.stillflowingwaterhermitage.org](http://www.stillflowingwaterhermitage.org) is where you can find us.

On 3 March Rev. Vivian spoke about Buddhism with a small group of children who are preparing to receive Confirmation at Faith Lutheran Church in Meadow Vista. Part of their curriculum is to learn about other religions. They were a joy and asked good questions.

On 13 March the Bear River Meditation Group enjoyed a spring wild flower walk led by two of our members, followed by a picnic lunch. We appreciated spending this relaxing time together.

On 17 March Rev. Vivian gave a Dharma talk to the nearby Mountain Stream Vipassana Group.

On 1 May Rev. Vivian was celebrant for a House Blessing for a couple in the Bear River Meditation Group who had recently moved. We all enjoyed tea and cookies afterwards in their lovely garden.

The last week of May, Rev. Vivian attended Jukai at Shasta Abbey, along with three people from the Bear River Meditation Group who were receiving the Precepts. This was Shasta's first in-person retreat since the beginning of COVID, and so it was an especially joyous occasion. We offer our congratulations to those who received the Precepts; they worked hard, and this was reflected in the richness of the week they spent at the monastery. We are grateful to Shasta Abbey for hosting us.

Now that we have a building with some space, you are all invited to come for a visit, for an hour or a week, you are welcome.

— *Rev. Vivian*

## Wallowa Buddhist Temple

— *Joseph, Oregon – USA* —

**Three New Lay Ordinands:** Three people in the Wallowa Buddhist Temple congregation – Daniel, Erica, and Ty – received the Buddhist Precepts during the week-long Jukai retreat at Shasta

Abbey in May. Rev. Meidō attended Jukai as well so she could witness the three of them taking this important step. We all offer our heartfelt congratulations to Daniel, Erica, and Ty, wishing them all the best as they continue on the Buddhist path.



Daniel, Erica, and Ty at Rev. Master Jiyu's Stupa,  
Jukai 2022

Daniel and Ty journeyed independently to the Abbey. Rev. Meidō and Erica drove together, staying on the way down with Rev. Master Hugh at the Eugene Buddhist Priory, and on the return trip with Lay Minister Ernie Rimerman and Eugene Priory congregation member Gwen, and were grateful for the kind hospitality shown them. While at the monastery, Rev. Meidō

found it wonderful to train together with the monastic Sangha and to participate in the ceremonies of Jukai. She and the three new lay ordinands offer deep gratitude to Rev. Master Meian and the community of Shasta Abbey for making the ceremonies of Jukai available this year, and for their warm welcome.

**Open One-to-One, Offering Dharma:** The temple remains open for the individual visits, emails, and phone calls which fill our days. We hope to resume larger gatherings in the near future. We continue to offer to our regular emails with attached audio Dharma talk by Rev. Clairissa for independent home listening during our suggested Sunday Morning Retreat schedule or as desired. As we are unable to hold online video meetings due to limited internet service, we are glad that these audio reflections are proving helpful and encouraging to the widespread listeners on our email list.

**Potential for Individual Retreat Guests:** One of the main purposes of the Wallowa Buddhist Temple from its beginning almost two decades ago has been to offer individual retreats. Currently, we are resuming in-person retreats as ever-changing conditions allow, with priority for those who have already made requests. If you are opening to the possibility of a future retreat here with the monks, you are most welcome to contact us.



Daffodils blooming at Jizō shrine,  
Wallowa Buddhist Temple

— Rev. Master Meidō and Rev. Clairissa

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## Lions Gate Buddhist Priory

— *Lytton, British Columbia – Canada* —

Spring is here. The heavy snows of winter have disappeared. Even though it has been a rather cold spring, we are happy to hear songbirds and see wildflowers and green leaves.

In late April, we welcomed Rev. Chizen Matyszewski, who has come to join our monastic community. Rev. Chizen was ordained in Poland in 2010 by Venerable Kanzen, who is abbot of a Sōtō Zen temple in Szczecin, Poland. He is here with the mutual permission of his Ordination Master and the Head of our Order. We are delighted to welcome him.

Our good friend, Venerable Ern Ting, a female monk who lives in Vancouver and Taiwan, entrusted a large amount of financial donations to Rev. Master Kōten. She had collected this money from her Chinese Buddhist supporters, and wished it to go to the Lytton First Nation (Indigenous) members who had been affected by the fire, particularly those who lost their homes. On May 14, Rosalin Myles, a member of the Lytton First Nations, visited us here, and we presented the money to her. She thanked us, and told us it will be used to help pay for food at the first gathering of the people since the fire.

We held the Annual General Meeting of the Priory's Society on Saturday, May 14 at 2:00 pm. Seven people attended in person and nine via Zoom. Rev. Aurelian, as treasurer, presented the financial statements and they were accepted by the membership. We ended the year in good financial shape, partly as a result of the many generous donations we received the past summer during our evacuation from the Lytton fire. We also elected the board of directors for the coming year.

On May 21, we held our first in-person retreat in over two years. We began with meditation and morning service at 6:30 am,

and we incorporated our weekly Saturday afternoon Dharma Talk and discussion into the retreat schedule, which ended with the Closing Ceremony in Mandala Hall in the evening. The next day we celebrated Wesak, followed by a festive meal together. We thank those who attended and made it a success. We are planning to hold similar retreats during the summer.



Most of the Covid restrictions have been lifted, and we have been glad to welcome visitors once again. People have come from the local area and further afield for tea and for longer visits. We were really glad to have Rev. Valeria return here for a two-week visit before returning to Shasta Abbey, where she will be training for now. If you would like to visit, you are most welcome, whether it's just for tea or for longer stays.

— *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: <http://obcon.org/>

Information on the whereabouts of the Order's temples and meditation groups, with their website and contact details, can be found at: <https://obcon.org/temples-and-meditation-groups/>

As well as the two training monasteries mentioned above, there are a further nine affiliated priories and nine meditation groups in North America, and in the United Kingdom there are ten priories and twenty-two meditation groups.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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