



THROSSEL HOLE PRIORY

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Newsletter

June, 1973

Throssel Hole Priory is a Zen Buddhist training monastery following the Soto tradition located at Carr Shield, Nr. Hexham, Northumberland, England.

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OUR FIRST NEWSLETTER

This is our first newsletter from the Priory. We will be publishing it bi-monthly (six issues per year). The newsletter will be primarily concerned with Zen training and meditation and how it can be applied in everyday life. Many people have already been to the Priory for retreats or visits and have returned to their homes and families continuing their zazen once or twice daily. As many of us have found out, it can be difficult sometimes meditating completely alone, as many problems and questions arise, so most of the articles will be concerned with the attitude of mind necessary for Zen training, some of the problems to be aware of, etc. The newsletter, remember, like the Zen master, only points the direction to be traveled. It is up to each person to make the journey for himself. Remember that anyone can train in Zen successfully by maintaining a positive attitude of mind, by pushing on, and by not relying upon teachers, books, or external circumstances to do the training for you.

If anyone does have any questions or problems in their practice, please feel free to write to us here at the Priory and we will try to help you. Also, if you would like an article written on any particular aspect of Zen Buddhist training, please let us know.

Rev. Jiyu Kennett, Roshi is here for the summer. She arrived in late April from Shasta Abbey, the Zen seminary at Mount Shasta, California, accompanied by some of her disciples. Already we have had a number of very successful week retreats, with more scheduled (see news). At the retreat in July, fourteen men and women became lay Buddhists, receiving the precepts from Kennett Roshi. The ceremonies of lay ordination will also be held during the retreat in September. We wish all of our new Buddhist friends well and hope that they will be successful in their training.

So far this summer, we have had very mild weather, and so have been using the time building and renovating all the buildings. We hope to put in a new well and finish the work on the roof of the meditation hall. The car park is also nearly complete.

We hope that all our friends who have not yet been able to visit the Priory will be able to do so this summer. It is possible to visit at anytime, but please write or call beforehand. (New phone: Whitfield 204 STD 049 85).

Throssel Hole Priory was established last year as the British Zen Mission Society. It is not a branch of the Zen Mission Society in America, nor is it in any way subject to Shasta Abbey. That I personally am in charge of both, does not make any difference to this. Both are completely independent of each other, whilst accepting each others credentials. For this purpose, as in Shasta Abbey, so here, my authority does not extend beyond my front gate, and I make no secret of the fact that I do not intend to join with any other organisation although maintaining at the same time good relations with them all.

When a religion travels from one country to another, it is important that its founder should have the first word. I therefore quote here in full the preface to my recent book, Selling Water by the River, written by the late great Zen master Keido Chisan Koho Zenji, who says far better than I can what is required under these circumstances.

"It was Dogen Zenji who brought Soto Zen from China to Japan in the twelfth century, but it was not until Keizan Zenji became abbot of Sojiji several generations later that the teaching spread throughout Japan. The reason for this is not far to seek. Dogen had returned from China thinking that only the Chinese way of doing things was right, and as Reverend Kennett quite correctly points out, it is not possible to graft the customs and culture of one country onto another. When a religion is carried from country to country it is only the basic Truth that will survive; it is like a Japanese bride, who wears white at her wedding so her husband may realise that she is willing to be dyed to any colour, with regard to customs, ways and behaviour, that he may wish. When a religion is married, as it were, to a new country, it must be willing to be dyed in the same way as the Japanese bride. Keizan realised this and changed the customs, but not the Truth, to be in accord with Japanese thought; thus did Soto Zen become the bride of Japan and gain acceptance throughout the country, so that it now has more than fifteen thousand temples and is the second largest religious organisation in Japan.

"But this expansion was impossible whilst Zen remained in its original Chinese state, since Japanese people felt that a foreign religion was being forced upon them. The people of Western countries also, if Zen is ever to reach them properly, must colour it for themselves just as the Japanese did. Thus will Zen be reborn in the West. Like the Buddhist at rebirth, the new Zen will be neither completely new, having the same stream of Truth, nor completely old, as it will have new forms, ways, customs, and culture.

"Reverend Kennett has worked hard to make this book a manual suitable for Western people who are sincerely seeking true Zen but not trying to copy Eastern ways and manners. It is my sincere hope that all who read it will keep this fact in mind, for the Zen of the West must be born of Western priests in Western countries and not be spread by Japanese who know nothing of Western ways and customs. My blessings are with this book."

Having read Koho Zenji's words above, you will understand why I have taken the important step of making certain that British Buddhism shall be British with British priests, subject to neither America, Japan, nor any other country or priesthood. When Buddhism moved from India to China carried there by

Bodhidharma, it was not subject in any way to the old rules or regulations of the Indian Buddhist Church. It was indeed a separate entity, and grew with Chinese priests out of the blood, bones, marrow, and earth of China. It became its own specific brand of Zen. It held no allegiance to a Head Office or to any council or organisation outside of China. When Buddhism moved again through Korea and when it came to Japan, the same thing happened again. The present day Japanese Zen Buddhists hold no allegiance to their friends in Korea, China, or India. They are all good friends together, but they hold no allegiance to anyone. Now Zen has come to England, and as when it went to America, it must hold no allegiance to Japan, but must be its own master within its own country. It must grow and flourish, as did Zen in all other countries, and belong to Britain, albeit having connections all over the world. For we here in England need our own Buddhist identity. There has been too much fiddling around in the last 40-50 years of British Buddhism, trying this and trying that, seeking oriental teachers and getting badly disappointed.

Buddhism here saddens my heart greatly when I realise that it is primarily debating societies who are afraid of, or scared of getting down to genuine Buddhism from the point of view of doing meditation. For meditation is the backbone of Buddhism and without that backbone, no real Buddhist progress is possible. So long as it remains on the debating level, so long as all we have for Wesak is a collection of pretty speeches given by people who are laymen and not priests, we shall have no knowledge of what is true Buddhism. I have lost count of the number of times in which good British Buddhists have put their money, their energy, and their beliefs behind spurious oriental teachers, convinced that now at last the real one has come, only to discover that these people not only had very little knowledge of genuine Buddhism, but were also in any case unsuited to teaching the British Buddhist. It is not possible, as Koho Zenji himself says, to graft the customs and culture of one country onto another, and so often these teachers have been more interested in such things as quietism, tea ceremony, painting, and the martial arts, rather than the genuine hard work of doing something about one's self, which is after all the core of Buddhism. To do something about changing one's self, to make one's self fit to know is, in other words, to become a whole integrated human being.

Whereas it is nice to have our friends from abroad visit us, it is nevertheless important that we do not despise ourselves. Much of the charlatany that has masqueraded in the name of Zen in particular and Buddhism in general in the last few years has caused many good British Buddhists to become extremely bitter. Many have turned away. Long ago Zen and Buddhism could have become a very great force in this country had not some people deliberately decided that only the orient could teach or that only laymen were necessary for the job. One of the saddest things I have had to note in the last three years during my time in England has been the realisation that most people are absolutely terrified of genuinely learning Buddhism. They like to talk about it, they like to toy with it, but they are afraid of the real thing, and above all, some of them who should know a lot better, are very much afraid of a genuine priesthood, because then, of course, they would really have to do something about themselves. They could not go on having their happy junketings and parties and calling them Buddhist training.

Make no mistake, however, no takeover bid by any one school or debating society can ever be regarded as Buddhist. Too often Buddhist organisations

here have tried to have the grand get together, "Let's all be one great Buddhism," leaving out of account that just as in the orient so also here in Britain, not everybody has the same opinion. There will always be the man who will like the Theravada system, always the man, woman, or child who will like any of the other systems: the Shin, the Tendai, or the Zen. All of them, as the Buddha himself pointed out, lead to the goal. No one of them is specifically the only way. Therefore, we should have a united Buddhism, united in the true spirit of the Buddha, united in the true spirit of the all is one, but recognising also that all is different. Unless you can understand the oneness in the difference and the difference in the oneness, you will never know the joy of tolerance and the joy of certainty simultaneously.

I do not encourage hopping from one teacher to another, for all that this leads to is misconceptions and comparisons. As Dogen quite rightly says, "If you cannot understand the Truth where you are right now, you will never understand however far you may search." I have noted in the last two years a liking of some people to go from one teacher to the next in order to compare them. "He said this, or he said that or she said this or she said that;" trying to find a teacher who will agree with their own delusions. This can only end in confusion, never getting down to the hard work of doing something about changing one's own nature, transcending the egocentric "I" into the real "I" which is itself the Buddha Nature. In fact this very teacher hopping is an extremely good way of avoiding having to do anything whatsoever about one's self, because then you can blame your failure on the teacher and the fact that something here is better than something there.

I have deliberately refrained from starting an actual Journal here in England until we had sufficient numbers of the priesthood to be able to have a really effective monastery. Now there are at least six Zen priests living at Throssel Hole Priory. All of these are wearing robes, shaving their heads, and living under the discipline of the Buddhist Church as adapted for England. This is something that has been done throughout the centuries in each country. As Buddhism moved from country to country, so the rules have had to alter for the sake of climate, national traits, and the general cultural atmosphere of their surroundings.

It is also my hope that we shall also very soon see an end to what has come to be associated with Zen Buddhism in some countries: permissiveness, drug taking, and various other rather unfortunate misunderstandings have come again out of this business of having either spurious or inadequate teaching. It should be understood that Zen was established solely for the purpose of making sure that people lived not only a completely spiritual life, but also a completely moral one. The purpose of the koan technique is to lead people to the final set of koans which is how to live completely and utterly keeping the precepts, for true freedom comes as a result of living an utterly moral life to such an extent that morality, kindness, goodness, compassion, love, and wisdom are second nature. They are expressed in every action and in every place. It follows logically from this that permissiveness, promiscuity, drug taking, and other abuses are absolutely the opposite of what Zen teaches, and anyone who permits anything of this sort to take place in whatsoever place he may be teaching, is not teaching Zen. It should be understood that a true Zen Buddhist is an extremely law abiding citizen, for he is in fact, since he is an integrated whole, the most responsible person that can possibly be met, having no loyalties whatsoever other than to the Buddha and to his own society.

One of my problems when in the far east was very much brought about by the fact that the Japanese could not understand why it was necessary for foreigners to come. It took me a very long time to understand fully what they were talking about, but finally I realised that they could not understand the necessity of someone trying to copy Japanese customs and culture, for Zen is expressed within one's own environment, as indeed many of those who have truly studied Zen have found out. Again comes the importance of not trying to copy culture. This problem, in fact, became in many respects my koan throughout my stay in Japan, as indeed it becomes the koan of almost every foreigner in that country, and the solving of that koan is the one great thing that all of us have to learn when we are abroad. Dogen Zenji, when asked by the Emperor of Japan what it was he had learned in China, replied, "Nothing really. The only thing I am certain of is that on a face there are two eyes and a nose." When asked the same question by one of the officials of the British consulate in a certain city in Japan, I told him that if I told him the truth of what I had learned he would be embarrassed, but he insisted on hearing anyway, and my reply was, "The only thing I know for sure is that I am British and always will be." This then is the attitude of mind that has to be encouraged by a true Zen Buddhist here in England. First and foremost, we are ourselves British Buddhists; we are not studying Japanese Zen, we are studying British Zen; we are not wearing Japanese robes, we are wearing British robes (one should not understand British in the political sense of the word, only in the ethnic). We do not eat with chopsticks because we are not orientals; we use a knife and fork, but at the same time, the spirit which rings through every one of these actions whether in China, Japan, Korea, India, America, or Britain is always the same thing: "We must think deeply of the ways and means by which all things have come to us. We must consider our merit when accepting them. We eat lest we become lean and die and a nuisance to other people. We accept all things that are given to help us that we may become enlightened;" and that includes the British weather and the knife and fork. It does not include, in this country, an insistence on an artificially created oriental environment, sitting on the floor and using chopsticks. We hope in the future to become ourselves, in the true sense, for that after all is what Zen teaches - how to become yourself. If you become a Japanese and you were born in Britain, you are not yourself. There is something you are not accepting about yourself. You have to accept things where they are right now and where you are right now, and above all, you have to do something about it, not just talk, debate, and lecture.

Throssel Hole is deliberately non-luxurious, but it is a lot more comfortable than the average Japanese temple. We are maintaining the spirit of Zen, at the same time expressing it in the British way. We have now ceased to use the kyosaku (Zen stick). This is of great importance to us here in Britain, for the simple reason that too often Zen has been associated with beatings, kickings, slappings, and other theatrical performances which make it attractive to the wrong sort of person. We are not here to encourage either misconceptions of Zen which have so often resulted in sadism and masochism. We are here to do something about ourselves.

Anyone who wishes to visit us may do so, but we reserve the right to refuse those we consider not yet ready for the path or who may do better in other schools of Buddhism. In Buddhism, all are called, but few answer.

JIYU KENNETT

PRIORY NEWS AND EVENTS

RETREATS. We will be holding week retreats August 5-11 and September 2-8. There will also be a special weekend retreat August 18-19, with guests having the option to stay over and participate in our daily schedule of meditation, classes, services, and work. The September retreat will include the ceremonies of Jukai or laymen's ordination. Already the retreats are very full, so if you are interested, please contact the Priory immediately. After Kennett Roshi returns to Shasta Abbey in September, Rev. Strathern who will be Prior will be conducting retreats throughout the year.

NEW QUARTERS. Due to our limited accommodations and very rapid growth, we are now looking for a more suitable and larger property. It would have to be able to accommodate at least thirty residents with a very large room for the meditation hall and a number of other fair size rooms. Also we would prefer to be closer to the major areas of population so friends and members would be able to come to weekend retreats without great difficulty. We have found a number of old manor houses which would be ideal, but unfortunately the cost is around £50,000. Therefore we are starting a drive in order to raise the necessary funds. We are in need of low-interest or no-interest loans to be paid back over a ten year period, as well as donations and pledges. This summer we are already very full and have had to turn away dozens of sincere people simply due to lack of space. If you are able to help us or know someone who can, please contact Rev. Strathern at the Priory. (Phone: Whitfield 204).

VISITORS. A group of 27 students accompanied by three instructors from Neville's Cross College, Durham, visited the Priory on July 4th, as part of their course in Religious Studies. There was a discussion on Zen Buddhism and all the students were shown how to practice Zen meditation. We hope the visit was helpful to their understanding of Buddhism. There was also a visit in late May from a class of students from the Grammar School at Hartlepool.

RETREAT. Kennett Roshi lead a retreat at Hawkesyard Priory, Spode House, under the sponsorship of Fr. Simon Tugwell of Blackfriars, Oxford, from July 16th to the 22nd.

REV. CHERLIN. Rev. Mokurai Cherlin who was Prior here until last April, will be returning to the United States in September.

NEEDED. We wish to express our gratitude to the many people who have helped us out in establishing the Priory in England. We are still in need of the following items: bedding, beds, curtains, cement mixer, paint and paint brushes, tools of all sorts, garden implements, a clothes dryer, etc. In the event we are not able to raise the necessary finances to establish a larger center, we will be in need of £2,000 in order to renovate our present buildings.

COMMUNITY---

Rev. Jiyu Kennett, Roshi - Abbess, Rev. Daiji Strathern - Treasurer, Rev. Gensho Florence - Director's Assistant, Rev. Jitsudo Baran - Guestmaster, Rev. Dogo Klein - Chief Junior, Rev. Kembo Wyatt - Cook, Rev. Ryuge Prince - Gardener, Rev. Hofuku Hughes - Maintenance, Rev. Kyosei Hughes - Seamstress, Rev. Suigan Liddie - Maintenance.