



# THROSSEL HOLE PRIORY

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Newsletter

February 1974

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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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## EDITORIAL

We are in the midst of an exceptionally mild winter and Spring is almost upon us here at Throssel. The snowdrops are out and the early primroses are just beginning to show and the countryside is just on the verge of loosing its sombre brown colour, changing now to a more lively green. Unfortunately, Jiyu Kennett Roshi will not be able to come to England this year. The pressure of commitments in America and financial shortness will make her trip impossible, but she has promised that she will be with us again in 1975. Something we all look forward to immensely. In the meantime we hope to consolidate the community here at Throssel Hole and try to build a good solid spiritual base.

We have in the past on several occasions been asked if we would not set up a group here or there in the country, where there are a number of people who have visited the Priory. We feel it much more important that we build a good solid base before we contemplate going out from it. We had thought of moving the Priory further towards the south, that people may come and visit us. But we do not have the necessary finances and could not raise them. So we must content ourselves with remaining here and building a solid foundation stone for any future developments. It would be ridiculous to dissipate all the effort by so many people that has so far gone into Throssel by taking on premature commitments that would only sap our training. This is of course a mirror of how ones personal training must be done. For many people, it seems from your letters, that one of the major problems is that of alienation in one form or other. This is of course just one of the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism, that is, Dukkha or as it is normally translated rather badly as suffering.

People find that they are alienated from themselves and the world around them, this is of course, a mirror of their own hollowness and we can see if we look the signs of this spread far and wide in the world around us. To begin with the treatment for this is of course to come back on oneself and look inside to see who one truly is. Early on this apparently passive procedure though it is actually more apparent than real. But because of this many people think that Buddhism is quietistic. This is just not true and is the reason why we have always emphasised very strongly activity. But not the constant activity that one sees around one. There all too often the activity is only indulged in to cover up an inner emptiness. What is truly needed is real activity. This is action stemming from the foundations of inner strength and its true source is life itself. Not life in a small or self centred sense but life in the sense that is quite beyond our conception which we unfortunately

cannot bring to our level. Only when our activity is imbued with this life will it become real and then we will become truly real to ourselves and in so doing find reality in all things around us and in all the things we do. In the world a man is either active or passive. He is either constantly doing something or he is not. But the real man when he sits in meditation has a core of activity in him greater than a businessman in a flurry whilst when he is active, say hard at work shovelling coal. He has a core of peace within him quieter than the peace in the lovers heart on a spring day. It is the essential balance between peace and action, between true activity and true passivity that is the mark of a spiritual man. When there is nothing to do he does nothing, but what is important is that he does nothing. Whilst most people would sit around idly letting their minds wander and dart hither and thither, dreaming and becoming bored. But when there is something to be done, again he does it but he never loses himself in the activity and so there is always a peaceful core within him that is never disturbed by activity or stillness. This is not something that he has made, rather it is something that he has discovered and which he has learnt by bitter experience that it is the most precious thing that he has. Such a person is truly active and is not motivated by selfishness but does all that needs to be done as it comes to him with joy in his heart or sadness as the occasion needs both for himself and for all those around him. Such a person is indefatigable and a tower of strength though he will not stand out in a crowd for he will not push himself forward.

But it is only after he has built the solid foundation of his own training that he can go forward into the distractions of the outside world with a pure heart and not be carried away by them. First we have to start with our own training and with the discipline that it entails. For when there is no discipline there is no training and if there is no training there is no real discipline. Then and only then will he be capable of going out and truly helping others. Before that however generous we may appear to be our actions are always selfish and after we have truly awakened to our own heart and whilst we carry it around with us and listen to it however selfish we may appear to others to be, our actions are in fact always selfless. They may not always of course be right ones but one of the first things we learn in Zen is to be able to admit our mistakes to ourselves. The man who must always be right will be driven and will not be in charge of himself. The man who cares and tries whilst capable of admitting his mistakes and doing what he can about them will be free. In this state we turn again to the world and find it a transformed place where ceaselessly all things are active and yet all things are peaceful too and so we can go forth and help others to new lives for themselves as we have built new lives for ourselves. But it must always be remembered that the process does not end for we can always deepen the peace within us. When we must be ever vigilant and on guard against acquiring new bad habits and letting the old ones rise up again. For

although we may have routed them out, all too often they have lain their seeds in forgotten corners and there they germinate and grow again. So we must be ever vigilant for in truth we are always in one sense building the foundationstone and yet always in another sense actively carrying out our work in the world. This we can never cease to escape. It is the man who has fully realised and awakened to this, then puts it into practise and this last is most important, for all too often people think that they are beginning to understand. Understanding is only a small part, It is the putting into practise that counts. Only when we have done this will we truly come to understand the words of the Buddha's and Patriarchs and come to feel their presence ever around us and guarding us in all that we do and think and say.

DAIJI STRATHERN

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### PUTTING EFFORT INTO THE EFFORTLESS

"Carrying a heavy load  
And walking a long way  
Among men, among gods  
I am all exhausted now.  
Isn't there a place  
Where I can set the burden  
Down, even for a while?"

This was said to have been a song that was often sung by Hotie (Pu-tai in Chinese, who died in A.D. 916) whenever he felt just a little more than sorry for himself. You may have seen pictures of him, with his huge belly, laughing face and sack slung over his shoulder.

Isn't this what we all want to do? Unload our burdens, then everything will be all right, or so we would like to think. But more often than not, the new trainee finds it very difficult to do just this.

We enter through the monastery gate, opinions on one shoulder, our own ideas and conceptions on the other. What a weight! What a heavy load!

Our particular method, which has been handed down from countless generations, from Patriarch to Patriarch in the Soto Zen line, is very simple and therefore most difficult! All we have to do, is to get on and do the things that are at hand. Which means lots of actual hard physical work for us here at the Priory - what with the gardening and buildings that need constant repair. We are fortunate because there is always something to be done. Many people think that we spend most of our time in meditation. But this is a luxury that only the idle can afford. In fact, we spend more time outside working than actual zazen in the Zendo. So if you come here expecting to find a kind of Buddhist Holiday Camp, then you have come to the wrong place. It will not be worth your while (or ours, come to that) unless you wish to do something about yourself.

As I have said, it is through work and zazen (the two are not to be differentiated) is our method. We take our meditating mind with us, out into the world. If we find that we can only meditate whilst in the Zendo, and cannot continue with this state of mind whilst working, then something is wrong with us and things are seen to take on a top sided point of view. And the weight increases.

One of the first things we realise when working is that we have to put effort into it. The spade will not dig of itself, the hoe will not hoe of itself. The same is also true of the mind of meditation. Unless we actually want to do something about ourselves, unless we grasp what will we have; no matter how small it may seem at the time, then we will only add further loads upon our shoulders. If we can make the effort, push ourselves a little further each day, until in the end, there is nothing but the digging or hoeing (or whatever it is we are doing at the time) remains in our consciousness :-

When hoeing the garden

It forgets all about the weeds -

The hoe!

We must not let distractions (weeds) govern our lives - "my back hurts, I think that I will slow down a bit" and "Look at that lovely flower" are just excuses that arise to prevent us from truly meditating.

Maybe this isn't the freedom that we first thought of as being freedom when we first started out. I mean, its all very nice to wander through the woods, taking in the fragrance of Spring's flowers, watching the birds fly and build their nests and listening to their songs. Its all very lovely as long as we don't see that rabbits are being eaten up by foxes, that crows are pecking out the eyes of baby lambs. On another level, even the thought of having to do a bit of hard work, there doesn't seem to be any freedom in that! See how we hide and ignore the harsher realities of life. But, what the heck! Wouldn't it be even nicer to experience true freedom when confronted by the seedier aspects of life!

It seems that most of the time our thoughts are else where - never here, where we actually are at this present moment. So the digging or hoeing no longer becomes digging or hoeing, but rather, something else and our lives become more and more complicated. "I started off digging O.K. but now it seems to have got out of hand. All those burdens that I thought I had left outside the gate have come back!" This is the time when we really have to grasp the will and not allow ourselves to back-slide. It is so easy at this point to come to a stop and say "Ah well, perhaps I'll try a little harder tomorrow." Well, you can do just that if you want to, but remember, nobody else but you can make the decision - just as nobody else but you can decide whether to go on training or not. The harder we try, the less the effort seems in the long run - until in fact the effort becomes effortless. This is the true meaning of Zen training. In the world of likes and dislikes, just to get on and to do the real work at hand, not to stop and let the load settle down upon our shoulders. When we awake to this fact, its as though awakening from a long dream.

KEMB Ō WYATT



"What a burden I  
Awakening  
From a dream  
The long night  
(the universe)  
Is swallowed  
By a single yawn."

Kembo



after Sengai's 'Hotie'

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### SOTO ZEN MEDITATION GROUPS

These are meditation groups who practise the Soto Zen Meditation. They are not necessarily affiliated to the Priory and they therefore also represent a wide range of Buddhist and non-Buddhist points of view.

These are all small groups normally meeting once or twice a week at somebodies house. Please, therefore, before just turning up phone or write, after all, one of the first things we must learn in our training is consideration for others.

The Mousehole Buddhist Group, Penaluna, Clodgy Moor, Paul, Penzance. Phone: Mousehole 449. Meetings at 8:30 p.m. in winter and 9:30 p.m. in summer on Friday nights.

Ken Fry, 18 White Cottage Close, Farnham, Surrey, Phone: Farnham 24681. Meetings at 8:30 p.m. on Friday nights.

Rev. Kotei Sprenger, 16 Colmore Place, Armley, Leeds, Yorks. Meetings at 8:00 p.m. on Wednesday nights.

Rosena Eaton, 141 Gravelly Hill, Erdington, Birmingham, 23. Phone: 021-351-1966. Meetings on every Tuesday from 8:00 p.m. until 10:00 p.m.

Hexham and Newcastle. Monday evenings. Please contact David Brazier, Doves Pool Shield, Allenheads, Nr. Hexham, Northumberland, for further details.

John and Breda Watkins Flat 1, 13 Hamlyn Avenue, Anlaby Road, E. Yorkshire. Write for details.

## FUTURE RETREATS

2nd. and 3rd. of March.

The week long retreat of 23rd. to 31st. March is now full and we can no longer accept people for this period.

The Spring Training Period commences as from the 7th. April and will continue until the 30th. June.

Weekend retreats will be held on the 13th. and 14th. April. The 4th. and 5th. May, and the 1st. and 2nd. June.

There will also be a week long retreat from the 22nd. to the 30th. June.

Anyone wishing to come to a retreat please contact the Priory well in advance, Visitors are welcome at other times by arrangement.

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## PRIORY NEWS AND EVENTS

### A WEDDING

On the 19th. January, Nick Dwyer and Judy Hardwick were married by Rev. Daiji Strathern at Norfolk. We offer them our congratulations and wish them a long and happy life together.

### LECTURE TOUR

During January, Rev. Daiji Strathern visited Devon, Cornwall, St Catherines Centre, London and Lancaster giving lectures to local Buddhist groups. He also attended two schools to talk about Euddhism with the pupils, one of which was in Hexham.

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As already mentioned in the Editorial, owing to heavy and numerous commitments in the U S.A., Roshi has decided to put off her visit to England until next year. It should be well remembered that Roshi has said in an article entitled "We Deserve What We Get" (The Journal of the Zen Mission Society Vol.III No.10.) that one day she would have to choose as to whether to settle down permanently at Shasta Abbey or here at Throssel Hole Priory. But "As to which of these it happens to be will depend entirely upon the quality of the trainees." So it is up to us here in England to get on and do our training as best we can. To pull our socks up and not fiddle about as we have done so often in the past.