



THROSSEL HOLE PRIORY

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Newsletter

April 74

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

EDITORIAL

You may remember from our last Newsletter, how we reported that the weather had been very mild this winter, so springlike. As most of you who had come along to the two retreats in March will have noticed, this did not particularly hold true for that month. We experienced every conceivable kind of weather condition, from warm balmy days to snow and that cold freezing eastern wind. This is a constant reminder of the law of changeability. Our hearts went out to the sheep in this the lambing season, to Mary our goat who has just presented us with a little kid. This is the time when we need most to show our gratitude - to show that we should not take anything for granted. The weather, our training, the fact that we are able to eat three meals a day. The fact that the chickens, our duck and goose are giving us (we take) their eggs. How easy it would be to take on a negative state of mind now, when most things that are around us (at least here at Throssel Hole) are only just beginning to show that they have life. How easy to carry this state of mind into spring and summer. T.S. Eliot has spoken well enough of it in the opening lines of *The Waste Land* :-

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.

But isn't this just the neurotic boredom and disillusion that his critics spoke of? Isn't this the common disease of 20th. century man?

This is one of the main reasons why people turn to religion, to find something that will fill the spiritual waste land that they think they have inherited. This spiritual vacuum manifests itself sometimes in the form of a feeling of alienation, a sense of isolation, of being cut off from the outside world. You most likely have come across this sensation yourself at one time or another. You perhaps get up in the morning feeling that everything is not all quiet right with the world. As you eat your breakfast there is a :seperation between you and the eating. At work your thoughts are miles away from what you are actually doing. Maybe you will go down to the pub tonight and sink a few beers, play darts with

your mates. Make out that everything is just fine. Or else take the girl friend out to the pictures. Anything really, just as long as you can get out of this feeling of alienation. Of course it doesn't work! You play your game of darts, drink your beer, but it isn't real - you are already somewhere else, planing future events. Or maybe your girl friend seems a little different, not so nice as before, isn't it time you found someone else? Anything really, just as long as it will get you out of here (where your head is). So, the feeling increases and increases.

Of course, this isn't the only reason why people come here. Lets face it though, we are all just a bit like that. No one is perfect, and of course there are many reasons why we should want to change ourselves, into something a little better. We might not get on very well with other people, so we think something is wrong with them ("I mean, it cant be me, can it?") or else we do admit it, yes its me, somethings wrong with me. What can I do about it? So, maybe you come here in the hope of doing something about yourself. Perhaps you see yourself as a Zen Master, or that Zen is the true way of life ("It must be, 'cause I've read all the books and they all say so"). In a way, that's O.K. As long as you use your motives in a positive manner. Lets face, we come here because we want to do something about ourselves. If we kid ourselves that we are doing this for truly altruistic reasons, then we are indeed really having ourselves on. That comes later, when we train for the sake of others. But don't even let yourself get caught up in that, which is after all, just another delusion. To go on and train for trainings sake. Just your making the effort and getting here is the first big step in training. In many ways its the most difficult step, because its the first step that we make towards changing ourselves. After all, when we first get here, we don't really know what we are letting ourselves in for. There's the fear and uncertainty of not being able to make it, nagging in our heads. As we don't know what it is, that's silly. So, just let it go. Drop everything, is all we ask. Just let your selfish ideas and opinions fall way, is the second step.

It makes me sad when I think of all the people that write to us, and of only the few that actually get here. Say ten people write to us, enquiring about the place and its training methods. Out of these ten, only perhaps one or two will come along for a weekend retreat or at least a seven day seshin. As soon as they read the rules, its "What me follow all that rubbish! I'm after freedom and that kind of freedom just ain't freedom!" Your right, it isn't your kind of freedom. I mean, the fact that one has to do something about ones self is just not that easy! So find out what it is that really nags you. Right, you got it, that's it, you don't like getting up at 5 or 6 oclock in the morning, especially when its cold, wet and dark. You don't like the idea of a chemical toilet or working out in the rain. You don't like the discipline! If you think that you are going to get enlightened sitting on a mountain top, that's fine, go and try it. All those Zen Masters of China and Japan, how many years did they sit on mountain tops? twenty, thirty years or more. Most of them didn't make it, but you dont hear of

them, do you. After all, they wouldn't make very interesting reading! They wasted years, just sitting, not doing any real training. There was no need for all those years spent in isolation. Zen teaches you to lead an ordinary daily life. That means to become one with your family, your work and your surroundings. Whether it be in the middle of the country or else in the middle of a council estate.

One of my favourite poets is Han Shan (Cold Mountain), but what a pity that he spent all that time on his own, on top of Cold Mountain - what was it, thirty years or more? He had a big problem with people, just couldn't get on with them at all. Busted up with his brothers, split from his wife because she couldn't stand his ways. He must have been a bit on the lazy side, as most of us are inclined to be - he speaks of hoeing the field with a hoe in one hand and with a book in the other! But that was before he had decided to do something about himself. He expresses the feeling of anxiety very well in one of his poems:-

Somesay that it isn't easy to drive anxiety away,
But then someone else has said that this isn't true.
It was successfully driven away yesterday,
But its back again to burden me this morning.
Anxiety has lingered on since last month,
And will be renewed in the weeks to come.
Everybody knows that under his hat
He is no less sad than before.

The one thing you can say of Zen is that it will show you the way to gain true peace of mind. It will not necessarily make you happy (that is in the sense of putting on a cloak of happiness - "Look everyone, look at me, I'm happy!"). No, not that kind of happiness. It will even make you more efficient as a human being, and if you want, you can make a huge success out of your life, earn lots of money. If that's what you want. The choice is always open to you, but if you do, you will be cutting yourself off. And eventually, you will land up in a far worse and more sorry state than when you had first started out in. Because the fact will always be with you, the terrible fact that you can make a better person of yourself, and just by your own efforts.

We gradually learn the meaning of all acceptance. Accept everything with an open and positive mind. "All is one and the all is different". Everything, no matter what, is subject to this fundamental law of change. If we find that we cannot accept this simple fact, then every day will become a day of anxiety, a day of not making it. Some days we will be happy and on other days we might know only sadness. That's fine too, but only be sad when you feel sad and only be happy when you are happy. What's the use of trying to deny it or to make it out to be something other than what it is. Accept it whole heartedly. Perhaps then, within the sadness you will find that there is something that is not touched by the sadness. The same will also be found to be true of happiness. And you will soon find out that the Buddha-nature is not effected by either of these conditions, which after all, are nothing but a notion that we create from our selfish side, out of our heads. This does not mean that we will become completely emotionless, like robots. There will always be occasions when we will feel either happy or sad. We will always have thoughts, opinions and emotions. Zen shows us the way to become completely free in their midst.

DUFFY'S DREAM OF SNOWFLAKES

A short story for adults and children. By KEMBŌ WYATT

Duffy awoke with the morning shining through his feathers. The bright sun hurt his eyes, and he blinked rapidly. All the other pigeons were out in the woods, scratching away for food. Duffy felt extra lazy this morning, but as usual, the thought of food made his stomach stir. Off he flew into the direction of the other birds.

What a life, he thought as he hovered high above the trees, the sky blue and cool against his feathers. Look at those stupid creatures, scratching away their lives. Life seemed nothing more than a huge empty pit that need to be continually filled up with food.

He landed on the outskirts of the scattered flock, settling down next to Hank, his old companion. Hank said nothing, but just continued pecking with a far away look in his eyes. He hadn't even noticed Duffy's arrival, and even when Duff said hallo, he didn't even blink an eyelid. Blow you, thought Duffy and moved further away from him. He started scratching himself, eating anything that was within easy reach. But somehow he didn't really seem to have an appetite this morning and he was only going through the motions half heartily. What's up with me, he thought, looking up to where the other pigeons were eating. But they just carried on a usual, as if nothing in the whole world could ever disturb them.

I'll show 'em! he thought suddenly, I'll catch 'em out! He looked around until at last he found what he was looking for, a large piece of wood, at least large enough for him to carry. He picked it up in his beak and flew off high above the rest of the pigeons - until at last they seemed like distant ants. He flew and circled them until he was just above a large rock that was in the midst of the flock. He then let it fall from his beak. Slowly it fell, tumbling and twisting into nothingness - then suddenly there was a huge crash! Duffy chuckled to himself as the flock scattered in all directions at the sudden noise. Wings were everywhere and feathers fluttered in noisey commotion. That'll show 'em, the mindless creatures! he thought and slowly glided down onto the branch of an old conifer tree. He started to preen himself rather proudly.

After a while, he became aware that somebody was looking at him. He looked up to find a strange wide eyed scruffy looking bird inspecting him. It was an owl, and he seemed to be winking at him.

"Was that you, making all that noise", asked the owl. "Why, you've scared off all your mates, look at them flying all over the place. What on earth made you do that?" Duffy felt a little more than ashamed, he didn't know what to say. He knew that he had acted silly. "I was bored and felt like doing it" was the reply. "Anyway, what business is it of yours!" He could feel the senseless anger rising, the frustration of what, he didn't really know, but it was there, bubbling away, making his feathers prickle. He realised that he had no right to speak this way, but out it came, just the same. The owl shrugged his wings and said "Well, I'm sorry that you feel that way about it, perhaps I spoke out of turn". He sat very still, winking as owls will wink when they are not doing anything in particular.

Duffy began to feel a little uncomfortable and warm, for a moment he thought that he could smell burning. He looked around in anguish just in case he was on fire. But that's silly, he thought. And he looked back to the branch where the old owl was sitting. He don't look stupid, like the rest of them, he thought to himself, in fact he looks a kind of wise old bird. I wonder what his game is? Still the owl said nothing.

"What are you doing?" Duffy finally asked, trying to break the silence. The owl winked and shrugged his wings again, "Why, I'm just sitting" replied the owl. "What kind of answer is that?" retorted Duffy. "Ever since I got my wing busted by an old buzzard, I've had nothing particular to do, except sit. I can't fly much, don't get around and my eyes are not what they used to be. The young one's leave me enough food to eat. So I just sit." "Don't you get bored?" asked Duffy. "No, why should I" replied the owl, "Haven't you heard the song that goes :-

"What's the world?
Nothing but dewdrops
shaken
from a crane's bill"

"No, don't think so," said Duffy. "Anyway, I know for sure that I would get bored, just sitting around." "That's because when you sit, you aint really sitting, instead your elsewhere, in your head. Right? Your thinking about food, or else laying about in the sun. Anything, but you aint learnt how to sit. Right!" Aint learnt how to sit, why everybody knows how to sit, he thought. But then, he knew that he was wrong.

"Would you show me how to sit, please." It was the first time that he had said the word please in a long time. He knew suddenly that things were going to turn out all right. It was all there, in the please, but as of yet, he didn't know what.

"Why sure," said the owl.

Duffy sat back, waiting for the old owl to speak. There seemed to be a large black cloud floating high in the distance, towards the mountains. It was moving, but ever so slowly. The owl shrugged, winked once or twice, and Duffy lost his momentary preoccupation with the cloud.

"Well, it was a long time ago, when I first learnt how to sit," said the owl. "In fact, must have been just about your age - daft and reckless too!" Duffy felt a warm glow, but this time the sensation was pleasing. "Yup! Kind of an outcaste I was, didn't get on very well with the other owls, so one day I upped and buzzed off - flew for miles and miles until at last I reached the city." "What's a city?" asked Duffy. "That's a real big place where all the people live. Kind of like a huge nest, but with thousands of small nests within one big nest - do you understand me?" Duffy recollected how in his early youth he had once encountered a couple of people. The recollection had brought back a flood of distant frightening memories. One of the people had carried a long stick - he remembered how he had pointed it at one of his elder brothers, when suddenly it went bang with a flash like lightning, and his brother had dropped dead at his feet. Were they all like that, he wondered. "Yes, I got a good idea of what you mean" said Duffy.

"Mind you" said the owl, "I didn't stay for long. All the birds that I met seemed most unfriendly - kept chasing me off. And there

were lots of little people, children I think they were, who kept on throwing sticks and stones at me. They were most unfriendly. So I left that city after a couple of hours and flew further west, until I had almost reached the sea. I'm rambling on a bit, aint I" said the owl. Duffy had never met anyone who had seen the sea.

"Anyway" continued the owl "Feeling pretty tired and exhausted I came across this old building, stuck out in the middle of the mountains. A temple they called it. But here the people seemed to be a lot different, and they were even friendly. In fact they kept me supplied with tit-bits and scraps of food for many days. One old fellow in particular seemed to go out of his way to be nice. As he was the cook there was always plenty of bits of food for him to give me."

The old owl paused and sniffed the air, then continued. "I used to watch him work, never seeming to tire, preparing meals for all the people, from morning to night. Never a harsh word, or a word spoken out of place. When he wasn't working, which was not very often I might add, he would sit down, with legs crossed and back straight, as straight as this old conifer tree. This made me pretty curious, cause I knew like he wasn't sleeping. So, I used to sit down next to him. For a long while it seemed crazy, all those thoughts buzzing and jumping around in my head - just like a spinning top! But suddenly, it seemed that one day I had found that it had all settled down - not that thoughts came to a stop, but that all the thoughts were me, a process just as much a part of me as say breathing - only before I has seperated myself from it all. And so I learned how to sit."

It was at this point that there came such a noise and commotion, that the very tree upon which they sat, seemed to shudder. A great flood of deer, antelopes, horses, ponies flew past and beneath their branch. Great clouds of dust arose and left them spluttering. For a moment all was quiet again. The owl spoke up. "It is just as I feared. The woods are on fire." Duffy felt somehow a calmness around him, a great cloak of peace, which seemed to come from the owl. "We should try to get away from here" Duffy said. But his words seemed lost in the din of a second batch of clomping hooves and feet. Then came a softer patter, as the smaller woodland creatures followed behind, hares, rabbits, squirrels, rats and mice. The air became black with smoke and the flutterings of a million birds in flight. Still the old owl sat upon the branch, not moving. Duffy realised that he would be unable to fly, and a sea of sadness crept over him, because he knew that there was nothing that he could do to save his old friend.

"Duffy" said the owl, "It is your duty to see to it that all your pigeon friends make it to the safety of the island. As you know, I am unable to fly. So I will stay here on this branch and direct everyone to the river and the island. Please leave now and take good care of yourself.

"But I can't just leave you here to die," said Duffy with a lump in his throat. "There must be a way out for you."

"Of course there isn't, and well you know it. I have accepted the situation, that is the only sensible thing to do. Now, be on your way. There is very little time left. Before you go, here is a poem. You would do to remember it well :-

The bird path
Winds far
 & is right
In front of you.
Like a snowflake
Melting in fire —
Thus I end
My life."

The owl gave Duffy a final wink, then shoved him off the branch. Duff flew up high into the dark billowing sky with a heavy heart. He flew up and up until at last he was well above all the smoke and flames. He could see that the whole area that he had lived in and loved all his life, to be nothing more than a sheet of flames and smoke. As he circled, he saw another pigeon flying in his direction. It was Hank, and he was scared.

"This way" shouted Duffy, "follow me!" Hank flew behind him, in a complete daze. "Where's the rest of the flock?" asked Duffy as they headed in the direction of the river and island, smoke billowing up between them, at times hiding them from each other.

"I don't know," said Hank "we all panicked. The last I saw of them, was when we took cover by the ancient creek bed. Can we save them?"

"Yes, don't worry" said Duffy as they flew over the last stretch of water and landed on safe ground. "You wait here, and I'll go find them" and he was off again into the smoke and flames.

Duffy looked and looked, but it proved very difficult finding any landmarks, there was nothing but smoke and flames everywhere. But as luck would have it, he soon came across the dried up creek bed, and sure enough all the flock were there, huddled together.

"Come on you guys!" yelled Duffy, "lets get the hell out of here, don't lose track of me!" The firmness and control in Duffy's voice gave courage to the pigeons, and off they flew in one body, with Duffy at the head. Up and up into the clear sky and towards safety.

When they had arrived on the island, Hank greeted them warmly with tears in his eyes. "I don't know what we would have done without you," he said. "We might have all been burnt alive." "Like a snowflake in flames" came another voice. "That's O.K." said Duffy "after all, we're all here to help one and another, aren't we? I must go, there's plenty of more work to do."

Duffy flew on and on, for hours on end. Back and forth, until the whole island was swarming with birds, animals and insects. All safe from the flames. At one stage, Duffy rescued a ladybird and her family of young one's by putting them under the protection of his feathers. This way, he found that he could carry them to safety. "Thank you so much" said the ladybird "I wouldn't have made it on my own."

Thus, on that day Duffy saved many lives without any consideration for his own safety. Duffy knew that he had learnt something and that he would never forget it. This was his simple way of expressing his gratitude. Whenever he felt the pain of tiredness creeping into his wings, he thought of the opening lines of the poem that the old owl had given him and new strength would flow through his blood. At last it seemed, there wasn't anyone left for him to rescue. His last flight consisted of a flock of geese, mothers with their young goslings tucked away under

their feathers. It was risky, but all had made the journey safely. Duffy couldn't remember landing, nor the thousand wings that seemed to lift and carry him. There came such a cool breeze and something spluttered into his eye. Then another, and another and more. "It's the rains!" came the chorus, "The rains will save us!"

Duffy looked up, into the sky. He thought for a moment, that he could make out a familiar shape amongst the rain clouds. But that's silly he thought to himself. He sat and remembered the kind advice that the old owl had given him. As he fell asleep, his thoughts seemed to change into a dream of snowflakes.

THE END

SOTO ZEN MEDITATION GROUPS

These are meditation groups who practise 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.

Helen Percival, 31 Harrogate Street, Bradford 3, Yorkshire. 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 details.

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

FRIORY NEWS AND EVENTS

THE SUMMER TRAINING PERIOD starts on the 9th. July. Weekend retreats will be held on the following dates:- 13th. and 14th. July; 3rd. and 4th. August; 31st. August and 1st. September. A week retreat will be held from the 21st. until the 29th. September when this training period ends.

THE AUTUMN TRAINING PERIOD starts on the 7th. October. Weekend retreats will be held on the following dates:- 12th. and 13th. October; 2nd. and 3rd. November; 30th. November and 1st. December. A week retreat will be held from the 14th. until the 22nd. December.

Anyone wishing to attend one of the training periods, or any of the retreats should contact the Priory well in advance. Visitors are welcome at other times, but only by arrangement. It should be remembered that we will not accept anyone unless they have previously made a booking with us, and that we have confirmed such arrangements.

TRANSMISSION

Rev. Hofuku Hughes and Rev. Kyosei Hughes have travelled to America for a months stay at Shasta Abbey. During their stay at the Abbey, they will both receive the Transmission from Jiyu Kenneth Roshi. We look forward to their safe return and meanwhile offer them our congratulations and best wishes.

NEEDED

Gardening and building tools, such as wheelbarrows, shovels, forks, hoes, spades etc. Also we shall shortly be in need of a concrete mixer. If anyone has any ideas, we would be glad to hear from them. Also needed, kitchen equipments, fridges, cookers, pots & pans etc.

GIFTS

Our thanks to Cherry Harris for donating a wheelbarrow and to Ian Barclay for his contribution towards an 18 inch temple bell.
