



THROSSEL HOLE PRIORY

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Newsletter

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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.

EDITORIAL

As most of you will know by now we have recently started a new Priory, The London Zen Priory, in Kingston. We have for some time had requests for a center that was more accesible to the south of England, in particular forsomewhere in London. Because of this Kennett Roshi asked Revs Hofoku and Kyosei Hughes together with Rev Kembo Wyatt to start a small establishment to see what the need was. So far the Priory has been doing very well and they are hoping to move to new larger premises shortly to accomodate more residents. In the meantime those wishing to should contact The London Zen Priory, 2 Watermans Close, Lower Ham Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey. Phone No 01-549-1801. We hope that the Priory continues it's succes and grows steadily.

Meanwhile in Northumberland we have had difficulties in obtaining full planning permission for our new meditation hall at Throssel Hole Priory. There appears to be no real objection in principal but we have been going backwards and forwards between the architect and the planning officer on matters of detail. This has been very time consuming and bothersome, and so we will not be building this year although it is hoped to start next. In the meantime therefore we have been spending our time doing as much as possible to make the presant accomodations more comfortable. We have also started to open up a small old coal pit on the property in the hope that we will become self sufficient in coal in the near future. We estimate that this will provide us with sufficient fuel for some years ahead.

For those who might be interested there will be an inter religious retreat conducted by Daiji and Fr Stephan Gowers, O.C.R. at Spode House, Hawksyard Priory, Rugeley, Staffordshire. (Armitage 490112) from the 21st of July to the 26th of July. We belive the fee will be £14. Those interested should contact the Warden of Spode House at the above address.

We appologise for the fact that this issue is a month late but we have decided to change our publication dates so that there is an issue at the beginning of the year and therefore into line with our training periods. Those who have paid a years subscription will of course recieve six issues.

ZEN, MEDITATION AND WORK

Many of those who come to Throssel or write to us seem to think that Zen and meditation are passive, they can be under no worse a delusion. Both Zen and meditation are extremely active those who think that meditation is simply to sit and contemplate the absolute have fallen into quietism. It is true that in the beginning much of the emphasis in meditation is on quieting the mind which would appear to be a passive activity, this though is only an apparent passivity. It comes from a misunderstanding of the processes involved. You may then ask what is Zen? Zen is life in it's deepest and broadest sense this does not mean that in meditation and Zen practice we experience life, or, at least, we try to experience life, this would be passive and would again end up in quietism. In Zen we try to live our life as fully and freely as possible without any delusions or barriers in the way; this is of course something that must be very dynamic. Life after all is nothing if it is not dynamic. To do this we will of course have to be fully in charge of ourselves, and to do it properly we will have to take into consideration all the things around us as we share in their existence. It therefore follows that the true Zen trainee is a thoroughly responsible and compassionate person. Too much of so called Zen is self centered and is little more than a rather sick form of spiritual narcissism.

How then does Zen teach us to live this kind of full life? The process of learning how to do this we call Zen training and basically it has two sides meditation and work. Meditation is the foundation of practice. In meditation we first find our true life and then we must learn how to put it into practice. It is because of this that early on meditation appears to some to be rather passive, but this is not so. If meditation is to become true, it must become an activity; that is to say you must actively sit in meditation and not passively wait for enlightenment. There are too many who come to Zen because they think that enlightenment is some kind of cosmic zap, but in truth meditation will only show us how to live a life of truth in all circumstances with a peaceful and calm mind and it will, naturally, be a part of living that life. In the Diamond Sutra, Subhuti, a disciple of the Buddha asks him about people "How should their minds abide and how should they be subdued". Now in the rest of the sutra the Buddha talks about how the mind may be calmed that is to say subdued. Nowhere does he say that there is anywhere where the mind should abide, in fact he says "Their minds should abide nowhere. If minds abide somewhere it will be in falsehood." This is most important as it shows that the Buddha did not teach the trying to attain any special state of mind called enlightenment. He taught merely to put all of your life and energy into your meditation, if you do this, then your life will deepen and your understanding of life will deepen too, but it will be onesided and sterile unless it is reflected in a deeper more active life and it is this that counts in the long run. There is a great difference between just sitting passively waiting for enlightenment and true Zen meditation, where it is necessary to firmly grasp ones will and get on with it.

Most people do not of course live in monasteries where meditation is the foundation of their life. For most people ordinary everyday life is the main thing, and meditation tends to be something extra like beer and cigarettes. This is a pity for it represents a misunderstanding of meditation; meditation is the foundation of our everyday life, because through meditation we learn to truly live. It has been said that there is no Zen if it does not show in our ordinary life and it is here that work becomes important. There is a great

danger of those who come to Zen monasteries coming to retire from life ; it was because of this type of escapism that the early Zen Rules stated "A day without work is a day without food". Here we can see the great emphasis the early masters placed on work, but what attitude of mind should one have towards work? It is very important that work is not done merely as a chore but as a part of training only then can work be transformed into a great joy and be infused with the spirit of meditation. For example if one takes a spade and starts shovelling coal, very soon the voice of laziness appears and tells one that it is time to stop for a rest, that if one shovels any longer one will do oneself an injury. All this must be put aside it is just laziness trying to drag you back into the mire. If one continues to dig and puts one's energy and effort into it, one can dig, through any obstructions that may arise, to the very bottom of life. It is here that real Zen starts but a moments wavering and the voice of laziness is back with it's weadling excuses and it's dulling fog of the mind. Scampopa in "The Jewel Ornament of Liberation" says of this type of laziness that it must be thrown away quickly just like a snake that has crept up onto one's lap. I think this is a marvellous image and one that all of us who suffer from laziness should keep at hand. Because laziness and lassitude will forever drag us down if we let them but only through working hard and energetically can we learn to overcome them.

In work it is easy to grasp one's will but more difficult to keep a calm and quiet mind, in meditation it is easy to keep a calm and quiet mind and more difficult to grasp one's will. But there can be no true grasping of the will without the insight that comes from calmness of mind and only a dull unconciuosness or foggyness if there is no real grasping of the will. So work and meditation must balance and compliment each other. Too often people only take it onesidedly and only look at meditation. I cannot therefore overemphasis the importance of hard work. Of the people who come to Throssel Hole it is very noticable that those who do best are those who work hardest. It is in this willingness to work hard that we show in our daily life our willingness to undertake Zen training. When we do not we show that we only wish to get by in life, and do not want to do anything about ourselves. It is our choice and at all times we have freedom of choice, but we must take the consequences of our actions. If we wish life not to pass us by then we must live it as energetically and fully as possible in our work and our meditation. And soon we will find the truth of the sutra that says:

Enlightenment is easy
For the hard-working!

Daiji Strathern.

Timetable of Retreats Untill December.

There will be week-end retreats on the following dates:-
13th and 14th of July, 3rd and 4th of August, 31st of August and 1st of September, 7th and 8th of October, 2nd and 3rd of November, 30th of November and 1st of December.

There will be week long retreats from the 21st to the 29th of September and 14th to the 22nd of December.

PRIORY NEWS AND EVENTS

New Priory.

On their return from America, where they had recieved the trasmission from Roshi, Revs Hofuku and Kyosei Hughes set up the new Priory in Kingston (see editorial). Shortlyafterwards Rev Kembo Wyatt left Throssel Hole to help them in their work.

Chief Junior.

Suigan Liddie was installed as Rev Daiji Strathern's Chief Junior at Throssel Hole on the 20th of April, and will lead all trainees for six months

Ordination.

Robert Morgan was ordained as Houn Daishin on 1st of May by Rev. Daiji Strathern and has now taken on the responsible job of monastery cook.

Gardens and Animals.

Giko Kublicki has returned and has taken over the vegetable gardens which are blooming under his supervision. The animals which he also looks after, seem to be very fond of him. Mary our goat is at the moment giving us up to 2 pints of milk a day.

Lectures.

Rev. Daiji Strathern gave a talk to a class of fifth and sixth formers. The talk went well and seemed to provoke quite an interest. Daiji also gave a talk and discussion to the Oxford University Buddhist Society, which all seemed to enjoy.

Seminar.

Rev. Daiji Strathern attended an evening seminar on meditation held by the University of Lancaster Psychology Society. The discussion ranged quite widely but in the main was a little too theoretical for Daiji's taste but then it was a psychology society and not a meditation group.

Jukai Retreat.

We have recently finnished the Jukai retreat at Throssel Hole which went well despite the fact that many of us caught a cold. Eighteen people came, six to renew their commitment to Buddhism whilst ten people took lay ordination.

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DO THE ENGLISH HAVE A BUDDHA NATURE?

My wife and I recently went over to the States to visit Roshi and Shasta Abbey and the thing that most impressed me was most probably why Buddhism has taken off in America and remained like a stagnant pond over here.

The Americans seem to get up and have a go whilst we English form societies and talk about it. Maybe the direction is the same, but the effort is not. Half the problem appears to be that we don't think that we can make it, Shakyamuni could and so could a few orientals, but not us English - at least not in this life - put it off to another time, sit in an easy complacent stupa, but not actually get down to it - pretend to oh yes but not actually do it.

Well this seems to be our koan, I know to a greater or lesser extent its mine, but we can make Bodhidarma appear in Sorinji - we can make Shakyamuni raise his brow and wink and its not even much point in believing it you have to get on and do it.

Hofuku.