



THROSSEL HOLE PRIORY

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Newsletter

November

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

E D I T O R I A L.

This term we have celebrated two ceremonies which people sometimes find difficult to understand. They are Segaki and Founder's Day. Segaki is the ceremonial feeding of the Hungry Ghosts, it is traditionally performed on the day before Founder's Day which is celebrated on November 1st. The ceremony is offered to everything in the universe whether living or dead. The Hungry Ghosts can be seen as they are traditionally represented as actual beings who have died but because of their attachment to the things of this world become Hungry Ghosts and are condemned to an existence of craving that can never be satisfied.

We too are sometimes Hungry Ghosts, that is whenever we have a craving that by its nature can never be satisfied then we suffer the torments of the Hungry Ghosts in this life. In other words whenever we have a craving that has its roots in a dissatisfaction with our life and we project it onto something and then gorge ourselves with it to the point of nausea but are still not satisfied, because we have not begun to see the real roots of the craving. Then there we are stuck in our delusion until we either just go under or get so disgusted with ourselves that we do something about it.

The Hungry Ghosts are one of the six realms of existence, the others are heaven, hell, animals, the world of asuras or dissension and the human world. The important fact about the six worlds is that the Buddha appears in all of them and so whatever state we find ourselves in it is always possible to do something about it, but to truly hear the teaching we have to be born in the human realm in other words to find salvation we have to become complete human beings. The offertory in the actual ceremony reads, "The Body of the Buddha permeates the universe and manifests itself in front of all of us; there is no place where it does not so manifest itself. It does so for every relationship and in all need, yet it is still in its own true place."

The purpose of the ceremony is to give all beings the opportunity to hear the Dharma so that, "Everything may realise the Truth and be released from all bad karma, make the hidden and apparent free and complete the Right and True Wisdom."

Founder's Day is perhaps more easily understood. This is a ceremony that gives us the opportunity to express our gratitude to our temple founder Rev Keidō Chisan Kōhō Zenji for making possible the founding of the Priory and providing us with the opportunity to train in Buddhism. The final words of the offertory recited during the ceremony read, "The offering that we place in the fathomless begging bowl is formless and unlimited in weight and flavour, for it is the offering of our own Buddhist training that we bring today. Let us eat this daily and pray that all within this temple may be saved thereby."

I am often asked questions about sitting. These questions tend to fall into various categories, but the largest number are those who want to understand how to sit. I differentiate here between those who ask what to do in order to sit and those who want to understand how to sit. There are many classical descriptions of sitting and I do not propose to go into these, but would refer people to Roshi's book 'Selling Water By The River' and also 'An Approach to Zen' by Kosho Uchiyama Roshi. What I want to deal with today is a very common and repetitive mistake, one whose most common symptom is wanting to 'understand' how to sit. It may seem that if one's sitting is to deepen one would wish to gain more understanding of it and this is in a sense true, but, and here lies the fallacy, understanding only comes through actual practice. It is not something that may be grasped intellectually. All too often and too easily we fool ourselves by grasping after intellectual understanding and thinking that once we can understand intellectually we will be able to put it into practice. It is not so. We must come to it the other way round; when we have truly experience in our own lives, then we really understand, and perhaps if we have the intellectual capacity we may be able to express something of our understanding to ourselves and sometimes others, but the latter is obviously not the essential point.

Most of those who ask questions of this nature do not realise that the real problem that they have is not a lack of understanding, but a lack of trust in themselves. Anyone you meet, young or old, knows how to sit and yet when it comes down to a meditation practice which says just sit, everyone says 'Oh, but how?'. So we have a slightly special position, we sit in a slightly formal way, and we have a little ritual before meditation starts and at the end. But in between time we just sit, but this is on it's own most unsatisfactory. The mind has nothing to grasp onto so it wanders around looking for something to grasp onto. But if we want to know the truth we must train our minds as we would train a puppy, not to merely scamper about all day after this and that. Then the real crux of the problem becomes having trust and faith in our ability to sit, without which we are swamped by anxieties and fears. This is obviously wrong, but it is still there. Our minds in order to reassure us that we can sit search for a little picture of sitting. This is what so many questions are concerned with, our intellects trying desperately to find reassurance in an image of sitting, but in the longrun we must let such images go and sit where we are and as we are. This is not at first a very comfortable feeling for one finds oneself quite alone without any cherished hopes or joys, with nothing to hang onto. But here there is always one good companion, our own hearts, for whilst our intellect cannot understand and see clearly, our hearts can. So we must learn to trust ourselves, that is our hearts. To do this we must learn how to surrender ourselves completely to sitting. It is no use going to a meditation hall and then trying to work out how to meditate and then trying to put into practice what you have worked out. This is just to enmesh ourselves in Mara's net deeper and deeper. We must instead go to the meditation hall in all humility, recognise our complete and devastating ignorance and then totally surrender ourselves to sitting.

When we do this, Then we find that we knew how to sit all along. At this point there lies great danger, for the moment that we recognise this realization we are off the way, racing back towards our intellectual images. We must constantly surrender ourselves to our own hearts and our own sitting. Buddhism without heart is not Buddhism and life without heart isn't human.

The practice of zazen then simply becomes the acceptance of our own hearts and just sitting in freedom and openness. This is very easy to say, but it is difficult and terrible to do, yet in the final analysis what could be easier. Only our doubts and fears stand in our way, making us believe it difficult and making us lose faith and touch in our own hearts. Then we are like a nation that is divided in two against itself. There is no peace anywhere, only lonely bitterness and enmity, but when we trust ourselves and our hearts then we are like a country that is unified and vigorous, peace abounds, faults are corrected and prosperity grows.

So please just lay down any thoughts about Zen or meditation, and When you sit trust yourself just to sit.

Mr Craven-Jackson of Hull is starting an organisation to be known as the Buddhist Union. It will be for committed Buddhists and one of its aims will be to give practical help to the community at large, with particular reference to voluntary work such as prison visiting etc. Mr Craven-Jackson, as many of you will know, is a very active man and an excellent organiser. We wish him every success in this new venture, which we highly commend. Those wishing for further information should contact Mr Craven-Jackson at:-

128 Westbourne Avenue
HULL HU5 3H2
Tel: 492882

Mrs Louise Funnell has for many years before and since her retirement done much work typing lectures etc. for charitable organisations of all types without making any charges, and has been a great friend to us here. She is now finding difficulty finding accomodation. Would anyone who could help help her please contact us or her directly at:-

11 Brockhurst
Church Stretton
SALOP.

She is looking particularly for a room or small flat, hopefully in the Bournemouth area. Being a pensioner her means are not large.

PRIORY NEWS AND EVENTS.

Chief Junior. On the 5th of October Rev Suigan Liddie completed his term as Chief Junior successfully engaging in a mondo ceremony with all trainees. He has now temporarily left to earn some money. We offer him our congratulations and look forward to his early return.

Rev Daishin Morgan was installed as the new Chief Junior on the 9th of October

Postulancy. As was mentioned in the last newsletter all future monks will be required to spend three to six months as Postulants before being ordained. Carolyn Evans and Chris Kublicki commenced their Postulancy on the 25th of October, we wish them every success.

Segaki Segaki or ceremonial feeding of the Hungry Ghosts was held on the 31st of October

Founders Day As is traditional on the day following Segaki we celebrated Founders day with a memorial service for Keido Chisan Koho Zenji in the newly completed Founder's Shrine. The purpose of the ceremony is to offer our gratitude to him for founding our temple and providing us with the opportunity to train here.

Mushrooms We are starting to grow our own mushrooms. At the moment we are preparing mountains of horse manure kindly given to us by a local riding stable. We hope to have our first crop by Christmas. Rev Giko Kublicki an ex mushroom farmer has been providing the know how though he has left to earn some money but as mentioned above we now have his brother Chris as our resident expert.

Waterworks We have just finished laying more drainage tiles to extend the catchment area of our water supply so that in the summer we will have enough water for the new building.

Retreats and Lectures On the week end of 19th/20th of October Daiji conducted a retreat at Full organised by Brenda and John Watkins. Daiji also conducted another one day retreat at Durham University organised by the local Buddhist Society and on the 29th he gave a lecture at Lancaster University. The London Zen Priory held a very successful Jukai week end retreat on 9th and 10th of November, which Daiji conducted.

London Zen Priory The London Zen Priory have now moved to more spacious accommodation at 4 Fairford Gardens, Worcester Park, Surrey tel 01-337-2816. They will be holding Sunday retreats on the 1st, 8th, 15th and 29th of December and a week end retreat on 20th to 22nd of December.

Please contact the Guestmaster for details (Advance booking is required.)

Zazen Booklets We are selling the Zazen booklets published by Shasta Abbey price 35p (inc. postage)

New Building Another no-bulletin, we are still pressing on with planning applications. So far we have not encountered any serious objection from the Planning Officer and are hoping for a positive result soon.