



# THROSSEL HOLE PRIORY

vol. 2 no.3

Newsletter

January 75

---

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

---

## EDITORIAL

After many delays we have finally managed to obtain planning permission for the new meditation hall. This has taken us some considerable time; more than twelve months and we are glad at last to be able to get underway with the project. The building will comprise a larger meditation hall with new kitchen, which we badly need, and dining room. There will also be both male and female showers and lavatories. Those of you who have been here know how badly we need all of this. The building will be centrally heated and we hope to be able to supply the fuel for this from our coal mine which should be reopened by the time the building is completed.

We are at the moment in the process of organising the preliminaries, i.e. quantity surveying, costing etc. and we hope to start clearing the site in a month's time. We will then be set to start on the foundations as soon as the spring weather comes, hopefully in March. We shall be doing all the building ourselves using no outside labour and since there are few of us with much building experience we are not sure how long it will take. However we think that the following will be a reasonable time schedule. Starting as I said in the spring, we will lay the foundations. We would hope by early summer to have constructed the walls to first floor level, by midsummer to have reached the gables and by the time winter sets in in October/November to have raised the roof and tiled it. We will then be able to work continuously throughout the winter and should therefore be able to complete the building by mid-1976, that is to say eighteen months for the complete project. During that time there may of course be some disruption with the Priory from time to time. We apologise in advance if you suffer any inconvenience because of this. Whether we can meet this schedule will of course partly depend on our finances at each stage.

As I said earlier the community ~~will~~ itself be doing all the labour of building the new meditation hall etc., but we are unable to finance the project from our own pockets. We will therefore be launching an appeal within the next month or two to raise sufficient funds to allow us to build. Anyone who can help in the organisation and running of the appeal we would be most grateful to hear from.

## LONDON ZEN PRIORY

The London Zen Priory is holding meditation classes twice a week, on Monday night for beginners and Wednesday night for more advanced students. Evening meditation starts at 7.20.

Also Sunday retreats are held every Sunday and every third week-end in each month is a week-end retreat. There is also room available for people to live in. For further information please contact the Priory, 4 Fairford Gardens, Worcester Park, Surrey. +el. 01-337-2816.

The first of the Zen monastic rules is 'A day without work is a day without food'. Many people do not understand this. They think that a monastery is somewhere where people go to spend their whole time in meditation. This comes from a basically dualistic view of the world and is in fact one of the major attitudes of mind that Zen is trying to attack.

Work is important in a Zen monastery because it is a part of life. There can be no separation between the religious life and a life of work, they are the same thing. There are those whose commitment leads them to live in a monastery and those whose commitment leads them not to live in a monastery but there is no essential difference between such people if they are training in the truth. For both sets of people work in one form or another will be their daily lot. If this is not so, then they are rushing after a delusion and even worse than this, they are parasitic as well. It is true that the work of the monk is often different from the work of a layman, but this is not always so. We have a building to put up, the new meditation hall. The work will be done by us. Here we will be doing work that will be quite ordinary in the terms of the outside world and yet we hope that, if our training is pure, it will be done in quite an extraordinary fashion.

It is this extraordinariness that counts. When one does something for training and not for selfish ends, that is to say to do it for its own sake because it is worth doing and to do it with all one's heart and as much love as one can muster, then the work blossoms forth into a new significance. Significance is not only something which one finds for oneself, but it is also there for the others who work with you. In this way we help both ourselves and others and this must be a fine thing to do. However, all too often we find that we have some laziness in us and we are making excuses as to why we should not have to work, we have to do this or that, or the person on the next-door bench is not working very hard so why should we etc. etc. If a job is worth doing at all it is worth doing to the best of one's ability. This does not mean that we can do it perfectly. We are human and Zen is to make us human not superhuman. But our humanity will best express itself when we live fully and energetically, when we chase out the cobwebs of laziness from our minds. I know, speaking from personal experience, that when I am lazy life is irksome and dull and not a pleasure, but often when I shake that off and exert myself with a little bit of vigour, then my life is transformed into a great joy and I think this is true for most people. This is not something that we should make into some great ideology, but something that we should live out simply and naturally in our daily life.

This attitude goes into everything. When our work is religious then it no longer becomes work and becomes one with the rest of our life and so we no longer live in a world of duality, but we will have set aside the opposites, we will have gone beyond dualism. Here again we can often see a mistake that we make, for instance in trying to be spiritual heroes or heroines. This is no good. This only leads to despondency, because we fail and then we think that we can amount to nothing, that we are like animals, and so we swing in an internal cycle of giving up hope and sinking into the hells and of hoping and trying to be spiritual heroes or gods and going off to the god realm, but trully we are and what we must become more fully is human.

This is not something that is static, our humanity is something that is wonderfully alive and full of great dignity. Teilhard de Chardin defines man as 'a potential with a possibility of infinite growth', but this growth can only come if we live out our humanity. If we try to be either gods or sink into the depths of being animals or into the depths of hell, then we lose our humnaity and with it the thing that makes us human, trully human, our hearts.

There is a great Hasidic Rabi who used to say that on the day of judgement when he went before the Lord he would not be asked why he was not more Moses or Abraham, but why he was not more himself. And this is the judgement against all of

us, why are we not more truly ourselves, more truly human, and this is not something that we become and then forget about and then go off and do something else, but something that we will always be doing, because we will always be growing and changing. When we are young we will be growing up, when we are middle-aged we will be growing old and when we are old we will be growing to death. All this must be done by us and will be done by us, but often we run away from it and we try to live a life which is not our own. To live our own life truly and completely is the aim of Zen. This, of course, takes great courage and it also takes great faith. But in the long run it is worthwhile for only when we do so do we feel fully alive and fully real. I think probably the most common manifestation of the great Buddhist truth that the 'world' is 'suffering' is this feeling that is so prevalent today of things not being quite real, including ourselves.

Zazen has been described as the self making the self into the self. This means that it is a process in which we allow ourselves to rebecome our own original nature. This is an infinite journey which has infinite depths and it is therefore something that can only be begun, but it is something which gives life not meaning, but enormous significance and great beauty.

If we try though to live in a world of duality where we shut out either the 'worldly' or 'spiritual' or where we even split the world up into 'worldly' and 'spiritual', then we cannot be truly ourselves because again we are trying to grasp after being gods. This is very insidious and there are so many ways that we can do it, for instance how many of us do not carry on a constant analysis and commentary on the world, chopping up and describing it so that we think that we know it and can therefore manipulate it. This is only a mirror of what we do to ourselves. We do not just sit when we meditate but we try to work out how to just sit and then put that into practice. This is to make religion into an ideology and is the worst of mistakes for having found out what is 'THE RIGHT WAY' we will try to force ourselves to stick to it even when it goes against our basic nature. We will use it to whip ourselves with and, having whipped ourselves, we will whip others. What a foul way to live. But if we let all of this go and live in accordance with the things around us and in harmony with ourselves and others there will be great joy and great vigour in everything we do. Even on these occasions when we are sad there will be within us a great core of beauty.

Duality then is not just intellectual picking and choosing but a whole way of life. We can never learn that samsara is nirvana whilst we have this attitude and when we drop it we will find the world around us as it really is, in constant communion with us and with everything. Then there will be neither samsara or nirvana just great joy and peace.

Daiji Strathern.

#### FUTURE EVENTS.

Retreats. Week-end retreats:- March 1-2, April 12-13, cost £5. There will be a week-long sesshin from March 29 to April 6.

Jumble Sale. ETTY COOK with great enthusiasm is organising a Jumble Sale in aid of our Building Fund to be held in ST. GEORGE'S Church Hall, Cullercoats on Saturday 8th. February 1975 at 2.30p.m. Anyone who would like to help out on the day or contribute jumble please contact Mrs E. Cook, 31 Grafton Ave., Whitley Bay.

## NEWS AND EVENTS.

New Postulants. Paddy Ball has joined us from the London Zen Priory as a postulant, he has at present the job of cook. Three other people are becoming Postulants at the beginning of this term:- Roy Jilley, Gus Holmes and John Adams. We wish them all every success and offer them our congratulations. Rev. Giko Kublicki has also returned so our numbers are rapidly swelling.

Sesshin. The December Sesshin went well despite much wind and cold during the first few days which kept us all 'at it'. The retreat was attended by about twenty people in all.

Work in Progress. We are just finishing off the dining room in the house which we have been dry lining and installing a new stone fireplace and also a new staircase. Work has been done on the yard levelling it out and making it much neater, also it will now be less of a hazard to people's sumps and exhaust pipes when they come by car.

Mushrooms. The indoor mushrooms produced quite prolifically and were much enjoyed over Christmas. We hope the outdoor ones will come up about midsummer.

Lectures. Daiji has been giving lectures up and down the country, amongst others on 11th. and 12th. January he held a retreat for twenty Christians in Portsmouth and gave a lecture at 'Bethanie', a convent in N. London on 19th. January, and on the 24th. he lectured to a group in Leeds.

Before Shakyamuni was enlightened or rather realized his enlightenment he practised asceticism for nine years. He had already rejected his princely life of wealth and treasures. He rapidly became the best ascetic in the land, being both sincere and diligent. He even surpassed the three finest teachers of the time. Eventually he set out on his own, followed by four fellow ascetics. Starving themselves and hanging upside down from trees was easy; Shakyamuni was reduced to skin and bones, almost dying. A local woman, taking pity on him, offered him some milk. At that time Shakyamuni admitted to himself that his efforts may all have been in the wrong direction, which was quite an admission. He accepted the milk; so horrified were his four friends that they left him there sitting under the Bodhi tree.

So Shakyamuni sat. He emptied himself of his opinions of what he was trying to do; ideas of what it should be like. He just sat. Being unattached to within or without he realized his true nature exclaiming I was, am and always will be one with my true nature.

Nowadays most people do not have the same determination as Shakyamuni, their wealth of colour T.V. sets and fancy cars and palaces of semi-detached are too cosy to give up. But even more difficult are our ideas and opinions, the stupid even look for something which fits their own opinions. Even Shakyamuni gave up his opinions as useless. He knew a life of luxury did not work so he punished himself like mad, but when we admit that we could be wrong it's a time for turning the stream of compassion, embracing and loving, not hating and resenting.

Anyone who sits runs the risk of finding true religion, but it is not a matter of sitting looking at it, which is quietism. The Christians say be moulded by the Love of God - not sit looking at it.

So if a fool like me can offer any advice, it's sit, and get moulded by the Buddha within.

Hofuku Hughes.