



THROSSEL HOLE PRIORY

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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.

One of the problems many people have that is particularly highlighted in a monastic life style as well as outside is how to deal with life situations we dislike, for instance having to go outside and dig holes or mix concrete when it is cold, windy and pouring with rain and you don't think the concrete should be mixed like this or the hole doesn't need digging anyway and who the hell does he think he is telling me to work hard anyway!! This is a situation that most people who come here find themselves in at some time or other, especially to begin with. Outside the monastery this type of problem shows itself something like this; on your way to work one morning you see your bus coming and after running like mad for a couple of hundred yards the conductor rings the bell and the bus drives off leaving you panting and cursing and late for work. You finally get to work and your boss yells at you for being late and off you go into one of those days.

To deal with situations like this the first and most important thing is to stop blaming the outside circumstances and to look to yourself for the reason they make you feel so resentful, grumpy and as though the whole world is specifically ordered to annoy you. We can never isolate ourselves from these situations, it would be foolish to imagine we could, so what we have to do is to deal with our end of them-- that is the way we view them and how we act.

First we have to accept that the situation is of our own making and therefore within our power to do something about, then progress can be made. For instance we cannot stop the conductor ringing the bell but we can avoid going purple and chundering on to ourselves for hours afterwards, feeding our anger instead of letting it go and ending up feeling that all bus conductors should be strangled and if that particular one happened to fall off his bus (which he richly deserves) then we would be only too happy to walk straight over him. (All because he rang the bell and the bus was probably full anyway!) What is needed is a complete change of view of the world so that we no longer see such situations as affronts to our dignity and self importance but as useful and necessary in that they teach something very valuable and provide us with the opportunity to train and as such are something to be grateful for.

In Zen we have the figure of Kanzeon, the Bodhisattva of compassion, who because of her compassion for the world appears in many forms to teach, sometimes as bus conductors, to give us the opportunity to develop a truly compassionate view of the universe, and not to get carried away by our anger and frustration. If we take this open view of being prepared to see these situations and people who annoy us as manifestations of Kanzeon, compassion, then we open ourselves out to the world and the world can then become a far better place in which to live as we begin to stop separating ourselves out and become less lonely and isolated. If we take this view of the world then nothing can stand in our way as whatever comes along can be used positively to train ourselves towards enlightenment. That is nothing gets in the way of training but without an open commitment to training then the world seems incomprehensibly set against us. This means that we have to be prepared for

a great deal of hard work as real religious training is never easy. What prevents us from taking this open view is our own laziness and inertia, a clutching after the way of living we know even though if we dare to look we realise that it is causing us a great deal of unnecessary pain.

Daishin Morgan.

TWO WAYS TO TRAIN.

Today I would like to talk to you about two ways to train. Both work in their own way, but one is true Zen training and the other is not. These days it is very common for people to take up some form of psycho-spiritual training and, because of the dangers involved, I would like to talk about one of the possible sidetracks that there is. When you come to training it is very important that you understand and distinguish between the ways that you can train so that you can train in the correct spirit. This is much more important than would appear at first sight. This is because it is a question of motivation and one's motivation gives the direction to one's training so that if there is wrong motivation one will be misled and will not be truly training.

There are many who come to Zen because they have some problem in their life and they believe that Zen can help. There is nothing wrong with this. Zen may well be able to do an enormous amount for people with all sorts of problems. But Zen's primary purpose is not just to deal with problems. Zen is a religion. This particular attitude of mind also comes out in those who come to train in order to become more capable. This is really the same as coming to train in order to cure a problem, the problem here is a feeling of inadequacy or incapability. There is nothing wrong per se for coming to training with either of the above reasons as long as you clearly understand that what you are doing is training in the Truth. If you come to train in the Truth because you feel that you are inadequate, you must understand that the Truth will not necessarily solve your problems or make you more capable, although almost invariably it does, but only as a by-product, and this is the key to this problem, the games that one can put one's finger on, that one obtains from Zen, are by-products of Zen and not the main point at all. True Zen training is undertaken because training is synonymous with the Truth. If you train for the Truth, then in the long-run you will train for training's sake, that is to say because training is the Truth and the Truth is training. We train because it is the right way to live. When we reach such a stage, which is very rare, then we will have transcended our problems and our inadequacies because we will have become one with our own true nature and the true nature of the world around us, which is neither capable or incapable, adequate or inadequate. Then we will be able to see the splendour of the Dharmakaya like a mantle over everything. This is a beautiful state, but it is not a state that we must dwell in, in the sense of hang onto. If we do, then our training will not reach the heights of perfection that are possible. We must go on from here. You see here there is a great danger of stopping, we find a beautiful place where the Dharmakaya abounds and then, because we find it beautiful, we wish to stay there. If we attempt to do so we will give up our training and then we will live in a false passivity and quietism. We must train and be prepared to give up even this for the sake of the Truth. Then we will find the true magnificence of Buddhism, the great dignity and stature that not only all things around us have, but also we partake of as well.

Compared to this, training just for the sake of becoming more capable or merely to solve some problem is rather paltry. We may be brought to Zen by a problem, but we must transcend it, not just solve it. The attempt to solve problems is the attempt to use Zen to acquire the ability to manipulate your surroundings better. This is terrible, because as you learn to manipulate your surroundings you learn to manipulate yourself and others, and in so doing you lose touch with your own heart so that the world turns into a cold place and we become utterly selfish. It is possible to train in such a manner and it is possible to make progress in it and become more capable and to solve many of your problems, but this is exceedingly dangerous and leads

to megalomania and rather to a breaking up of the ego, the selfish self, to a strengthening of it, and in the end to a deification of it. At this stage there is no hope, because the person believes that they are God, that they are supremely capable and supremely adequate, which of course they are not. Again, very few people, fortunately, get to this last stage. This is because most people lack the perseverance to do so and here we should offer our thanks that it is so. But there are many apparent rewards for those who train selfishly, they do appear to gain in capability and adequacy, but at the expense of Truth, and so what they have gained can crumble in their fingers, can become nothing again, whereas to train in the Truth can never crumble, just as Truth can never crumble. Truth accepts our inadequacies and problems and our worries and fears as they are and transmutes them into adequacy and confidence. False training merely turns you into a computer, that is more capable of manipulating logical situations, but has no heart. The perfect example of this kind of capability is that of James Bond or KungFu, these people are not real, they are merely idealised superegos, utterly selfish, utterly cold.

So, I think you can see that although real training may appear hard and difficult to start with, in the long-run it carries with it great promise, whereas false training of this kind may appear superficially attractive, but in the long-run only leads to a worse situation. You might say that our situation is like that of a man in prison. We can just resign ourselves to where we are if we want to, or perhaps, if we learn, we may find some way to get out of the prison. The man who trains falsely is the man who resigns himself to the prison and then spends his time and energy organising and painting and decorating his cell. The man who trains truly finds the escape route and then, having found the escape route, because he has lost all selfishness, helps others to escape as well.

I hope that you can see from this that training is not something that should be undertaken lightly, it is always something that should be undertaken with deadly seriousness and with firm resolve and intent. If not, it will not get anywhere, just as the prisoner who merely plays at trying to escape does not get anywhere. Nagarajuna says rather beautifully in his Prajnaparamitaupadesa:

Bodhisattvas who produce the Great Thought,
Fishes' eggs and mango flowers,
These are three things common enough,
But rarely is it they bear fruit.

Daiji Strathern.

NEWS AND EVENTS.

Rev. Jiyu Kennett Roshi. Unfortunately Rev. Jiyu Kennett Roshi will not be able to come to England this summer as we had hoped, but we hope to see her perhaps next year.

Lectures. Daiji has again been very busy giving lectures and holding retreats up and down the country. On the 7th. of February he lectured to a group at Manchester University and on the 10th. to the Durham University Buddhist Society. On the 16th. he held a one day retreat for the Newcastle group at Killingworth. On the 6th. of February Cleveland Radio broadcast a 20 minute interview. Daiji also held a retreat at Loughborough University over the week-end of 8th. and 9th. March.

Retreat Dates. We will be holding week-end retreats at the Priory on the following dates;- 12th. and 13th. of April, 3rd. and 4th. of May, 31st. of May and 1st. of June, 5th. and 6th. of July and 30th. to the 31st. of August. There will be a week-long Jukai sesshin from 21st. to 29th. of June and a sesshin from 2nd. to 10th. of August. Daiji will also be conducting an inter-religious retreat with Fr. Stephen Gowers OCR at Spode House, Hawkesyard Priory, Rugeley, Staffs. (Phone Armitage 490112) from 18th. to 25th. July. Application to attend should be made to the Warden, the cost will be £23 for shared accomodation and £28 for a single room.

Postulancy. Helen Krasner has joined us a postulant from the London Zen Priory, we wish her every success in her training.

New Building. We have just purchased a second hand tractor with a powerful hydraulic digger on the front which will be invaluable for clearing the site, unloading lorries etc. and mixing concrete with a mixer attachment, also it will prove a very useful tool when the building is completed for ploughing etc. We have been busy laying new drains for what is to be the new car park and hope to start laying the foundations in April.

Gardens. Chris Kublicki has been enthusiastically looking after the gardens and in a fine spell recently we planted out what is to be our fruit garden with many different types of berries, plum trees and apple trees. We hope to produce most of our fruit in a couple of years or so when the garden gets properly established.

Jumble Sale. The Jumble Sale organised by Etty Cook and the Newcastle Group went very well, despite the organisers nearly getting killed in the rush when the doors were opened, and raised over £60 for the Building Fund. Our thanks to Etty and everyone else for their help and enthusiasm.

Animals. The last couple of months have been very hard for our animal population. Mary, the goat, caught tetanus and died within a couple of days and then a few days later Martha the goose and Daisy the duck were both killed, we think by a stoat or a fox. Arthur the gander has been very upset though he and Donald are consoling each other.