

# ZEN NEWS



Compiled and published by members of Tyneside Zen Buddhist Association with gratitude for the help given by individuals and groups in other areas mentioned within.

Readers are invited to submit items of news, articles, book reviews, poetry, artwork, photographs and other material to be considered for publication. Opinions expressed in the items published do not necessarily reflect the editor's own views or the practice of the Tyneside group. It is hoped that by sharing our experience and understanding we may learn to live together in a positive and harmonious way. In this way Dharma may flourish.

It is intended that Zen News will continue to be published at two monthly intervals. Please ensure that the editor is notified of changes of address. If you have a friend who wishes to receive this publication, please send their name and address. Distribution by post is free, but a small charge is made where available from shops to cover printing costs only. Your financial support is invited; payable to: Tyneside Zen Buddhist Association.

Editor - Gordon Bell, 27 Rothbury Avenue, Horden, Peterlee, Co. Durham.  
Week day telephone; Hartlepool 66611 ext 236.

The cover design is adapted from a greeting card available from Shasta Abbey, California and depicts Monju, a Bodhissatva representing wisdom. Monju has no fear of the lion on which he sits, since he maintains a continuous attitude of meditation. The lion, which is very much awake, remains inactive while Monju has no fear.

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#### EDITORIAL

In Zen training gratitude is strongly emphasised. Being grateful for what we are, for others, and the things we meet. Being open moment by moment to the teaching of ALL things, showing us ourselves. Gratitude and openness operate in two directions, turning us inward, being open to the heart; and in opening to others, showing gratitude. To practice religion is to open to how things are, to how you really are, and to go on. To hold nothing back.

I find you have to start with being open and honest to yourself, since you can't be open to others or to what they may teach, and be closed up inside. If I face my responsibilities honestly, Throw myself into what is to be done, I express gratitude in my actions. If I dodge responsibilities, cover them up kidding myself they are not there, subsequent actions (or inaction) are all 'take' and no giving. There is no gratitude, no openness, no positivity, no chance for going on, no learning.

When I sit down to write, there is a good opportunity for facing myself, for self examination, for clarifying the mind, for being open and honest. Perhaps if I can convert some of this to writing it may be of help to others. Perhaps you would like to try too.

Thankyou to all who contributed to this issue and to its distribution.

## TRAINING AND KANZEON

We come to Zen because of a yearning in our heart. Often this yearning is deeply buried within us so that we cannot see its face, but we can feel it kick like an unborn child. In rational or materialistic terms religion is not sensible and much of the time we may live by these terms. Yet we know something is missing. The best that rational materialism has come up with is 'enlightened self interest'. Yet we know that self is limited and the yearning is there to break out of this limitation. This yearning is the yearning for perfect freedom, for nirvana. It is buried by doubt, doubt fortified by our social training, by our collective retreat from life. It is buried but it is never actually lost. As we train ourselves it grows within us.

Our problem is no less than to uncover the true significance of life, life of which we are only a tiny part. In religion, freedom is found by finding a completely new perception of the world, a perception which is beyond the limitations of self. In Buddhism this is called the Dharma Eye. It is true religious experience. Every religion has many impressive ways of describing this experience making clear that it is at once very wonderful and very simple, like waking up or going from dark to light. It is just to see the world as it is truly is, free from the self centred distortions which we usually put upon it.

This experience is the root and purpose of religion. We all yearn for it. At times our yearning prevails over our doubts. At times the reverse is true. When we actively seek it, religion comes into being. Religions are the methods which have been evolved for seeking this, this contact with reality. No two people's spiritual quest is quite the same and so between religions and within them there is much variety and constant change. Some methods are complicated, others more straightforward.

In Zen we are set to find this total experience directly by complete involvement in what is here and now. We find this difficult and so we practice. The practice which is at the heart of Zen is sitting meditation. In just sitting we have the chance to see directly into the heart of life moment by moment. For those with a clear mind this is an excellent practice giving immediate awakening. For those of us with clouded minds it is a powerful aid to clarity.

Beyond formal meditation, however, we must carry this open attitude into our everyday activity. This level of involvement requires confidence, however. We have to trust the world. We need to see its benevolent nature. This benevolence is personified in the Bodhisattva Kanzeon. Kanzeon, therefore is not a remote figure in some mythical other world but is simply a way of experiencing this world in which our lives occur. Learning to see Kanzeon in all things, learning to find him in all we encounter and also within us in the action of our own will, this is the way in which the gate to true religious experience is opened to us.

To learn to see the world in this positive way requires, as in meditation, a constant gentle effort. Our life energy must flow into it. Whatever happens we may see the hand of Kanzeon within it. We may see that what happens has something to teach us. Every mistake can become a great opportunity. Every misfortune can be a great teacher. We call that teacher Kanzeon. Thus everything can be training and everything can enlighten us.

For some people the idea of Kanzeon smacks too much of superstition and

idolatry but it is not this, though it may be on occasion, an aid showing us our own hang-ups about superstition and idolatry. We must create our own attitude to life and we may express this directly or indirectly. For direct expression of life nothing can be said for description is always at least at one remove from reality. For indirect expression however, we use symbols. Kanzeon is a powerful and very human symbol of our quest for an open positive attitude in living. Kanzeon is the warm and passionate side of Zen.

Zen is a constant pilgrimage. We go on and on and on. We find the basis for this in our own hearts and in the truth which is all about us. We find it in learning to trust and in learning to be positive, in knowing that Kanzeon will always be there if we so wish it. Thus we can gain in confidence and go forward into life, to really try to do better, to be kinder, to approach others and to be approachable.

To live in Kanzeon's gentle arms is to give up all scheming and all self centredness by being intimately involved in the life of this moment. If we listen to someone else speak, let us listen with all our energy. It is the speech of Kanzeon. If we are walking down the street, let us be absorbed in the act. Kanzeon is all about us. When all goes well and we feel elated and when we meet with some mishap and feel low, Kanzeon is showing us our true nature and giving us a way to return to purity. When all the world is Kanzeon all anxiety is dissolved, everything is acceptable and accepted. Then we are free and can act effectively and the perfection which is inherent in us can be born into the world.

- David Brazier  
(Tyneside)

#### KOAN

(This article will not necessarily be of relevance or interest to all readers)

There is a stage a person comes to after they have got a certain amount of peace and insight. One knows one's unison with life and practices meeting life immediately, and it seems superfluous to be concerned with anything further. In fact it seems to do so, would be giving oneself over to completely arbitrary worry, a deliberate return to running around in one's head. "When questions arise, surely it would be best just to let them go like all other thoughts, rather than get hung up in empty thoughts and feelings", one thinks, "Anyway, suppose you do discover something. big deal, what's so important about 'knowledge' - just another noise in the head, more ego-boosts".

I call this a stage because after a while it gets to be a bit of a plateau, a flat empty state, where nothing much is going on. One of course may try to make it more stimulating, more active and alive with uplifting thoughts or observations, or one may redouble one's efforts not to get 'caught' in thought, to be 'aware', considerate, polite, and dismiss the restlessness, the something that you can't place, as just another distraction. But after a while it seems as though you're almost back at the place you thought you'd left ages ago. On the one hand there's this empty, dead waste one seems to have been moving in, and on the other, it looks like a resuscitation of all those things you thought you were well rid of. Well?

- Anne Cripps  
(London)

## SHOULD I BECOME A MONK?

Many laymen must have asked themselves the above question. This question is based on various feelings and ideas which may include the idea that many difficulties concerning facilities and opportunities for training would be removed, that companionship would be a help, one fears the loneliness and aloneness of lay life and thinks it easier to go wrong as a layman. Sometimes one may feel somewhat guilty about not becoming a monk. Also being a non-descript pleb and miserable has nothing of the picturesque story-book filmableness that the image of being a humble monk offers us as compensation for our miserableness. And also, unfortunately, often monks themselves echo the layman's ideas of his depressing and hopeless prognosis, which is very sad and irresponsible, (not to mention totally incorrect) as, heeding the words of those he presumes to have authority, the layman tends to make up his mind that he's doomed to begin with and this depressive rein (which it should be noted, he himself is holding) makes him stand around on the shore wondering if it's worthwhile even trying as he is bound to fail. However, I would say that the person who puts forward this view has either not looked closely enough at their own life, or has a dangerously false, or very young, idea of training and everyday life.

Now if one looks at all the above factors which may be involved in promoting the question 'Should I become a monk?', it is evident they are all largely based on personal preference or the desire for some kind of comfort in one way or another. There is nothing wrong with being comfortable, but it should be noted that the truth is not synonymous with comfort or living the way you like, (if you are miserable, this misery is you, is the truth of your life. That is not an advocacy for wallowing, but a statement of fact). But also a potentially very dangerous factor may be at work. The almost unconscious idea of magic, which in this way is absolutely synonymous with death, one-sidedness, mechanism, cutting off of life, a closed eternity of ideations and abstraction inevitably alter-faceted with fear.

What a person, whether 'monk' or 'layman' has to decide is whether it's his/her life, however mundane, unexciting, miserable and 'uncommercial' they want to experience, be, meet, live, etc.. or whether they just want another escape, crutch, approval. No one can live out the truth of anything but this very moment. How can you be unreal?

Sometimes a layman thinks, 'It's so hard on my own, I may easily go wrong'. But what is it one fears to get wrong? Are you afraid you will fall out of reality? Who is it one is afraid to displease, or wants to please? What is it you are hoping to get, or are fearing to not get? What are you afraid of when you cry, "I may go wrong, I can't bear it?" Take a good look at the question in your soul, because it is in that very question you will discover the real question, the actual components of the 'problem', and perhaps there will be a different perspective.

Needless to say, this is not a matter for pride, arrogance or ingratitude. How can you learn, discover, see, hear, if you spend all your time admiring yourself and flying your puffed-up image and opinions like a kite? Every time, every moment will teach you, temper you, and this is not always in the way you first think or expect, so be sensitive, e.g. being conscious is not the truth of sleep, how many Buddhists try to 'be awake' while they are asleep, or regard it as an activity not quite on par with the rest of life? But truth is not synonymous with consciousness, knowing, grasping or being non-stop so-called 'aware'.

To be clinging to any way of life as a 'must' leads eventually to clinging to ideation, death one-sidedness. One will always be somewhere, doing

something, being something, not doing something, not being something. A pleasant day is not limited by being a pleasant day, but it will always be a pleasant day; a painful day is not limited by being a painful day, but it will always be a painful day. Many of our 'answers' will be found by actually looking at the question itself. Only you can meet and take care of your own life (and this is synonymous with becoming a monk). It will not always be what you want, but if it seems problematic, the basis of this may not be in the life itself or in one's nature, but may be found in one's aspirations and fears, may be found, not outside or in front of the question, but in the question itself.

- Anne Cripps  
(London)

#### A NECESSARY EVIL

I have entitled this article "A Necessary Evil" because, unfortunately this is the way a lot of people in Zen think of meditation. From my own point of view I laboured on for almost three years under this illusion. It is my three years of unrewarding work that has prompted me to write this article, in the hope that it will shorten any potential three year period for at least a few of the readers of Zen News.

It is my opinion that we think of Zazen as a tedious, boring business because we are not seeing it clearly for what it is. So let us start again and have a good look at what we do when we sit.

We have a very nice comfortable room in which to sit, perhaps a fire that we can turn on when it is too cold, and maybe a window to open when it is too hot. We have friends we can sit with and share their company, a nice soft cushion to sit on, no makeshift for us, and we have time to sit. All this is given to us with very little effort on our part and all we are asked to do is sit. But we will not even do this without the promise of getting something more.

All the work of all the people that has gone into making it possible for us to sit in this room all stands for nothing to us. For example, the builder who built the room we sit in, the people who transported us to the room, and don't forget someone had to make your bike which transports you too and fro, the people who made the cushion on which you sit; the list is endless. All this we take for granted without gratitude or thanks if we ask for something more.

I have sat on my cushion in comparative luxury dreaming of Nirvana and after 15 minutes thought that by giving 15 minutes of my time I had made a great sacrifice. Don't let yourself be deluded in this way. Be thankful for the opportunity you have to sit and enjoy your sitting. If we do not enjoy our sitting we are like a man in a restaurant eating smoked salmon, whilst dreaming of dessert. He will neither enjoy his salmon nor his dessert if it is not what he expected. So I say enjoy what you have and what you have is sitting because the dessert is almost never what you expect.

What does it matter if by sitting we get a clear insight into the way people behave? If we have Kensho or understand the scriptures with great clarity? All these things are like the proverbial carrot in front of the donkey, chase them and you will never catch them.

It is paradoxical, but nevertheless true to say that if we try to achieve

understanding through sitting we will never find it; give up the idea of gain and understanding will be given freely. So please look closely and enjoy your sitting and ask no more of it than that you are able to continue sitting.

- Peter G. Richards  
(Hull)

### HOW TO CRACK A NUT

With the festive season approaching (Bodhidharma Day, October 5th), many will be involved with that stony problem, how to extract nuts from their shells. Most of us have used the traditional instrument, the nutcracker, but who has wondered whether there is an easier way? If we cracked nuts every day we would probably become quite skillful, but since we seldom eat nuts for the greater part of the year, the onslaught of the nutcracking season fills some of us with panic.

What about being clever and using a hacksaw? That way the kernel does not get shattered along with the shell. But experienced nutcrackers know that there is no substitute for the traditional instrument.

Here is a clear parallel with our approach to understanding Zen writings. We can think we are clever in choosing to use the intellect. However, experienced readers have learnt to use something more fundamental: the heart. There are some really excellent sections of the Teachings of Dogen Zenji translated by Kennett Roshi in 'Selling Water by the River'. I recommend particularly pages 136 to 145. Very little of this section can be understood by the intellect, and if we try, we feel a sense of rejection. Try opening your heart to it. I will quote a few passages at random.

"When called life, there is only life; when called death, there is only death; if life comes it is life; if death comes it is death. There is no reason whatever for being controlled by either".

"Do not, under any circumstances, try to understand this intellectually, or give it expression in words".

"There are times when I make the Buddha raise his eyebrows and blink, and there are times when I do not do so. There are times when it is good for him to do these things and times when it is not".

"They travel fastest who are not there, since arrival is hindered by arrival but quite definitely not hindered whilst on the journey".

"Should you touch the Truth your every action will be vital and express the Way naturally, for every action will be fully understood and digested Truth performed in the ordinary daily activities of an ordinary man".

Nutcracking is your heart being in charge of your nut (head). Do not let your intellect rampage out of control, colonizing ideas and possessing people. Ideas, people, open your heart to them. But do not discard the intellect; it can be a useful tool, just as a hacksaw. The heart is in charge, and the key to your heart is meditation.

- Robert Dunnett  
(Tyneside)

# Meetings

Aberdeen Meets twice weekly, for information contact Chris Roberts, 5 Richmond Terrace, Aberdeen.

Edinburgh Information on meetings and retreats available from Richard Zahler, 8 Starbank Rd, Edinburgh 6. (031 552 1975)

Tyneside Wednesday meetings as follows:

15 Hallington Mews, Killingworth	Oct 6		
7 Mardale, Albany, Washington	Oct 13	Nov 10	Dec 1
20 High Shaw, Edgewell, Prudhoe	Oct 20	Nov 17	(Dec 8)
4 Field Lane, Felling	Oct 27	Nov 24	
16 Sunderland Rd, South Shields	Nov 3		Dec 15

Wednesday meetings include periods of zazen, reading of texts, informal discussion and refreshments. Beginners are welcome and basic meditation instruction is available.

There will be evenings of intensive zazen on Friday Oct 15 between 7-12pm and Wednesday Dec 8 (Buddha's Enlightenment Day) from 7pm both at 20 High Shaw, Edgewell, Prudhoe.

For further information contact Robert Dunnett, 7 Mardale, Albany, Washington. (N'cle 466294)

Durham Meditation meetings on Mondays at 7.30pm in Lounge 2, 38 Old Elvet, Durham. Reverend Jisho Perry, Prior of Throssel Hole Priory will be giving an introductory talk on Zen Meditation on Monday Oct 11 at 7.30pm at the above address. For further information contact Stewart McFarlane, Dept of Oriental Studies, Elvet Hill, Univ. of Durham.

York Simon Fell and Jane Mellor of 20 James St, York would like to hear from anyone in the area interested in starting a weekly Zazen group.

Bradford - Leeds Contact Helen Percival, 31 Harrogate Street, Bradford. (0274 632393)

Hull Meets on Thursdays at 7.30pm at the Friends Meeting House, Percy St. Further information from Robin Baker, 19 Park Grove, Hull.

St Annes - Blackpool Information from Charles Fletcher, 107 Blackpool Road North, St Annes-on-Sea.

North Staffordshire Information on meetings in Newcastle, Staffs. from Alan Clayton, West View, Blackenhall, Nantwich, Cheshire.

Nottingham Meets on Mondays at 8pm at 26 Millicent Rd, West Bridgeford, Nottingham. Contact Alan MacCormick at the same address. (813351)

Shropshire A zazen group is establishing in the area. For further details contact Stephen Sambrooke, Boreatton Park, Nr. Baschurch, Salop.

South Staffordshire Information from Nich Churchhill, 154 Netherstone Lane, Litchfield, Staffs.

Warley Meets on Thursdays for zazen at 7pm at 41 Barclay Rd, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands. Contact Dorothy Bailey at the same address for further details. (021 429 4080)

Northampton Weekly meetings at 93 Lutterworth Road, Northampton. Contact Mrs. Carol Cooley of the same address for information.

Reading Anyone interested in forming a zazen group in the area please contact John Danvers, 40 Waylen St, Reading, Berks.

Dublin Current information from Moira Jones, c/o I.S.P.C.C., 20 Molesworth Street, Dublin 2.



# News

Kennett Roshi We are pleased to hear that Kennett Roshi's health continues to improve.

Throssel Hole Priory Reverend Jisho Perry and his daughter Eryn arrived from Shasta Abbey on August 12 and Reverend Daiji Strathern left the priory on August 22 for America. Nearly all of the joint fare has been contributed however £90 is outstanding for the return fares. Any contributions will be gratefully received.

Retreats There will be retreats at Throssel Hole Priory as follows:

Weekend Retreats -	Oct 9 - 10
	Oct 23 - 24
	Nov 13 - 14
	Nov 27 - 28
	Dec 4 - 5
Week Sesshins -	Dec 17 - 23
	Mar 21 - 27

Anyone wishing to attend the priory should write for an application form to the Guestmaster, Throssel Hole Priory, Carr Shield, Nr. Hexham, Northumberland. Visitors can attend without prior notice on Sundays at 11am for a lecture.

Wedding On August 21 Rev. Daiji Strathern conducted a marriage ceremony for Stewart Mofarlane and Anne Ward at Sacriston. Rev. Jisho Perry assisted in the proceedings. After enjoying the results of Stewart and Anne's cooking, some of the guests joined them in an energetic row on the river at Durham in the late afternoon.

Durham Lectures There will be a series of lectures entitled 'Exploration into Religious Outlooks' held on Saturdays, 3pm at the Adult Education Centre 32 Old Elvet, Durham. The titles and dates are:

- Oct 2 - Ways of Seeing:- A comparison of Zen Buddhism and the teachings of don Juan, as described in the books of Carlos Castaneda.
- Oct 16 - Meditation and Contemplation.
- Oct 23 - Science and Religion.
- Oct 30 - The Problem of Evil in Christian Thought.
- Nov 6 - The Buddhist Attitude Towards Evil and Suffering.
- Nov 13 - Religion and Culture.
- Nov 20 - Liberation East and West.

The fee for each lecture is 25 pence, it is half price for students and O.A.P.'s and free to the unemployed.

People Moving Jonathan Sutton has left Durham in August for his home in Sussex. He says he will continue his research work in Russian literature while trying to find employment. Jonathan has been a very active member of the University group for about four years. We look forward to seeing him again at some of the Durham lectures and wish him well for the future.

Festival Days Bodhidharma Day, Tuesday October 5, will be celebrated by a meal at Newcastle's vegetarian restaurant, Supernatural, Princess Square (adjacent to Central Library) at 7pm. Meals cost around 50 pence with wine extra.

Jodo, Buddha's Enlightenment, on Wednesday December 8 will be celebrated with an evening of zazen and short service, beginning at 7pm at 20 High Shaw, Edgewell, Prudhoe.