

ZEN NEWS



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.

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 in shops to cover the printing costs only. Your financial support is invited; payable to: Tyneside Zen Buddhist Association.

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The front cover graphic shows Fudo sitting still amidst the flames of greed, hate and delusion.

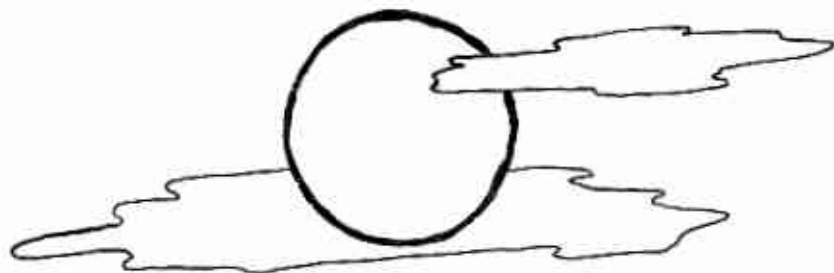
The back cover photograph is of the 500 Buddhas at Gohyaku Rakan-ji Temple, Tokyo. The central figure is (we think) Kiroku (Maitreya), the Buddha to come.

Over There

Chasing the bird
The feathered and fanciful truth
To see it just ahead
Winging from bough to bough
Just out of reach
At times hidden by leaves of life
Or apparently clasped in grasping palm
To find space where body should be
And looking up
There it is again
In another tree

- Tony Henderson
(Rowlands Gill)

Moon gazing:
Looking at it, it clouds over,
Not looking, it becomes clear.



Nearly all of us walk about surrounded by our own cloud of thoughts & hopes, wishes & daydreams, fears & memories, words & numbers. Sometimes these clouds merge into one another and we get a passing feeling of community and friendship. In Buddhism these clouds are called MAYA - the world of illusion, reason, classification, desire and non-stop intellectualization. There is a strong belief based on Buddha's own experience that by practising zazen, just sitting, this cloud which we carry about with us will dissolve and disappear. Suddenly we will be able to see clearly and walk unhindered - for walking in a cloud is like walking in a daze. The mist which had entombed us will have gone and our true nature, which was there all the time, will get a chance to shine through. In Buddhism this is called our Buddha Nature, and it shines as bright and clear as the moon on a cloudless night. The Bodhisattva tradition leads us to believe that just by doing this we not only help ourselves (by letting go of our 'selves') but also all mankind.

 We are all sleeping Buddhas - let's wake up
 and walk in the moonlight.

- John Danvers
 (Reading)

The Story of Balbus (An Ugly Man)

a tale for reading from time to time

There once was a man called Balbus who was born very ugly. One doesn't notice that kind of thing about oneself when one is young, but as he grew up, he began to realise that something was odd about himself. At first, he thought it was just a joke or a coincidence that other children sometimes laughed at him, but after a while, he came to the conclusion that he was really ugly. Oh, what shame he felt. He would stay up in his room at night and cry, cry, cry. He tried to avoid people as best he could. If someone engaged him in conversation, he would give as short an answer as possible so he could get away quickly, and he would keep his face averted at all times he was with them. People thought him very strange.

After a while, his sorrow turned to bitterness, and he began to hate the people around him. "They are lucky," he said, "all their ugliness is on the inside, but mine is on the outside where everyone can see it". He read books, masses of them, to try and find out the reason for his ugliness; perhaps something could be done about it. He did exercises to try and change the alignment of his features. He even considered visiting a specialist to have surgery performed. He would hear people talking about him, pitying him, laughing at him, or just being plain repulsed. How he cursed God: "Why, why have you done this to me?" he cried. Truly he was a freak, didn't the whole world agree on it? Wouldn't the world be better off without him? Balbus became sick, mostly with self-hatred. At last, he decided to spend some time in the country, 'away from it all', to collect his thoughts and consider, what, if anything, he was going to do with his life.

He was out one afternoon, just lying on the grassy, mossy bank stream, arms under his head, and squinting briefly from time to time at the sun as it winked its way across the sky through the leafy branches above. It was late summer, and little piles of glowing leaves were beginning to collect in the gentle eddies of the wind that rose from time to time. It was quiet, still. Balbus sighed. Perhaps this was the most at peace he had felt in his whole life. He began to doze.

All at once he was dreaming, and in the dream a young girl stepped out of the forest before him. She was beautiful. Clothed in the stuff dreams are made of.

"Balbus", she called, "Balbus, what would make you the happiest man in the world?"

There was a strange quiet around.

"To be beautiful", Balbus answered. He heard his words echo slowly, sinking around him. He looked at the girl. Her

eyelids were lowered. Two tears were spilling over. They coursed slowly down her cheeks.

"Why are you crying?" he half-whispered, his voice hoarse in the silence.

"Who will look after the world if you are beautiful?"

"I..I don't understand.."

"Who will give love to the world if you are beautiful, to all the sorrow, pain and ugliness?"

Balbus felt strange.. "But surely the world should be a beautiful place, with laughter and joy and brightness everywhere?"

"You would have the world only beautiful, bright and joyous; you would shut out all the ugliness, pain and sorrow, be rid of them?"

"Yes," said Balbus, "yes."

The girl looked at him. "Oh Balbus," she sighed, "what kind of selfishness is that? What kind of heartlessness is that for the jewels of life? Have you no love?.."

There was a rustling nearby, Balbus woke up, the dream vanished. He remained still for a moment trying to recall the dream and wondering how it would have ended. The rustling came again and Balbus turned his head to see what it was. A small pile of leaves had collected under his right arm, and on it a little creature was making its way, under and over, over and under. It was a black beetle. Its back was shiny, but all the appendages on its head made it look quite ugly. "Ug," said Balbus, and jumped. "Ug", he thought. And then, as if he heard an echo from his dream, he heard the last words of the girl in his dream. Balbus stopped. He looked again at the little creature. And as he looked, tears of joy burst from his heart, all the bitterness was washed away.

- Anne Cripps
(London)

People Moving

Robert Dunnett has finally got away to Knowle after much delay. Robert is now a factory manager in Birmingham.

Duncan Sellers has moved southwards too, taking up a post in a children's home in Stoke Newington.

Both Robert and Duncan's energetic activity with the Tyneside group is much missed and we wish them every success in the future.

Class Consciousness and Buddhist Practice

One of the consequences of Buddhism having such a small active following in Britain is that, if one wishes to practice with others one must travel fair distances to meetings, and sooner or later get to know some of those people who are putting Buddhism into practice in their daily lives.

Recently, I met a group of older people who had stopped going to their local meetings because they were made to feel out of place by the younger people there. They spoke of a generation gap. One of the teachings of Buddhism is that one should learn to see that there is no real separation between self and other. Those who believe that old people are less human than young people are deluding themselves, and by spreading such thoughts are going against the Buddhist precept "not to sell the wine of delusion".

Discussion of the class system started while drinking coffee at one of the weekly Typeside meditation meetings. Meditation helps to break artificial barriers between people and thus we were able to admit to each other that class is the very foundation of English social life. An instance was cited of parents actually changing religion in order to get their children accepted by a 'better' school.

Where did class come from? Perhaps the days of Empire. At any rate it is planted so firmly in peoples' minds that very often they will deny it even exists, let alone controls many if not all of their actions. If you practice Buddhism, and are truly aware of your actions, you see that you are free to meet and talk to any human being as an equal. There is no need to conform to the social mores of whatever group wishing to trap you in their petty delusions.

You are free not to scowl at, or disapprove of others. You are free not to own a house and car (most are forced by circumstances). You are free not to eat meat at business lunches. You are free not to express opinions on religion and politics.

In England the consequences of ignoring class may be severe. Large numbers of people you meet over the years will find that you give no support to their egocentric delusions of self which the class system helps to foster. Their ego may rebel against you, and display hatred and bigotry. Do not get caught up in other people's shortcomings. It is quite sufficient to be given the opportunity to practice the Buddha's teachings under the severest provocation. But remember your practice of Buddhism is at all times invisible to others. It is you being in touch with your true centre of gravity. To cut off your greed, hate and delusion at the very instant they arise: If not the very instant then as soon as possible: If you see yourself breaking the precepts,¹ stop:

If you see you have already broken the precepts, then do not compound your error by building on your false actions.

The Buddhist recognises the class system for what it is. He does not blithely support it, neither does he become a communist to oppose it. He just lets it alone, so that it cannot control him and he remains free to act as the instant demands. The class system will go away when people lack the interest to sustain it. If you oppose it, you give it energy from the very attention required by opposition.

Those who allow the class system to control their thoughts and actions are in danger of segmenting humanity into hierarchy of groups. Women become inferior beings, dogsbodies in the house. Niggers and Pakkies become aliens rather than neighbours. Old people become 'past it' and not encouraged to take part in 'Buddhist?' meetings. At the pinnacle of this hierarchy stands the ego. Enthroned and invented entirely by itself. Kept in place by its control of the intellect.

The intellect and the ego are seen to be closely related in England. Thus a 'good' school will foster intellectual ability along with 'character', i.e. a strong ego. This strong ego will force the intellect into service, to help it in its life long task of social climbing. Social climbing is deadly. It pressures people through fear into actions which they know are against their true nature as human beings. This is known as socializing; drinking and talking in a bigotted way about ones opinions, perhaps how the workers won't work, or how communism or Buddhism is the answer to ... (the latter only in self styled 'enlightened' circles); opinions of the latest play/music/football. These are all instances of the ego trying to find support from others for even the most outrageous workings of the intellect. the ego controlled intellect might say all blacks/workers/commies should be shot.

It is indeed fortunate that we were born as complete human beings with a heart. By searching the heart we can find our true selves. Sesshins, week long retreats held at Zen monasteries, are times for 'searching the heart' (the meaning of the Japanese word Sesshin) During such times, and at all times we are practicing meditation we can see what vile constructions our egos create and perpetuate. One of these constructions is the English class system.

- Robert Dunnett
(Knowie)

1. The Ten Great Precepts - I undertake: 1. Not to kill. 2. Not to steal. 3. Not to covet. 4. Not to say that which is not true. 5. Not to sell the wine of delusion. 6. Not to speak against others. 7. Not to be proud and devalue others. 8. Not to be mean in giving either Dharma or wealth. 9. Not to be angry. 10. Not to defame the Three Treasures.

Za Zen

Metaphysics
evaporates
into aching thighs.

The shadow
blocking out the day
is mine.

Pondering
in the rain
about the way ahead:
discovering
my shoes leaked.

- David Brandon
(Preston)

Deprived

of grit,
the ego cracks the egg
shell
of its vanity

Individuality

Individuality -
a reflection of one's self
which isn't me!

- Cyril Patterson
(Consatt)

Meditation & Brainwashing

We tend to depend very much on our sense of identity. Take away our beliefs, our psychological hand-holds and we are helpless, lost. This is what makes brainwashing work. The structure of consciousness is ripped up and we are awash. That which gives us foothold, a sense of security, place, identity is ripped away.

It is interesting to note that meditation has much in common with brain washing. There is, however, a difference.

After brain washing, it is usual to 'feed' the victim. That is, to cram him with whatever the brainwashers want him crammed with. A person who is washed up, helpless, with nothing to hang on to grabs at whatever is around to 'fill his belly' again, to give him place, identity, a foothold. He grabs as one starved at the 'truth' fed him by his 'physicians'. What they say must be right, his former beliefs have been proved so ridiculous and untenable. At last he can be a 'proper' human being. He can have beliefs as unassailable and invincible as a 'proper', 'respectable' human being should have. Nothing will hurt him now. He may go on his way assured of his worth. His physicians were saviours who redeemed him from a former deluded way of life.

However, the brainwashing in meditation is different. It leads away from hanging on, away from the continual trying to fill the hole of our insecurity. It leads to living with and in that insecurity.

When we hang on, it is the things that are not too deeply threatened in some way that we grasp. But as one thing is threatened, the tendency is to look again for something else to give us security, to fill the hole, (until that something is threatened too). If we are moderately aware, our 'teddies' will be threatened almost all the time. But the tendency is to go on exchanging one thing for another, this for that, in order to fill or escape from the void.

But meditation is the living out, the meeting of that insecurity. It is not the holding up of 'this' side of consciousness over 'that' side of consciousness, the trying to fill the hole, or grasp at some 'permanent' solution. Yes, things may come, insights, understandings, but the meditator's hand is open, and they may go, and his hand is still open. (And this applies to everything written here).

If we try to hang on, we cannot deepen, and will always be losing our lives in the very attempt to hang on or push away.

- Arne Cripps
(London)

Meetings

Aberdeen Meets on Tuesdays at 7pm. Further information from Mark Hill, 163 King Street, Aberdeen. (29669)

Edinburgh Contact Richard Zahler, 8 Starbank Rd, Edinburgh.

Tyneside Wednesday meetings at 7pm as follows:

4 Field Lane, Felling	Mar 30	Apr 27	May 25
15 Hallington Mews, Killingworth	Apr 6	May 4	Jun 1
16 Sunderland Road, S. Shields	Apr 13	May 11	
20 High Shaw, Edgewell, Prudhoe	Apr 20	May 18	

Meetings include periods of Zazen, reading of texts, informal discussion and refreshments. Beginners are welcome and basic meditation instruction is available. For further information please contact David Brazier, 20 High Shaw, Prudhoe (32140).

Durham Weekly Zazen meetings on Mondays at 7.30pm at Lounge 2, 30 Old Elvet, Durham, and occasional lectures. For further information contact Stewart McFarlane, Dept. of Oriental Studies, Elvet Hill, Durham.

York For information of meetings contact Simon Fell, 20 James St,

Bradford - Leeds Information from Helen Percival, 31 Harrogate St, Bradford. (0274 632393)

Hull Zazen meetings on Thursdays at 7.30pm at the Friends Meeting House, Percy Street, further information from Robin Baker, 19 Park Grove, Hull.

St Annes - Blackpool Meets every Thursday at 7.30pm at 107 Blackpool Road North, St Annes-on-Sea. Contact Charles Fletcher at the same address. (Blackpool 724905)

Ormskirk Wayne Spavin would like to know of anyone in the area who would like to start a weekly Zazen group. Contact him at: Edge Hill College of Higher Education, Stanley Hall, St Helena Rd, Ormskirk, Lancs.

North Staffordshire Meets on alternate Mondays at 8.30pm and occasional Sundays at 6.00am. For more information contact Alan Clayton, West View, Blackenhall, Nantwich, Cheshire. (Batley 292)

Nottingham Meets on Mondays at 8pm at 26 Millicent Rd, West Bridgford, Nottingham. Further information from Alan MacCormick, at the same address. (813351)

Shropshire Meets on Tuesdays at 8pm at Boreatton Park, Baschurch, Salop. For information contact Stephen Sambrook at the same address.

Knowle Contact Robert Dunnett, 103 Lodge Road, Knowle, Solihull West Midlands. (Knowle 78586)

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

Warley Meetings on Tuesdays for Zazen at 7pm at 41 Barclay Road,
Smethwick, (Bearwood) Warley, West Midlands. Contact Dorothy
Bailey at the same address for further information. (021 429 4080)

Northampton Meets on Thursdays at 7.30 at 93 Lutterworth Road,
Northampton. Contact Mr. K. Cooley for more information.

Reading Meets on Tuesdays at 7.30pm for Zazen at 40 Waylen Street,
Reading. Contact John Danvers at the same address.

Andover A Zazen group has started, meeting on Thursdays at 8pm
at various addresses. For full information contact Stephen Close,
Bungalow 1, Longbolton, Biddeaden, Nr. Andover, Hants.

Dublin Meets on Wednesdays at 7pm at 61 Butterfield Avenue,
Bathfarnham, Dublin. Contact Kaira Jones at the same address for
further information.

At all the above groups it is possible to practice Soto Zen
meditation. This does not necessarily mean that all groups follow
this practice exclusively.

News

Throssel Hole Priory Retreats are to be held as follows:

April 9-10, 23-24, May 7-8, 21-22, and June 7-14.

The week retreat in June is to be a Jukai Seeshin. Those wishing
to attend, to take the Precepts formally and become lay Buddhists
should spend a weekend or longer period at the Priory before the
Seeshin. The cost will be £25.

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 the Priory without
prior notice on Sundays at 11am for a lecture and meditation.

Earlier in the year we heard that the Reverend Daiji Strathern had
returned from Shasta Abbey and that he will not at the present time
be involved formally with the Priory. Daiji personally financed
the setting up of the Priory and would now like to sell the property
to the Priory over the next five years for £10,000 at 5% interest.
The appeal fund is to be extend for this purpose, and a further
appeal will be made to raise funds. The new situation has greatly
helped the Priory's application for Charity status. The Priory
would be very grateful for further financial assistance.

Our group members are sincerely grateful to Daiji for his help,
his guidance given while Prior of Throssel Hole Priory.