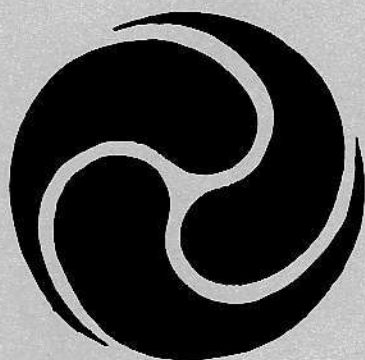


ZEN NEWS



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Compiled and published by the members of Newcastle Zen Buddhist Group to foster the practice and study of the Dharma.
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Readers are invited to submit items of news, articles, poetry, artwork and other material to be considered for publication. Opinions expressed in items published do not necessarily reflect the editors own views or the practice of the Newcastle 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 would like to receive this publication, please send their name and address. No charge is made but your financial support is invited. Payable to; Tyneside Zen Buddhist Association.

Editor: David Brazier, 20 High Shaw, Prudhoe, Northumberland.

Editorial:

There is no Magic

When people come to our meditation group we ask them simply to follow our activity. We make room for them and they sit with us. Half an hour of sitting quietly. Then there is kinhin, quiet walking. The newcomer follows the pattern. We read a text which in a very practical way reminds us of our training and hints at what lies within it. More meditation. It is all very orderly, acting together, bowing to one another. Then we relax. Tea, biscuits, talk, hospitality. People enjoy one another's company. Then more meditation and another reading before we finish. People may go home or stay and chat awhile. That is all.

This mixing of formal and informal is important. Zen training is made of the same stuff as ordinary daily life. It is not set apart. It must carry over into all activity. Zen training does not stop when the bell rings and the teapot appears. If we would be truly free we must be hindered neither by discipline nor by leisure, neither by form nor by formlessness. Thus the situation we create when we meet reflects worldly life but it is clearer. Our ritual is clearly ritual, work is work, rest is rest. Nothing is more holy than anything else but everything is kept in the light.

In our daily life we often pretend. We have a long social training in this. We are encouraged in it by many others who are playing the same sort of games with life. In the meditation group and, even more, in a monastery, this sort of thing becomes more transparent. Everyday we live within the rituals of bureaucratic-industrial society yet may never come to terms with them for want of seeing clearly what we are doing. In Zen ritual is meditation in action. If you do it, do it properly. The wooden figure comes to life. Zen training is a matter of opening our eyes then living in the light.

The newcomer finds it puzzling. How much does he want to learn? How much does he simply want his preconceptions reinforced? He looks for some structure which he can either lean on or feel justified in rejecting. We have all been taught to reject the idea of dogmatism yet most of us still carry around a more or less carefully worked out set of dogmatic opinions in our heads. Religion without dogma we find disconcerting. Enlightenment which cannot be reduced to a formula offends our educated ego.

The beginner looks for something he can hang on to, yet life does not work like that. Whatever we hang on to is ephemeral and our wish for it to support us is delusion. Zen training is training for life. To see life without delusion and to act on that vision is to be Buddha. The mind which is not deluded is Buddha mind. The nature which is true to itself is Buddha nature. Zen is a training which enables us to be free of hang-ups, of inhibitions, of enslavement to taboos and stereotypes. The enlightened man is free whatever the situation. He bows to the world but his true nature is in no way compromised for he is not apart from the world. The world inevitably bows back. Our karma is the karma of all things.

The beginner tries to reduce Zen to what he already knows and has made safe. Yet life cannot be reduced. It is always experimental. Always there are new forms, new manifestations of the way things are. Each grows naturally, though often unpredictably, out of what went before. Zen training too has many forms and they too change with time. What is constant cannot be found by going back but only by going into it deeper. The forms change yet the

essence, the heart, stays the same just as the waves do not move the depths of the ocean. Do not despise the waves, do not neglect the depths. All are part of one sea, one life. We must each find our way through the ephemera of life and, as we do so, we must learn to trust to what know in our hearts rather than to conventions or artificial ideas. And by following our heart courageously, even though at times the world sees it as folly, we are able to help others and be helped by them, for the heart is open and warm, reaches out to the world and is always responsive and ready to learn. This the potential we have within us, which we must find and to which to give expression.

It is for this reason that our practice includes a great deal of bowing. Bowing symbolizes a respect and gratitude. It expresses a very basic feeling of warmth and appreciation for people and things beyond ourselves. It is a way of opening to the world. Out of gratitude may grow compassion and love, and out of these, when tempered by experience, may grow wisdom. Other systems may have other ways of developing these qualities. In Zen we bow. All the formal aspects of our training, springing as they do from thousands of years of experience, have such profound symbolic significances are excellent aids for developing harmony of body and mind. No action is more sacred than another however and Zen must not be allowed to become another hang-up. When you bow, bow, when you shit, shit. In reality there are no distinctions. Only in delusion is there sacred and profane.

If you come to our meditation group follow the practice and keep your mind open. Whatever ideas you brought with you, try to put them down for a time. Meditation too is experimental. You cannot know in advance. If you are puzzled about something, ask; but do not expect the answer to be total or final. A good answer may lead you to look further. But we are human. You may not even get a good answer. Each must make his own effort and if we do, we will inevitably help one another. To practice in the midst of friends is very helpful but the effort and commitment must still come from somewhere. Where else could it come from than from each individually, from you and I? In Zen there is no magic, only a simple way of self training which requires a wholehearted and serious approach. The results are as great as the effort made.

Throssel Hole Priory Appeal

In April of this year an appeal was made by Throssel Hole Priory for funds with which to build a new Zendo. This was our chance to make an important contribution to the growth of the monastery and to show our commitment in a very practical way. So far the response to this appeal has been excellent. Cash gifts and covenants now total over £17,000 and although a further £3,000 is needed to reach the original target of £20,000 the most pressing need is for low interest loans to provide ready cash in advance of the income from covenants.

Building is going ahead, after several set backs and much strenuous effort by the priests and visitors, the foundations are now completed. It is expected that it will now take another 9 months or so to complete the shell of the building.

If you would like to help with the project in any way, please contact the appeal chairman, Gordon Bell, 27 Rothbury Ave., Horden, Peterlee, Co Durham.

First Impressions Of Japanese Zen

After a visit to Honazono University in Kyoto, where I went to meet someone from the Zen fields, I was invited to stay at a temple of the Obaku sect, this in the nearby town of Uji. I hadn't any idea of what to expect and in this attitude of no attitude I presented myself to the monk in charge of the temple students. He made a great impression on me, being a tremendous bloke with a ready smile that almost spliced his head in twain. He seemed to have great inner strength or anyway something which gave him a rollicking goodness and spread joy to all around.

About five-thirty in the evening I was seated in a huge wooden building, facing a massive lotus postured Buddha. I was shown how to sit in a like manner with the Buddha exemplifying the relaxed attitude I was to assume; eyes open, back straight, legs in a half lotus cross, with a slight tilt toward the floor and the hands clasped in the crux of my legs, they soon cramped in their torn jeans. My party trick was to put one leg behind my head and because of this capability the posture did not cause too much discomfort at first. I was left in this position for half an hour allowed five minutes rest after which once again I took up the posture and sat in silence. After some time a string of lay folk along with the monks residing in the temple came and sat alongside and around about, to sit as I and blend with the silence. The pain in my legs increased as the evening wore on, it it reached peaks where I thought I could bear it no longer, but somehow did. My eyes were tired of staring at the lines of flooring and watered causing the squares to waver and tilt and colour.

We paused for green tea and sweet cake, real happy food. Back to work, my legs fired with pain again. During that late evening session I was shocked by a loud crash and jolted my head to see a monk being belted over the back with a broadsided stick, six times, I counted the whacks and wondered what was going on. By then I had decided the whole scene was a test of my determination. I noticed the monks offered their backs for the beating and this I found odd. I decided against doing the same as I could not think of any reason for such flagellation, however as the monk with the stick was about to pass my side, my young friend who brought me from Honazono to Obakusan in the afternoon and had seated himself by my side for the meditation session offered his back for beating, setting an example with a curt bow. The monk sure laid into my friend. After that the monk with the stick approached me, but I was of the same attitude as before and held my pose. As he was about to pass the head monk gave out a fierce bellow and I felt the stick lightly touch me on the shoulder; I bent to receive my 'blessing'. He was taking it easy on me until the other monk rent the air with another resounding which lent great energy to the last three strokes and gave me quite a shock: Zen is no picknick. I realised where I was and it was a serious situation, not serious sad, serious definite, in that I was thousands of miles from where I was born, residing in a Buddhist temple and being beaten by a fellow without apparent reason. Yet there was no confusion as things were just as they were; no one was pretending. The reality of it all brought a certain joy and determination to do what was right.

A day in the temple would go like this: my friend would wake me at four - thirty and we proceeded to the main hall where morning prayers would be played out; we would prostrate our bodies on the floor three times. Bong, bong, bong of a great gong regulated the rhythm of the mantra run of deep voiced monks. Bells joined the clamour which gradually increased to a climax and

intoned the morning, with vibrations of a quality which invigorated and caused me to jog along to the bounce of inner melodies, stirring the brain to an awakening of the community spirit I was within.

Quick trot to the meditation hall where we would sit for an hour or so in the morning quiet. I listened to the birds, who, in their direct appreciation of what actually is, would chink and churtle into the peace of the day as if they knew the truth and had ceased all meditations and laughed at the world in their own joyful way.

After that early session I would be allotted a task and as I was the latest to join them at Obakusan I was given the easiest task; clearing away the leaves from the paths in the garden. This working period would take us up to breakfast and bowls of rice with strange tasting vegetables, no meat and more prayers. Free time until nine and then back to the meditation hall where after the usual sitting in silence the others visited the respected koan master; this pleasure being denied me as I could not speak Japanese. We would have green tea and sweet cake and more beatings and their I was amid this medley of happenings. A light lunch of rice, and vegetables from land and sea. Prayers and brisk walks around the temple walls. Pleasant talks and drinks of water with my fellows and stunted conversations, laughs and more meditations with some variety in the afternoons. An evening meal with prayers and a repeat of the previous evenings events which I found was the usual and had not been specially enacted for me; I really thought it had been some kind of initiation ceremony. This finished at nine-o'clock or thereabouts when we all retired. At first I was living in the lay quarters and had a lot of freedom. Three of us became good friends and would visit the local 'ofuro' in the evening having a refreshing bath. Later, I tried living the same way as the resident monks and found I couldn't take it.

On the final day, in the evening, during the last session after the warning stick had made its rounds, I resolved the conflict set up inside. I walked out and made my way sadly back to my spread. I had neither the will nor the inclination to give up my youth and life in the search for truth which I knew would bring me peace of mind and allow me to help my fellows everywhere whom I knew were in great disillusion concerning the chaos of our present way of life. Three of us had a party that night, with sweets and chocolate and soft drinks, it really was a sad scene. I'd have to find another way!

- Tony Henderson

Wild Geese

Spearheading
winter -
wild geese flying south.

Swans at Coniston

An unexpectant nip
in the air -
boy feeding swans
at Coniston.

- Cyril Patterson

A Few Words About A Visit To Sojiji

Towards the very end of a two week long visit to Japan this summer, I discovered that Sojiji Monastery is easily accessible from the centre of Tokyo. I don't know wheather or not I was particularly fortunate in this, but I met a Japanese man in his late 30's who'd taken up Zazen 4 years ago and was sufficiently involved in his practice to go and stay at one or other of the Soto monasteries once a year. He had been to Sojiji itself, and he handed me a leaflet about it. I first noted on the map provided, how near we were to the monastery. Then making my way through the information I turned the last page and there recognised a picture of Chisan Koho Zenji, Kennett Roshi's late teacher. It was in fact within Sojiji that she had done a large part of her training. Following detailed directions, I set off for Sojiji early on my last full day in Japan.

Travelling through Tokyo and Yokohama without the least knowledge of Japanese demanded no small amount of concentration! I started at Shinagama Station in Tokyo, from where Tsurumo is only five stops down the line. A slight wrestling match with the machine, and I came away with the appropriate ticket. One thing that surprised me was when I'd got on the right train and we were underway, a man who'd heard me ask "Tsurumo?" said in English: "You must be going to Sojiji"

Half an hour later I parted company with the train, and I turned right outside the station, as directed. Had I turned left outside the station I would have got to Sojiji in little more than four minutes. But I turned right and happened upon numerous other places of interest in the hour I spent getting to my destination.

The leaflet about the monastery indicated the way to the reception centre, a large building not difficult to locate. I put my sandals alongside the neat row of people's shoes just inside the entrance hall. Beyond that, through some quite modern glass doors - the reception area. I went in and approached a young monk seated on the floor at the other side of a long low counter. Kneeling down on the cushion provided, I made 'gassho' and asked in English if it were possible for me to visit the monastery buildings and then do some periods of zazen. His reply - "Wait, I make a phone call!" - seemed an amusing and almost incongruous alternative to the replies that generations of laymen received as they sat by monastery entrances hoping to gain admission! The phone call put the monk at the desk in touch with someone somewhere in the depths of the monastery, and it was not long before another monk came to see me. In pretty good English he asked me how long I would be staying in Japan. A number of other questions and replies seemed to assure him that I was intent on doing zazen that day if it were possible, and he led me beyond the reception room down a very lengthy passage towards the other monastery buildings.

First of all I was told that the monks would not be doing zazen together during the morning since it was the 4th of the month, one of the days set aside for the shaving of heads and mending of robes. He apologised on his own behalf, saying his English wasn't good enough for him to give me instruction in meditation, and even if one of the head monks were available to instruct me, he himself couldn't interpret from the Japanese sufficiently well. But I think it was pretty clear even without those explanations that had I been altogether without experience of meditation and had I needed

initial instruction then, it is very unlikely that I would have been admitted to the Zendo.

The English speaking monk led me along various lengthy passages which took us past the monastery kitchens. We stopped there and could see right into a very spacious, slightly dark room, with large pots and pans neatly stood high up on the shelves against the wall facing us. The monk made sure to mention how important it is that the high standards of daily training in a monastery should be reflected in the orderliness of the monastery kitchens and in the mindful execution of the Chief Cook's tasks. As we walked further along the passages, passing one or two monks with their heads newly shaved, we came to the monastery bathrooms and toilets. The monk accompanying me pointed at the statue of the bathroom deity which faced us and mentioned the important and strict rule of silence which applied to monks whenever they are in the bathrooms - monks should at no time be distracted from turning their minds towards greater purification, no less when bathing than at any other time. We went on to the Zendo, passing through the main lecture hall - a rather ornate ceiling distinguishes this hall from the other monastery facilities with their more simple design. Whereas the Zendo I saw held 150 people, the lecture hall had sufficient room for a possible audience of 2000.

We entered the Zendo at the left hand side of the wide entrance, bowed before the central image and went over to one corner of the room towards the slightly raised platform that runs the length of the Zendo walls. The wooden platform is covered by tatami mats and a zafu marks the place where each monk normally sits. Before leaving me to sit by myself the monk wanted to see I could sit properly. He was admittedly puzzled by the sight of my meditation stool - "What is that?" When he had been told, he stated bluntly, "I do not know how to sit on such a thing!" However my demonstration of sitting appeared to satisfy his curiosity - thank you for making that well travelled and much admired stool, Mr. Bell!

I was then left by myself for Zazen. After $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours, when I had done two periods of sitting and a period of Kinhin in between, the monk returned to say that I should take a rest. In a small room just a little way from the Zendo I was brought a cup of tea and a large, bird-shaped, gingerbread-like biscuit. After quarter of an hour I resumed Zazen, sensing that whatever the heat of the day had taken out of me was restored by the tea. One more hour passed, and as I reached the very end of that last sitting the beating of the han resounded through the monastery. The monks could be heard gathering in some nearby building, and when the sound of the moving feet came to an end there followed the authoritative voice of someone who was possibly the Chief Junior shouting instructions. My own guide had reappeared by this stage, and then indicated that I should end my meditation.

We returned to the reception hall and the monk explained that unfortunately I couldn't stay for lunch or stay at the monastery during the afternoon since they would be busy all the rest of the day and unable to look after visitors. Following directions, I went the short way back to Tsurumo Station.

- Jonnathan Sutton

Book Reviews

It was thought that some readers of Zen News, wishing to read more, may like to know of other publications and newsletters in the same or related field as this one. These publications below, judging by their popularity in the group are thought worthwhile reading, and so are recommended. The publications all point back to one's own training, thus reminding, that no matter how much we read, it is up to you to make the running, it is your responsibility to do the work.

Throssel Hole Priory Journal is published in six issues per year. Contains articles of practical help on Soto Zen from the monks at the priory, news and retreats. Subscription - £2 per year.

The Stubborn Ox is the newsletter of the London Zen Priory, published every two months, again contains practical guidance on Zen, news and retreat dates. Subscription by donation from; London Zen Priory, 4 Fairford Gdns., Worcester Park, Surrey.

Journal of the Zen Mission Society is the monthly publication of Shasta Abbey, Headquarters of the Reformed Soto Zen Church, of which both London Zen Priory and Throssel Hole Priory are branches. Features translated scriptures commentaries, articles, news, question and answers on training, Rev. Kennett Roshi's diary while training in Japan etc.. Subscription - £5 per annum from; Zen Mission Society, Shasta Abbey, Mount Shasta, CA.96007, U.S.A.

Approach To Zen - Kosho Uchiyama Roshi (Japan Publications)
A very clear, direct and modern guide to Zazen practice with the minimum of Buddhist terminology.

Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism - Chogyam Trungpa (Watkins)
Written from the stand point of Tibetan Buddhism it covers clearly many points and pitfalls found in all religious training.

Selling Water By The River - Jiyu Kennett (Unwin)
A manual on Soto Zen training for both monks and laymen, includes many important translations of Dogen and Keizan, scriptures and ceremonial. Hardback available from Throssel Hole at the much reduced price of £2.50 inc. post. Paperback reprinting.

Way Of Zazen - Fujimitta Roshi
A concise talk on the practice of shikan taza (just sitting)

Zen Meditation - Zen Mission Society
Practical instruction on Zazen from Rev. Jiyu Kennett and monks at Shasta Abbey. Available from Throssel Hole at 40p inc. post.

Zen Mind, Beginners Mind - Shunryu Suzuki (Weatherhill)
Non-technical, yet penetrating informal talks on Soto Zen practice.

Many other books as well as these are available to those attending the meditation groups at up to 25% discount.

Meetings

Aberdeen

Chris Roberts of 5, Richmond Terrace, Aberdeen, would like to meet others interested in Zen in his area with a view to starting a regular group meeting.

Edinburgh

Weekly meetings. Current information from Richard Zahler, 54, Meadowhouse Road Edinburgh 12. Telephone 031 334 7282.

Tyneside

Meetings on Wednesdays at 7pm as follows.

20, High Shaw, Prudhoe	Dec 3	
31, Grafron Road, Whitley Bay.	Dec 10	Jan 28
16, Sunderland Road, South Shields.	Dec 17	Feb 4
83, Tavistock Road, Jesmond.	Jan 7	Feb 11
7, Mardale, Albany Village, Washington.	Jan 14	Feb 18
15, Hallington Mews, Killingworth.	Jan 21	Feb 25

In addition two evenings of intensive meditation will be held, in silence, on Tuesday Jan 13 and Feb 17, at 7pm at 83 Tavistock Rd, Jesmond.

Information and organisation of lifts - Rycharde Apps, 15, Hallington Mews, Killingworth, Telephone 682610.

Durham

Meetings on Mondays at 8pm in the Quiet Room, Van Mildert College, Durham on Dec 8th and weekly from Jan 19, and at Littleton House, Littleton, Co. Durham on Dec 15, Jan 5 & Jan 12. Information from Jonathan Sutton at Littleton.

Cleveland

Meetings on alternate Thursdays at 103 Overdale Rd., Berwick Hills, M'bro. on Dec 4, Dec. 18, Jan 8 and fortnightly thereafter. Information from Mrs. Joyce Shaw at the same address.

North Staffordshire

Information on meetings in Newcastle, Staffs, from Alan Clayton, West View, Blakenhall, Nantwich, Cheshire.

South Staffordshire

Nick Churchhill of 154 Netherstone Lane, Litchfield, Staffs, would like to meet others interested in starting a meditation group in that area.

Retreats

Throssel Hole Priory Programme

Nov 29 - 30	Weekend Retreat
Dec 13 - 21	Sesshin
Dec 22	End of Term
Dec 23 - Jan 1	Priory closed to visitors
Jan 2	Beginning of Term
Jan 3 - 4	Weekend Retreat
Jan 31 - Feb 1	Weekend Retreat
Mar 6 - 7	Weekend Retreat

Jukai sesshin will be held at the end of March, dates yet to be fixed. Those wishing to attend or stay at the Priory should apply in writing to the Guestmaster, Throssel Hole Priory, Carrshield, Near Hexham, Northumberland.

Day Retreats - Tyneside

Retreats led by Rev. Strathern, Prior of Throssel Hole Priory, will be held on the 6th December and 24th January at 15 Hallington Mews, Killingworth. 9 am to 9 pm. Cost £1 payable on the day. Bookings in advance please. Bookings and information: Mrs. E. Cook, 31 Grafton Road, Whitley Bay.

Weekend Retreat - Wales

A retreat will be held from Thursday, Jan 29 to Sunday Feb 1 1976 in a farmstead in mid-Wales. The weekend will cost £4 per person. All profit to be donated to Throssel Hole Priory Appeal. Accommodation for 14 people only. Further information from: Cherry Harris, 50 Archfield Road, Bristol (40035)

Weekend Seminar - Derby

A weekend of meditation talks and discussion will be held at Swanwick, Derbyshire from Dec 12 to Dec 14. The cost is £8. Applications to Buddhist Groups Association, 8 Eileen Ave., Leicester LE4 0DR. Gordon Bell (H'pool 66611 ext 25) has 3 spare seats in his car.