

ZEN NEWS



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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 the items published do not necessarily reflect the editors 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.

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Editorial

NEW YEAR, OLD PROBLEM

A new year, a new beginning. Time for a new effort. To live in Zen we must always be beginning anew, every day dedicating ourselves to the task again. This is how training is strengthened and selfishness defeated. Only thus are obstacles naturally overcome and not just postponed. It is important of course that we try to understand Zen, but that understanding is of very little significance compared with the importance of actually practicing it. Without practice there is nothing. But through practice lives can be transformed with benefits that are incalculable.

Let me invite you to consider with great care what we are creating, what we are doing. What sort of trainees are we? Do we want Zen on the cheap or are we willing to metaphorically (sometimes literally) roll up our sleeves and get down to actually living it? If we can really do it, if we are willing to put in everything we've got, turn all of life into meditation, train ourselves without reservation, go beyond every obstacle, then we will give the world a priceless treasure. If not, will we not just add to the mountain of hypocrisy which most of us are here to try to demolish?

It seems to me there is no time for delay. There is no need to wait for there is no time when we cannot practice. If we approach life with this resolve there is no situation which cannot be used to good purpose, nothing which cannot be a source of enlightenment. Buddhism is a religion of peace but also of vigorous effort. The peace which Zen gives is not an apathetic peace. It has nothing to do with resignation or indolence. The peace of Zen is the peace which comes when one is no longer at war with oneself, when all the energy flows one way, into whatever needs to be done.

The word Buddha means one who is awake. Shakyamuni throughout the forty-five years of his ministry sought always to awaken his pupils, to open the eyes of a world weighed down by its own discontents and drugged by escapism. Throughout history great teachers have continued his work. We are all aware of the suffering there is in the world, but how often do we see our responsibility? How often do we see that our own anger is the same force which, in different circumstances, led to Auschwitz and Hiroshima?

Can we be sure we will never be in such circumstances? Can we be sure we are not in them now? How often do we consider the contribution which our resignation to greed and waste makes to maintaining both the covetousness and the demoralization which is so common in the world? How clearly do we see the way our pursuit and cultivation of delusions and rigid ideas leads our life and the lives of others into distressing dead end situations. For the most part we are in a sorry state. But let us not add to the difficulties by whipping ourselves or by becoming filled with self pity. Let us work at the solution which is available.

Although we are often unaware of it, it is our own folly, our own hate, greed and delusion, which creates our feelings of unease about life. Zen training exists to deal with that unease. By mediating we expose both its branches and its roots and create the motivation to do something about them.

A period of meditation is simply a slice of our life stripped of distraction. Why do we find it so hard to simply be alive? Meditation, sitting quietly persuing no other activity or train of thought, is the ultimate state of ease and yet we find it so difficult. Why? What stands in our way? What are the

obstacles? In Zen the obstacles are called koans. A koan is anything in the trainee's mentality which prevents him from meditating. In Rinzai Zen trainees study the koans of the ancient masters. In Soto the pupil is set to find his own.

Koans are always with us. Seldom do we feel our life to be completely free of obstacles. Things would be fine if only.... It is that "if only", that unease about life, which is the basic koan. This the koan of human suffering which Shakyamuni strove so diligently to understand and which we too must deal with if we are ever to be at peace with ourselves. We must face the koan as it arises in our practice, inquire into it, give it no rest until we find a way through. Every time we think we have broken through we must take our answer to the master to be tested. The koan has many layers and we can always go deeper. The possibilities for man are infinite.

The obstacles which we find in meditation are exactly the same obstacles that face us in every other aspect in our life. All the unease we feel about life appears in our practice. Practice is in no way separate from life. The more progress we make the more it shows in daily life. This is the real test of our understanding. Every day the koan arises anew. Every day we must renew our practice.

In this new year let us redouble our efforts to make the Dharma a reality in our lives. There is much to be done.

TEMPLES IN KYOTO AND NARA

The brief visit to Kyoto and Nara began on an impressive note - at Sanjusangendo Hall. In accordance with tradition an archery contest is held here each year, and it remains as difficult as ever to get arrows to reach the far end of this extremely long hall. To give one an idea of just how long the hall is, I might explain that within it stands a whole army of statues - 1001 Statues of Buddha. These can be seen by visitors at any time of year. I remembered them from a previous visit, and particularly looked forward to returning to Sanjusangendo. The Buddha statues were carved out of cedar wood by a number of artists over a fifty year period. Ranged in parallel rows, and all painted in gold-leaf, they look strikingly similar - yet slight differences are just perceptible, the marks of different craftsmen's work.

Kiyomizu Temple stands a considerable way up a steep hill looking over the city of Kyoto. A busy road thronging with pedestrians leads up a large flight of stone steps. From the foot of the steps one can already see a vast expanse of sky and the promise of clear, wide open spaces. The climb up there is neither disheartening nor tiringly long.

The temple is a large wooden structure. Its simple wooden pillars are rough in texture - pleasant against the palm of your hand. You can walk to the railings which project out quite a way from the hillside and allow you to see the modern city slope away beneath you. As you turn and get back to the very side of the hill and to the neighbouring Shinto shrine, you feel the impact of a somewhat less modern Japan. The hill is thickly covered in trees that are deep rich green. Springs feed water to some fountains that rise quite a way into the air. "Mizu" is the Japanese for "water", hence the name of the temple, "Kiyomizu". Novice monks proved themselves by standing under these fountains in the severest weather.

Before Kyoto became the Imperial City and remained as such for 1000 years, the nearby city Nara had been established as the capital. Nara lies 25 miles from Kyoto, and between the two cities stretch the extensive tea fields of Uji. This district is known to provide Japan's best green tea. Not only do tea-leaves still get picked carefully by hand, but also Uji has apparently escaped the more obvious signs of mass industry and large scale tea production on which it depends.

This seemed to be a good setting in which to find Byodo-in Temple. In 1052 the building was transformed into a Buddhist temple, having previously been a ministerial residence occupied by the influential Fujiwara family. But always Byodo-in was reputed to be an idyllic haven where the aristocracy could retire from the pressures of the world beyond. Though fire destroyed much of the original structure in war between prominent families during the 14th century, the supreme elegance of Byodo-in lasts, embodied in the surviving halls and in the temple grounds themselves.

A seemingly immaculate statue of Amida Buddha sits beneath the richest of canopies, and looks East across the water of a silent, flower-bedecked lake. In former times the ordinary Japanese citizen had not been permitted to come any closer to the statue than the far side of the lake. Evenso, whilst the seated Buddha does look beautiful when seen from the very base of the statue, the view from across the lake is no less full of wonder. A grill screens the statue's body from view, but a neat opening in the grill allows one to see Amidha Buddha's head. Since only the head is visible from the lakeside, it struck me that the fineness of the features is in a curious way accentuated rather than diminished.



Buddha - Todai-ji

In Nara you are brought to the second largest Buddha statue in Japan - at Todai-ji Temple. Everything here seems to have assumed awesomely large proportions: while their frowning beady eyes rested upon me, I roughly estimated that the two 'temple guardians' stand higher than 25 feet.

Centrally placed in the main hall of Todai-ji sits Vairocana Buddha. Nothing takes away from the impact you feel upon confronting this presence. The smell of incense is pervasive, tarpaulin covers on the partially restored roof beat and flap in the persistantly blowing wind.

- Jonathan Sutton

A DISEASE OF THE MIND

As we become more involved in training, more committed to a meditative way of life, one will gradually or more suddenly come face to face with how we really are (not how we think we are). How we act, and more so, the intensions and reasons behind our actions. If we truly train it will arise naturally. From the calm and moving depths of the river of life, disturbances are clearly seen on the surface, and so too the obstructions below that cause the turmoil. The turmoil (dukkha) that we become mixed up in.

The obstructions are self made, mind made, to quote the Dhammapada; "All that we are is a result of what we have thought: all that we are is founded on our thoughts and formed of our thoughts." The obstructions are diseases of the mind, that develop in the course of life, born out of growing up, education, and the conditioning of life. In ignorance of how things really are, the mind created 'ego' helps perpetuate the diseases in order to consolidate itself. The diseases are many, as the obstacles in the flow of the river are many. All are a facet of the koan of everyday life, the Genjo-koan, the problem that arises in the present moment, the thing that stops us really getting on with what we are doing. More often than not, in ignorance of how things really are, the underlying problem is missed, is not faced up to, the resultant turmoil can knock us off balance and even take us for a ride. In our gross over indulgence with the surface, we miss the deep centre of life and consequently are not ready or able, to see and deal with the obstructions as we come upon them in our daily life.

The meditative mind is a gateway, a turning inward to oneself, an opportunity to see the diseases as they arise, an opportunity to say 'no' to them, and 'yes' to living completely, autonomously. This is not easy, it is not always pleasant. Accepting one's darker side and doing something about it requires courage and is hard work. Our diseases, such as laziness, complacency can pull us down again and again, the 'I' or 'ego' never wants to be exerted, it is not happy in the unknown territory of meditation. Where it sees it's strong hold weakening, where it's defences are seen for what they are. The 'I' is ever ready to recreate an obstruction.

Laziness is one of the diseases that comes to me regularly and I am sure it does to many others. If you are honest with yourself and look, you will see obstructions, some mind diseases that control your actions from time to time. Your training is to deal with them when they arise.

The obstructions arise out of the depths, and in moments of lapse awareness when not training with diligence, a decision is made to be swayed by them. Usually un-noticed, it is the voice that says, "Don't bother, leave it, do it later," when working on a job that is not so interesting, and before you know it you have given in. Not wanting to face your responsibilities, you have given over the control of your life to something else. The disease of laziness takes a good hold. Like most diseases there is a cure, diseases of the mind are invariably unpleasant to cure. Laziness requires lots of effort and energy. At all moments there is a choice. The more we say 'yes' in a sense, the easier it becomes. The more we dodge responsibility, the more we cut ourselves off from life, from parts of our life. Several years of practice in this negative process builds up a great mountain of inactivity, and then the diminished active side has a very difficult task moving such a burden.

The meditative mind works through the active, uncovering areas in our life which we have switched off and switching them on. Seeing the diseases,

accepting them, not being satisfied with them saying, "I could do better," and then trying to do something about it. So if you are not happy with your life, if you are not happy with the obstructions, the diseases, it is up to you to do something about it, no one else will do it for you. The Buddhas and the patriarchs only point the way.

- Gordon Bell

LIVING ZEN NOW

It is easier to write about aspirations than present living. I wish that my Zen was evenly spread but it is not. Walking in the mountains is more often an enriching experience than struggling through the crowded city. Washing up and dealing with college memoranda takes far less of my energy and concentration than meditation and writing. I experience much joy but also a great sense of being unworthy and falling short.

That is a beginning. To see that the difference between the 'important' and the 'trivial' is an arbitrary decision. Shakespeare wrote, "There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so." The world is painted in the poster colours of our value systems; my decision as to what is important, trivial, good or bad.

Slowly becoming aware that I do not see people at all except in relation to, often desperate, cravings. That awareness is extremely painful. Slowly perceiving that my social work is a form of moral imperialism, motivated more substantially by pity for others than by genuine compassion.

In a dim way, I can see that is fine. I can learn to accept myself more fully, 'good as well as 'bad.' But daily I am increasingly aware of large pits between which I scramble unsteadily. I can absorb myself in arid intellectualism which makes patterns out of the experience. I can tumble headlong into Puritanism which takes a perverse pride of torturing through constant reminders of falling short of ever eluding standards. My life seems presently an experience of falling into those pits and eternally scrambling out.

Initially, for me, the Zen journey was a pathway to Superman. It was a road whereby I could get rid of all the 'bad' and uncomfortable aspects of self - the nasty black bugs underneath the stone. SATORI was an effective escape from 'evil'. I am learning (this week anyway!) to forget about enlightenment, the sutras, Hui Neng, Japan and even meditation and to concentrate on living now.

Much of that is uncomfortable, banal, mundane and inglorious. Living now with my wife and two children, with gas bills, mortgage demands and the frustrations of everyday work. Fortunately I have an old car which is a magnificent vehicle for acceptance practice; it breaks down in the most isolated and rainy places! I have even begun to suspect a plot between the car salesman and my reverend Zen teacher!

Stubborn, greedy dominating and loveable ego. Everything seems to lead to your ultimate expansion and inflation. Living Zen is opening out to others; trying less to impress in an untrying sort of way; loving myself and others just a little more. Living more fully in the present moment. All very simple and yet extraordinarily difficult.

- David Brandon

Views on Books

The Way of Non-attachment by Dhiravamsa (Turnstone Books £2.50)

"The mind can recognise the symbol of truth but only through meditation can we go beyond the mind and know truth." Dhiravamsa stresses the importance of going beyond, of opening the way to truth via awareness, which is the result of meditation, of the importance of doing it now, in this lifetime. He describes some of the tricks/states of mind and explains how each can be observed and travelled through, so that the mind becomes a useful servant instead of the master who rules. He also writes about emotions and the dangers of pretending one doesn't have them when one does, and how by constant awareness (meditation) they will cease to be a governing factor.

It's an excellent, dogma free, piece of writing which is constantly punctuated by the advice that one should spend more time in meditation than one spends talking or reading about it. It also contains a concise appendix on the principals of meditation.

- Jane Harris

The Three Pillars of Zen by Philip Kapleau (Beacon Press, Boston. £1.40)

So many words and philosophies later, and there it was in Philip Kapleau's Pillars of Zen. Years before I'd aired this theory to a future Cleric, but had this been theory or intuitive knowledge? Let me quote from Yasutani-Roshi:

"The essence of your True-nature is no different from that of a stick in front of me or this table or this clock - in fact of every single object in the universe."

And isn't this the essence of the Dharmakaya?

The Three Pillars of Zen is a truthful and exciting book, and I stongly urge practitioners of Zen to read it.

- Cyril Patterson

A First Zen Reader by Trevor Leggett (Charles E. Tuttle Co. £2.65)

This collection has been compiled and translated by Trevor Leggett and includes; A Tongue-tip Taste of Zen, The Original Face, Hakuin's Song of Meditation, The Two Poems, Bodhidharma and the Emperor, and Leggett's able and conclusive Note enhanced by twenty illustrative plates.

A Tongue-tip Taste of Zen and the Meditation Commentary form the bulk of this anthology. The discourses are by Takashina Rosen of the Soto sect, and the latter is by Amakuki Sessan of the Rinzaï sect. Here are several extracts:

The trees on the mountain are not so thick
That from time to time a moonbeam
Cannot penetrate.

"The word 'ice' is significant. Water, when exposed to cold, freezes, hardens, and becomes ice, and though its nature does not change, it loses complete freedom of movement. So through illusion of ignorance, the human being sets and hardens, and though his Buddha-nature does not change, he is debarred from the limitless freedom of the Buddha. But just as ice, set and hardened by the

cold, is still in fact all water, so the human being, set and hardened by illusion, is still in fact all Buddha." Amakuki Sessan.

I prefer the Wong Mou-Lam translation of The Two Poems, but recommend this book without unnecessary ballyhoo!

- Cyril Patterson

Zen Art For Meditation by Stewart W. Holmes & Chimyo Horioke (Tuttle)

As yet I haven't come across this book in shops here in England. I received a copy of 'Zen Art' from the States as a present, and the least I can do is to inform people of the book's existence, suggesting that you devise some means of getting to see a copy. It is a very striking book. The extremely worthwhile commentaries which accompany the pictures do not completely draw one's attention away from the fact that the whole book is well conceived and produced.

It has been the writers idea to bring together a considerable number of pictures painted by artists whose work brings to light something about Zen. Within this not at all large book, one is provided with high-quality reproductions of 31 paintings. The writers have done the work of choosing from a wide range and assembling these particular pictures, and to help us yet further, they have linked the pictures with certain 'Zen' themes. This is in fact what I had in mind when I mentioned that this book is well conceived.

The introduction refers to fifteen general 'tenets' which reveal what attitude of mind is ideally sought. These are not intended as a set of rigid criteria for Zen art that you must unreservedly accept. In this book each section is devoted to one tenet: two paintings are used to illustrate the point, and you may judge for yourself whether or not the pictures 'work'. It's more than likely that the commentary will help you here. One of the 15 basic tenets reads like this:

"Security and changlessness are fabricated by the ego-dominated mind and do not exist in nature. To accept insecurity and commit oneself to the unknown creates faith in the universe."

Here are two more:

"Man arises from nature and gets along most effectively by collaborating with nature, rather than trying to master it."

When we perceive the incongruity between theories about life and what we feel intuitively to be true on the nonverbal, non-judging plane, there is nothing to do but laugh."

Neither are the pictures nor the tenets treated 'academically'. The directness of approach in the text can further be judged by the way the commentaries blend easily with the haiku that follow. Even if you were simply interested in having a small collection of haiku by your side, 'Zen Art for Meditation' has much to offer.

"One man
And one fly
In a large room."

- Issa

- Jonathan Sutton

Meetings

Aberdeen Weekly meetings. Information from Chris Roberts, 5 Richmond Terrace.

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

Durham Meets on Mondays at 8 pm in the Quiet Room, Van Mildert College, Durham until March 22. Information from Jonathan Sutton, Littleton House, Littleton, Co. Durham.

Cleveland Meeting on alternate Thursdays at 103 Overdale Road, Berwick Hills, Middlesbrough. Information from Mrs. Joyce Shaw of the same address.

Bradford/Leeds Helen Percival of 31 Harrogate Street, Bradford 3 would like to meet others interested in Zen in this area with a view to starting a regular group meeting. It is good to hear that Helen is now well on the way to recovery from the illness which has troubled her for the past year.

Nottingham Meetings every Monday at 8 pm at 26 Millicent Road, West Bridgford, Nottingham. Information from Alan MacCormick at the same address (tel 813351). Occasional day retreats may be held.

Lancaster Meetings every Wednesday at 6.15 pm in the Quiet Room, Chaplaincy Centre, Lancaster University. Information from Carol Riddell, 33 Primrose St. Lancaster (tel 64785).

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

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

Dublin A group is at present being formed. Current information from Moira Jones, 139 Walkinstown Road, Walkinstown, Dublin 12.

Tyneside Meetings on Wednesdays at 7pm as follows;

16 Sunderland Rd., South Shields.	Feb 4	Mar 17	
83 Tavistock Rd., Jesmond.	Feb 11	Mar 24	
7 Mardale, Albany Village, Washington 2	Feb 18	Mar 31	Mar 10
15 Hallington Mews, Killingworth.	Feb 25	Apr 7	Apr 21
20 High Shaw, Prudhoe.	Mar 3	Apr 14	

In addition two evenings of intensive meditation will be held, in silence, on Tuesdays Feb 17 and Mar 9, at 83 Tavistock Road, Jesmond.

An all night intensive meditation will be held, starting Saturday Feb 21 at 8pm, finishing 8am Sunday morning, at 7 Mardale, Washington. 2

For information contact; Robert Dunnett, 7 Mardale, Washington (N'cle 466294)
Organisation of lifts; Rychard Apps, 15 Hallington Mews, Killingworth(682610)

It is possible to practice Soto Zen meditation at all of the above groups. However, this does not necessarily mean that the practices of the groups are exclusively Soto Zen.

Retreats

Throssel Hole Priory Programme

Mar 6 - 7 Weekend Retreat
Mar 20 - 28 Jukai Sesshin
Apr 3 - 4 Weekend Retreat
May 1- 2 Weekend Retreat
May 29 - June 6 Sesshin

Those wishing to attend the priory should apply in writing to the Guest-master, Throssel Hole Priory, Carrshield, Near Hexham, Northumberland.

Day Retreat Durham 15th February

A retreat marking the Death of the Buddha will be held at 26 Victoria St. Sacriston, Co Durham, from 9am to 9pm. Reverend Strathern will commemorate Buddha's death with the group in the evening. Bookings in advance please to Gordon Bell, 27 Rothbury Ave., Horden, Peterlee, Co Durham.

Day Retreat Edinburgh 13th March

A retreat led by Reverend Strathern, Prior of Throssel Hole Priory, will be held at 12 Bruntsford Gardens, Edinburgh. Bookings and information contact; Richard Zahler, 54 Meadowhouse Road, Edinburgh 12.

Day Retreat Tyneside 10th April

A retreat will be held at 15 Hallington Mews, Killingworth, from 9am to 9pm. Bookings in advance to; Rychard Apps, at the same address.

Seminar Derby 15-19th April

A seminar of meditation, talks and discussions will be held at Swanwick, Derbyshire, the cost £16. Bookings and information; Buddhist Groups Association, 8 Eileen Ave., Leicester LE4 0DR.

ZAFUS

Tyneside members are making black zafu cases (meditation cushions) for sale, the proceeds going to Throssel Hole Priory Appeal. They will not be filled, so if you required one, you would need 1-1½lbs of kapok (costs approx. 85p/lb) They are 9 inches in diameter and 6 inches high, fully filled. The cost is £1 inc. postage, payable to Tyneside Zen Buddhist Association, and available from Robert Dunnett, 7 Mardale, Washington 2, Tyne-Wear.