

ZEN NEWS



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Readers are invited to submit items of news, articles, 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 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.

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Tyneside Zen Buddhist Association

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Editorial

DISSOLVING BARRIERS, BUILDING COMMUNITY

I find that to train in the Zen way is to be constantly forced back upon myself. I push forward I come up against my own inflexibility. The koan of daily life is there alright. At other times I am just adrift. I find myself doing things I really do not want to do, awareness gone, thoughtlessly making a mess of life for myself and others. With every meditation period I am, in some form or other, confronted with my self. One delusion after another. Meditation shows up so much, allows me to hide nothing, the tension is too much. Either I must do something about myself or I must give up meditation. When I get really fed up with it I stop myself and take stock. I have to decide again what is important to me. Am I going to face the reality of the insight that has come through meditation or am I going to deny it. There can only really be one answer. To deny reality would be a kind of suicide. When I consider seriously I always know what I want.

What I want is the fullness of life. What I want is freedom. I want to feel free of hang ups, free of fear, free of lies. I want to be able to live without fear of what others will think, without stereotyped ideas about what must be done, without compulsive habits running my life for me. I want to be able to relate to others in an open and sincere way, free of prejudice and inhibition. I want to feel in harmony with my environment. I want to discard my psychological armour. How can I sum this up? I call it liberation. I believe that when one person achieves these things he cannot help but benefit others. If a number of people achieve them the effect for good will be very large. Such people quite naturally have an invigorating effect on those around them. In these dark depressed times we vitally need such people. I believe I am far from this goal. To seek it however is the only important thing. If I do not work toward it what will have been the point of my life?

I got involved in Zen because, unlike much of what passes for religion, it offers method rather than dogma. Zen is for me because Zen is a quest for liberation. At the moment of course the western world is full of groups whose aim is the liberation of some section or other of the population. To me it seems the efforts of these groups are sometimes valuable but often they are not. Often they are based on self interest in a very worldly sense. Often the 'liberation' which is sought is thought to be found at the expense of some other group of people who are labelled as oppressors. Groups that seek liberation in this way are motivated by bitterness. Inevitably they overvalue themselves and devalue others. The most that can be achieved is a turning of the scales. The old oppression may die as a new (and often more avid) one is born. I do not see how true liberation can be found when one is still driven by compulsive forces, by greed, hate and delusion. True liberation is surely only to be found in the cultivation of generosity, love and wisdom. We have always known this. Why do we act on it so seldom?

The liberation I seek does no injury to others, except perhaps to their delusions. It is not something that can be achieved in isolation. Isolation does not exist. Why are we not free? What are the forces that tie us down? Greed, malice, inertia, worry, doubt. All the irritants which prevent our life flowing smoothly. In a very straight forward passage in one of the early Buddhist scriptures it says that as long as we cannot throw hinderances down we feel as if in debt, diseased, in prison, in slavery or lost in the desert. I know that feeling well. When such hinderances are put away there arises the

sense of freedom, gladness and joy; the body is set at ease, the heart is peaceful and this peace is the foundation of meditation in life.

And what is it that sets us free? When do we feel free? I feel free when there is, as it were, no friction in my relationships: relationships with other people, relationships with my environment generally. To become truly free means to seek a sense of intimacy with one's world. This is what brings people to life. Everyone has some sense of it. Mostly it is hidden away but it is never completely lost. People feel it occasionally, perhaps trusting friendship, perhaps in visiting an especially beautiful piece of countryside. That same sense of freedom, gladness and joy, that same ease. Everyone recognises it but few understand it. At these moments our defences are gone, we are involved in the reality.

This is the only sort of freedom which is worth having. It is the only sort which is real for it is the only sort which is not just an attempt to offload our own misery onto someone else. True freedom is not selfish but is the dissolution of self. This dissolution of self is achieved by total involvement in life, in the life we share. This is intimacy. I may be afraid of it and prefer to play safe. But what are my creations worth then? I may do what is expected of me but what is the use of this if my heart is not in it? It is so easy to slide into the apparently safe world of hypocrisy, to abandon one's truest friends, to abandon truth itself, but I cannot believe this is what life is for. Who really wants always to take the soft option? It is not what I came to Zen for.

Where this sense of intimacy exists there is a true community. Some say that Zen is a lonely path but I have not found it so. In the Buddha land we are very close. Only through liberation can we truly know others. Only thus is there a chance to make real contact. And when contact is made only the person who knows his freedom can refrain from smothering it with ideas of possession, control or exploitation. This contact creates a community, a Sangha. This is a creation which I feel is worthwhile, the community which is formed not by any form of cohesion but by the efforts of those who dedicate themselves to training. This community is the full expression of freedom. In conventional thinking harmonious society and individual freedom are seen as opposed. In Zen they are found to be the two sides of the same coin.

Zen News is a small contribution to the spreading of that coinage. It has brought us, here in the North East, into touch with many people, people with a similar quest to our own, people who have made the Dharma a part of their life, some very tentatively, some unreservedly. I hope these contacts may continue to grow. I hope we can help one another. If we try we can grow freedom in our everyday lives by sincerity of our relationships with each other and by doing what we think is important wholeheartedly. Cynicism is death. Life is real. Whether our Zen is meagre or magnificent we each have much to do. To train in Zen is to work tirelessly for the total eradication of self, for the service of all. Nothing less.

Tyneside

LOOKING FOR A ZENDO

The meditation group on Tyneside has existed for a little over two years. We have had ups and downs but now seem to have a reliable nucleus of members with some real commitment to Zen training. So far we have, for the most part, held our meetings one another's houses and this has worked well, giving members an opportunity to extend hospitality to others and spreading the responsibility for the organising which must be done amongst a number of people. With the group better established, however, we are looking into the possibility of renting a permanent centre somewhere in Newcastle. This would enable us to continue to expand our activities without the organisational problems becoming impossibly complex and might enable us to be more outward looking. Our initial minimum requirement would be one fairly large room, suitable for use as a Zendo. We would need a power point and there would have to be access to toilets. If any readers in the area know of a disused office, shop or meeting room which might be suitable, do please let us know.

MEETINGS

Wednesday meetings at 7pm as follows:

15 Hallington Mews, Killingworth	Apr 7	Apr 21	May 26
20 High Shaw, Edgewell, Prudhoe	Apr 14		Jun 2
16 Sunderland Road, S. Shields	Apr 28		Jun 9
7 Mardale, Albany Vill. Washington	May 12		
31 Grafton Road, Whitley Bay	May 19		
9 Chester Street, Sandyford	May 25		

These meetings include periods of sitting and walking meditation, the reading of one or more short texts about meditation practice, and an informal period for refreshments and discussion. Beginners are welcome and basic meditation instruction is available.

Tuesday meetings at 7pm at 7 Mardale, Albany Village, Washington on May 18. These meetings are run on a more demanding schedule, refreshments are served but there is no period for discussion. Proceedings are, for the most part, in silence.

For further information/organisation of lifts, contact Robert Dunnett, 7 Mardale, Washington, (N'cle 466294) or Rycharde Apps, 15 Hallington Mews, Killingworth, (N'cle 682610).

DAY RETREATS 10th April, 23rd May & 19th June

Retreats will be held at 15 Hallington Mews, Killingworth, led by Reverend Daiji Strathern, Prior of Throssel Hole Priory, from 9am to 9pm. Bookings in advance to Rycharde Apps at the same address. Cost £1.25 payable on the day.

BOOKSHOP

Readers living in the area may be interested to know that the Stocksfield Studio Bookshop, in Stocksfield village (more or less en route to Throssel), has a good range of Buddhist books published by Routledge and Kegan Paul and Sambala.

PEOPLE

Gordon Bell has just completed a month stay at Throssel Hole Priory.

Robert Dunnett is planning a trip to America to attend Jukai at Shasta Abbey. He has given us the following thoughts:-

Preparations for a visit to Shasta Abbey, California

The journey (to the temple) has always been regarded as incredibly important because at that time you have no visible discipline from the temple. You are doing something about yourself by just going there. That is the first chapter (of the Shushogi). 'There is something I've got to do about me; I've got to understand life and death; I must go to the temple'. So no matter how far you may travel, the first real ceremony is the journey.

- Kennett Roshi

Many people must wonder: why I travel 6,000 miles to Mount Shasta, when Throssel Hole Priory can do a perfectly adequate Jukai? In fact readers of Zen News No 4 will recall that members of the Tyneside Meditation Group who took part in the Throssel Jukai retreat last year gave it the five star seal of approval. Throssel Jukais are not about to be down graded, and I see no foundation for the assumption that next year will see the advent of Zen Charter Flights to the U.S.A.

No, I happened to find myself in possession of sufficient cash, and able to give myself two weeks holiday from work. At first the trip looked rather unlikely. The American Consulate in Edinburgh did not approve of my World Citizenship and I was too stubborn to apply for a British passport.

However, there are firm indications that the English Buddhist is no longer going to have annual administrations from Kennett Roshi in the comfort of their own country. Serious Zen trainees might have to "travel to other dusty countries thus forsaking their own seats".

When I read Kennett Roshi's article criticizing English Buddhists for a tendency to think of Zen as little more than an amusing religious hobby, I realised the finger was in part, pointing at me. Quickly I got a booking on the only charter flight to the West Coast, not fully booked, after giving serious consideration to approaching Mt Shasta from Canada. But a flight to Los Angeles was available.

The American Consul, when he saw I was now in possession of a 'valid document issued by a competent authority' i.e. a British Passport, consented to give me an interview. He had not heard of Shasta Abbey, he said. Furthermore he was concerned that once I had sampled the delights of his glorious country, I might not want to leave. Clearly he had not been on a Zen retreat! I assured him that I had visited the U.S.A. once before and was quite pleased to return home. On registering with a doctor for the purpose, I established that a vaccination certificate is no longer required for entry to the U.S.A. All that remained was to book a return flight from Los Angeles to Oakland.

I hope to be able to stay a couple of days with Mokurai Cherlin at Berkeley Buddhist Priory, Oakland, before travelling on to Shasta by Greyhound bus. One may recall Mokurai from the early establishment of Throssel Hole Priory. I have not yet met him.

Don't miss episode two: Return from Shasta (I hope).

- Robert Dunnington

Scotland

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

Edinburgh Weekly meetings and occasional day retreats. Contact Richard Zahler, 54 Meadowhouse Rd., Edinburgh 12. Telephone 031 334 7282

North of England

Durham The Durham meditation group continue to meet at 8pm on Mondays in the Quiet Room, Van Mildert College, Durham. On Monday 26th April the usual meeting will be replaced by a Buddhist - Christian discussion on Meditation and Prayer. Information from Jonathan Sutton, Littleton House, Littleton, Co. Durham.

Cleveland Contact Mrs Joyce Shaw, 103 Overdale Rd., Middlesbrough for correct information.

Hull We do not know what is happening in Hull these days. Perhaps somebody will write and tell us.

Bradford - Leeds Information from Helen Percival, 31 Harrogate St., Bradford

Nottingham Meetings every Monday at 8pm at 26 Millicent Rd. West Bridgeford, Nottingham. Information from Alan MacCormick at the same address (tel. 813351)

Derby Seminar 15-19th April A seminar of meditation, talks and discussion will be held at Swanwick, Derbyshire. Cost £16. Bookings and information: Buddhist Groups Association, 8 Eileen Ave. Leicester LE4 ODR

Lancaster Information from Carole Riddell, 33 Primrose St. Lancaster (64785)

St Annes - Blackpool A group has recently started in this area. Information from Charles Fletcher, 107 Blackpool Road North, St Annes on Sea, Lancs.

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

North Staffordshire Information on meditation meetings in Newcastle, Staffs is available from Alan Clayton, West View, Blackenhall, Nantwich, Cheshire. Alan has sent us the following description of the group.

The meditation group in Newcastle, Staffs has been in existence for about three years. Until last August we had been practicing various types of meditation gleaned from books and from organisations such as Mind Dynamics and the Findhorn Trust.

A few of us became increasingly interested in Zen, mainly through the works of Alan Watts and D.T. Suzuki. Then we discovered, from 'Selling Water by the River' and from the Throssel Hole Priory Journal, that Zen Buddhism was not just a collection of concepts to be studied, but that it could actually be put into practice! Soon after this discovery three of us joined a one week retreat at the Priory, and on our return the group was reformed as a Zen meditation group.

Starting this new phase in August '75 with the three who had been to Throssel and two other members of the old group we met every Monday evening to sit together and read the scriptures. Gradually we found people in the area who wished to join us. The growth and development of the group was helped along by a lecture given by Reverend Daiji Strathern at nearby Keele University in the autumn.

there are now twelve of us who meet regularly. We have two periods of meditation, we read the scriptures together, we listen to extracts read from either 'Selling Water by the River' or 'Cutting Through Material Spiritualism', and we finish each meeting with talk and a drink.

- Alan Clayton

Spode House Retreat 16 - 23rd July There will be an inter-religious retreat at Spode House, Hawksyard Priory, Rugeley, Staffs. WS15 1PP. For bookings please contact the Warden at Spode House (telephone Armitage 490112). Cost in previous years has been about £25.

Eire

Dublin The group in Dublin is now underway. Current information from Moira Jones, c/o I.S.P.C.C., 20 Molesworth Street, Dublin 2.

At all the above meditation groups listed above it is possible to practice Soto Zen meditation. There are a few groups listed which do not follow this method exclusively however. The information published is as up to date as we have it. It is helpful if groups can keep us informed of any important changes. Beyond this, however, it is enjoyable to read of the experiences of other trainees. To commit one's feelings to writing is often a valuable practice, helping the writer to take his training seriously and examine his mind carefully. To offer these same feelings to others is an act of generosity which we are often too shy to perform. To write arrogantly, believing that one understands and has achieved is undoubtedly a grave mistake. But to write in human terms, sharing a little of one's life with others can be one effective aid to training. I hope that Zen News will remain a sufficiently unpretentious publication that even the shyest of us may get a word in now and again.

- Editor

Priory News

THROSSEL HOLE PRIORY

Resident Community

Reverend Daiji Strathern, Prior
Reverend Daishin Morgan, Accountant
Reverend Jitsuyu Evans, Cook
Reverend Jimyo Krasner, Guestmaster

Several former residents were present for the Jukai Sesshin (March 20-28th) as were Reverends Hofuku and Kyosei Hughes from London Zen Priory. Reverend Kozan Ball is at present working in London.

Programme

April 1	Beginning of term
April 3 - 4	Weekend Retreat
May 1 - 2	Weekend Retreat
May 29 - June 6	Week Sesshin
June 7	Term ends
June 8 - 10	Priory closed to visitors

Those wishing to attend the priory should apply in writing to the Guestmaster Throssel Hole Priory, Carr Shield, Near Hexham, Northumberland.

Sunday Lectures

Open lectures which visitors may attend without prior booking are held at the Priory at 11.30am on Sundays. The present series is based on the lectures of Dogen Zenji as recorded in the Shobogenzo Zuimonki (translated by Reiho Masunaga as A Primer of Soto Zen - Routledge & Kegan Paul). Transport from Newcastle can usually be arranged as members of the Tyneside group frequently attend these lectures. There is opportunity for zazen and often for sanzen (private interview) after the lecture. Those wishing to stay for lunch should make advance arrangement with the priory.

New Building, New Quarry

Work on the new Zendo has been more or less at a standstill just recently, partly for want of ready cash to buy materials, partly because of the very poor weather conditions. The modifications necessary to the foundations when it was found that the site was undermined by coal workings, proved to be not only time consuming but also expensive. The priory is now however, in the process of buying a compressor for rock cutting and authorisation is being obtained to quarry rock on the priory's own land. These developments should enable work to go ahead once again in the near future.

Land Use

A good deal of thought has been devoted to the best way to use the Priory's land in the future. The short growing season limits the options and it will be necessary to try a number of crops to see how well they do. In the meantime much work is going into the existing gardens, more crops are being started under glass and a second attempt at growing mushrooms is being made. A hive of bees is also being obtained and if it is found that the local clover

and heather can support the apiary well, this activity may be expanded in due course.

Coal Mining

The Priory's mines have now been inspected and the mining regulations sorted out. The major problem in this respect is that the work must be supervised by a qualified Mine Deputy. The search is on, therefore, to find someone with the necessary qualifications who could visit the Priory from time to time to supervise.

LONDON ZEN PRIORY

The Priory has now moved to larger premises at 8 Radford Road, Lewisham, London SE 13 (telephone 01 318 4699)

With much help they have managed to buy the property outright thus relieving the burden of a mortgage. Hofuku can now spend his energies running the Priory full time instead of working as well. Work is going on taking down a wall, creating a 30 ft Zendo, and both the Priory's garden and allotment are receiving much attention.

Activities

A zazen and study class is held every Wednesday evening at 7.15pm. There is a weekend retreat every month, the next two are on April 23 - 25 and May 21 - 23. There is a one week Sesshin planned for August 7 - 13.

Anyone wishing to visit the Priory should write or phone first.

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 1-1 $\frac{1}{2}$ lbs 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.