



MOUNTAIN SILENCE

NEWSLETTER OF THE DANCING MOUNTAINS ZEN SANGHA

Issue 18 ; Summer 2012

Lay Practice

Events

Weekend Retreat Hebden Bridge Yorkshire

with Ingen Breen
21st July 2012 to 22nd
July 2102

This is a non residential
retreat to be led by Soto
Zen priest Ingen Breen.
Accommodation is
available in the hostel
adjacent to the zendo.

Cost: Contact Rebecca
07970425932
rebecca_habs@gmail.com

August: Zen Retreat with Ingen Breen, Soto Zen priest 3rd August 2012 to 7th August 2012

Zen retreat with Zen
priest, Ingen Breen
Cost: £170 to stay in
the house and £130 to
tent

Mobile: 07756554374
zenincambridge@tiscali.co.uk

Weekend Retreat Hebden Bridge with Ingen Breen 25th August 2012 to 26th August 2012

Weekend Retreat
Cost: Contact Rebecca
07970425932
rebecca_habs@gmail.com

Weekend Retreat Hebden Bridge



Practicing Where We Are

Editorial

By Michael

‘Can you hear the dharma on the wind?’

Tenshin Reb Anderson Gaia House 2006

In this issue of Mountain Silence we focus on lay practice which is the place where most of us following the Soto Zen tradition of Shunryu Suzuki Roshi find ourselves. Although over the last 50 years or so since Zen arrived in the west a number of monasteries have sprung up they are still uncommon. Even if there were more such places most practitioners would not be able to devote themselves to monastic practice due to other responsibilities in their lives. Because of the long monastic tradition in Zen there still exists to some degree a tension between lay and monastic practice. This partly exists because for long periods in its history there has been a substantial inference that lay practice did not have the same status as that which occurred in the monastic setting. In my experience this sense is still evident amongst western practitioners despite the stress laid by

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Skies Opening, Rain
falling

with Ingen Breen
**15th September 2012 to
16th September 2012**
Weekend retreat
Cost: Contact Rebecca
07970425932
rebecca@habs@gmail.com

Writing As A Wisdom Project

with Soto Zen Priest &
Writer Catherine
Gammon
**17th November 2012:
09:11 - 17:11**
Bringing self-study to
our practice of
imaginative
Cost: To be announced
07817604156 melsmere@hotmail.com

Day Retreat

with Catherine Gammon
**18th November 2012:
09:11 - 17:11**
Meditation day with Zen
Priest Catherine
Gammon
Cost: £45
07875155464
devin@dancingmountains.org.uk

Rohatsu Sesshin

with Ingen Breen &
Catherine Gammon
**1st December 2012 to
8th December 2012**
A traditional Zen
sesshin
Cost: To be announced
07786369682
mountaindancing1@yahoo.co.uk

our own teacher and many others that we should practice where we are. Maybe, being human, it is well-nigh impossible to eradicate this desire or wishing to be in that 'other place,' where teachings and teachers are always available, where our deepest longings to receive the dharma might be fulfilled. Yet because of causes and conditions we are where we are. How then are we as committed practitioners 'to hear the dharma on the wind,' and in Thich Nhat Hanh's words 'to see the miracles that are all around us'? In our current newsletter we have thoughts on the subject from Reb in a transcription (by Angyu Devin Ashwood) of a talk given at Gaia House in 2006, whilst Francis Checkley (Anryu Chyu) muses on lay practice and its relationship to 'beginners mind'. There is an original, only recently discovered story, about the 'Buddha that Stayed at Home,' and yet further thoughts on the experience of being a lay practitioner over many years of practice.

There is all this along with delightful yet deep poetry, accounts of retreats and regional reports from different sanghas.

The power of accepting that our practice lies within us and around us in domesticity and in our work is demonstrated by the heartening growth and strength of practice in the regional sanghas of Dancing Mountains. For some time now DM has been blessed by the support of Soto Zen Priest Ingen Breen who has been leading a number of weekend/day retreats and will lead a major 5 day retreat at Unstone Grange in Derbyshire from 3rd August to 7th August 2012 for further info. see events diary. November will see the return of Soto Zen Priest Catherine Gammon to UK (she offered great support and teaching s to DM in 2010) from Green Gulch. She will hold retreats and 'Writing as A Wisdom Project,' days (some of my writing students still talk about the one day workshop she held in Devon on her last visit) in different parts of the country as well as a longer traditional Rohatsu Sesshin in partnership with Ingen again at Unstone Manor from 1st to 8th December 2012 (again for more info. this is listed in the events diary). Despite deeply practicing where we are, we all, I think, need the special reassurance and inspiration that is offered by such events.

Please do not forget that if Dancing Mountains is to flourish we need a strong financial foundation. I recognise that in these straitened times being able to offer such support may be far from easy but if you do have the ability to offer a one off donation or a more regular offering please do so. A form for this purpose may be downloaded from this newsletter

Training
By Rebecca

Warminster Weekend
Retreat 20-22 April
2012

By Michael



Get involved

Facebook group

For general discussion and socialising about Dancing Mountains and related events on Facebook, please click the link above. Business matters and decisions are made separately via an email list - please contact us if you want to be part of this.

Local Contacts

Visit the [Local Groups webpage](#) for details of Dancing Mountains groups in your area, and the [Diary](#) for their regular meeting dates and times.

Next Issue

The **Autumn** edition will have a theme around "Form & Ritual in Zen". We welcome your articles, poetry, pictures, letters, retreat reflections and book reviews! Publication date: 21st **September**, deadline for submission of material 1st **September**.

(bottom of right hand column front page). Also holding an event or a raffle where any profit may be used to support us would be deeply appreciated.

Finally I apologise that this newsletter is being published a little later than previously stated this is due to the fact that as the new editor I am learning the trade and familiarising myself with the new Content Management System! I hope that over the next months I will enlist the help of two or three people who will form an editorial team that will develop the scope and depth of Mountain Silence in order to build on the accomplishments of its two former editors Chris Brown and Devin Ashwood to whom many thanks and deep bows. If there are any cartoonists out there I would like to hear from you!!! I do hope you enjoy and are inspired by this eighteenth edition of Mountain Silence.

Gasso

Kogan Muju Michael

Previous issues are available [here](#).

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Issue 18;

Dharma Talk

Finding Your Place Right Where You Are - August 2006 at Gaia House,
Transcribed & Edited by Angyu Devin Ashwood

By Tenshin Reb Anderson



I wanted to mention that a number of people in this retreat, and usually in retreats, bring up the issue that they are enjoying the retreat, but they wonder about whether they'll be able to continue the enjoyable practice when the retreat's over, and they wonder if they should go live in a monastery where they will be able to practice like they're practicing now, more continuously.

When I first started practicing sitting meditation, I thought it was totally cool, but I noticed that sometimes I wouldn't do it very frequently. I noticed spaces occurred between the sessions. Then the thought occurred to me that it might be good to do it with not such big spaces between, but to do it more regularly, and I tried to do it more regularly, but I couldn't. So then I thought, maybe if I practiced where a lot of other people were practicing sitting, that that would help me to be a bit more regular, and I heard about the Zen Centre in San Francisco so I went there to visit and I visited for a while and sure enough it did happen that I became regular in my sitting, so then I went back across the country and packed up my stuff and made three attempts to move across the country to live at Zen Centre and the third time I made it.

Then I practiced in San Francisco for a while, I lived across the street from the Zen Centre and I practiced every day and it was not too difficult to get to the Zendo every day. Once I was in the Zendo, it was difficult, but it wasn't difficult to get into the difficulty. I managed to enter the difficulty every morning, very regularly. Then after practicing that way for about nine months, I went to the mountain monastery called Tassajara. And I went to a three-month practice period in the winter in the mountains and every moment I was there, there was a story in my mind, so I have 8,000,000 stories to tell you, the following is one of them.

This story occurred towards the end of this three-month time. The whole time was a retreat, but then during the retreat sometimes, we had more periods of meditation than usual. The usual day had five periods of sitting meditation and three periods of sitting formal meals, so we actually sat cross legged eight periods a day on a regular basis as a group and then during the intense part of the practice period we would sit more like 20 periods a day, but because we sat eight a day usually, it was only like doubling it, so you can imagine some of you sit one period a day, if you went to a retreat that had two periods, it wouldn't be that difficult, but to go from one period like some of you do to 13, it's a big jump, but to go from eight to 20, not easy exactly, but not such a big jump. So there was this intense period of meditation at the end of the practice period, and I don't remember exactly the reason but I was late for one of the periods and so I came into the hall, everyone else was already sitting.

I had never seen the people sitting; I was always just one of the people sitting looking at the floor. All I ever saw was the floor. I knew there were people around me, but I never actually looked at the people sitting and I was deeply struck, deeply moved by what I saw and my feeling at that time was it was like going into the generator room of the Hoover dam. The Hoover dam is a big dam that supplies the electrical power to Las Vegas, and maybe it's the biggest dam in the world, I don't know but anyway, in these generator rooms they have these long banks, these long lines of electrical generators and the long lines of students looked like long lines of electrical generators. They were just sitting there you know, it's this kind of quiet energy, but they were still and pulsing with life and radiant, so I was happy to join the sitting.

And also I realise that they did not know, they could not see, just as I could not see how they looked,

even though that is the way they did look to me. And during this retreat, someone came late to the sitting here and this person has been practicing sitting for 20 or 30 years, this person had never seen a zendo with people sitting in it. He had sat in zendos, he had sat in meditation halls with people sitting but he had never got to see what it looked like, this time he came in late so he sat in the back of the room there, in one of those chairs and the chairs were positioned so he got to look at these rows of people sitting and he was struck by how beautiful we are and how the room's full of sitting Buddhas, sitting so still and so beautifully and he thought, "maybe these people don't know how beautiful they are when they are practicing seated Buddha". He wanted them to know, so I'm telling you what he saw when he saw you practicing.

Since 1972 I've been sitting facing out as we say, so for the last 34 years I've been getting to see how beautiful sitting people are, so that's why I keep coming, to see the beautiful people. It's a very happy thing for me to see people sitting so still, so sincerely and I know that you are having a hard time being still sometimes, sometimes you don't have a hard time, that's OK but still with the help of each other you are sitting quite still. I also understand that some of you when you're sitting alone do not sit so still, so then you think you should go to a monastery.

This situation right now is what some people would call 'monastery' we are practicing monastically this week, so if any of you want to be in a monastery, you are in one now. 'You'll never get rich by digging a ditch!' you are in the monastery now.

Now when the retreat is over, most of you are going to leave the monastery, but I just wanted to mention to you that in Tibet and China and Japan and Korea, in South East Asia, the people who are in monasteries also leave monasteries. They go in and they out and then a lot of them go back in again and then they go out. Monastic life has a rhythm. It has retreat periods and within three-month retreat periods it has more or less intense periods within the intense period and then when the retreats are over, it has a different mode, the monks go out and do other things. So actually you people are spending part of your life as monks, during this time that you are here, you are monks. As far as I know none of you are doing things which monks don't do during this week and you are doing things that monks do during this week. You are practicing together, you are helping other people practice you are receiving their help and we're practicing. The practice is happening, that's the story of what's going on here that I'm telling. Maybe you have a different story but that's my story, the story is "we are in a monastery" and we are monks helping monks be monks. So some of you think "I want to move to a monastery", and if you want to, you have my full support, but I want to point out that even if you don't so called 'move' to a monastery, you already are somewhat practicing monastically. And for all of us for the rest of our lives, the question is are we going to be in a monastery one week a year, two weeks a year, three weeks a year, four weeks a year, ten weeks a year, twenty weeks a year, 30 weeks a year or 52 weeks a year, but I just want to point out that most monks are not in the monastery 52 weeks a year, most of them go out of the monastery, however as you might guess, if you spend a lot of time in monasteries, when you are outside the monastery, you are still kind of in the monastery. And if you are not in the monastery between monastic visits, when you are out of the monastery, if you are not in the monastery, you feel kind of funny. In other words if you leave the monastery and find yourself in the security line at the airport and you don't feel like you are in a monastery, you feel like confessing and repenting because you understand that the practice can be realised right there if you find your place right where you are. Sometime people are in these lines and they feel like they are wasting their time, but sometimes they wake up and realise that they are doing walking meditation with the people. That it's a period of meditation and sometimes in a monastery people are doing walking meditation and they sometimes try to get ahead of other people in the line, just like they think they are at the airport. They actually want to butt in front of somebody in a monastery, they forget they are in a monastery and sometimes people in the security lines or in the lines to check in, they also forget they are in a monastery. They also forget that they are doing walking meditation or standing meditation at the airport.

So each of us has to see how much time we need to spend in a literal monastic setting in order to remember that we are in the monastery when we are not in the literal monastic setting.

And the monastery is the place where you are when you find your place where you are. And you could say that the monastery is the place that supports you to find your place where you are and if you have found your place where you are, suddenly there is a monastery. If you can't find your place where you are even if you are in a monastery, for you there is not a monastery, it is not happening, because you don't yet have sufficient support to find your place right where you are.

At the beginning of this retreat I would guess some people could not find their place right where they are even though everybody was trying to help you, except some of the other people who couldn't find their place and were angry and didn't want you to find your place ahead of them! But really your place, your way is right where you are and when you find the place right where you are, you are in a monastery and the people who find their place where they are, are in a monastery but also, a monastery arises when they find their place. So the stories of the Zen teachers is that they go sit some place and they find their place where they are and then people start putting buildings around them.

"Hey somebody found their place where she is, lets build a temple around them to testify to the fact that somebody found her place right where she is and the practice is occurring here, lets put a sign up which says 'temple', 'monastery', 'come, find your place'."

I don't know, it's up to each of us how much time we are going to spend at places that have signs, but we all have to find our place where we are. So each of you can look to see how many retreats like this you need so that you can eventually have continuity.

The Buddha did not live in a building like this during his practice, most of the time, he was just standing on the earth and sitting on the earth, finding his place where he was so wherever he went was a monastery.

He was walking along with his group one day and he stopped and pointed to the ground and said "this is a good place to build a monastery" and Indra the king of the gods who just happened to be in the group picked up a blade of grass, stuck it in the ground and said "The monastery is built" - If you can't point to the ground moment after moment and say this is a place to build a monastery and then build a monastery there, if you can't, get some help until you can. And I hope you get the help you need so you can be in a monastery all the time without needing walls, but you may need walls for a while, so this fall, I'm going to the mountains again where I went quite a while ago and saw the people sitting, I'm going there this fall, back to those mountains to sit there for three months again with a group of people and you know, I will be challenged that whole time to find my place right where I am every moment, and in the monastery with these people who are in the monastery for three months, after not too long into the three months, they will be coming to me and talking about being some place else, they will come to me and start talking about "after the practice period is over" and I will beg them to enjoy that they are in the monastery right now and actually it is like October 2nd and that all day Oct 2nd, they can enjoy Oct 2nd and not think about December 17th -At least today, "One day, during this practice period, would you please be here in the monastery". It's amazing! People make this big sacrifice to arrange to be in this remote mountain valley with other people who have done similarly and then when they get in there, they start thinking about how to get out and for months and years before that they are thinking about how they can get in. Still we have these places for people to go, where it is really silly that they are trying to get out shortly after they arrive.

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Article

Lay Practice and Beginner's Mind

By Francis Checkley Anryu Chiu

There comes a time in our life when we sense a change coming over us. Something we read, a casual remark, the birth of a sibling, the death of a loved parent or grandparent, the coming into the world of one's child, holding an injured bird in the palm of our hand or as in the life of Dogen Zenji, watching the curling smoke rising from a stick of incense at his mother's funeral.



At this moment, we may find ourselves choking back tears, trembling with joy or anguish as if we have been taken over by some kind of inexplicable force. And often there is a sense of being almost overwhelmed with feelings. We then find ourselves asking "What is this"? "What is going on here?", "Why am I so disoriented/ confused/ fearful/ anxious, and of course variations on the same theme. Somehow there can seem to be so much emotion, fear, sorrow or even hurt all around. Yet, now the questions begin to allow spaciousness, at least a little light at the end of a dark tunnel. And then one day, if we are extremely fortunate as I was (and continue to be) we may hear or read about the Dharma, as I did, as many of us reading this newsletter have. We may then ask as I do almost every day, how do I respond to this suffering. Whose suffering is this anyway?

Our shared suffering maybe? And how do I contribute or lessen this?

Rev. Bill Kwong one of Suzuki Roshī's first students said each morning as he awoke: "How much suffering am I going to create today"?

And Kobun Chino Sensei, a Japanese priest who helped in the establishment of Tassajara remarked: "Once we realise our true responsibility, we simply find ourselves "just sitting". "Just Sitting", becomes our natural response. In this respect I think lay practice is not too different from that of a priest. We are all investigating, looking into just how we might respond appropriately to "what arises in our life". Suzuki Roshī much appreciated the quality he described as "Beginners Mind" where there is a sense of purity or freshness to our practice, the moment to moment awareness that we haven't quite got it all figured out. The exact opposite of being dogmatic, inflexible, too sure of ourselves. And so as lay practitioners we are instructed to sit upright in stillness and in silence and to be with what arises, from moment to moment. Neither running away from our fears nor getting too involved with those intensely joyful states that come along to entice us. And if we are tired and weary and it's all a bit much, loving ourselves even if we do get overly involved in it all. For myself, practice is: "Relaxing into this growing sense of being at home, of not being on the outside looking in, estranged, unappreciative, uncaring, but rather it a confidence that it's all O.K., that life in all its mysterious and magic workings is unfolding in ways I cannot and will never understand"

So, even now as I write these words, I'm aware of an unease arising, an unease that no matter how much I may try, this miracle of life and my responses, can never be pinned down, satisfactorily explained, and categorised. My, our, suffering arises because it's almost unbearable to "just be "with this "not knowing"

Our daughter Natasha lives in Osaka, Japan, (not overly near the Fukushima Nuclear Power installations), dearly cares for her Japanese fiancée and loves her life there. And yet those fatherly, instinctive, protective voices clamour for recognition, trying to "set up camp", take prime location, cause havoc in my natural order of mind. News filters through of the large inland lake of fresh water being in peril of contamination were there to be further accidents and I give thanks for practice, for Buddha, Dharma, Sangha.

Our son Pascal lives in Cairo, Egypt where we recently went to visit. The revolution is on-going. People killed almost on a daily basis (not as many as in Syria, still...). Fear, anxiety, concern is etched deeply

into people's faces, their eyes dulled by worry. Pascal is advised daily by the British Council to avoid certain areas of the city, possible flashpoints. It's a high risk environment, even crossing the road carries a possible death threat. Once again my mind presents a numerous number of tempting pathways to follow. Should I follow? Would they lead to a greater sense of compassion for not only our son, but for all beings that live in such danger? Or, would following such a pathway to its destination, speak to me only of despair, sadness and of being emotionally overwhelmed?

With such questions, daily I try to sit upright, over and over again take refuge in the Three Jewels, and give thanks for this precious life we all share. Acknowledging that such questions in one form or another are continuously arising for us all, I try to share time in silence and stillness with others who "sit & practice". Is this of help to those with financial problems, marital concerns, and serious health issues? I don't know. Does it in some small way make a difference? I hope so but really I don't know, taking comfort in Tenzin Reb's counsel that we are saved not by the results of our actions but in our vow to save all beings. Sometimes, often, the question arises, is "just sitting" enough? Could I do more especially for Dharma friends who perhaps struggle with the early life issues of neglect, abandonment, bereavement, matters left in the shadows of the mind, unresolved until slowly/ sometimes suddenly breaking into awareness after years of practice. For many of us, and I most definitely include myself, Zen Buddhism and Sangha was unconsciously a place in which I hoped to find a sanctuary for my personal wounds. One day if I "just sat", I would be zapped by this thing called "Enlightenment" and I would have no more problems. It soon became clear that this was not the case and some kind of on-going remedial work would be needed to address and heal the past.

And so a part of my "lay practice" where I am not in close proximity to a teacher (a disadvantage indeed), is to quietly admit to my imperfections. This is not to say that a teacher is without imperfections, but that any confession is preferably shared rather than done alone. Presently, our fledgling Sangha lacks the experience and therefore the resolve to incorporate a ritual called confession before the community "whereby individuals could publicly recite the precepts, and admit in some discreet fashion their shortcomings. Perhaps, the past can only be changed by allowing our confession and contrition to transform and heal (our ancient twisted Karma born of body, speech and mind) as we continue to sit together. In this way my faith, if not always my practice, is in the "Prajna Paramita" of upright sitting, the importance of Precepts and the confession of my shortcomings recited in the Purification. This, together with my dedication of any merit to all of our Ancestors and to all beings, in my understanding, completes the circle.

Ultimately for me this practice has brought blessings I would never have thought possible and more than enough surprises that I sometimes struggle to integrate.

May all beings live in peace and harmony.

Deep bows,

Francis Checkley

Anryu Chiu

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Creative Writing

The Buddha That Stayed at Home - A newly Discovered Story from the Teachings

By Angyu Devin Ashwood

Thus have I imagined. Once the Lord was staying at Savatthi, in Anathapindikas monastery, in the Jeta grove. And among a number of monks who had gathered together after their meal, after the alms round, sitting in the Kareri pavilion, there arose a serious discussion on the merits of going forth from home, as they said: 'It is necessary that one of good family goes forth and gives up worldly things' and 'The Lord himself showed us his example' and 'We are sure to accomplish the path by following our Lord thus'.



Upon hearing this, the Lord rose and said "Enough monks, enough, sit and the Lord will espouse to you what he has seen with his purified divine-eye faculty, surpassing the powers of humans"

"One hundred and eight kalpas past, a girl was born to the Kalissali family to a mother of lowly caste. No auspicious signs heralded her birth, no sages predicted a glorious future and no wise men bought gifts. She grew up in obscurity with all the weaknesses and desires, joys and follies of a child. A girl of average intellect she did not shine above her brothers and sisters.

As she grew into a woman, she loved and lost, felt the pain of clinging to her desires and struggled to find meaning to life. No-one noticed the growing doubt inside her. No-one saw the widening expanse of voidness in her life, no-one witnessed her inner scream of daily obscurity.

She married and had a child but this too bought no end to her inner anguish, she knew she must seek where no-one else had looked, but she did not leave her husband and child in the middle of the night, but stayed with the day to day cleaning and the day to day hardship of family life, the arguments, the sleepless nights, the unfulfilled expectancies and dreams.

She sought answers that never came, but she noticed that there were those who carried their pain with dignity and peace, these wise friends she tried to be with, to learn from and in time, she found a teacher and after that, another and another, but none of them answered her deepest question. She then had more children.

So she set out alone in the centre of her family, raising her infants, working day and night to pay her way, balancing the calling of her husband, parents and the expectations of family. Each day, she opened to the teacher of her experience, her pain, frustration, disappointment, pleasure, joy, laughter and each day she sat in the stillness and confusion of her own mind. She sought resolutely for the cause of all suffering and vowed to be unmoved till she had penetrated the truth. After eight years of struggling with her ridiculous vow, on the full moon of Vesak while sitting under the clothes drying rack, she finally gave up her quest and went once again to soothe her crying baby, and in this simple act of compassion, she realised that infinite Buddhas in the ten directions were with her and never sought the truth again.

After seven weeks of contemplating her great awakening, she realised that there was no way to teach what she had learned but instead lived out her life in the obscurity of devoted service to her family and community and a great many gods and men were inspired by her kindness to live the holy life.

This was the Buddha called 'No-one-heard-of'."

Thus the Lord spoke and the monks rejoiced at his words.

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Article

Twelve Gathas - Short Verses for everyday use

By Angyu Devin Ashwood

Thich Nhat Hanh describes gathas as “short verses we can recite during the day to help us dwell in mindfulness and look more deeply at what we are doing.”

The following writing is inspired by reading a book that was recently given to me by a dear friend. *'The Dragon who Never Sleeps, Verses for Zen Buddhist Practice,'* is by Robert Aitken, forward by Thich Nhat Hanh. Most of the gathas below are from the book, but some are from elsewhere and some I wrote myself. I hope you may be inspired to use these or better still, write your own gathas and practice them for the welfare of all beings.



This morning as I wake

I vow with all beings

to bring all things to awakening
without throwing off the world.

While brushing my teeth

I vow with all beings

to renounce 'getting it done'
and joyfully receive the present.

When children wake me early

I vow with all beings

to open to their cries
hearing the call to practice.

When hatred stirs my heart

I vow with all beings

to remember Kanzeon
and offer my life to her.

Whenever I'm tempted to judge

I vow with all beings

to remember we both have two nostrils
and the same implacable fate.

When the children get cranky and whiny

I vow with all beings

to stop what I am doing and cuddle
and show them I know times are tough.

When amused by thoughts in zazen

I vow with all beings

to wave them through with a smile
and not follow them out the door.

Whenever the telephone rings

I vow with all beings

to allow it to ring one more time
as I carefully breath in and out.

When traffic is bumper to bumper

I vow with all beings

to move when the world starts moving
and rest when it pauses again.

When the table is spread for a meal

I vow with all beings

to accept each dish as an offering
that honours my ancient path.

When greed stirs my heart

I vow with all beings

to realise the end of suffering
and make an offering to Buddha.

This evening when I sleep

I vow with all beings

to still all things

and clear the mind of confusion.

I believe the first and last are traditional gathas, I am unaware of the authors name. The 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 11th were written by me, all the others are from Robert Aitken's above-mentioned book.

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Article

Lay Practice My Experience - 'Can You hear the Dharma on the Wind?' - (Tenshin Reb Anderson Gaia House 2006)

By Michael Elsmere Kogan Muju

Soto Zen Lay Practice; Experiences, Questions and No Answers!

Firstly to place the subject in perspective. Lay practitioners have always been an important part of Buddhism. In legend this goes back to the time of the Buddha. The lay practitioner Vimalakirti was said to be as realized as the Buddha and recognized by Shakyamuni as an enlightened teacher. With this precedent was set the tradition of lay practice that has continued with many eminent lay teachers emerging over the centuries. In China the tradition and importance of lay practice was exemplified by Layman P'ang, his wife, and their daughter who were all realized Zen practitioners.

However although there is this occasional emphasis on the laity I infer from my reading that more often than not their practice was seen as having a lesser status than that of the monks.

Despite the history of Zen in India, China, Japan and Korea with the emphasis on a monastic way of life for most of us this is not an option. How then are we as lay practitioners to aspire to Eihei Dogen's advice of holding firm to Buddha, Dharma and sangha? Despite Zen having settled its roots in the west for little over 50 years there is still no widespread culture of monastic Zen especially in England. It often seems that by the time many of us awaken to the dharma we have other responsibilities in our lives. Despite this no system to fully support lay sanghas and lay training seems to have emerged. Yet there will always be a majority for whom practicing in daily life with families and colleagues is the only reasonable path. In my experience it appears that there are few, if any, templates or examples from the past that we can use to rectify this. It seems to be a classic case of 'being a lamp unto ourselves' as remarked by the Buddha himself.

Until a short time ago I often found myself yearning to be in a monastery. This understandably, I think, grew out of a perception that a monastic setting was the only place where I could be as deeply involved as I wanted to be, a place where the real 'Buddhist professionals,' were and where I could obtain teachings regularly! As stated above even though Zen has moved to the west its old eastern traditions still trail behind it! It is only recently that I have committed myself more fully to practicing in the place where I find myself right now. This is not to say that when I read of Practice Periods at Green Gulch and long retreats at Tassajara I do not have some moments of yearning! It is also clear that such periods of deep immersion are an important part of any lay practitioners life.

Another of my regrets although these days I try not to cling to it too tightly is that sometimes I have felt I needed a close relationship with a teacher who was accessible to me. Someone that is, who understood the day to day problems I was encountering in some detail and depth. This even though I recognise the great support and wisdom I have received from within Dancing Mountains and other sanghas. For most of my practice then I have not had a teacher present to whom I could go on this regular basis with questions and for teachings. My first teacher in Sweden was a pupil of Deshimaru and had trained for many years in Korea but only came to the community in which I lived twice a year for two months at a time. Tenshin Reb Anderson who I was inspired, even 'electrified,' by on a visit to Green Gulch in 2001 has only visited England annually. I realise that some would argue that a teacher does not need to be actually present.

It is certainly true that in some ineffable manner I have been supported by both Reb and Suzuki Roshi whose photograph on the back cover of an early edition of 'Zen Mind Beginner's Mind,' opened up to me the vast and pure world of Soto Zen. Neither of them has been physically present in UK or, in the



case of Suzuki, not in the physical realm at all! There is however little doubt that having an accessible teacher is one of the greatest treasures that lay practitioners could possess. The teacher/pupil relationship is often seen as being at the heart of practice. Indeed the Buddha declared that it was of greatest benefit to have a good teacher. In this respect the positive developments over the past four years in Dancing Mountains have been nourishing. In addition to Tenshin Reb Anderson we have directly experienced the dharma face to face with many fine teachers from our lineage and others and this trend continues to grow and blossom. Even as I write there are major retreats being planned in August (led by Ingen Breen) and a Rohatsu retreat 1st to 8th December co-led by Ingen Breen and Catherine Gammon whom it is a great delight to welcome to our shores once again. It does seem that after many years of practice my dream of having a teacher close by will be at least partly realised! But even as I attain this desirable situation another question I have long pondered arises. Should we in the future, in the absence of having a recognised teacher near, look to the possibility of having teachers who are also lay practitioners? But then there is the matter of protecting our lineage. Respect for lineage has protected the transmission of the Dharma from corruption and is perhaps essential to keep the blood line of the tradition pure and true. To do this it may be argued a long and perhaps arduous training that might take ten years or more mostly in a monastic setting is necessary. But in my view the danger is that this traditional defence might also contain within itself justifications for hierarchy, status and a certain elitism. There have been and continue to be examples of fine lay teachers in many other traditions, but in Zen the lineage has always been passed on through a monastic line. As stated above there are good practical reasons for this but does it need to continue in this fashion? Lay teachers would not necessarily be second-rate. Could lay practitioners perhaps under certain circumstances receive transmission when appropriate? I recall the Sixth Patriarch, Hui-Neng. Although the legend relates that he was pounding rice in a monastery kitchen for many months, he received transmission when he was still a lay man and was not ordained until many years later. I have recently learned much about Tibetan Buddhism from a lay practitioner whose deep knowledge, pragmatic manner and long experience has given me considerable insight and a much better understanding and appreciation of this ancient tradition.

The digital revolution that has occurred over the last few years has also opened up bountiful other possibilities to receive the dharma. Teachings and teachers are available at the touch of a screen and a practitioner can hear them in any place or situation they wish. Whether teachings given under such conditions are as beneficial as those presented within the context of a sessin, retreat or zendo may be debatable but, I believe, this modern way of presenting the dharma is an invaluable resource for our world. The developments that are taking place at San Francisco Zen Center whereby ceremonies such as the Full Moon Ceremony are streamed will provide much needed support and inspiration for all lay practitioners.

Whilst a teacher is seen as desirable to support our lay practice another essential is that of sangha. Dancing Mountain's followers are spread out over the UK but the way that energy for practice has bubbled up in the various regions and then been utilised has been one of the most fulfilling aspects of our development over the past few years.

Sangha meetings which avoid dharma discussion/teaching/training out of a rigid respect for lineage can be superficial. Leadership within local sanghas may also be variable and as there are no defined guidelines laid down relating to the running and governance of such sanghas the potential for problems to arise is obvious. In the absence of a teacher who is deeply in touch the solutions to problems in such groups may be protracted, ignored or even denied to the detriment of all. Despite all this it is clear that Dancing Mountain's local sangha groups are becoming a firm foundation for the wider sangha in the UK. Having a fully authorised teacher or lay teacher in close touch with each of these would, in my view, give them a strength, purpose and influence which they otherwise would not possess. If DM is to fully flower this thorny question of lay training should be discussed and debated.

It will probably be some years before we have the resources to found our own temple or practice place. Here we would have a space devoted to Soto Zen practice in the tradition of Shunryu Suzuki Roshi. This is certainly part of my vision for DM. At a time of increasing environmental stress the costs and ethics of us or our teachers flying to and from U.S.A. might seem increasingly inappropriate. Happily in the light of recent developments in DM I do see the possibility of having a permanent teacher here being realised. But what then? As our sangha develops, as I have faith it will, how do we offer teachings to a new generation of seekers? Will we of necessity have to found our own monastery so that our teachers can be trained here? Or is it time to "master the limitless approaches to the Dharma" and discover the capability to deliver teaching and training to the lay

practitioner in novel ways that supersede the traditional and yet respect and protect it? Whatever the answer to these dilemmas as Eihei Dogen the founder of the Soto Zen Tradition taught “pure zazen must be practiced.”

In preparation for the writing of this article two articles one **Lay Zen Buddhist Practice** by Robert Aitken Roshi (27 April 2009) and another by Simon Child 1996 The New Chan Forum were most helpful.

Michael Elsmere

Kogan Muju

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MOUNTAIN SILENCE

Issue 18;

Book Review

'In This Very Life' - The Liberation Teachings of the Buddha

By Sayadaw U Pandita

Sayadaw U Pandita is one of the foremost living masters of Vipassana meditation. He trained in the Theravada tradition and is a successor to the late Mahasi Sayadaw. During his long teaching career (he is 92) he has taught many of the Western teachers and students of the Mahāsi Burmese style of Vipassana meditation. He is the abbot of [Panditārāma Meditation Center](#) in Yangon, Myanmar.



U Pandita is known for teaching a rigorous and precise method of self-examination. He teaches [Satipatthāna](#) or Vipassana meditation, emphasizing [sīla](#) or moral discipline as a requisite foundation.

An extract from the instructions for participants during retreats at U Pandita's Monastery Panditarama in Myanmar www.panditarama.net hint at the rigour of the practice:

1. *There is only one task to be done by the meditators, i.e. to practice with:*
 - *respect and sincerity*
 - *diligence*
 - *heroic effort*
 - *perseverance*
 - *patience*
 - *sustained, continuous, moment-to-moment mindfulness from the time of waking up in the morning to the time of falling asleep at night.*
2. *Meditators should do 14 hours of formal sitting and walking meditation per day.*
3. *Meditators should keep alone and observe silence. Socializing is not encouraged at all.*
4. *Meditators must refrain from talking.*
5. *Meditators must keep reading and writing to an absolute minimum.*
6. *Lay meditators must carefully observe the eight precepts. Smoking is not allowed. Monks and nuns must strictly observe their respective monastic discipline.*
7. *Sleep should be limited to 4-6 hrs per 24 hours.*

And I thought Zen could be tough!

U Pandita became well-known in the West after conducting a retreat in the spring of 1984 at the [Insight Meditation Society](#) (IMS) in [Barre, Massachusetts](#) in the United States. Many of the senior Western meditation teachers in the Mahāsi tradition practiced with U Pandita at that and subsequent retreats. The talks he gave in 1984 at IMS were compiled as the book under review "In This Very Life."

I have been studying this with a Swedish friend in a weekly series of SKYPE conversations and I would recommend this method to anyone who wishes to inquire deeply into a book or sutra. It is fun, enlightening and sociable!

The style of 'In This Very Life,' is lucid (the translator The Venerable U Aggacitta) is to be congratulated) humorous in places and spiced with metaphors and analogies that clarify with simplicity and power.

When speaking of the effort and concentration required in lifting the foot in walking meditation:

'As we get closer and closer to this lifting (of the foot) process, we will see that it is like a line of ants crossing the road. From afar the line may appear static, but from close up it begins to shimmer and

vibrate. From even closer the line breaks up into individual ants, and we see that our notion of a line was just an illusion. We now accurately perceive the line of ants as one ant after another ant. Exactly like this, when we look accurately at the lifting process (of the foot) from beginning to end, the mental factor or quality of consciousness called "insight" comes nearer the object of concentration.'

Another example of U Pandita's ability to clarify what can often appear to be complex concepts occurred in a meeting with a cousin of the king of Thailand when she asked him,

"If you were to give the most concise, the clearest explanation of the nature of vipassanā possible, how would you do it?"

Sayadaw had her open her palm and then make a fist. "What do you perceive?" he asked.

"I perceive tension and hardness, Bhante," she answered.

Sayadaw had her spread her hand, "What do you perceive?" he asked again.

"I perceive loosening and movement, Bhante," she answered.

Sayadaw told her to slowly, minutely and mindfully make a fist and open it. "What do you perceive?" he asked again. She answered, "Other than coming to perceive even more the tension and hardness, looseness and movement, I came to perceive hardness and softness, warmth and coolness."

"That kind of looking to perceive the natures which are, as they are, is the work of vipassanā," Sayadaw said. When he said that, she understood well the nature of vipassanā. She was extremely pleased with Sayadaw's ability to give such an immediate and experiential explanation. Most people think that vipassanā is extremely difficult work. It seemed that the Thai king's cousin had thought that way too. Apparently, she concluded that though she had thought it difficult work before, now that Sayadaw had explained it, it was quite easy.

Yet another vivid analogy is given when speaking of the care and attention that is required when meditating:

"A meditator can also be compared to a person carrying a bowl that is brimful with oil. You can imagine the degree of care that is required not to spill it. This same degree of mindfulness should be present in your practice."

'In This Very Life' is wide ranging, covering many topics from Sila, Basic Morality, to 'Potential Unwholesome States' in the chapter on 'The Ten Armies of Mara,' to the 'The Seven factors of Enlightenment'. *"One does not become enlightened by merely gazing at the sky."*

Whilst recognising that this book is teaching a very different tradition to our Soto Zen practice I have discovered In U Pandita's wisdom much to reflect on as well as gaining some insight to the Burmese Vipassana tradition. I feel certain I will return to these wise teachings again and again.

Review by Michael Elsmere

Kogan Muju

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Poetry

Hungry Goats

By Guido Montgomery

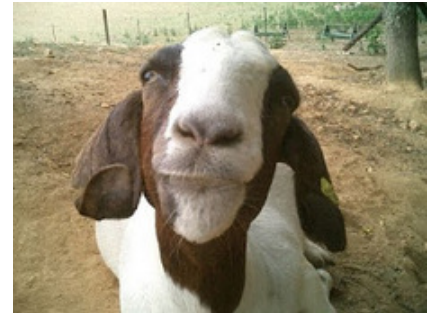
The land is lean from lack of rain,
My goats are hungry as hell.
I feed them rough hay and buckets of grain,
Striving vainly to husband them well.

Their instinct's to browse sweet leaves as they grow;
The stuff I give them's too dry.
What they desperately need is the succulent flow
Reaching from earth toward the sky.

They suffer that want, but never complain
Or reproach me my careless neglect.
Living the present, with no sense of blame,
They simply endure and accept.

I admire their indifference,
the lightness they show,
Whilst I am weighed down with regret.
Those goats are encouraging me to let go,
To graze on the now and forget.

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MOUNTAIN SILENCE

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Poetry

Accomplishing the Way

By Angyu Devin Ashwood

Staying home, not going anywhere.
In the temple.
Precepts of compassion for walls,
and a heart of devotion for fire.

Children's cries, call me to practice,
laundry and dishes offer themselves to me,
day after day.
My lovers past and present, my dear friends and teachers.

I sit in the hall,
my sangha surround.
It seems I could leave at any moment
but the cries of the world whisper again and again

'stay home'.

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MOUNTAIN SILENCE

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[Retreat Report](#)

[Totnes Sangha Up Date](#)

By Francis Checkley Anryu Chiu

Recently our Sangha were happy to welcome Shundo David Haye, Ino at SFZC to lead a week-end (non-residential) retreat held at our local Natural Health Centre. Both days brought in about fifteen people.

Shundo David Haye, originally from England, is an ordained priest and has been living at San Francisco Zen Centre for some twelve years including several years of practice periods at Tassajara.

Together, we took turns in reading from Dogen Tenzokyokun (Instructions to the cook) and reflected on how words written for the monastic community in Japan almost 800 years ago, are still relevant for us as we live our lives today. Shundo explained how Dogen's Tenzokyokun had come alive for him during his time as Tenzo (Head Cook) at SFZC, as his team often read from it prior to working in the kitchen. Of particular importance was Dogen's exhortation to waste not even a single grain of rice in the preparation of food for the community and of focusing wholeheartedly on the task at hand.

During the week-end, Shundo gave time to adjusting our postures if and when appropriate, as well as leading lunch time service and the chanting of the Heart Sutra.

For those who wanted, Shundo suggested a brief time out to watch the procession of the Olympic torch through the town centre, no doubt the first and maybe the last such occurrence in the history of Zen Practice.

We thank Shundo for his brief but deeply meaningful visit as we continue to practice together as a community and hope someday (maybe next spring) he might be free to visit again.

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MOUNTAIN SILENCE

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Sangha Update

Skies Opening, Rain falling

By Rebecca

Hello everyone, a few pieces of Hebden Bridge, so you can get a feel of how we are up here. Yes lots of that wet stuff falling all around, leaving rivers seeping and banks soaking, and very very lush green valleys all around.

We are settling into the room we are renting and have sole use of. We have moved our Wednesday sitting group there and have also used it for day retreats, and some unplanned more spontaneous sitting sessions. Other groups are also starting to use the space which is exciting.

We are still using the Yoga Centre for our Sunday sitting group. Numbers have reduced here as the group constantly changes form, ebbing and flowing a bit like our rivers.

Ingen Breen joined us for a weekend retreat in June. The theme was Deepening Practice. We are feeling very grateful for the gift of Ingen and how his gentle landing in our valley continues to enrich and contain our practice.

We now have other dates with Ingen booked for summer weekend retreats:

[July 21st and 22nd](#)

[August 25th and 26th](#)

[September 15th and 16th](#)

They are non-residential, but as mentioned before, they will be running from our room which sits right next to Hebden Hostel where myself and Ingen will be staying. It offers reasonable rates and comfortable accommodation. We hoped this arrangement may encourage families or friends to come together to stay and have a break alongside having a space to practice in. We are experimenting with costing and at the moment are seeing if we can cover costs by asking for Dana for Ingen and the room, with no set price for courses. This will be reviewed over time.

For those who have sat with us you will know that we have a strong commitment to sitting, but little practice in form and ceremony. Ingen has been softly introducing this to some of us, and there is a feeling of this supporting and deepening our practice. We even now have a mokugyo if i get my camera sorted I will share of photo of it, our room and some of our sweet sitters in the next newsletter.

Please do call me if you have questions about when Ingen will be with us in Hebden and how we can share with all to benefit others.

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MOUNTAIN SILENCE

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Retreat Report

Warminster Weekend Retreat 20-22 April 2012

By Michael

This peer led retreat was held in Warminster Wiltshire at The Centre for Addiction Studies (an apt name for a place to sit zazen!! www.actiononaddiction.org.uk Thanks to Devin for organising this superb venue to practice together. These weekend retreats have grown out of the monthly SKYPE conferences of the group who came together as a result of their commitment to work on the formal/legal development of Dancing Mountains and its constitution. It was recognised early on that sitting together as regularly as possible was a vital part of this process.

At present the group consists of Frances Collins Co Chair, Devin Ashwood Co Chair, Chris Brown Treasurer, Michael Elsmere Secretary, Wendy Klein Membership Kath Bennett, Gill Jackman, Lucy Ellis Fundraising.

We were also joined by Francoise Elvin and Lloyd Skett.

It was decided that we would be in silence from after dinner in the evening to breakfast and that we would sit formally with morning and noon services and refuges in the evening.

On the Saturday morning we listened to one of Tenshin Reb Anderson's talks on Genjo Koan given in 2006 at Gaia House. There was discussion and questions based on this afterwards.

One of the central purposes of this particular weekend was to further consider the wording of the precepts within the constitution. There had already been considerable discussion of this and we hoped during our retreat to develop these ideas further. Gill had taken the opportunity to develop novel ways of opening up solutions around the precepts. This resulted in a wide number of suggestions regarding their length and wording which ranged from the view that the precepts should be worded as concisely as possible whilst others considered it important to include the wider meaning of them as in the San Francisco Zen Centre version. Other suggestions were that we should study Tenshin Reb Anderson's book 'Being Upright' to help inform our decisions. Some draft precepts have also been sent to Reb for his comments and advice. After much debate and discussion Chris Brown offered to collate the varying ideas and to present them at the next SKYPE meeting on 27 June.

Many thanks to Kath and Gill for arranging the catering with so much flair and efficiency.

Deep bows to all those who participated especially those from the north who travelled a long way to be at this weekend.

Michael Elsmere

Kogan Muju

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