



# MOUNTAIN SILENCE

## NEWSLETTER OF THE DANCING MOUNTAINS ZEN SANGHA

Issue 23 ; Winter 2013/14

### Social Action

#### Events

**Brighton One Day Sit**  
with Brighton Sangha  
**11th January 2014: 00:01**  
- 00:01

Brighton One Day Sit  
[FULLY BOOKED]  
[chrisjhannah25@gmail.com](mailto:chrisjhannah25@gmail.com)

#### January Practice Period

**5th February 2014 to**  
**27th February 2014**

Three week practice period - in your home!  
[wendyklein@btinternet.com](mailto:wendyklein@btinternet.com)

#### Weekend Retreat in Glastonbury

with Ingen Breen  
**15th February 2014 to**  
**16th February 2014**

A weekend of Zen in Somerset  
**Cost:** £80-£120, please enquire

07875 155464  
[devin@dancingmountains.org.uk](mailto:devin@dancingmountains.org.uk)

#### Non-residential Practice Period

with Ingen Breen  
**21st February 2014 to**  
**3rd May 2014**

3 month non-residential Practice Period  
[hebdenbridgezen@gmail.com](mailto:hebdenbridgezen@gmail.com)

#### Dancing Mountains Group facilitators weekend

**29th March 2014 to 30th**



Big Issue Seller

#### Editorial

By Devin Ashwood

2013 has been an important year for Dancing Mountains. Not only have we organised our first large, week long retreat with our teacher Reb Anderson Roshi, we have also completed the paper work to formally incorporate as a Community Interest Company and endorsed this at our Annual General Meeting. 2014 promises to be another big year as we are now beginning to have more teachers who are available and willing to lead retreats and practice periods, including Ingen Breen who will be in Hebden Bridge for three months during the spring to support the sangha.

We have titled this newsletter Social Action and have received articles on homelessness, a powerful theme this time of year as temperatures drop below freezing. It seems appropriate for Buddhists who practise in a tradition that has been passed on for thousands of years by intentionally homeless monks to embrace this issue. Can we now live the teachings of these wise teachers while remaining in our homes, taking care of our responsibilities as members of families and

#### In this issue...

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By Francoise Elvin

## March 2014

A weekend of support for local group facilitators

**Cost:** £120 (in the region of)

carolhunter135@hotmail.com

society and still reach out to those who live on the streets and others? Please take the time to consider the offerings presented in this newsletter and ask yourself, "what is an appropriate response?".

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Previous issues are available [here](#)

## What are you doing?

By [Francoise Elvin](#)

## Sewing support

By [Devin Ashwood](#)



## 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

We welcome your articles for the Spring edition, poetry, pictures, letters, retreat reflections and book reviews! Publication date: 21st March, deadline for submission of material 1st March.

Submissions to the Newsletter/Website:  
Devin Ashwood, 07875 155464

Address: 18 Westfield,  
Bruton, Somerset, BA10 0BT

[devin@dancingmountains.org.uk](mailto:devin@dancingmountains.org.uk)

## Donations

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# MOUNTAIN SILENCE

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Article

## Halloween Sesshin

By Ingen Breen

Dear Friends and Fellow Followers of the Way,

After a few hiccups we finalized a plan for the Halloween Sesshin at Hebden Bridge. It was a real joy to be on and to be leading this Sesshin. I knew almost everybody there and got to know those whom I had not previously met.



It was a first in more than one way. Our first time to have a Sesshin in Hope House, a first time to have a non-residential Sesshin in Hebden Bridge, a first time to have Oryoki meals in Hebden Bridge, and a first time to have 'our own' Sejiki ceremony in this lineage in the UK. It was wonderful to have a self-catering Sesshin, with completely 'home-grown' Tenzo and assistant.

The Sejiki ceremony is complex and I knew before going into Sesshin that it was nothing like the ceremonies we've done up to now. I also knew

we could practice the ceremony every day before we did it for real and these practice sessions, along with hours of zazen and thoroughly delicious & nutritious meals, made it all flow smoothly, even the mistakes. And I left that Sejiki ceremony feeling it was the best I'd ever been to, with only one possible rival at Tassajara. What made it so memorable and touching was the intimacy of a small group and the atmosphere of having it in a small zendo, made 'cavelike' with candles, a carved and glowing pumpkin and a group of standing ghouls. I really hope we can have another Halloween Sesshin next year. It is something to look forward. I also found the teachings about the Hungry Ghosts were well received and were meaningful to those present.



In Gassho,

Ingen.

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# MOUNTAIN SILENCE

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## Article

### Halloween Sesshin Hope House, Hebden Bridge - 27th October – 2nd November 2013

By Sam Bartlett

The start of our new tenancy in Hope House was initiated with a 5 day retreat, led by Ingen Breen, who has been actively encouraging and supporting our practice here in Hebden Bridge for the past few years.



The 5 day retreat was an intensive formal practice period, which had 13 sitters, including Ingen, intimately assembled in the front sitting room, which has been set up as a zendo to encourage and support further practice. Each day started with us on our cushions (or chairs or benches) at 6am and ended there at 9. 30pm, after an evening Dharma talk included.

The theme for the week was Hungry Ghosts and practice included daily rehearsals for a Sejiki procession, which took place on Halloween. Traditionally, the Hungry Ghosts represented ancestors who had not been properly provided with what they need to flourish in the afterlife. However, the Hungry Ghost also describes a psychological condition inherent in us all, where one is never satisfied, or fully capable of living and appreciating what each moment has to offer. This procession provided an opportunity to address this suffering, by offering food, chanting and remembering those close to us who had recently died. It was a noisy, colourful and powerfully playful ritual, which was enjoyed by all, including Devin and Nicky's children who looked on in silent wonder...

This 5 day sesshin saw us sitting and eating oryoki style together in the zendo. This intense period was punctuated by the different forms and ceremonies, which I am beginning to understand, provide a neutral mirror to reflect ones patterns, and opportunities to welcome and work with those...this is what I have been left with, along with an experience of intimate, generous and compassionate containment that has allowed me to do that. I feel blessed. Thankyou to all that enabled that, I hope to see us sitting together again soon.

Bows and blessings,

Sam

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# MOUNTAIN SILENCE

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## Event

### Announcing our first Practice Period at Hebden Bridge

By Ingen Breen

We are pleased to announce a non-residential Practice Period at Hebden Bridge, led by Ingen. The Practice Period will commence on the Spring Equinox with a sit and dharma talk on Friday, February 21st, and a One Day Sit on Saturday, 22nd. It will run through the beginning of May, ending with a One Day Sit on May 3rd or else a Sesshin taking us up to May 3rd.

The details of the Practice Period are yet to be filled in but it is intended to have a One Day Sit every month, with perhaps a Weekend Sit at least once, and towards the end to have a five-day or seven-day Sesshin. We will have a weekly dharma talk, a weekly dharma class, and a weekly Half-day Sit with an Oryoki meal, either breakfast or lunch and both on the One Day Sits.

All in all this looks like a great opportunity to step a little deeper in to Zen practice and delve a little deeper into the teachings. You may choose what parts of the Practice Period you wish to sign up for, you do not have to sign up for the whole.

We will publish the schedule as soon as possible.

Looking forward to this new step and to practicing with each other soon,

Ingen, the Hebden Bridge Zen Group, and the Dancing Mountains Sangha.

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# MOUNTAIN SILENCE

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## Creative Writing

### Homelessness - Voicing Our Great Shame With Love For The Invisible Ones - Reflections from the heart .....

By Ji Den Frances Collins



Our Dancing Mountains Board meets regularly by skype and as often as we can face to face to practice together. We have submitted all our official documents and await incorporation. This new edge of 'becoming' left us exploring questions about the shape of our practice. Who benefits? What do we want to commit to in the form of engaged practice? How could we join together as a sangha to work toward change that benefits our community?

I offer here an amalgamation of reflective writings that we shared after our conversation on the subject of homelessness in our so called '*developed world*.'

'I admit I haven't liked this time of year for many years now. The mercenary thrust of sales from Halloween until exhaustion in January, the wasteful burning of electricity in flashing lights with Santa or the nativity whether you want it or not leaves me feeling alien. The use of children's images to manipulate spending on charities we don't trust anymore adds to the burden of helplessness about what else to do. Expressing views that are different to the masses carries the risk of being called, 'Humbug.' Existential questioning engenders a sense of frustration with the culture we live in and an energy that then dissipates into self-blame or hopelessness. The winter of 2009 was especially cold in UK and Ireland. Walking on New Year's Eve along Galway Bay in my big duvet coat I enjoyed the water and the ice with 2 good friends. On our way to eat and enjoy music bringing in the New Year we passed over a bridge where a young man sat freezing and homeless. In a moment as if out of time I saw people pass by as if he was invisible, something I have also been conditioned to do. Eye contact is powerful and in a moment I was hooked. I sat down on the street beside him and we talked for a while. He was 19 years old and had left Poland with his girlfriend who was pregnant. He was sure that moving to Ireland they would get work that would lead to a better quality of life. My friends joined in my dilemma whether to join them since we had a table booked and it was getting late or find some way to help despite all the old beliefs about why people are on the streets in this culture of abundance. It was as if I couldn't leave a limb behind and they are good hearts. We managed to book a B&B for the couple that night and give money for food. They were beautiful in their surprise, love and gratitude. But this didn't satisfy as a happy ending. From the pavement I watched how people passing looked through me also as an invisible one. It felt cold, detached, set adrift, de-humanised and, now known, I have never let go of the experience, brief and penetrating. I remain haunted by faces I pass on the street expressing their pain, shame, addiction and abused bodies as a means to be visible to the past suffering they can't express. Homelessness is the great growing shame of our so called developed world. Bodhisattva vows crash in my heart to open and engage in some sort of engaged and visible action, not on my own, but as a sangha, as a body toward interconnected bodhisattva action.

I am motivated by, The Joseph Rowntree Foundation/Crisis report which states:-

*'One of the most worrying trends of recent years, that of rising homelessness. The study found that the number sleeping rough rose again last year by 6% in England and by 13% in London. Over the same period, the number in temporary accommodation increased by 10%, with a 14% rise in B&B placements. In total, homelessness has increased by 34% in the last three years (having fallen in the previous six), with 185,000 now affected in England.'*

[http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/admin\\_uploads/research/HomelessnessMonitorEngland2013\\_ExecSummary.pdf](http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/admin_uploads/research/HomelessnessMonitorEngland2013_ExecSummary.pdf)

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# MOUNTAIN SILENCE

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Writing

## On meeting homelessness...

By Angyu Devin Ashwood

I can walk past people living on the street and tell myself "giving money might just feed a drug habit", "I'll give something to a homeless charity", "they don't want me to draw attention to them" or "Connecting with them with a smile acknowledging our common humainty is an appropriate response". But any conceptual or even physical response seems meaningless in the face of the situations and stories that have led someone to be living outdoors. How can I respond? Do I meet each stranger with the mindful presence with which I go to meet my Zen teachers? I confess I do not, and if I reserve the best of myself for meetings with those I consider important, am I not a fraud?, selecting the worthy and unworthy, reaching out to those who least need it and passing by with a swift excuse, those who are maybe most in need?

I think that the reality of homelessness, especially in the depths of winter forces us to face ourselves, question our compassion, to reach for an appropriate response. I do not know what this is, but I'd like to commit to being present for life and giving my whole self to whoever I meet on the streets. Awakening is everywhere!

~ Angyu Devin Ashwood

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# MOUNTAIN SILENCE

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## Writing

### Are you willing to be homeless?

By Ko Gan Kath Bennett

Spending time reflecting and opening to the reality of homelessness, threads have appeared & somehow woven themselves in my mind.

Listening to Steve Stucky's talk - 'Gratitude' (worth listening to) he reminded me of a phrase I've heard before ...'we don't know what tomorrow will bring'.... and I recall pondering this almost dismissively.

Alongside Dancing Mountains I practice with the Community of Interbeing (COI) and the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh. One of the forms is to share reciting their '*Five Mindfulness Trainings*'. As we sat at the last meeting in a cold hall, I was caught by a snippet from the second training ...'remembering that I already have more than enough conditions to be happy' ... and caught my thoughts of returning home to tea & a warm fire; how fortunate and grateful.

Fast forward a week ... at the Chester sangha listening to another talk by Steve Stucky, '*Cultivate Beginner's Mind*'. (Another recommendation) I recall the snippet '*willing to be homeless ... the radical notion in Buddhism is to be willing to be homeless, to be willing to be always at the edge of what's familiar.*' Then he posed the questions: '*What's it like to be right at the edge?*' *You might take a moment and just imagine .... can you imagine your whole universe has somehow gone.*'

Threads were weaving.....

I sat with Steve's question reflecting if conditions changed and my living changed & my world vanished - if tomorrow was different and I became truly homeless. I was surprised by the depth of fear and discomfort that arose, the mind went into overdrive. And as I continued to sit I recognised how easily I retreat to my world of comforts. When faced with persons on the street I am quiet, avoiding; it's easier not to say anything or just expressing token concern. Inwardly there's a reluctance to truly recognise these 'invisible ones', to be present, to face the suffering.

So what now? Not sure.

What I am sure about is that there is an intention for 2014, to gently hold the fear; to in some way acknowledge & be present to all those I meet, the visible and the invisible and in some way raise awareness of homelessness through engaging in some visible action with our sangha.

If you feel moved to join us in exploring how Dancing Mountains could come together to explore a way to support an end to homelessness, please let us know at ----[directors' email](#) or Facebook?

~Ko Gan Kath Bennett

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# MOUNTAIN SILENCE

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## Poetry

### On looking at a wall in Hope House

By Sue Kay

"A wall is a wall, is a wall" you say  
Not necessarily so my friend, not necessarily so.  
Walled in, walled out, walled up  
See the writing on the wall,  
is that another brick in the wall?  
Struggle with form, form with struggle  
which way round for the oryoki bowls?  
I need to slant my chopsticks, can't take discipline without question  
though maybe straight chopsticks say 'no question without discipline'?  
What is the space between the cushion and the wall,  
between the looker at and the looked at?  
In a moment of peace, I see your turmoil,  
in moments of turmoil, all is clash and clatter  
Do we hear the same bells, smell that same incense,  
feel the same backache and taste that same porridge?  
Can you see what I see?  
In Hope House we were busy busy busy -  
ceremony, cooking, eating, ceremony, planning  
juggling plumbers, coal deliveries and ourselves  
Oh, yes and there was  
zazen, kinhin, zazen, kinhin, zazen.....

~Sue Kay

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# MOUNTAIN SILENCE

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Poetry

## Words don't reach

By Francis Checkley

Been check-mated,  
struck dumb,  
silenced,  
stilled,  
opened up,  
turned around,  
moved empty handed into a dark,dark night,  
Gratitude returns,  
with a heart of light.

Francis Checkley

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# MOUNTAIN SILENCE

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[Creative Writing](#)

## [What are you doing?](#)

By Francoise Elvin

'What are you doing?' Buddha asked Jesus as he was dying on the cross.  
'I tried taking the blame.' He replied, but it didn't go too well, so  
I'm practicing 'no abode' through my Death and Resurrection.  
'Oh' said Buddha. 'Thanks for clarifying that.'  
They parted on good terms.  
In another realm, not too far from where they were,  
A few wars got cancelled.

~ Francoise Elvin

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# MOUNTAIN SILENCE

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Creative Writing

Misconception

By Francoise Elvin

'Thanks so much for coming at short notice'  
said a disciple to Avalokisheshvara Boddhisattva, as she  
unpacked some things.  
'I brought my tool box to the place where the 2 worlds meet, as requested...' she replied.  
'...Apparently the hinges need oiling?'  
'...I am so sorry to have troubled you', said the disciple.  
'There is no need for oiling, for there are no doors,  
No hinges, and therefore no creaks and no turbulence.'  
'Oh, ok, I'll be on my way then', said Avalokiteshvara Boddhisattva,  
'I won't charge a call out fee this time, since I was passing,' she said smiling,  
packing away screw drivers, oil and paraphernalia...  
'I'm glad everything is already in order...'  
She walked off back towards Home, toolbox in hand,  
Silhouetted in the glowing light of dusk.  
...And couldn't help a nod and wink towards the Buddha when she reached that  
Side of Town!

~ Francoise Elvin

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# MOUNTAIN SILENCE

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## Article

### Sewing support - for people wishing to sew a rakasu

By Devin Ashwood

We have a number of sangha members either considering sewing robes for ordination or are currently in the process of doing so. If you would like support in making a decision to sew, in sewing itself or can offer support to others, please get in touch as we are looking at developing a mutual support group for committed practitioners on this path.

[devin@dancingmountains.org.uk](mailto:devin@dancingmountains.org.uk)

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