



MOUNTAIN SILENCE

NEWSLETTER OF THE DANCING MOUNTAINS ZEN SANGHA

Issue 25 ; Summer 2014

Light

Events

Good Friendship and Perfect Wisdom

with Tenshin Reb Anderson Roshi
16th August 2014 to 23rd August 2014

7 day retreat -
BOOKING RE-OPENED,
Last few places

Cost: £260-£460

rebineurope@gmail.com

Dancing Mountains AGM Retreat

3rd October 2014 to 5th October 2014

A weekend of sitting together and our AGM meeting

Cost: £55

07875155464

devin@dancingmountains.org.uk

2 day Retreat

with Brad Warner
6th November 2014 to 8th November 2014

Brad Warner 2 day residential retreat

07970 425932

hebdenbridgezen@gmail.com

November Intensive Practice Period

with Ingen Breen
12th November 2014 to 30th November 2014

Practice opportunities with Ingen Breen in Yorkshi

07970 425932

hebdenbridgezen@gmail.com



Kannon

Editorial

By **Angyu Devin Ashwood**

This issue announces the Dancing Mountains Annual General Meeting and retreat weekend, which has been an intimate and nurturing event in the past and we hope you can support us by coming along. We also offer details of another Rohatsu sesshin, this time with Ingen Breen and David Haye, a wonderful opportunity to deepen practice together in this traditional re-enactment of the Buddha's enlightenment. We offered a Rohatsu last, two years ago and it was deeply appreciated by all who attended.

An important book review by Catherine, fascinating retreat report by Sue and contributions of some wonderful poetry and writing all make what may be the last Mountain Silence for a while well worth taking time out for.

I am stepping back as the coordinating editor of the newsletter and so far no-one has offered to step into these shoes, so until they do, I am

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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**

Rohatsu sesshin 2014
with Ingen Breen
3rd December 2014 to
9th December 2014
Rohatsu sesshin
Cost: £390
07875155464
devin@dancingmountains.org.uk

sorry to say this quarterly publication will live up to its name and be truly silent! We hope you enjoy this last (for a while) Mountain Silence, may it find an auspicious re-birth in the not so distant future, when someone offers themselves to fill the void. It has been wonderful to facilitate this vehicle so far and I am happy to offer wholehearted support and guidance to anyone who is interested in breathing life into it once more.

with deep bows to all,

Angyu Devin Ashwood

Previous issues are available [here](#)

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 next edition is as yet unscheduled, however, we welcome your articles, poetry, pictures, letters, retreat reflections and book reviews for the time Mountain Silence is re-born! Submissions to the Newsletter/Website: Devin Ashwood, 07875 155464

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

devin@dancingmountains.org.uk

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Book Review

[Notes on The Hidden Lamp](#) - The following review was written for the San Francisco Zen Center blog Sangha News, and appeared there on November 12, 2013

By Catherine Gammon

The new koan collection, [The Hidden Lamp](#), edited by [Zenshin Florence Caplow](#) and [Reigetsu Susan Moon](#), takes as its manifestly traditional starting point the collecting of one hundred Zen teaching stories. The radical difference is not simply that the stories feature women as students, adepts and masters, but that the commentaries and reflections paired with them are offered not by one living teacher, but by one hundred, all women, and from many lineages and Buddhist traditions.

This diversity brings a palpable vitality to stories that include both the classic and the contemporary, and a single reflection can suddenly shift with startling effect from a traditional way of reading to a wake-up call grounded in engagement with the collective present, as for example when Pat Enkyo O'Hara turns from explication of a koan presenting a playful encounter between Iron Grindstone Liu and Master Guishan Lingyou, to ask, "What does this koan teach us today? Is it not that New York melts the arctic ice; that karmic threads of colonialism have woven twenty-first century violence; that restitution across the globe rests in our hearts, here at home?"

In a similar spirit are moments like this from Susan Murphy:

In a life-world on the brink of crumbling in mass extinctions, while human forms of insanity are roundly certified as "business as usual," how will you actualize the cry of the rooster with this whole great body and mind of fields, mountains, and flowers?

And from Joanna Macy:

My attention, too, is so preoccupied with what we, collectively, are doing to our world.... My spiritual practice calls me to come to terms with the destruction we humans are causing. I wouldn't want an "enlightenment" that would keep me from knowing and feeling the ways our actions are unraveling the very web of life. I want to be present to the suffering that comes with "the spirit of the knife and the axe"—the spirit of bulldozer and chainsaw, of deep sea drilling and mountaintop removal, of factory farms and genetically modified seeds.

And from Natalie Goldberg:

All the meditating in the world doesn't stop a rape in the Congo. Some effort needs to be made; we must be willing to get our white clothes dirty. We don't need more wisdom poured into an empty vessel. We need to be willing to hear about horror, broken bones, economic collapse, betrayal.

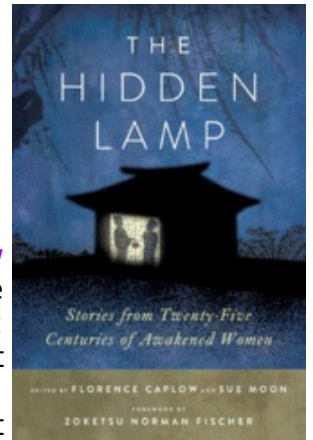
It is tempting to go on, but these moments that bring timeless practice face to face with contemporary crisis are not the only treasures here.

Most Zen students are likely to be familiar with the expression "the bottom falls out of the bucket," but how many of us know its origin in the life, work, and enlightenment story of one particular woman? How many of us who chant a dedication to our women teachers that ends with the name Chiyono know who Chiyono was? No doubt such details are not new to every reader, but for me coming across them was one of the many delights of this book.

The story of Chiyono goes like this: In the midst of long and deep practice, on a full moon night, she fills her old bucket at the well. The bucket breaks and the moon's reflection falls away with the water. This is Chiyono's moment of awakening, not unlike the possibly more familiar stories of a monk awakening after years of study and practice when his broom sweeps a pebble to ping against bamboo, or another who awakens on seeing a peach tree blooming.

Chiyono's enlightenment poem expresses her understanding and gives us the well known image:

With this and that I tried to keep the bucket together,



*and then the bottom fell out.
Where water does not collect,
the moon does not dwell.*

In her reflection on this story, Merle Kodo Boyd offers a fresh take on the image itself:

As much as I may wish to appear competent at all times, I cannot immerse myself in Zen practice without a willingness to come apart. Sometimes it's appropriate to stop patching things back together. I have come to trust the true freedom of living where the moon does not dwell.

In her own commentary on the koan "The Old Woman's Relatives," Caplow captures the spirit of the whole collection when she writes:

But you must understand that it is the asking that matters, not the answer. Because every real asking, every real meeting comes from the place where the Buddha glimmers in the depths. In the asking is the answerer; in the answer is the asker. And in the meeting of the two, there are mountains, rivers, and the whole earth.

The Hidden Lamp is a large and spacious collection, rich with the voices and years of practice of these hundred living women and two and a half millennia of women forebears, known and unknown. I have sampled here only a few of them. For all their richness and diversity, these stories and reflections share the central wisdom expressed by Emila Heller:

Taking refuge in a community of practitioners for so many years gave me the gift of knowing that we are all suffering, and my faith is that there is the possibility of an end to suffering.

May it be so.

The Hidden Lamp: Stories from Twenty-Five Centuries of Awakened Women
Edited by Zenshin Florence Caplow and Reigetsu Susan Moon
Foreword by Norman Fischer
Wisdom Publications
Paperback
440 pages, 6 x 9 inches
\$18.95
ISBN 978086171659

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Retreat Report

Joy and Jhanas - A retreat with Leigh Brasington

By Sue Blackmore

A strange thing has happened. I took a retreat that was utterly different from any I've been on before. I learned new skills, entered states I never knew existed, and since then I seem to have changed. I've no idea whether this retreat would have had the same effect under any circumstances, or whether by luck it came at just the right time for me, but the effect has been extraordinary.

This all began in 2010 when [Leigh Brasington](#) gave a lecture at Sharpham House, near where I live in Devon, on the topic of the [jhanas](#) - a series of eight increasingly absorbed states reached through concentration. I had heard of these mental states and was fascinated by the very idea, although I'd assumed that they were accessible only to advanced adepts - or were perhaps just a fantasy of the early Buddhist literature. I had to find out more.

Leigh turned out to be a smiling American who describes himself as a retired software engineer and ex-hippy geek from Mississippi, and his style was refreshingly down-to-earth. He explained each state and the methods used to reach it and said that anyone can explore them. 'Come to one of my retreats in California' he said. I was not about to fly to California, but he said that in October 2013 he would be leading a ten day retreat at Gaia House. I wrote the date in my diary. The following year I moved the note to my 2011 diary, then 2012, then 2013. After keeping it for so long I had to go!

Like most of you, I guess, my previous practice has been Chan and Zen. I have done many retreats with [John Crook](#) and the [Western Chan Fellowship](#) at the Maenllwyd in mid-Wales, and that was where I first met Reb. I subsequently sat several Zen retreats with him, including some at [Gaia House](#). I meditate every morning and practice 'just sitting' i.e. open meditation. I have my eyes open and practice paying attention equally to all things without judgement or entanglement.

So it was a bit of a surprise when, on the first day, we were expected to close our eyes and concentrate on our breath. This felt terribly weird. Where has the floor gone, and all the sights and sounds around me? How can I concentrate on just one thing when I'm so used to being aware of everything else? I needn't have worried. Within a few hours I found the narrow focus was quite possible. Indeed, I suspect that training attention in one way can transfer to other skills - although that's a question to be answered by research.

We spent the first couple of days building up what Leigh called 'access concentration' and, in his daily lectures, hearing what lay ahead. His method of teaching comes from his own teacher, [Ayya Khema](#), and is based on the early sutras. This is different from the jhana practice taught by [Pa Auk Sayadaw](#) that is based on later traditions. Having read the entire Pali Canon, Leigh had many insightful stories to tell while he explained how the discourses describe each of the eight jhanas.

The first jhana (J1) describes a monk, quite secluded from sense desire and withdrawn from unskillful qualities, who enters and remains in the first jhana. He experiences "rapture and pleasure born from withdrawal, accompanied by directed thought and evaluation. He permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the rapture and pleasure born from withdrawal. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by rapture and pleasure." To this Leigh added descriptions of joy, bliss and other happy states, all saturating the entire body.

This all sounded ridiculously delightful, and slightly unconvincing. How could we possibly enter 'rapture and pleasure' at will? But Leigh simply told us what to do. He said that if we followed his instructions we would experience the upwelling of a kind of energy called *piti*, marked by visual phenomena such as white light or coloured floating blobs, shaking of the whole body or of just parts, and rushes of

energy. I couldn't really believe that I would experience any of these, and feared I might just imagine the symptoms and never know if it was really *pīti* or not – if there is such a thing. Nevertheless, I threw myself into the practice and tried to do exactly as he said.

We began each sitting period with gratitude, planning the session, building up motivation and metta, and then practiced [Thich Nhat Hanh's](#) 'Breathing in, I calm body and mind; breathing out, I smile'. From there, still smiling, we were to build access concentration by focussing on the sensation of breath passing through our nostrils – not on anything else, not the rise and fall of our chests, or any other sensation, just the end of the nose. Difficult, I thought, but OK. Then at some point, with sufficient access concentration, we were to shift attention to our smile.

Something to do! My first reaction was, 'This is such fun!'. I have spent half a lifetime meditating with nothing to do – just sitting; heading in some incomprehensible way for insight or even for the ultimate 'non-meditation'. I have sat those dreadful traditional [Chan retreats](#) in which you rise at 4 a.m. and spend endless sleep-deprived hours just sitting, waiting (or trying not to wait, or to let go of waiting) for 'silent illumination'. Illumination may indeed come, but it's so tough.

Now I had something to do. I wasn't bored. I wasn't frustrated. I wasn't battling with unwanted thoughts. If any came along they were instantly cut off by the demands of the task in hand. Terrific!

Concentrate on a smile? What an odd thing to do! But this was just Leigh's down-to-earth way of getting us to concentrate on 'rapture and pleasure', building it up until it was suffusing the whole body. And it worked. There I sat, filled with joy and pleasure, smiling away idiotically. And then the shaking began. For me it was my head rapidly shaking back and forth, my lips and chin twitching, buzzing in my ears. For others it was different kinds of shaking. At first I was convinced I'd just made it up but in one of the discussion sessions someone mentioned rushes of heat, like a hot flush. Yes, said Leigh, these happen with *pīti* too. And I had had just that; a sudden rising flush of heat like a menopausal hot flush. So it seemed I was not imagining things after all.

As the days went by we learned how to use the breath to end the sensations of *pīti*, calming down the rapturous joy and stilling the directed thoughts and evaluations to enter J2. This is a state of 'rapture and pleasure born of composure' and unification of awareness. As the *pīti* begins to subside a second kind of energy called [sukha](#) arises. This is much less dramatic than *pīti* and associated with contentment and equanimity, J2 being a mixture of the two. These odd effects may be the same as those described in [tummo](#) or the [Kundalini](#) experience.

J3 involves *sukha* alone. The sutras describe the fading of rapture so that the monk 'remains equanimous, mindful, and alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters and remains in the third jhana, of which the Noble Ones declare, "Equanimous and mindful, he has a pleasant abiding." ... there is nothing of his entire body unpervaded with pleasure divested of rapture.' In J4 even this fades away to leave a completely neutral emotional state.

Leigh's tentative [theory](#) is that we begin with an active seeking or wanting system based on the neurotransmitter, dopamine. Withdrawing from this seeking increases norepinephrine (noradrenalin in UK English) and activates opioids (endorphins – the brain's own opiates) which correspond to *sukha*. As norepinephrine levels fall, the opioids remain, corresponding to the mindful 'pleasurable abiding' of J3. Finally the pleasure generated by the opioids also fades, leaving the neutral state of J4.

Leigh himself has meditated in a brain scanner, and both EEG and fMRI scans show different patterns corresponding to his entering and leaving the jhanas. The researchers [report](#) what seems to be self-stimulation of the reward pathways in his brain. But the details of Leigh's theory need much more research, more funding, and more adepts able to enter and leave the jhanas at will.

I found the transition from J1 to J2 quite obvious but that from J2 to J3 was not so clear. I wondered, again, whether I was just imagining things. Yet the descriptions are clear and specific, and the states feel just as they are described. As the days went by I gained confidence in just following the instructions and letting the states arise and fall away. From the lectures and discussion periods I learned that some of the other retreatants had done many retreats with Leigh and could navigate most or all of the eight jhanas. Others, like myself, were beginners, having varying degrees of success.

J3 was as far as I got during the retreat. J4 seemed just too difficult and scary. This is described as arising 'with the abandoning of pleasure and stress ... he enters and remains in the fourth jhana:

purity of equanimity and mindfulness, neither-pleasure-nor-pain. He sits, permeating the body with a pure, bright awareness'. In this state there are no thoughts, just deep stillness reached by concentrating on neutral emotion – not an easy thing to do! Leigh described a sinking or falling sensation, like dropping down a well or falling in space, and suggested we might physically slump down too. I have met this on-the-edge-of-falling sensation before on Zen retreats and I met it again here. I felt I was about to drop off the edge of an abyss, but I never did. Perhaps I was too scared. But in the months since the retreat I have become more familiar with this falling into silence.

So what's the point? Isn't this all just a load of gimmicks – a set of fancy states to claim achievement – the opposite of the Zen endeavour? Not according to Leigh, who says the states are not so important in themselves but are valuable as aids to insight. The tradition claims that insight is smoother and more pleasurable with jhana practice; that 'the vehicle of dry insight' lacks the powerful serenity of the jhana practitioner. I guess our Zen practice is 'dry' and perhaps this deeply emotional practice really helps – or perhaps it's just a diversion. As you can tell, I am still asking lots and lots of questions.

Towards the end of each session we had to exit from one of the jhanas and practice insight meditation. Then we did a kind of summing up in our own minds, along with metta, insight, recognising impermanence and getting up mindfully. I did indeed have some insights during the retreat but I cannot tell whether they were due to the jhana practice rather than just the many hours of meditation. In any case, it was not these insights, such as they were, that were dramatic, but the after-effects.

Back home I had to decide what to do about my daily practice. After some deliberation I reverted to just sitting and I now continue my regular morning practice as usual, adding occasional longer sits in the evening to practice the jhanas. This combination has worked well. But what is so surprising is that something about me has changed. That smile that we spent so much time concentrating on now seems more natural, and anger seems less so. When I sit down to meditate I find I am smiling and relaxed. When I'm walking around or gardening, a smile seems not far away. When I stop work for a moment and look out of the window a smile comes more naturally. It's as though a switch has been flipped in my brain so that pleasure and contentment are part of its default state rather than a rarity. I am so grateful for this – and gratitude too seems to pop up of its own accord. So – increased happiness, gratitude, contentment – can they really be the result of 10 days of this peculiar practice? I do not know.

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Poetry

Swan

By Chris Roe

Preening,
Soft, virgin white feathers,
Aware of my presence
But not of my world.

Before me, another world,
No analytic philosophy,
No targets, budgets or schedules.
No self-appraisal,
Or attempt to be
Something other than
Just part of.

Now she rests,
Head tucked under wing,
Slowly drifting down stream,
Among the reeds and dragon flies
And the trees on either bank.

I stayed awhile,
Until the moment was lost
But not forgotten,
A picture to place
Upon this page.



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Article

Dharma Ripples?

By Michael Elsmere

Old pond . . .
a frog leaps in
water's sound
Basso (1644-1694)



When does a retreat begin and when does it finish?

Already several weeks, even months ago, I was thinking about Tenshin Reb Anderson's retreat in Sweden this summer and was sorting out in my head the practical matters; finances, flights, arrangements to be made whilst I was away etc. But apart from this rationale I noticed that this anticipatory mood was working on me at a different, deeper level. I was musing on the topic of Friendship and Perfect Wisdom and also remembering 'deep sangha moments' from other of Reb's retreats at Gaia House Devon and last year at Hebden Bridge as well as brief moments of recollection from my stay at Green Gulch in 2001.

'All beings walk to and fro at the threshold between two worlds. The gate is open and wide. Are you awake?'

'By learning to welcome everything we accept the emptiness of all things.'

The Lotus Sutra Aug 2009 Gaia House Devon

'Enlightened zen conversations take place in unconstructed stillness and silence.'

Zen Koans and Bodhisattva Precepts Sep 2010 Gaia House Devon

'Zen is the practice of tuning into the phenomenal present. We need enough faith to tune in exactly all the way not a little less or a little more.'

Wind Bell Winter 1995

And, of course, not just Reb's teaching but all the great teachers, nuns, monks and Zen masters of the past and also those in other traditions.

Master Dogen was asked on his return from China 'What did you find there?'

Dogen replied, 'a flexible mind'.

'To carry yourself forward and experience myriad things is delusion. That myriad things come forth and experience themselves is awakening.' Genjo Koan

A monk asked Yun men 'What are the teachings of a whole lifetime?'

Yun Men said, 'An appropriate statement.'

The ascetic Bahiya asked the Buddha the way to happiness. 'When seeing,' the Buddha said 'just see, when hearing just hear, when knowing just know and when thinking just think'.

So now embraced and supported by these teachings old and new I move with faith and gentle anticipation towards the southlands of Sweden, to Good Friendship and Perfect Wisdom.

All these ripples of memory and reflection are like a pebble dropped into the ocean of dharma, gentle, circular waves that move outwards, outwards into the cosmos of Indra's Net, permeating our lives, spiralling in the depths of our conscious and unconscious lives.

It seems to me that retreats, koans, dharma stories, have no beginning, no end, are universal, beyond duality, more like that hiatus, the subtle pause in the middle of a haiku that gives such poems their feelings of transcendence and going beyond.

Old pond . . .
a frog leaps in
water's sound
Basso (1644-1694)

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