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MOUNTAIN SILENCE

NEWSLETTER OF THE DANCING MOUNTAINS ZEN SANGHA

Issue 10: Summer

Sangha

News

Visit from Zen Priest Catherine Gammon



With this issue on "Sangha", we celebrate the arrival of Catherine Gammon from the San Francisco Zen Center, who is visiting our UK sangha for the next three months.

Catherine was ordained a Soto Zen priest by Tenshin Reb Anderson Roshi in 2005. Catherine has been in residential training at San Francisco Zen Center since 2000, and served as Shuso, or head monk, for the Spring 2010 practice period at Green Dragon Temple/Green

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Friday 3rd September, Gaia House, Devon

Gulch Farm. She received precepts as a layperson in 1998 from Rev. Shohaku Okumura. Before entering residential training, Catherine wrote fiction and taught creative writing in the Master of Fine Arts program of the University of Pittsburgh. Her novel *Isabel Out of the Rain* was published in 1991 by Mercury House, and her shorter fiction appeared in many literary journals between 1977 and 2000.

Catherine will offer Dancing Mountains teachings in the South West, North West and East of England during her stay. Topics include teachings on emptiness, writing workshops and Dogen studies, as well as leading practice in the Soto Zen tradition. If you would like to attend any event, please [click here](#) for Catherine's schedule, and [here](#) for more details on the teachings that will be offered. Please note that the current schedule is provisional and subject to change. Please contact leaders of local groups for more information on events in your region.

Dharma Talk

Practice with everybody, fools and all!

by Tenshin Reb Anderson

I recently spoke about the tradition of bodhisattva vows, these huge vows; and the practice of practicing with everybody - even practicing with fools. Bodhisattvas vow to practice with fools and with geniuses. I recently heard the statement that stupidity, unlike genius, or genius unlike stupidity, has its limits. Bodhisattvas vow to practice with everybody: - geniuses, fools, and murderers. This is the amazing vow of the bodhisattva; it's so amazing – to promise to practice with everyone. But that's similar to promising to enter the oceanic practice of Zen meditation. So, in my description I said we would practice to enter the oceanic practice of Zen meditation – the big practice of bodhisattvas. At noon service we chant about what it's like in this



Upcoming Events

[Click here](#) for further details of these events. *DM indicates a retreat using Dancing Mountains forms and liturgy.

July 9 - August 6
Friday evenings, 7.30 - 9pm
Zen Buddhism in Totnes
with Catherine Gammon. *DM
[Click here](#) for further details

July 13- August 3
Tuesday evenings, 7.30 - 9pm
Bodhicitta: The mind of awakening
with Catherine Gammon.
[Click here](#) for further details

August 27 - September 3
Zen Koans and Bodhisattva Precepts
with Tenshin Reb Anderson. *DM
Gaia House, Devon.

November 20 - 21
Chan weekend retreat.
Led by Ned Reiter.
Shekinashram, Devon.

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.

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oceanic practice - in the bodhisattva practice and wholeness of practice and equally wholeness of realization. [Read more...](#)

Article

Sharing Life in Sangha

by An Ryu Chi U, Francis Checkley

Though conventionally we may speak of "Sangha", in truth it is completely inter-dependant and so inseparable from the three treasures of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. The richness and intimacy of our sharing of life springs forth from the great Bodhisattva vow to save all beings, and from taking refuge not in our small selves but in the truth of our Buddha nature. We witness today almost unimaginable suffering as our environment is challenged by crisis after crisis, the disintegration of social cohesions, the resultant alienations and loneliness, and the widespread apathy about just what to do in the face of such challenges. It is as if the very fabric at the heart of all existence is being wrenched apart, as if the connective bond which unites all beings is in imminent danger of collapsing around us. And so we vow to meet and to sit together in silence and stillness. And to sit upright in the midst of our personal and collective suffering so that in doing so we might become more intimate with our fears and compulsions. In this simple yet profound act of faith we find the courage to share our vulnerability and our longing for meaning.

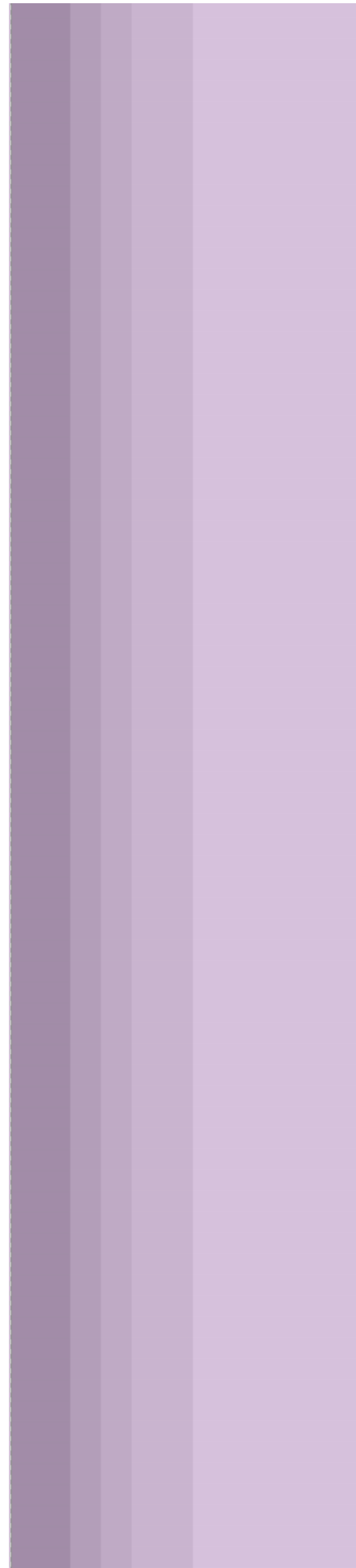
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Article

Some Thoughts on Sangha

by Ko Gan Mu Ju, Michael Elsmere

Just now in late Spring, South Devon is a paradise; it's always a paradise but at this time its true nature is more obvious. The sun shines from dawn to dusk out of a sky more reminiscent of Provence or Catalonia. Trees are



alight with the green energy of the season laden with a perfection of blossom unsullied by rain or wind. The banked, steep lanes are strewn with the yellow and golds of primroses and dandelions, purpled with tiny shadowy violets. All this gathering of energy and beauty is caused by the changed relationship of the sun to the northern hemisphere of our planet. Clear evidence if we need it that the Earth, indeed the Universe, exists and depends on the constant harmonious relationship of one thing to another. Life is relationship. The world is sangha. In the Lotus Sutra, Dogen even views space and time as bodhisattvas upholding our practice. [Read more...](#)

Retreat Reflection

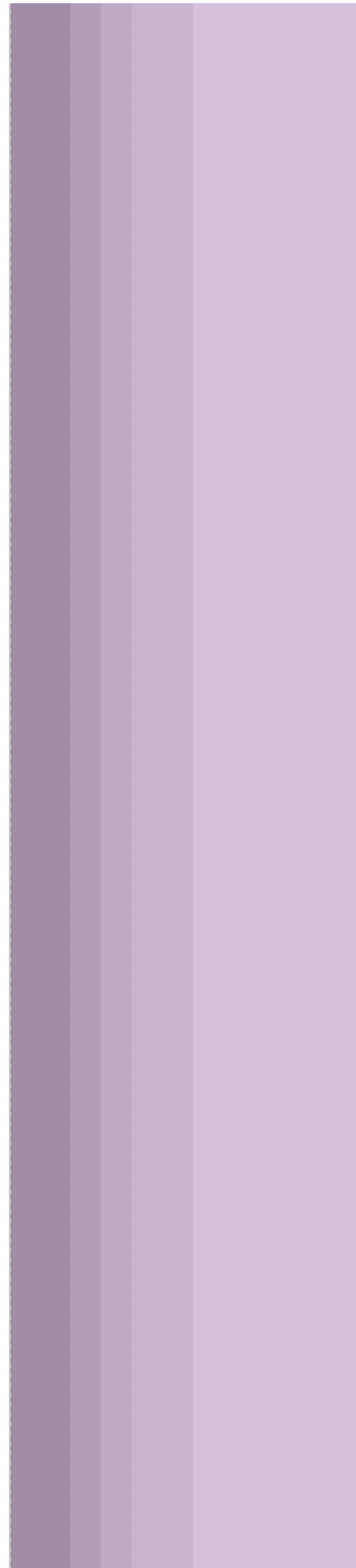
Meditation is a holiday for the heart

by Ko Gan Mu Ju, Michael Elsmere

On the 7th May this year I found myself in terminal 5 at Heathrow waiting for an incoming flight. A year previously I had, perhaps rashly, promised a long time Swedish friend I would accompany her to a retreat in the Theravadan tradition at Amaravati. Lena had listened on CD to many of the talks given by Ajahn Sumedho who is the Abbot. When she learned that he was to lead a 10-day retreat she was determined to take part but felt she needed a 'like minded friend', as she put it, to accompany her. Subsequently we applied, only to find that in the lottery for places I had obtained a place but she had not! However as May approached as she was still on the waiting list her name came up for a place. [Read more...](#)

Next issue of Mountain Silence

Autumn edition with a theme around "Suffering". We welcome your articles, poetry, pictures, letters, retreat reflections and book reviews! Autumn issue publication date: 30th September, deadline for submission of material



15th September.

Previous issues are available on the [Dancing Mountains website](#).



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For enquiries related to this newsletter please email:
chrisb.by.name@gmail.com

MOUNTAIN SILENCE

Issue 10: Summer

Dharma Talk

Practice with everybody, fools and all!

A Dharma Talk given by Tenshin Reb Anderson at Felsentor, Switzerland in the Summer of 2008.

Transcribed by Frances Collins and edited by Chris Brown.

I recently spoke about the tradition of bodhisattva vows, these huge vows; and the practice of practicing with everybody - even practicing with fools. Bodhisattvas vow to practice with fools and with geniuses. I recently heard the statement that stupidity, unlike genius, or genius unlike stupidity, has its limits. Bodhisattvas vow to practice with everybody: - geniuses, fools, and murderers. This is the amazing vow of the bodhisattva; it's so amazing – to promise to practice with everyone. But that's similar to promising to enter the oceanic practice of Zen meditation. So, in my description I said we would practice to enter the oceanic practice of Zen meditation – the big practice of bodhisattvas. At noon service we chant about what it's like in this oceanic practice - in the bodhisattva practice and wholeness of practice and equally wholeness of realization.

But another translation is: In this oceanic practice, each moment is equally the same practice and the same enlightenment as all beings. That's what the actual oceanic Zen practice is. It's not my practice. It's not your practice. It's the same practice as you and me and all beings. It's the way we are practicing together with everyone. So the bodhisattva vow is to promise to enter that ocean of practice; to practice together with and in the same way as all buddhas, all bodhisattvas and all fools... and all frightened, violent people. That's the actual practice that bodhisattvas vow to plunge into and to live in that practice. The vow is to promise to practice that way and that practice is the practice of buddha.

We also have two images that I like; one is that if you go out into this ocean or any ocean, you start at some point or place; you either get dropped into the ocean at some point or you start at the shore and move out. Where you put your foot in the water, that's where you enter the whole ocean at some small point. Then if you move out into the ocean,

where you can't see the shore anymore, the ocean looks like a circle of water and that's where we are now. We are in the ocean of the world; we are in the ocean of Zen practice and we see a circle of water. This is normal, a part of the situation of life, and bodhisattvas live in circles of water too.

Bodhisattvas have vows and their vow is to open to the whole ocean. Even though I can only see a little bit of it right now, I promise to open to the whole ocean. Opening to the whole ocean means opening to everything in the circle I am in right now and opening to all beings and practicing with them. It is practicing opening to the whole ocean, to every thing in the circle I am in right now, every being I can see right now and practicing with them. But it is practicing realizing that this practice is occurring in a vast space, though I can't see the vast space; but all the forms I see are in the context that all these forms are empty, ungraspable, unfindable. I take care of everything in the little world in the context of vast emptiness, or I take care of things in the little world in the oceanic context of bodhisattva vows. I take care of this person and this person in the context of taking care of all persons. I am taken care of by this person or this person and this person but in the context of all beings taking care of me. The vows are the context for my little activity and the little activity of my friends. Again, someone may be rude to me or kind to me but either way that rudeness, that cruelty, or that kindness, is in the context of emptiness which is also in the context of all beings are helping me, not just this person; all beings are being rude to me not just this person. So it's caring for things, attending to bodhisattva practice in this circle of water, taking care of things in the context of emptiness, in the context of this huge practice and in the context of these huge vows.

Bodhisattvas vow to live in circles of water. They vow to live in the whole ocean but because they are committed to the vow to live in the whole ocean, they also vow to live in each little circle that they wind up in. Again, if they wind up in the circle of being abused that's their circle and they vow to live in that one. If they wind up in the circle of sickness, of getting old, that's the one they vow to live in. They vow to be relaxed and playful and they vow to play with everybody in that circle. They vow to play with everybody in that circle and if people do not know how to be relaxed and playful in that circle, they vow to teach them. They vow to create a play area. They vow to develop a positive attitude towards play. They vow to promote appreciation and respect for playfulness. They tell people that playfulness is necessary in order to live in the circle of water, in order to open up to the bodhisattva vows. In order to open to the oceanic vows we need to open up to the circle of water and not try to get away. They tell people that playfulness is necessary and that I am

relaxed here. Not only am I relaxed here but I am playful here. Not only am I playful here but all the other people who are tense and serious and frightened in this circle, I vow to teach them to relax and play too so that they too can open to the vast practice that surrounds us.

I heard a rumour that Switzerland is one of the most affluent countries in Europe, in the world. Since it is one of the most affluent countries in the world, people want things to stay the same. They want it to continue to be the most affluent country. They don't really want to be playful. They don't say, let's be poor next week shall we? Or...That's a nice thing to say but it's not funny. We pay homage to playful Swiss people. Wherever you go, his animal is the otter. Otters are very playful animals. It would be good to learn about otters. They live in streams and also the ocean. The question is whenever they are fighting are they playful? It's possible to fight in a playful way. It's possible to play chess in a playful way. Part of creating a positive attitude toward being playful is to recognise that playful is always liable to become frightening. So in this retreat the bodhisattvas provide a playful environment so that you may feel afraid. Many people are feeling fear during this lovely retreat where you can be playful. We have some forms for you to play with and since you can play with them you can be wrong....and be punished (laughs). Someone asked me if I still have fear and I said yes. But actually, I would say that I don't HAVE it but I feel it! There's fear in this world and I feel it. The question is how do we deal with the fear? I would say that the way to deal with the fear is to be relaxed and playful. Then, if we are relaxed and playful, we are likely to have more fear. We don't get to say, okay I'll be fearful and then we won't have fear anymore. No. If you're playful, fear can come; if you're not playful fear can come. In order to be playful you are opening to fear. If you are not playful, you are not opening to it. But it still comes, and you are not opening to it, necessarily.

So in this circle of water we have expectations and obligations, obligations and expectations, fear, tension. These things work together. In Zen we have practices to stimulate these intentions, obligations, fears and tensions to come out in the open where we can relax with them and play with them, not by ourselves but with others. We play together. That invites more to happen. We start to open up to the emptiness of the fear, the emptiness of the expectations, the emptiness of the forms. I am working on a book now and one of the publishers asked me what the difference is between psychotherapy and Zen training. I think one of the main differences is that it's not really different. Zen is psychotherapy as a ceremony. You could say it is psychotherapy plus ceremony or psychotherapy plus ritual. But it is really psychotherapy AS a ritual.

When you take care of things like fear and tension, you are attending to these things. Etymologically, psychotherapy means you are attending to the psyche. You are attending to your fear, attending to your greed, attending to your hatred. I am suggesting that if you attend to your fear in a playful way you will be healed – that's psychotherapy. In Zen it is not only that you will be healed, but in the healing you will realize these things are empty and that what you are doing is a ritual. The things that you are doing, even the playfulness, are vast emptiness. You are playing with these people but you're not just playing with these people; you are playing with ALL people.

When you realize that you are playing with all people, then you understand that what you are doing right now is just a ceremony. It's a little ritual in a circle. It's a ritual of how you are taking care of your fear. Your taking care of this fear is the basis of the entire universe. That's the bodhisattva vow surrounding you. When the bodhisattva vow surrounds you while you are taking care of your fear, you're not really only taking care of your fear, you are doing a ritual of enacting the cosmic oceanic practice ceremoniously in this caring for your fear. If I don't take care of my fear in a relaxed way, then I am in the circle and I am afraid that what I am doing is not a ritual. Since I am not being relaxed with my fear, I am not opening to my fear. So I am not opening to the vow which is always surrounding me; I am not opening to the actual oceanic practice which is the way that I am living with everybody right now. When I take care of this fear in a gentle, relaxed, completely generous and upright way, I open to the emptiness of the circle. These little things I do, I keep doing in the midst of the actual practice.

Another thing I want to mention relates to countries where people are serious; in other words towns, cities or countries where people are serious or not playful. When you're not playful, surprise is the triumph of the past over the future. When you're not playful, and you are serious, something surprising happens to the serious person. It's the triumph of the past over the future. In Buddhism, it's the triumph of past karma over your life, because you're not being playful. But when you're being playful and something surprises you, it's the triumph of the future over the past. If you're playful when things surprise you, the past is always changing. We think that I am changing, but when I am not playful, we don't normally think our past is changing. The point of surprise, when you are playing, is where you become free of your past karma which is producing this circle of water. You don't have to get rid of the circle of water; the circle of water realizes the whole ocean. The circle doesn't reach the whole ocean, but it is not separate from the whole ocean. But if you don't practice the circle you don't realize the whole ocean. If you don't reach the ocean you don't realize the ocean because the circle does

not reach the ocean. It can't because it's not separate.

I have a story about a doctor, a mother and a little girl. The mother has a little girl who is very unhappy. She brings her sick daughter to see the doctor. Her daughter is not only really unhappy, but she is crying all the time. Some children cry but its like a happy cry in the sense of "You people are not doing what I want you to do and you'd better start doing it soon!" Other cries say "I am very unhappy, I'm really miserable and not trying to control my mother." This girl was also having a lot of seizures – four a day and unable to sleep. The mother would bring the little girl to the doctor. One day the little girl got up close to the doctor and started playing with his tie and bit his knuckle really hard. Then she reached into his pocket and got a tongue depressor and started throwing it around the room. This goes on for a few visits where she gradually starts to play with him. She's still having seizures when she's a year old but when she comes to see the doctor, he is relaxed with her. The doctor knows how to play with little girls. He is relaxed with her biting his finger and playing with his tie. Little by little she dares to play. But there is fear all around this play. This little girl is frightened; she has seizures. She starts playing with her shoes. The doctor takes her shoes and off so that she can play with her feet. She plays with socks and takes her socks off. Then she starts to play with her toes and sees that they don't come off and she is surprised. She discovers a surprising reality in the midst of play. People who don't play meet reality too, but if they are surprised, it's as if they lose control; it's the past taking over their world. But if you are playful it's the future triumphing over the past.

The little girl and her mother went away and the next day the seizures stopped and she was able to sleep. In five days she was released from the hospital. So it was a miracle. It doesn't always work like that but this is one time it did. The Mother did not know how to teach the little girl to play! Not all children know how. Not all Mothers know how. Some children do know how. Some children are bodhisattvas. Some children do not know how; mothers and fathers do not know how and their children get sick. In this case the mother brought the daughter to someone who could teach her and she learned. Then the little world opened to the bodhisattva's practice of being together with everybody. Even if it doesn't cure the seizure, it brings happiness and peace to the circle of water which doesn't reach the ocean. So that is basically Zen practice! We're doing psychotherapy or physiotherapy. We are working with our body and our mind in a little field and we're trying to be relaxed and playful with this. We are being taught that what we are doing is in the context of vast promises. To practice with everybody and to be playful with everybody is so that everybody will become free. We understand

also that if we are relaxed we can be wholehearted in our play and we will realise the emptiness of our world. That too will open us to the real practice which is the one practice of all beings.

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MOUNTAIN SILENCE

Issue 10: Summer

Article

Sharing Life in Sangha

Written by An Ryu Chi U, Francis Checkley

Though conventionally we may speak of "Sangha", in truth it is completely inter-dependant and so inseparable from the three treasures of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. The richness and intimacy of our sharing of life springs forth from the great Bodhisattva vow to save all beings, and from taking refuge not in our small selves but in the truth of our Buddha nature. We witness today almost unimaginable suffering as our environment is challenged by crisis after crisis, the disintegration of social cohesions, the resultant alienations and loneliness, and the widespread apathy about just what to do in the face of such challenges. It is as if the very fabric at the heart of all existence is being wrenched apart, as if the connective bond which unites all beings is in imminent danger of collapsing around us. And so we vow to meet and to sit together in silence and stillness. And to sit upright in the midst of our personal and collective suffering so that in doing so we might become more intimate with our fears and compulsions. In this simple yet profound act of faith we find the courage to share our vulnerability and our longing for meaning.

Then gradually through our continued practice of Zazen we stumble upon an inherent gratitude for our ancestors, teachers and friends in the Dharma, and words cannot express our thankfulness. In Sangha we share the sacred ordinariness of daily life in eating together, working together, in our mutual concern for each others wellbeing, and in the music of our words after long silences. And slowly in time the harsher judgemental overtones of our interactions give way to kindness and appreciation for those we previously avoided. So yes, there is a transformation that comes upon us in Sangha, unexpected but welcome, as if our confessions and repentance have been working on unconscious aspects of our karma and in so doing freeing us of its effects. This, despite our practice being one of not seeking beneficial gains. It seems paradoxically to invite healing.

No wonder then that Sangha in its many different cultural forms has not

only survived, but flourished in the West where so much healing is necessary at this time. So at the heart of Sangha is a profound sense of commitment towards a practice which has been faithfully transmitted to us down through the generations since the time of the Buddha. More recently this commitment has shone brightly through the life of Suzuki Roshi and for many of us our teacher Tenshin Reb Anderson who has dedicated his life to the Transmission of the Precepts, which he sees as "a prerequisite for, and inseparable from Dharma". It may seem an obvious statement but Sangha is first and foremost a group practice, it is not a solitary, individual activity which we do alone. Our ancestors warned of this so that we might not deceive ourselves into believing our practice was wholesome, when in fact we were simply following our own prejudices, likes and dislikes. For this reason Sangha is about accountability, having intimate friends who can give us feedback as to the appropriateness of our efforts as we try to practice with the forms and ceremony of daily life. This can be very difficult because we all tend to seek approval and so can easily be offended when challenged or confronted in any way which does not reflect the greatest of sensitivity and compassion. In this respect sharing life in Sangha requires us to show courage if we are to practice right speech because most people desire harmonious relationships, and challenging someone, however delicately, might well lead to an even more hostile situation. Honesty is often compromised therefore, in order to maintain a fragile harmony rather than address interpersonal resentments. Tenshin Reb has suggested that a bilateral approach to any kind of personal problem is preferable to simply taking someone by surprise. This gradual softly-softly approach prepares the way for both parties to realise that a meeting is necessary to clear the air. The great respect and even veneration in which some priests and teachers have been held in various communities in the West has quickly evaporated and turned to hostile condemnation when behavioural issues have not been addressed when they arose. Silence may be noble and inspiring but not when it is used as an escape and method of denial.

In its most limited sense, Sangha means "the community of monks and nuns" who seek to practice the Buddha Dharma together. This meaning may be expanded to cover all those who love the Triple Treasure even if they do not practice Buddha teaching. And ultimately it can extend to include the vast inter-relatedness of all being, which for most of us leads to the painful truth that even those we might thoroughly despise, must be counted as potential teachers. Tenshin Reb, in his book "Being Upright", speaks of Sangha being "Harmony", of being "the community of those who practice the truth, realised by a Buddha" and describes it as "the release of beings from suffering and bondage to the world of birth

and death". Later on he refers to Suzuki Roshi's understanding of the Triple Treasure as an act of adoration, where Sangha is "The adoration of the community of beings who practice the way of awakening".

And then as if to emphasise beyond any possible doubt its absolute importance, Reb speaks of Dogen's final days of illness before death. When, at this time, he wrote the words Buddha, Dharma, Sangha on a large manuscript, pinned it on a pillar in a room, then roused himself to walk around the pillar chanting "I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the Dharma, I take refuge in the Sangha".

It is now a little more than 50 years since Suzuki Roshi left Japan to lead a small Sangha of lay Japanese in San Francisco. Since that time his teachings have spread throughout the U.S.A. and beyond. And in perhaps no more than 25 years, Reb's understanding and commitment have begun to bear fruit in the U.K. Now almost imperceptibly we witness the beginnings of Sangha right here as the need for commitment is made manifest in the growing number of people receiving the Precepts. And I believe it is understandable that as we come together to sit in silence and stillness, and as we wake up to our private and collective suffering, there will be growing pains and much to learn. So our daily confession and repentance and all forms and ceremonies that we vow to practice will be of utmost importance to us all. At this time then I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Buddha, Dharma Sangha. To all those near and far who have dedicated their lives to the benefit of all beings and continue to do so and especially to my dear wife and friend Bernadette for her continued support.

And, in closing a special thank you to Reb for his help in bringing about the forth- coming visit of Catherine Gammon without which none of this would have come to fruition.

With deep gratitude
An Ryu Chi U, Francis Checkley

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MOUNTAIN SILENCE

Issue 10: Summer

Article

Some Thoughts on Sangha or "Cooking in the Cauldron of all Beings"

Michael (Ko Gan Mu Ju - Radiant Light Vow No Abode dwelling)

Just as the dawn is the forerunner of the arising sun, so true friendship is the forerunner of the arising of the noble eightfold path.

Shakyamuni Buddha

Just now in late Spring, South Devon is a paradise; it's always a paradise but at this time its true nature is more obvious. The sun shines from dawn to dusk out of a sky more reminiscent of Provence or Catalonia. Trees are alight with the green energy of the season laden with a perfection of blossom unsullied by rain or wind. The banked, steep lanes are strewn with the yellow and golds of primroses and dandelions, purpled with tiny shadowy violets. All this gathering of energy and beauty is caused by the changed relationship of the sun to the northern hemisphere of our planet. Clear evidence if we need it that the Earth, indeed the Universe, exists and depends on the constant harmonious relationship of one thing to another. Life is relationship. The world is sangha. In the Lotus Sutra, Dogen even views space and time as bodhisattvas upholding our practice.

I had intended to write this earlier in the week but the sunshine and the garden drew me outside. As I planted and hoed and watered I reflected on this enigmatic word 'Sangha,' and the deep often unnoticed intimacy that we have with earth, sky, sun, wind and rain. In the evenings, tired, I watched a TV series 'How to Live the Simple Life,' in which an Anglican priest Rev. Peter Owen Jones, realising his subtle estrangement from his parishioners and society, decided to follow in the footsteps of Saint Francis of Assisi, the 13th century nobleman who gave up everything to become a mendicant (wandering) monk, depending on the generosity of others to sustain his simple life as he preached. The 'others,' famously included the birds, beasts and trees to whom Francis would also preach and care for. The Reverend discovered that by making himself vulnerable

and open even in a society such as ours that is based on a creed of gross materialism, the kindness that is our original nature would still shine through. He received many acts of generosity even from strangers. Benevolence and a longing for community is deeply embedded in us as our very essence.

The word 'sangha' is from the Pali and may be translated as 'an assembly', 'a community with a common goal or vision.' Immediately this definition clarifies the difference between a sangha and a group. Essentially a group is a collection of people who happen to be in the same place for sometimes quite different personal reasons. As we've all experienced, it is possible to be part of a group and never really get to know or appreciate the other members in any deep way. A dharma sangha – a community of friends – has a much better chance to do this because, ideally, a sangha is a group of people who care for each other's well being. When deeply practiced, this level of caring can weave everyone together in a beautiful brocade of wisdom and support. The Sanskrit word 'kaliyanamitra,' means 'good friend' and often in Buddhism we hear of the necessity of such friends to practice. There is the proverb relating to this: "If you wrap sweet grass around a rotten fish it will soon smell of rotten fish. But if you wrap a leaf around a piece of incense the leaf will smell of incense." We are strongly influenced by those around us.

The first Buddhist sangha was established soon after the enlightenment of Shakyamuni Buddha 2500 years ago, in the Deer Park at Sarnath when he gave his first sermon to the five ascetics who had once been his companions. This act to form a community was not an original or inspired thought on the part of the Buddha. Sanghas were already well established in the cultures of India at the time. There were all kinds of religious orders, communities of naked ascetics, communities of forest dwellers, communities of sadhus. Society at that time tolerated what today might be thought of as groups of drop-outs, antisocials, travellers. Their way of living was even admired. Though the lay people may not have felt that they could be monks they were often happy to feed and give support to the sanghas. It was a way of contributing to the well being of the greater society, of participating more meaningfully, much like the priest in the TV series was encouraging in himself and others. The lives of the monks were always pointing to a path of sane, communal living; a reminder of something precious yet freely available for everyone if they wanted to avail themselves of it.

To be ordained into the Buddhist sangha at this time apparently was very simple. The Buddha said "Ehi bhikkhu" and snapped his fingers, and that was that. 'Ehi,' means 'come'. 'Bhikkhu,' in this context means 'to

wander.' 'Come wander forth for the good of the many folk'. 'Ehi Bhikkhu,' could just as well mean; 'come, wander forth, freely questioning and investigate the natural world of inner and outer, the laws of nature for the benefit of all'. The wider lay community then was happy to give monks support in the form of food, clothing, medicine and shelter and, in return, the sangha provided a clear example of mindful living. In this way the sangha supported the society and society supported the sangha. It was a co-operative endeavour that the entire culture was engaged in.

As the years went by and the fame of the Buddha spread more and more people came to join the community. Five monks became many. All of them were not necessarily mature in their aspiration to cultivate wisdom and compassion and there were disputes. Even the Buddha became fed up with this discord! One story says he went off into the jungle and lived with a monkey and elephant as his preferred sangha! Maybe St. Francis with his deep love and acceptance of all creatures heard of this story many centuries later?

We live in an utterly different culture to the one where the early Buddhist sanghas thrived, but human beings today are essentially the same as then. Surely the same questions of how we can live together harmoniously, how we can accommodate our essential longing for oneness arise. More particularly perhaps, how do we in Dancing Mountains Sangha meet the challenges posed by these questions? When we meet on retreats and other sangha occasions the sense of oneness that always exists between us, even though we mostly live many miles apart, is strengthened and its depth and inherent loveliness is perhaps made more apparent. But these times together are brief. We do not live in close community for extended periods of time where the difficulties of life together are manifest. How do we nurture our sense of community of supporting and enhancing everyone's practice when we are physically so far apart? Can our digital age assist us in this or are e-mails and mobile phones and video conferencing just chimera, a dodging of the essence of relation and community? What is the way forward to develop our strengths and soften our weaknesses under such circumstances? Indeed is a dharma sangha possible under the circumstances we live in? After all we are lay people and it does seem in Buddhist history there has often been a sharp distinction relating to sangha between monastics and the lay community.

Scott Peck in his book 'The Road Less Travelled,' comments that many of the church communities he was involved with in U.S.A. were only superficially communities, in that they failed to embrace and descend into darkness and chaos when deep differences arose. This chaos he

viewed as a vital precursor to true community. Is this an aspect of sangha? Perhaps so. When we look at the history of San Francisco Zen Center we see it endured such phases and emerged from them maybe stronger and more resilient.

Tenshin Reb Anderson in his book 'Warm Smiles from Cold Mountains,' describes the nature of sangha robustly: "Each of you – not separately, but in the cauldron of all beings, cooking and being cooked - is realising awakening. Not you by yourself, because that is not who you really are. You by yourself are not buddha nature; but your total being in the cauldron of all beings is realising the buddha way. This is the total exertion of your life."

My thanks to:

an essay entitled 'Sangha Work' by Tarchin Hearn which helped to direct my thoughts on this article.

to Tenshin Reb Anderson for his book 'Warm Smiles from Cold Mountains,' from which the quotation 'Cooking in the Cauldron of all Beings,' is taken.

Michael (Ko Gan Mu Ju) Radiant Light Vow No Abode dwelling

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MOUNTAIN SILENCE

Issue 10: Summer

Retreat Reflection

Meditation is a holiday for the heart

A retreat in the Theravadan Tradition.
Written by Michael Elsmere.

On the 7th May this year I found myself in terminal 5 at Heathrow waiting for an incoming flight. A year previously I had, perhaps rashly, promised a long time Swedish friend I would accompany her to a retreat in the Theravadan tradition at Amaravati. Lena had listened on CD to many of the talks given by Ajahn Sumedho who is the Abbot. When she learned that he was to lead a 10-day retreat she was determined to take part but felt she needed a 'like minded friend', as she put it, to accompany her. Subsequently we applied, only to find that in the lottery for places I had obtained a place but she had not! However as May approached as she was still on the waiting list her name came up for a place.

Ajahn Sumedho had been invited to England in 1977 after many years of practice in Thailand with a number of Theravadan masters, amongst them Ajahn Chah. The English Sangha Trust wanted to establish a forest monastery in England and this was achieved in 1979 with the purchase of a large ruined house in Chithurst which became Chithurst Buddhist Monastery or 'Cittviveka'. As a result of this the sangha expanded rapidly and it was decided to build another larger monastery and retreat centre, and in 1984 Amaravati near Great Gaddesden in Hertfordshire was founded. Central to and dominating the site is the magnificent temple. If you can imagine a Thai temple translated through English architectural traditions this is it. The sweeping curves of the exterior roof are clad in tiles reminiscent of Kentish Oast Houses. Inside, the huge supporting timbers with exposed tenon-joints and wooden pegs remind one of great tithe barns and country churches with their beamed ship-like roofs. The upward heart-stopping swoop of the roof, the serenity of the huge golden Buddha rupa along with the lingering smell of incense at once induce a sense of deep peace and awe.

On the southern side of the temple is a cloister and courtyard of the type that is common in many Christian monasteries across Europe. Here it is

much used by the monks or 'bikkhus,' for their long periods of 'kinhin,' or walking meditation that traditionally is practised outdoors. During the retreat we could also use this cloister but there was also a large meadow bounded with many young trees and a large area of mature woodland with massive old beech trees, sycamore, holly and oak. One day whilst I was there, the strong sunlight striking through the soft green of newly opened beech leaves mingled magically with the intense light thrown up by a massed carpet of bluebells.

The retreat was held in the centre adjacent to the temple which was established to cater for such a purpose. Here 60 retreatants were very comfortably accommodated in dormitories and rooms in the several long low wooden buildings dotted around the grounds.

The schedule began at 05.00 with a wake-up bell for a sitting and talk at 05.30. Each of the sittings was 45 minutes which at first seemed a long time compared to the usual 30 minutes at Gaia House and the Totnes zendo! Each sitting was usually followed by a 45 minute kinhin outside. I certainly appreciated the outdoor aspect of this but felt that the atmosphere in the zendo tended to disperse unlike in our own practice where it seems as if the energy builds through the session.

Another rule of the retreat was that after the noon meal no food was to be taken! Despite my initial concern I found my body getting used to the regime by the end of my stay. By 05.30 the next morning after 17 hours without sustenance however I did feel my blood sugar level bumping along on empty. It was also difficult, despite the wisdom and humour of Ajahn Sumedho's talks, to keep my concentration! Throughout the retreat he defined and redefined meditation practice; 'flexible, relaxed openness'; 'the open gate through which we can walk to liberation'; 'the sound of silence.' He examined closely through several other talks what we mean by the term 'mindfulness': 'a state of mind that is quietly reflecting on the present moment and nothing else, pure unadulterated reflection'. In other talks, our state as sensitive beings subject to birth, life and death and our impermanence was discussed. This sense of impermanence makes us vulnerable but as human beings this is our karma. Another time he insisted that 'sitting, the precepts and forms and ceremonies are interdependent not separable.' I thought where have I heard this before? Later talks referred to our essential/ original deathless state:

*Mindfulness is the path to the deathless,
heedlessness is the path to death,
the mindful do not die but*

the heedless are as if already dead.

Dhammapada 2.1

All the talks, even those at 05.30, were full of deep wisdom, great humour and full of stories from Ajahn Sumedho's own experience (44 years) as a monk in Thailand and England. He pointed out that it's relatively easy to reach blissful states when one is alone in one's little hut ('kuti') out in the forest or jungle but it is in the world within the sangha that we truly face our conditioned self in relation to others.

I came away from Amaravati with a deep sense of gratitude for the temple, the monks and the wonderful staff of the retreat centre who served us with great kindness and generosity. However I could not but long that Dancing Mountains Sangha had such a monastery set in England's countryside. I trust with all my heart that this may be so one day.

There is a land, an island beyond which you cannot go. It is a place of no-thingness, a place of non-possession and non-attachment. It is the total end of death and decay and this is why I call it nibbana.

The Buddha to Brahmin Kappa in Sutta Nipata.

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MOUNTAIN SILENCE

Issue 10: Summer

Event

Dancing Mountains Sangha Meeting

Friday 3rd September, Gaia House, Devon

Directly after Tenshin Reb Anderson's retreat this Autumn, Dancing Mountains Sangha will be holding a meeting in the Lounge at Gaia House commencing at 2 p.m. and concluding around 3.30 p.m.

The initial part of this time will be taken up with our first formal Annual General Meeting when representatives from the regions and committee members will be appointed and formal accounts for 2009/10 will be presented. At the end of this meeting there will be an opportunity for discussion, and any questions sangha members may have can be raised.

If you have any questions for either the formal or discussion part of the proceedings please forward them to me as soon as possible so that an agenda can be planned.

All sangha members will be sent the formal Notice of the AGM at a later date.

With a bow,
Michael

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07817604156
Westerly
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Totnes
Devon TQ9 7UF

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July 2010

July 2010						
M	T	W	T	F	S	S
			1	2	3	4
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12	13	14	15	16	17	18
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August 2010						
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16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

[Click here to add these appointments to your calendar.](#)

1 Thursday

2 Friday

3 Saturday

4 Sunday

5 Monday

6 Tuesday
07:30 07:30 Catherine arrives

7 Wednesday

8 Thursday

9 Friday

10 Saturday

11 Sunday

12 Monday
06:00 07:30 Sitting; Morning Service

13 Tuesday
19:30 22:00 Evening Sitting and talk

14 Wednesday

15 Thursday
11:30 13:00 Ways With Words

16 Friday
13:30 17:00 Afternoon Talk/Seminar & Sitting

Saturday

17 10:45 12:15 Ways With Words
14:00 15:00 Ways With Words Great Hall Dartington

18 Sunday

19 Monday
06:00 07:30 Sitting; Morning Service

20 Tuesday
19:30 22:00 Evening Sitting and talk

21 Wednesday

22 Thursday

23 Friday
13:30 17:00 Afternoon Talk/Seminar; Sitting

24 Saturday
To Glastonbury

25 Sunday
One day Retreat

26 Monday
19:00 21:30 Evening Sitting; talk

27 Tuesday
19:30 22:00 Evening Sitting and talk
Return to Totnes from Glastonbury

28 Wednesday

29 Thursday

30 Friday
13:30 17:00 Afternoon Talk/Seminar; Sitting

31 Saturday

August 2010

August 2010						
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September 2010						
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26	27	28	29	30		

[Click here to add these appointments to your calendar.](#)

Sunday

1

2 Monday
06:00 07:30 Sitting; Morning Service

3 Tuesday
19:30 22:00 Evening Sitting and talk

4 Wednesday
06:00 07:30 Morning Sitting; Service

5 Thursday

6 Friday
13:30 17:00 Afternoon Talk/Seminar; Sitting

7 Saturday
Travel to Cambridge

8 Sunday

9 Monday

10 Tuesday

11 Wednesday
Cambridge retreat begins - TBC

12 Thursday
Cambridge retreat

13 Friday
Cambridge retreat

14 Saturday
Return From Cambridge to Totnes

15 Sunday

16 Monday
Travel to Brighton

17 Tuesday
Brighton events

18 Wednesday
Brighton Events

19 Thursday
Brighton Events

-
- 20 Friday
19:30 22:00 Return from Brighton to Totnes
Sitting; talk
-
- 21 Saturday
Writing Course Kingsbridge Provisional
-
- 22 Sunday
-
- 23 Monday
06:00 07:30 Morning Sitting; Service
-
- 24 Tuesday
19:30 22:00 Sitting; talk
-
- 25 Wednesday
-
- 26 Thursday
-
- 27 Friday
Zen Koans and Bodhisattva Precepts Gaia House
Zen Koans retreat
-
- 28 Saturday
Zen Koans retreat
-
- 29 Sunday
Zen Koans retreat
-
- 30 Monday
Zen Koans retreat
-
- 31 Tuesday
Zen Koans retreat
-

September 2010

September 2010						
M	T	W	T	F	S	S
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27	28	29	30			

October 2010						
M	T	W	T	F	S	S
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11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

[Click here to add these appointments to your calendar.](#)

-
- 1 Wednesday
Zen Koans retreat
-
- 2 Thursday
Zen Koans retreat
-
- 3 Friday
Travel to North
-

4	Saturday	Recreational walking Wales/The Peaks
5	Sunday	Day retreat Peckforton
6	Monday	Day retreat Manchester/Eccles
7	Tuesday	Hebden Bridge event
8	Wednesday	Hebden Bridge event Writing as a Wisdom project?
9	Thursday	Visit Lake District
10	Friday	
11	Saturday	Weekend Retreat Venue to be arranged
12	Sunday	Weekend Retreat Venue to be arranged
13	Monday	Return from the North to Totnes
14	Tuesday	Totnes Events
15	Wednesday	Totnes Events Potential visit to Sweden?????????????
16	Thursday	Totnes Events Potential visit to Sweden?????????????
17	Friday	Totnes Events Potential visit to Sweden?????????????
18	Saturday	Potential visit to Sweden?????????????
19	Sunday	Potential visit to Sweden?????????????
20	Monday	Potential visit to Sweden????????????? Return from Sweden

21 Tuesday

22 Wednesday

Return to USA from Heathrow

23 Thursday

24 Friday

25 Saturday

26 Sunday

27 Monday

28 Tuesday

29 Wednesday

30 Thursday

Totnes Zen Group

Zen Buddhism in Totnes

This summer, we are hosting the UK visit of Catherine Gammon, a priest from San Francisco Zen Center. We invite you to join our small local Zen Sangha to practise and study together, with Catherine, on

Friday evenings

9th July to 6th August

7.30 – 9pm

Totnes Natural Health Centre

***Please arrive before 7.30 pm,
as we will begin promptly.***

The evenings will include silent sitting and walking meditation, followed by a brief talk and group discussion.

For those new to Zen meditation,

Catherine will offer zazen instruction at 7 pm.

Please call (numbers below) if you wish to come for this.

If possible, we would prefer to know in advance that you will be coming.

To book a place, or *for more information,*
please call or text Josh on 07910 202368, or
call Francis on 01803 866735.

There is no charge to attend these events, but we invite you to give a suitable donation, suggested minimum: £4 per evening.

Totnes Zen Group is part of the Dancing Mountains Zen Sangha
www.dancingmountains.org.uk

Totnes Zen Group

presents a series of 4 talks on

Bodhicitta **The Mind of Awakening**

with Catherine Gammon from San Francisco Zen Center

Tuesday evenings

13th July to 3rd August

7.30 – 9pm

Totnes Natural Health Centre

Please arrive before 7.30pm, as we will begin promptly

We will begin with a short period of silent meditation and the talks will allow time for questions and discussion.

July 13th: Bodhicitta as Compassion

July 20th: Bodhicitta and Emptiness

July 27th: Practicing with Karmic Consciousness

August 3rd: Bodhisattva Vow and Grandmother Mind

This is an opportunity for those with an interest in Zen to deepen their understanding and practise.

We ask you, if possible, to book in advance to attend all 4 evenings.

To book a place, or find out more, please call Josh on 07910 202368, or Francis on 01803 866735

Entry by donation, suggested minimum: £4 per evening.

Totnes Zen Group is part of the Dancing Mountains Zen Sangha
www.dancingmountains.org.uk