

MOUNTAIN SILENCE

NEWSLETTER OF THE DANCING MOUNTAINS ZEN SANGHA

Issue 7

Autumn

Vows

I sat down to write this editorial and then my neighbour asked me to help him erect an old style canvas ex-Girl Guide tent he had bought. As we unfolded the tent the distinctive smell of dry canvas and damp grass assailed me with a rush of memories from my days as a Scout. During the summer our troop would spend weeks at a time in an idyllic valley of the river Meavy under the shadow of the Dewerstone on the edge of Dartmoor in South Devon. When I sat down to write again, the subject of the piece 'Vows' and this memory came together.

As a Scout I made a promise 'To do my best, to do my duty to God and the King'. This may be viewed as archaic along with many other vows, pledges, oaths, promises in today's world where 'spin' and ways of avoiding personal integrity are widespread. In essence though it is not perhaps all that different from the Bodhisattva Vows that I, along with three other sangha members, took at the recent retreat at Gaia House led by Reb Anderson Roshi, entitled 'Dharma Flower Turning Dharma Flower.' Both vows and promises are to do with being mindful towards oneself and to others in order to

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Photo by Chris Brown

help bring into being a more harmonious world in the case of the former with insightful awareness of karma, of causes and effects. Perhaps though Baden-Powell would not have put it quite like that!

The origins of the word 'vow' go far back to the Sanskrit 'vaghat' (which means 'one who offers a sacrifice') through the classical Greek 'eukhomai' ('I pray') to the Latin 'votum' ('a solemn promise') to the Old French 'vou'. It is noticeable that throughout its long history

the word has carried with it associations of the sacred and of deep committed intention on the part of the person receiving the vow. In medieval times the breaking of a vow, or 'troth', could lead to death or excommunication.

There should be no element of compulsion in the taking of a vow. In this it can differ from a commandment, a 'Thou shall not.' If the vow taker is not deeply intentional in doing her best to implement the pledge then the taking of a vow is almost a waste of time. A vow has to come from the heart and be based on one's unique intuitions and feelings about how life could be, and how this vision can be made a reality. So the taking of a vow is in part a statement of who we are and what we believe is worthwhile. In our tradition it may also be seen as a springboard for our leap beyond the duality of 'the many and the one,' as expressed by Dogen in his 'Genjo Koan'.

Taking a vow offers us a way of focussing our intention and direction in life. After we take the precepts we are, whether we like it or not, irrevocably changed. At best the vows or precepts are the very essence of our daily life around which all our actions, thoughts and feelings turn. Vows offer us an inner compass from which we can judge our direction, our true north. If we have such clear aims, then we will naturally know what to do and what not to do.

“The taking of a vow is in part a statement of who we are and what we believe is worthwhile.”

“The longer we commit to our practice the more courageous we become”

To a marked extent our lives may be seen as being driven by habit. When we have taken a vow if we fall from grace we may notice the swing of our inner compass away from the desired or 'vowed' direction. Our pledge also has the effect of supporting our integrity, that part of us that intuitively flows in the right direction. The river (our intention) flows on despite, but the path to actualising our aim is made up by gradually removing the obstacles, by not falling into error or by avoiding hazards in the first place.

The longer we commit to our practice the more courageous we become. Our vision becomes clearer and we may attain a peace and strength that nourishes us. As that river within us surges ever more strongly when we suffer from periods of drought, we are sustained and strengthened 'to polish the tile,' to continue come what may.

Of course we feel uncomfortable when we know we have fallen short of our ideal. This feeling of discomfort is actually a positive thing. Until we have sifted through our actions and behaviours thoroughly time and time again, there will be inconsistencies between what is best in us and our actual thoughts and behaviour. At such times there is a need to feel whole-hearted compassion for ourselves and to be in touch with the gentle coursing of our intention running through us.

The 16 Great Bodhisattva Vows of our tradition are derived from the rules that governed the community of monks who sat at the feet of Shakyamuni Buddha. These precepts evolved to help bind the sangha and all beings together on the path to liberation. Even today these precepts are accepted by Zen students in the solemn initiation ceremony known as 'Jukai' (receiving the precepts).

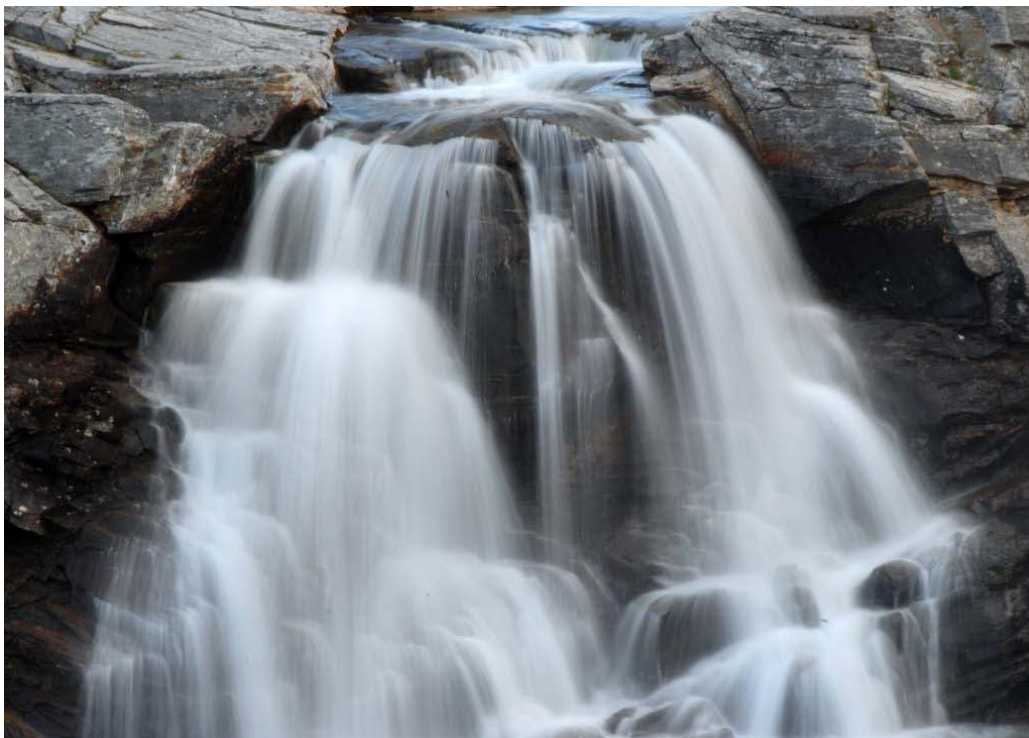
Reb Anderson Roshi in his book 'Being Upright: Zen Meditation and the Bodhisattva Precepts,' points out that beyond the conventional understanding of the precepts of being concerned with good and bad there is an ultimate meaning that transcends ordinary reality as stated by the great sage Nagarjuna in his 'Fundamental Verses of the Middle Way':

*Without a foundation in the conventional truth,
The significance of the ultimate cannot be taught.
Without understanding the significance of the ultimate,
Liberation is not achieved.*

Only by standing on its banks and attempting to constantly immerse ourselves in the flow of this river beyond 'understanding' can we hope to meet the vast ocean of Liberation.

As so many of us were fortunate to witness or be involved in the ceremony of 'Receiving the Precepts,' at the recent retreat at Gaia House, this edition of Mountain Silence is focussing on Vows. We hope you enjoy reading the range of articles as well as the transcript of Roshi Reb Anderson's talk on the subject. It is our hope that they will help broaden and deepen our understanding of the 16 Great Bodhisattva Vows for the sake of all beings.

Michael Elsmere



Markus Kvist

Do not be disturbed by the dark rivers of mind,
cherish them as your own dying children
for each one is the vast and silent ocean.

Devin Ashwood

the breeze has been kind
windfall apples for reynolds
peaches for the goats

Guido Montgomery

Zen Meditation as Bodhisattva Vow

A talk by Reb Anderson Roshi given at The Yoga Room, Berkeley, California, in July 2007. Transcribed by Frances Collins and edited by Chris Brown.

The word bodhisattva was originally used to refer to the life of Shakyamuni Buddha prior to his becoming a buddha. We say there was a historical person who lived in India. This person who realized the state called buddhahood said that he had many lives. To say that he had many lives, I think, means that the person who became buddha depended on many past lives. He wasn't those people just like you are not the person who was a teenager. You are not the person who was a child or an infant. However there were teenage persons and infant persons that your existence depends on. They aren't you and you are not them. They were not you; they aren't you now... and yet you depend on these past persons, these past living beings. I would say that. It is my understanding that Shakyamuni Buddha would say that his appearance as a buddha and his career in teaching depended on many past persons, and in particular, a lot of causal connections between a lot of past persons. The 35 year old buddha who began teaching, as well as the 40 year old, 70 year old and 80 year old buddha, depended on a bunch of past buddhas and a close, intimate, causal relationship with them. But he is not any of them and they are not him. He depends on them and also on all beings.

***“A bodhisattva
is a being
whose mode
of being is
awakening.”***

Prior to reaching buddhahood he called all those past lives ‘*the bodhisattva*.’ He might have conventionally said ‘when I was the bodhisattva so-and-so I took this form and that form.’ So one way to understand is that a bodhisattva is someone who is evolving in understanding toward buddhahood. Etymologically, ‘bodhi’ means awakening and ‘sattva’ means being. Sometimes people say a bodhisattva is a being whose mode of being is awakening. You could say it is a being who has this essence of awakening or whose essence is the process of awakening. Their essence is that they are in this process of awakening. But you could also think that their essence is awakening. You could say that they have this essence of awakening but also that this awakening is a process. This being is the sort of being who is evolving more and more toward awakening. This awakening is not the awakening of one person, or the process of evolving toward the awakening of not just one person. This is also not a process of one person. It is the process of realizing the awakening of all beings and a process of all beings realizing the awakening of all beings. So it isn't as if only one or several of us possess this bodhi-being, that we have it all by ourselves. It is that kind of being in our lives that is involved with all beings waking up. Instead of ‘*the bodhisattva*’ it is ‘*bodhisattva*’. It is bodhi-being. In a sense the buddha becoming buddha is no longer a bodhisattva. Buddha, in a sense, is no longer evolving. It is just awakening itself. It is the way that everybody is related every moment, and in a way, the way that everyone is related is evolving. It is just always that way but there is also an evolutionary process of realizing it.

That makes buddha sound a little static. It is like a state, and the causal basis for beings evolving toward this realization and the causal basis for beings becoming free of being asleep and believing that being asleep is the truth. It is the source of waking up from being deluded. That's what enlightenment or buddha is. The bodhisattva vow is the vow of this bodhisattva as a kind of being which can be beings, in the sense that it can get hooked into an individual being. An individual person can be entered or enter this form of being. In that sense we would say that is a particular bodhisattva. According to the tradition of the bodhisattvas, bodhisattvas have intentions like all other beings, and they also have vows.

“Vows, and intentions, actions and karma, are said to be conditions for the arising of worlds of existence.”

So what is the difference between a vow and an intention? We have had lots of classes here where we have recognized that intention is karma. Normally in our life in each moment, moment by moment, we have an intention. So I would guess right now that each of us has the intention to be in this room and most of us are staying because of our intention to stay at least until about 09.15hrs. You could also say that there is serious vow to stay until 09.15hrs. I vow to come to the classes in this series. That could also be, I have the intention to come. So intention and vow are kind of similar. So, in that way intention and vow could be possible definitions for karma. But we don't usually say that the definition of karma is vow. We say I have the intention to go to this class or I have the intention to go to sleep tonight or that I have the intention to have breakfast. We don't usually say, I vow to have breakfast. You might say I vow to come to this class. Therefore intention and vow don't have a real black and white line between them. Intention could also be a wish or an aspiration. An intention could be a prayer. An intention could take the form of worship. You could worship in the form of: I want to become this form of being, I aspire to be this form of being, I worship this state of being, I worship this way of life, I honour this way of life, I pay homage to this way of life, I align myself with this way of life. So these could all be called intentions or they could be called vows. I said prayer: I pray that such and such would happen; I pray that you are well; I pray that we can continue to find a way of peace and harmony among all beings. I intend to work for that, I aspire to work for that... I aspire to give my life for that. I vow to give my life for that. It seems to me that there is a field of possibility between the definition of intention which is karma, and vow which it is not usually used as a definition of karma. However, both vow or vowing and intentions, actions and karma are said to be conditions for the arising of worlds of existence. Perhaps this is abstract. But I have not often heard it said in this tradition that spiritual realms of peace and harmony are born of karma. They are usually said to be born of these vows. So you could say that vows tend to be used for those forms of being which are particularly conducive to peace and harmony. Although these forms also contribute to worlds where beings are suffering and that they can join with the worlds where beings are suf-

There is sometimes the language of speaking of a problem of birth and death. Birth and death are referred to in an Eastern way as samsara. Samsara means going around between birth and death and also between different states of being. It's the world that arises and is dependant on karma and is the same as the world that arises that is dependent on ignorance. It's a world where there seems to be misery. This is paired with another world or way of life called nirvana which is not a world of birth and death but is a world of peace and harmony.

These are often taught to be intimate and inseparable, and in enduring samsara one realizes and enters nirvana. In East Asia, samsara was named birth and death so they used the Chinese characters for birth and death to refer to samsara. So, samsara is sometimes said to be the problem with birth and death and is often seen to be in the problem that the buddhas are concerned with. There

are many, many beings involved in birth and death; many, many parents involved in the birth of their children; and many, many beings involved in the death of people they care about. This birth and death process is one that many, many beings seem to be very keen on, and more or less, struggling with. In a sense all these beings form a great ocean of being involved with birth and death. Many beings live in this realm called birth and death, or samsara, and are confronted with various problems and challenges. Some people coming from the East Asian tradition of Buddhism might say that one way of looking at this problem is that it is something that you enter into because of some mistakes of past action, of karma. That's how you wind up with other beings in the realm of samsara, because of karmic mistakes or accumulation. You're in the realm of suffering because of your past intentions but you really didn't *intend* to be in the world of birth and death. But you intended something, and as a result of your intentions, you are in a world of birth and death. There are teachings for people who are looking at birth and death in that way. There are teachings to help them under those circumstances.



Linda Griffiths

But another way to look at it is that you are in birth and death because you intended to be in birth and death, not that you intended to be in heaven or some great comfortable place. Actually heaven is part of birth and death. It's not only that you intended to be a buddha, but *along with* intending to be a buddha you intended to be in birth and death. You are in birth and death but also you *intended* to be in birth and death, although in the past sometimes you may have *not* intended to be in birth and death. Sometimes in the past, and maybe now, you do intend to be in birth and death, not in a masochistic sense but in a joyful sense. But, you really think that being in birth and death could be a great opportunity and that there is something to find here which is incomparably marvelous and wonderful and can only be found in birth and death, and by wanting to be in birth and death for the realization of that. That is more the life of vow. That is a way of using the word vow which is somewhat different to the word intention.

“This bodhisattva wants to live in birth and death for the sake of its essence — awakening”

You don't want to be in the world of turbulence and attachment testing just for the pain of it! You wish to be in it in order to realize freedom from attachment right in the middle of the world which is born of attachment. You can only get into this world if you have a little bit of attachment. To some extent you have to give rise to a mind of attachment in order to get in the world which is for most people a world of attachment. Still, you are here because of the wonderful thing that can be realized here. So for this we use the word vow rather than just intention or mental activity. This bodhisattva, this bodhi-being, which is basically the being of awakening, wants to live in birth and death. Its desire is to live in birth and death for the sake of its essence - awakening. So it is living in birth and death for the purpose of awakening - of course not personal awakening but universal awakening, which is the only kind of awakening that the bodhisattva is interested in. All bodhisattvas are interested in all other types of beings who are interested in other types of enlightenment. So, if a person is interested in a different way of enlightenment, that person is also interesting to the bodhisattva, even people who would like beings to be more deluded! All beings are part of this process of awakening and part of the misery of birth and death. Bodhisattvas vow to live there and to live there by vow, by that wish. When bodhisattvas forget that, you could say that at that moment they are not bodhisattvas any more, or that a person who forgets this has forgotten about the bodhisattva. They are temporarily distracted from this bodhisattva way of being.

Zen meditation, or Zen practice, is basically about this vow, how to take care of it, and let it work this bodhisattva, this bodhi-being, this awakening form of being in the world of beings who, because of other forms of intentions, are somewhat closed to this way of being. The bodhisattva wants to live with all the beings that are open and not open to this bodhi-being, and open or not open to the vow to live here in every possible state of misery.

I guess we talk in many different ways about how bodhisattvas dive into and play in the world of suffering helping other beings to play in the world that they are already in. Since we are already here we might as well be friends with all the people who are here and then work that until it is fully realized among everybody. Those who want to do that are those who are already living this bodhisattva way. Zen is about this process. You could say this includes studying all the beings who are not yet open to this process, all those beings who are thinking, "Okay, now I am here in birth and death and I am going to do this for *me*." The bodhisattva is totally devoted to those beings who are unlike themselves, and wish those beings to open to the wonder of the world of misery that they are trying to control.

The compassion of the bodhisattva is the wish they have for these beings to open up. But they are not caught by the distinction between how the person is now and what they hope for the person. They see a person who seems to be closed right now and wish for that person to open, knowing that the way the person is now and what I want for this person is different and I can discriminate between them, but not getting caught by the discrimination. So I fully appreciate the person as they are now and even if it takes them eons to open, I'm perfectly happy to hold their hand the whole time and not be the slightest bit impatient because I'm not caught by the distinction. I am perfectly willing to live with them again and again, moment by moment, plunging into the world where they are not making any progress. This is the bodhisattva. The bodhisattva has that kind of attitude.



Linda Griffiths

Dancing Mountains sangha meeting

Around 20 members of the Sangha met after the Gaia House retreat on 4th September this year to discuss progress and future plans for the Sangha. It is pleasing to note a steadily increasing participation and interest in these post-retreat Sangha meetings over the years. In the interests of an open-ended and inclusive discussion on the contents of this meeting, we present below a summary of the main points. We invite Sangha members who were either present or not at the meeting to feedback to us on the matters and questions raised.

Until now meetings have been held in the lounge at Gaia House but with greater interest in the meetings we may wish to consider moving the venue to the meditation hall, where we can encourage the growing attendance and establish a more formal atmosphere appropriate to discussions with our teacher Reb Anderson, whose presence we humbly regard as most important to facilitate the growth of our Sangha. To decide on this will require discussion both with our teacher and with Gaia House. We will also in the future ask for agenda points to be proposed and decided well in advance of the meeting to facilitate a better use of Reb's time and resources, and to reflect on the relative importance of different issues raised to allocate appropriate time to each.

First on the agenda of the last meeting was a reminder and update regarding the planned Envisioning Retreat, to take place on 13th – 15th November in Totnes (contact Francis Checkley or Michael Elsmere for details). The aim of the retreat is to explore ideas around the future of the Sangha, and especially around the possibility of establishing a Dancing Mountains training centre in the UK. There will also be discussions about the possibility of inviting a priest from the San Francisco Zen Center (SFZC) to reside in South West England, for a minimum of 6 months, to facilitate training. Reb has agreed to make enquiries at SFZC to see who may be interested in this role. This may allow for the possibility of running longer retreats, for example 3 week intensives. There is no cost to attending the envisioning retreat and its likely there will be spaces for between 8 and 12 people. For those not able to attend, the possibility of remote involvement in the retreat via an internet-based medium (for example Skype or a Google Group) are current being considered – please let us know if you would be potentially interested in joining in discussions using such a method.

The issue of finance was raised with respect to how to fund the current and future activities of the Sangha. In the previous edition of the newsletter, donations were invited to support activities such as organising visiting teachers and retreats, networking, facilitating discussion, and producing and

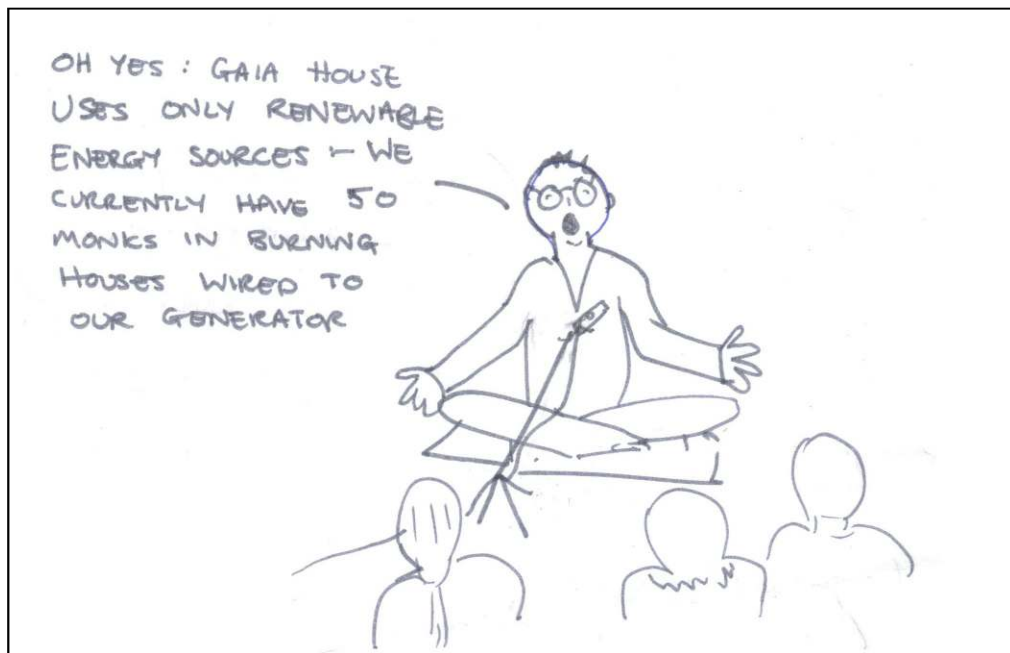
mailing copies of this newsletter. The point was raised in the meeting that it is important to think about our commitment and financial contribution to the developing Sangha rather than just thinking about finance in connection to items being purchased or funding the newsletter. Despite this the subject of defined projects for donations was discussed and agreed. Donors should be able to choose on which projects their money was to be spent. For example, funds should be kept separate for donations made to support the newsletter and those made to support future projects such as a new temple. One possibility is advertising suggested donations of different levels depending on whether a person receives an email or a paper copy of the newsletter. Another option is a fixed subscription fee rather than a voluntary donation. We invite feedback on this issue.

Liselotte Alden gave a summary of the activities of a 'sister' Sangha in Sweden who have been visited by Reb every year for the last five years. The Sangha has around 15-20 regular members. There was a clear desire for there to be improved connections and dialogue for the purposes of mutual learning between Dancing Mountains and European Sanghas who regard Reb as their main teacher. It was suggested one amongst many possible advantages of this would be improved coordination in the timing of retreats in European countries to minimise the amount of travelling Reb would need to do by airplane. There was general agreement that reducing the environmental burden of running retreats by such means would be desirable. Reb also encouraged Sangha members to form small group in their local area to encourage practice in those communities and to minimise the need for travel. With this in mind we are delighted to announce the formation of a Dancing Mountains sitting group in Manchester. For details on this please contact Chris Brown or Frances Collins, who are in the process of arranging a venue and appropriate meeting dates. Wendy Klein, and Clare and Chris Hannah, are also intending to improve their already established Sangha meetings in East Anglia.



Bev Eatwell

A further option raised is that while limiting travel to reduce negative impacts on the environment has its place, we need to hold things in the balance by not getting obsessive about these methods and instead utilising strategies that have *positive* impact. This will have a more beneficial effect on the growth of our Sangha. A first move could be to link our website to progressive environmentally active organisations to establish an intention towards moving in this direction. Secondly, when flying teachers over from the US it's also possible to calculate the carbon dioxide emissions for the journey and opt to invest in carbon offsetting projects such as planting trees to neutralise the emissions. Lastly, we could establish strategies for the environmentally conscious use of water, use of recycling facilities, etc. We invite ideas in response to this environmental issue.



Bev Eatwell

In addition to transcriptions of Reb's dharma talks for the newsletter, the idea was put forward to start transcribing and compiling any significant question-and-answer exchanges that take place during dharma discussions. These more dynamic and interactive aspects of Reb's teaching are widely valued and a strength of his approach to dharma that we wish to make available to a wider audience, perhaps by compiling them into a book. While Reb's time is limited in selecting such material, he has agreed to review transcripts of material that we have selected and transcribed for this purpose. Hence we invite Sangha members who have any significant audio material to either submit this to Frances Collins for transcription or, if desired, to send accurate transcripts of such sessions to her. Such sources of audio material may include the SFZC website, Reb's own website, and any talks you may have purchased that were recorded at Gaia House or other venues over the years. We regard this as a real opportunity to show appreciation for our teacher and spread his teachings.

Chris Brown

Receiving the Precepts

To formally become a Zen Buddhist, one must be initiated; that is receive the Precepts in a formal ceremony wherein one pledges to give him/her self up wholly to the Three Treasures of Buddhism and to keep the ten cardinal Precepts. Zen master Dogen wrote that the formal taking of the Precepts is an essential step towards Buddhahood; so obviously it is an aspect of our practice demanding the most sincere respect and wholehearted gratitude. Perhaps the closest ceremony of any such import previous to receiving the Precepts was on my wedding day when I made certain vows which I believe would imbue our promises to each other with a certain protective virtue.

Years later, when receiving my Serene Name and Blood Vein Document, I read that "The preceptual vein of the Bodhisattvas is the same single great causal condition of the Zen Gate"! Later in the document I am exhorted: "To protect and hold these Precepts, to not let them be lost, and to cherish and actively guard this perfected virtue". So it seems quite apparent that Zen Mind, Big Mind, No Mind is perfected virtue and that our purification chant:

*All my ancient twisted Karma
From beginningless greed, hate & delusion
Born through body, speech and mind
I now fully avow.*

...is our continual reminder.

Receiving Precepts into our life aids us in bringing awareness to the many times that we talk ill of others; in my case this is often guised in some quite needless joke or put down which I later conclude was completely unnecessary. Here zazen clears and calms the mind so that in our sincere effort to observe the Precepts it becomes increasingly easy to recognise the many occasions we are inattentive and lax in cherishing their importance.

In a book I am presently reading which appears more oriented to Christian concepts, it is stated that: "If you want to find the sacred space in your life, you must want to walk without blemish. You will, of course, fail to live without blemish; but failing is quite different from not even trying". Here, virtue is seen as the door to the sanctuary and as an essential part of the real spiritual life. Our ancestors implore us to embrace this one track without side roads, the way of perfected virtue, our way home, a home that is always with us as we practice 'just sitting' wholeheartedly.

Gassho, Francis Checkley.

***“Receiving
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Vast and Empty Vow

With the love of the Tathagata, this vast and empty vow I offer for the sake of all beings. To give mind and body over to the work of Kanzeon with whole being and to uprightly face each precept transgression with humility and repentance.

The forms of practice of sitting, standing, lying, walking, bowing, chanting, making offerings, confession, repentance, speaking, eating, cleansing, thought and non-thought and the turning of delusion and enlightenment with the grasping and renunciation of the practice are not done by you or I but are the turning of the universal wheel of Dharma. I vow to realise each moment of practice as a manifestation of this truth with an open heart offering life after life to the work of the great vehicle.

May each moment be realised as the teaching of the thus come one. May the limitless depths of this vow never be reached nor its form defined so in impeccable freedom may we realise together the liberation of all beings whose numberless names we cannot even conceive yet who intimately support our lives and our vow.

May the vast and empty vow that manifests this practice-enlightenment be transmitted to all beings across the infinite worlds so they may join in the great practice of the Vast and Silent Ocean.

An Gyu Dai Chi, Buddha's Disciple



Linda Griffiths

Retreat Reflections

**Dharma Flower Turning Dharma Flower, led by Reb Anderson
Roshi, Gaia House, August 2009**

When Michael approached me at the end of this retreat and asked if I could write something for 'Mountain Silence', I must admit my first thought was "he's mad, how could anyone write about such an amazing experience? Words could just not touch it"... In the same instance this thought turned in my mind and the honour of being asked and feeling the space between us open up, the dharma flower of universal possibilities began to emerge. I offer these reflections not as an attempt to recapture the wonder and beauty of the retreat but to gather up some of my nougats of learning.

Arriving with lovely warm welcomings, meeting new and familiar people, performing ceremonies of welcoming – feeling by now a familiar range of emotions of loving being here and wanting to run away before it's too late. I'm still in some respects dealing with the legacy of years of boarding school life which ended 42 years ago but is as fresh as the daisies when it comes to starting a retreat. Well Reb, I have learnt to be gentle, upright, honest and harmonious with these feelings and they melt away in time. This teaching has been so helpful to me, it creates a space in which preoccupations can dissolve and make way for a more universal relationship with this aspect of experience. The feelings don't seem to change but my relationship with them has certainly changed, opening opportunities for new actions and stories.

Reb's arrival in the hall and then feeling his presence, studying the loving warmth of his face, is always a wonderful experience. This time it seemed even more special; there was a sense he was going to unfold some wondrous opportunities. There seemed to be a charge of energy that was soft, warm and deeply loving a place I could melt into, trust and be carried along into new fields.

I found myself readily appreciating the richness of the Dharma talks that were deeply grounded in the text of 'The Lotus Sutra.' My wonderings about what Zen had to do with scriptures and sutras and what was its concern with transmission through some mystical means fell away and a 'both/and reality,' emerged. Realising the limits of my learning and depth of ignorance (not knowing and assuming to know more than I know) connected strongly to Reb's invitation to stand up and acknowledge our pride and conceit. I had a sense that for many of us this triggered a world of thought, emotion and lived experience of living with the word pride and all that that entailed. Unpicking the tendency to confuse pride with self-regard and well-being seemed very apposite, allowing the word pride to stand more alone in its habit of taking credit for others achievements as if they were one's own (achieved on our own) and the traps of falling into favoured ways of thinking as if they were the truth.

***“How could
anyone write
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Words could
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Whilst I found the long days of sitting physically hard I came to a few new realisations. I would often wake around 4pm and find myself wrestling with some aspect of life I was troubled by. I was struck by how the immediate effect of walking into the meditation hall for the 6pm sitting, bowing, sitting and hearing the beauty of the bell ringing, opened the space for different ways of relating to these what can be consuming preoccupations. They seemed to dissolve into the softness and warmth of atmosphere and thoughts like (referring to my worries) "well I did not create this all on my own, you know, all beings past, present and future all play a part". It seemed the bell ringing resonated through them and beyond them.

As time moved towards the ceremony of confession on these mornings I could enter the ritual with a sense of making commitments and resolving to take responsibility for my part in the co-creation of life's experiences. The thought that I could prefer sitting on my mat to lying in bed seemed to challenge the legacy of my adolescent mind and bring me to focus on the reality of being who I am now, now, now...

On another morning (I think it was Tuesday) I awoke gently singing to myself "the wheels on the bus go round and round, round and round, round and round, the wheels on the bus go round and round all day long". I wondered if this was a true sign of my spiritual progress and development! In Reb's offering of how the surface is intimately connected to the depth, maybe we could say it was "the one Dharma vehicle turning all day long", turning I am led to think without any effort on my part; but in turning that thought, realising that the awakening moment of the day is connected to the efforts of all beings, allowing the awareness of turning and playfulness to be seen.

Back home two weeks on, Clare, Wendy, Carol and myself intend to meet in some combination of us most Wednesday evenings in Cambridge. In these meetings, inspired by the power of this retreat and what it connects to we will spend time meditating, discussing Reb's talks and reading from 'The Lotus Flower Sutra'. If anyone else would be able to join us that would be wonderful and I will offer some feedback on how we progress to future editions of Mountain Silence.

With deep gratitude to Reb and all who made this a wonderfully wonderful retreat.

Chris Hannah

***“The awaking
moment of
the day is
connected to
the efforts of
all beings,
allowing the
awareness of
turning and
playfulness to
be seen.”***

Finding Our Place and Our Way

Retreat at Felsentor, Switzerland, led by Reb Anderson Roshi, June 2009

Arriving in Switzerland I was once again struck by how neat and orderly this small but diverse country is; it was apparent passing through Zurich that even the graffiti on the walls is offered to the community in a way that is respectfully restrained and with notable artistic flare. And so it was with the magnificent timber Zendo at Felsentor; whilst having been grown, cut and carved in California under the design and supervision of Paul Discoe, a master builder and student of Suzuki Roshi who had spent five years studying temple design in Japan, the final building was flawlessly constructed



by Swiss carpenters and fitted with an uncluttered and sleek modern interior. At 2400ft above Lake Lucerne on the side of the Rigi Mountain and with a view of the high Alps, it is hard not to be impressed by the vision of the founders of this retreat centre. As Reb commented upon his arrival, the site is *excruciatingly* beautiful.

Travelling from Zurich in a group of four of our English contingent on the retreat (out of a total of seven), we passed over the Rigi Mountain on a quaint 19th century rail system that is still in use to this day, although electrified since it's original conception. Passing near the peak we were greeted with an unexpected snow shower which, upon our arrival at Felsentor, descended into the warmer air as rain. Richard, the office manager of Felsentor who was also previously ordained as a Zen priest at SFZC, commented that "A student of Zen should be able to walk between the raindrops" (a welcome alternative to the more familiar "A student of Zen should practice as if their head is on fire"!) My initial reaction of amusement was quickly turned as I realised he was being serious. Maybe that's what people learn when they come to Felsentor!

***“A student of
Zen should be
able to walk
between the
raindrops”***

Over the nine days of the retreat, I was lucky to have been given the opportunity to be part of the Doan Ryo team, whose responsibility it is to be the 'orchestra' of the meditation hall. Our Ino (head of the meditation hall), Thiemo, trained our group of four over work periods each day until we were all ready to perform, and was patient and humble in feeding back to us our shortcomings as we learnt. These jobs comprised three major roles. The *Tenken* wakes up the retreatants with a morning bell (in a somewhat ritualised way involving lots of bowing), strikes the *Han* (wooden block) in specific patterns to signal the time of the next period of *zazen*, and pounds the *mokugyo* (wooden fish) during ceremonial chanting. The *Kokyo* leads the chanting and is responsible for making dedications during services. Finally, the *Doan* rings the bells in a coordinated fashion with the bowing of the Zen Master and to signal the beginning and end of chants

during services, in addition to signalling the beginning and end of zazen and kinhin periods with bells and clackers. Despite initial anxiety as the perfectionist in me psychologically prepared to perform each of these functions for the first time, I soon found that despite some minor errors I was enjoying the roles (and pleased that few people noticed my mistakes!). Thiemo said that we didn't have to do these jobs if we felt like it would make us too agitated, and that someone more experienced could take over if need be. It was a very kind thing to say, and immediately helped me feel more relaxed about the whole thing!

Of course the focus of the retreat was the zazen. As is typical of a sesshin my zazen went through a number of phases. Firstly, settling in to the posture and schedule always takes some adjustment. Reb commented on how the whole group of around 30 retreatants appeared to settle very quickly (after only about a day). Possibly because we were preparing for a longer than usual retreat (nine days instead of seven) we were in less of a rush to progress, and therefore relaxed into the sitting more easily. Also Reb was in the unusual situation of teaching a group which did not contain one person who had not attended a retreat of this type before. Hence the group very quickly found themselves in harmony when expressing the forms of practice.

Reb focussed his initial teaching during dharma talks on encouraging inner stillness and silence with whatever movement of body and mind was experienced. However, first we needed to “find our place and our way”, paraphrasing part of the text of the Genjo Koan; in other words, we had to be right where we are. And yet, in *trying* to find this place, we distract ourselves.

As regards to my sitting, the inevitable achiness, sleepiness, pain, and general postural resistance of the first two or three days was met by a progression of coping strategies. Firstly arose habits of resistance and distraction from any uncomfortable experiences, until these could no longer be sustained due to the relentless schedule of sitting. This transformed into a strategy of exploring and investigating into the discomfort (physical and emotional), although still with an intention of wanting to solve the problem of the discomfort, and fix the situation. For example, noticing that focussing the attention into the sensation of pain has a suppressive effect on any emotional response to that pain, and through awareness also clears away any secondary bodily discomfort associated with those emotions of fear and the accompanying tension. Layers of tension and exhaustion were released and deeper layers revealed.

Reb's teaching then moved on a stage by day three, as he started to emphasise loving-kindness and compassion (as he stated, in response to what he felt our needs were, communicated to him during private interviews). Difficulties arising in body and mind can be *loved*; this means not interfering with them but letting them be and watching how they become unstuck, evolve, and transform with a sense of fluidity (without expecting them to do so). And in this unstuckness arises the possibility of flowing with one's experiences, such that the *beingness* of life is emphasised over fixing or improving oneself or one's situation.

“The beingness of life is emphasised over fixing or improving oneself or one's situation.”

And yet this is still only a preparation for the crux of Reb's teaching, which he introduced in the latter half of the retreat, once he felt that we had had some success in "finding our place". When one's responsibility is sustainably focussed on being in this place, here and now, without trying to change a single thing, there arises the possibility of witnessing the creation of the self in that moment. Our normal perception is one of: first there is the self, then it acts upon and realises the world. This is delusion. By contrast, by relaxing in beingness there is the possibility of seeing how the Universe comes forth and realises the self, the inverse of our normal way of understanding.

And yet, and yet... our very efforts to experience the enlightenment of this process obstruct the process of enlightenment. So can we just sit with total faith in what's happening? Can we see that each experience is the never failing manifestation of Buddha-dharma? Can we sit with no dependence on sitting, walk with no attachment to any particular way of walking, eat without giving rise to preferences of like and dislike? In this way each moment of one's life can be a revelation. Sitting still in zazen, with an intention to be here in complete stillness, whilst accepting that every movement away from one's idea of perfect sitting is *still* the glorious light of Buddha's teaching.

***“When there
is just pure
faith, what is
there to seek
anymore?
What is there
to gain by
sitting in
zazen?”***

***“Can we see
that each
experience
is the
never failing
manifestation
of Buddha-
dharma?”***

As I contemplate the effects of this retreat on my life, now that it is over, I see how each retreat I attend appears to be less and less dramatic in its immediate effects, and yet more and more aligned with a basic faith that whatever difficulties arise in my life are a welcome opportunity to learn acceptance and humility. The aftermath of a retreat used to be a very 'special' experience in which I found my attitude and perception of my life dramatically shifted for a period of time. This can be kind of addictive of course – a way of trying to get 'unstuck' from difficulties in life. But now, my experience is that each retreat is an affirmation of a basic faith in life and its difficulties. When there is just pure faith, what is there to seek anymore? What is there to gain by sitting in zazen? And yet we vow to uphold and maintain the forms and ceremonies of Zen in the hope that they may inspire others to find this faith in the future. Our practice therefore transforms from saving ourselves into a gift to sentient beings.

And only now I'm reminded that Reb's very first challenge to us as we began the retreat was to sit for the sake of all beings, a challenge that at the time seemed only remotely within my reach. Now I see that this vow is and always has been the pivot around which all vows turn, and that by making vows I can joyfully dance around this pivot. This way I vow to practice wholeheartedly.

Chris Brown

Making It Real

A few months ago I had the blessing to sit on retreat with Ryushin Zendo Paul Haller and the Zen team from Belfast. I had decided to attend at the last minute and was blessed to have the opportunity to discuss with Paul what it would take to create a Zen Centre here in Guildford, UK. The possibility of this has been a vision of mine for the last year, but my knowledge of developing such a service in the community is very limited.

After meeting Paul and coming back home I began to wonder just what it would be like if he could somehow make time to come and speak to us here in our area. His presence would serve our community and provide greatly needed support for us all. I called and emailed the San Francisco Zen Centre and began speaking to whoever would answer the phone. Before long I received a response and I must say, the word yes was the last thing I ever thought I was going to hear. I had to pull the car over in shock when I got the news.

So with that in mind I set out looking for a location for the event and the people who could support me in putting it all together. We had about two-months lead-time but with all the rest of life going on, for many people the event would often fall off the screen. Every once in a while I would panic and realise I had not been doing enough work towards the event and that if I didn't get off my butt I would be bringing a Zen Master to speak to an empty room. Now I have been in some touchy situations in my lifetime but that would have been right up there at the top the list.

We had no money for any kind of marketing and for some reason the thought of promoting it in that way didn't really feel right. It was not a business approach we needed but people sharing the opportunity with their friends and bringing them along out of love for the teaching. So I just kept sending out emails to everyone I know with a link to a page with information about the San Francisco Zen Centre and Paul Haller. I then asked everyone to pass it on to their friends and to please help us in keeping the conversation alive.

Well, wouldn't you know it people began to buy tickets and it wasn't long before I could see that wow, this thing was really going to happen, Paul was coming to lecture and people were coming to listen. Of course even though tickets were being bought in my little conceptual mind no one was really going to actually show up.

“It was not a business approach we needed but people sharing the opportunity with their friends and bringing them along out of love for the teaching.”

The day arrived and Paul came through the airport gate right on time. I was so excited that I unconsciously missed our turn off on the way home and before I knew it we had travelled ten miles out of our way. "Life's embarrassing and then you die". We got back to my place and what a joy it was to spend the afternoon in conversation with this beautiful monk, or should I say it was more about me trying to get all my questions answered so I could become enlightened before he left. I mean, how often do you get a Zen monk of his calibre over for dinner?

Our house was full of kids and friends and Paul made everyone feel comfortable and at home in the home we already had. Now that's as Zen as it gets folks. The time came and off to the venue we went. The location was a private school for young kids and what a stunning building it was. We got the room set up and before we knew it 65 people had arrived. I couldn't believe my eyes and as we got under way and to get things started a good friend of mine was kind enough to start us off with a beautiful chant that set the tone for the evening.

***“The master
handled
everyone and
everything with
grace and joy”***

***“It was about
me trying to get
all my ques-
tions answered
so I could
become
enlightened
before he left.”***

Paul then took the stage and spent the next hour talking to everyone and opening the floor up for any questions they might have. The evening became very interactive and the master handled everyone and everything with grace and joy. At around nine-fifteen we closed out and before we knew it the room was as we found it, profoundly empty. As if nothing had ever happened, yet so much had taken place in what seemed like just a few moments.

We got home to a few hours sleep and then I was up and off to the airport once again with Paul, the morning light not yet breaking in the English sky. I pulled up to the terminal, unloaded the Masters bags and was lost for words as to how to thank this man for such a great blessing and his presence. All I could think of to do was wrap my arms around him, give him a big hug and say, God bless you. Then like smoke rising from the fire of Zen, he disappeared into the airport.

May the infinite silence of your Buddha nature touch you like Ryushin Zendo has touched us all here in the UK.

Thank you Master.

JC Mac

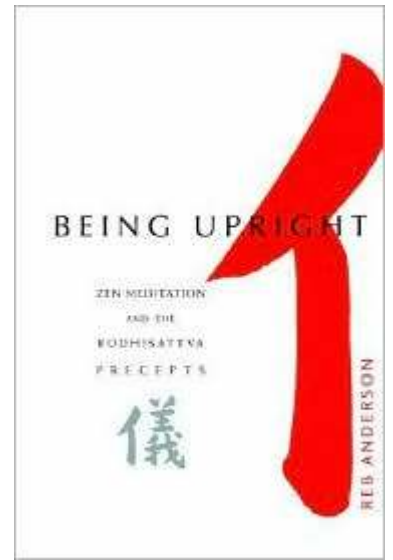
Please contact JC on: info@gzc.org.uk if you wish to offer your support to his vision of a Zen Centre in Guilford

Book review

Being Upright: Zen Meditation And The Bodhisattva Precepts

By Reb Anderson Roshi

This book published in 2001, many years after the foundation of San Francisco Zen Centre, introduces us to the fundamental ideas of Zen. The title says it all: Zen Meditation and the Bodhisattva Precepts. It appears that during the early stages of Zen in the United States the 'beat generation,' who so impressed our founder Suzuki Roshi with their dedication and thirst for practice, were primarily interested in sitting. This they considered was the foundation, the essence of Zen. They were in part supported by many of the great Zen teachers of the past not least the towering figure of Dogen Zenji whose powerful injunction 'Just sit!' galvanised my own early practice with its simplicity and power. This focus on sitting is entirely understandable when one considers that many of the early practitioners were not least seeking sanctuary from the ritual and symbolism of their own Jewish and Christian faiths. Paying homage to Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and ethical behaviour were present but not explicitly so.



It was apparently not until the late 1980s that Reb Anderson Roshi became fully aware of this failure in understanding that the fundamental concept of 'just sitting' included all these practices. 'Being Upright' is an important part of Roshi's long-standing and continuing effort to bring the beauty and depth of the precepts and Bodhisattva Vows to successive generations of Zen students in the west. The book is ordered around 'Jukai' or the 'Bodhisattva Initiation Ceremony,' and is interwoven with Reb Anderson's long personal journey through Zen practice. Unique though, I believe, is the author's exploration of 'conventional' and 'ultimate understanding' of the Bodhisattva Precepts as postulated by the great sage Nagarjuna, 150 - 250 CE:

*Without a foundation in the conventional truth,
The significance of the ultimate cannot be taught.
Without understanding the significance of the ultimate,
Liberation cannot be achieved.*

In the conventional sense the precepts may be seen as concerned with good and bad, but ultimate truth goes beyond ordinary reality, beyond the pervasive rationality of our world view.

Along with such deep explorations are colourful stories of Zen masters and their challenging inquiring monks. The one I always enjoy most is Tetsugyu serving tea to the warlord of Sendai. This vivid tale illustrates that with the traditional forms and ceremonies of Zen we have an opportunity to go beyond them, break them and put them together again for the sake of all beings.

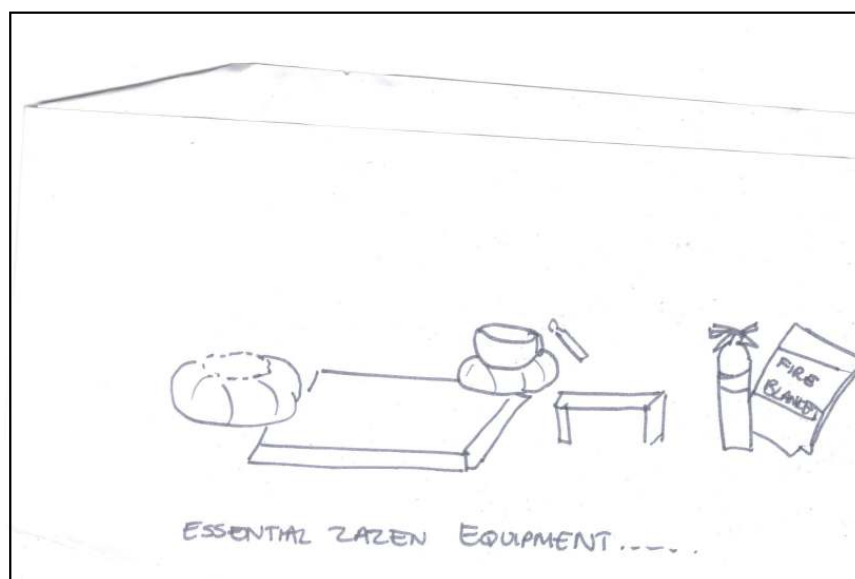
I purchased this book soon after its publication and it has taken me a long while to begin to understand its true value and worth. I would recommend it be on every Soto Zen student's bookshelf along with 'Zen Mind Beginner's Mind,' by Suzuki Roshi.

Michael Elsmere

A typical meditation session

- 6.00 am Sit and arrange robes.
- 6.01 am Replay scenes from last night's dreams and seek potentially worrying Freudian significances.
- 6.03 am Listen to bird song and unsuccessfully attempt to identify species.
- 6.04 am Doze.
- 6.06 am Distracted by sneeze. Ponder why people sneeze more in the morning.
- 6.08 am Distracted by own sneeze. Debate whether sporadic sniffing or graphic nose blowing will annoy neighbours more. Eventually settle on sniffing.
- 6.09 am Blow nose.
- 6.10 am Ponder possibility of incense allergy and possible consequences.
- 6.11 am Replay 80's songs including hits from Bananarama and Bros, with alarming clarity and precision.
- 6.13 am Try to figure out how the non-squeezy toothpaste tubes with the stripes work.
- 6.17 am Ponder the ecological merits of squeezy versus non squeezy tubes.
- 6.18 am Listen to medley of hits from Jackson Five back catalogue.
- 6.20 am Doze.
- 6.22 am Shoulder pain.
- 6.23 am Try to embrace and dance with shoulder pain.
- 6.24 am Fail.
- 6.25 am Try to treat shoulder pain with kindness and see as a gift from the buddhas.
- 6.26 am Fail.
- 6.27 am Try to open fully to shoulder pain and welcome what comes.
- 6.28 am Fail.
- 6.28 am Eyeball Doan from edge of peripheral vision and repeatedly mutter under breath "c'mon punk, make a move".
- 6.28 am Decide that bell will never ring as Doan has forgotten.
- 6.29 am Silent scream.
- 6.29.55 am Collapse into wholehearted, non-seeking 'mind like a wall' zazen.
- 6.30 am Bell rings

Bev Eatwell



Bev Eatwell

Local Contacts

Below is a list of people who have offered their details as local contacts for Sangha in our tradition. Please contact them if you wish to meet and practice with others in your area.

Bedfordshire (Broham)
Chris and Clare Hannah
channah1@btinternet.com

Brighton
Bev Eatwell
01273 620 349
beatwell69@hotmail.com

Cambridge
Wendy Klein
07756 554374 / 01223 426590
wklein02@hotmail.com

Chester
Frances Collins
01244 683289

fmjcollins@hotmail.com

Devon (Totnes)
Michael Elsmere
01803 732761 / 07817 604156
melsmere@hotmail.com

Dorset (Poole)
Jason Miller
07837 303972
jasonthemiller@hotmail.co.uk

Guilford
John Mackormik
07768 475622
info@gzc.org.uk

Gwent (Chepstow)
Edwin Green
07868 709163, edwin-green@gmail.com

Manchester (Swinton)
Chris Brown
07812 602794 / 0161 7934844
chrisb.by.name@gmail.com

Somerset (Glastonbury)
Devin Ashwood
01749 813969 / 07875 155474
devin@zendesigns.org

If you would like your details included here, please write to us (details on back page)

Appeal for funds

Dear Friends,

Those involved in Dancing Mountains have a number of functions and projects. We uphold the forms and ceremonies of Zen by organising visiting teachers and retreats, networking, facilitating discussion, producing a newsletter and are working towards developing a Zen centre in the south of England. So far, these activities have been resourced from ad hoc donations, occasional surplus money from retreats and from the private finances of core group members. To develop our activities to their full potential, more money is needed so we can take the next step. Publishing and more widely distributing the newsletter in hard copy, purchasing items to support forms and ceremonies, financing the development of a centre, all these things can only happen with wider financial support. At present, we ask for no membership fee to be a part of our community but in the tradition of Dana, freely give what we have. If you would like to join us in the spirit of generosity and make a one off contribution, please send a cheque made payable to 'Dancing Mountains' and send it to the address below. However what may help even more is a regular contribution so that we can budget for the future. Please fill in and return the form below and we will supply you with a bespoke standing order form to send to your bank.

With a deep bow,

Angyu Devin Ashwood.

Subscription Form:

I wish to make an offering to Dancing Mountains

Name:		Address:	
Phone:			
Email:			

I would like to make a voluntary contribution of: (please tick as appropriate)			
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Newsletter publication	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ceremonial texts\equipt.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Any Dancing Mountains work.	<input type="checkbox"/>

note: It costs about £4 to cover minimum costs to post out a years worth of newsletters for one person in A5 format.

return to: **Devin Ashwood, D.M. Secretary, 18 Westfield, Bruton, Somerset, BA10 0BT**

Diary of Events

2009 - 2010

Every Monday

Glastonbury Chan/Zen Group meet at Shekinashram 7:00pm
Phone: Devin, 07875 155464.

Every Tuesday

Totnes Zen Group meet at different locations 6:15pm
Phone: Francis 01803 866735 or Michael 01803 732761

Every Sunday

The Guildford Zen Centre group meet the Pepper Pot at 7pm
Phone: JC Mac 07768475622 or email info@gzc.org.uk

Monthly:

Dharma Discussion Group:

Email: Alan,
woodap@btinternet.com

October

Sat 3: Chan day retreat (Glastonbury). Phone: Devin Ashwood, 01749 813969

November

Fri eve 13 - Sun 15: Envisioning Retreat *DM (Totnes, Devon). Time for Sitting & Brainstorming the future for Dancing Mountains. Phone: Michael Elsmere, 01803 732761

February

Sun 7: Chan day retreat (Glastonbury). Phone: Devin Ashwood, 01749 813969

March

Sat 13 - Sat 20 Retreat with Tanto Meiya Wender *DM (Gaia House, Devon).

Contact: Gaia House
01626 333613

www.gaiahouse.co.uk

May

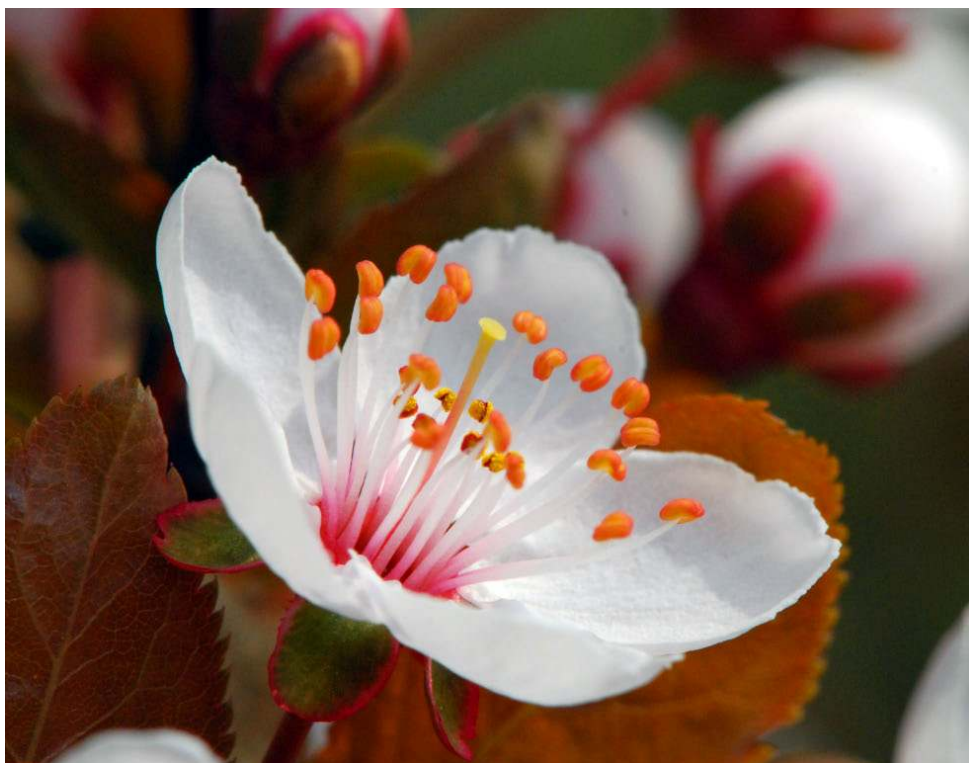
Sat 8 - Sun 9: Weekend Retreat Ermington *DM. To be confirmed.

*DM Indicates that the retreat is either using the Dancing Mountains Liturgy or is led by a priest in the Lineage of Suzuki Roshi.

New Zen Group in Manchester

We welcome newcomers and experienced practitioners alike to join us for three introductory evenings to Zen practice, taking place at Ordsall Community Cafe, Salford (Greater Manchester). The dates for the meetings are 19th October, 16th November and 21st December from 7pm until 9pm. From the New Year onwards, we also anticipate running regular meetings.

Chris Brown and Frances Collins



Markus Kvist

Next edition of Mountain Silence

Autumn edition with a theme around Green issues. We welcome your articles, poetry, pictures, letters, retreat reflections and book reviews! Summer issue publication date: 18th December, deadline for submission of material 4th December.

With thanks to: Reb Anderson Roshi and San Francisco Zen Center; the editorial team, Michael, Chris, Gill, Frances, Francis, Devin and everyone who has contributed to the newsletter and supported and encouraged us in our devotion and practice.

THIS ISSUE AND BACK ISSUES OF MOUNTAIN SILENCE ARE ALSO AVAILABLE ON THE WEB:

www.dancingmountains.org.uk

Submissions to future editions & comments on newsletter design:

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Web Development: Devin Ashwood (Secretary)

01749 813969 / 07875 155464; devin@zendesigns.org