



MOUNTAIN SILENCE

NEWSLETTER OF THE DANCING MOUNTAINS ZEN SANGHA

Issue 8

Winter

The Green Tara issue

Buddhist perspectives on ecology



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The Green Tara is a symbol of enlightened activity. As the international community begins to take action on the ecological crisis, albeit with conflicting views on how to proceed, in this issue of Mountain Silence we present perspectives on green issues from people committed to enlightened activity. There may not be such a thing as a "Buddhist viewpoint" on ecology; Buddhists may vary in their opinions as broadly as our politicians. Similarly, there is no clearly prescribed strategy for how to care for our environment laid out by the founders and ancestors of our tradition, although great teachers such as Dogen and Shakyamuni Buddha did make some useful suggestions. Perhaps more importantly, the practice of Buddha-Dharma stimulates certain common attitudes amongst diverse people: attitudes of reverence for life, and of universal care beyond our personal concerns of gain and loss. Dharma practice facilitates a greater sensitivity, but also equanimity, to the suffering in the world and to the great threats that lay before us, allowing us to respond to that suffering with greater care and wisdom. I hope you will see and enjoy this flavour of attitude within this Green Tara issue.

Chris Brown

Into the deep of an autumn song,
when I am with you all I feel suddenly strong,
swept off my feet by the raging wind
of our hearts and minds and souls combined.

We are all mirrors, turning in the dust,
capturing the light, it feels like the rust
of too much time spent talking to myself
gets rubbed off: a little by my efforts, and lots by stealth!

Francoise Elvin

To Night! (a sonnet)

I'm standing 'neath this black, star-glittered sky
I know there's nothing new that I could write
So many minds have sought words to express
The joy of opening to Life; to never-changing Beingness
Silent, vast and glorious: the time-transcending Night
I cannot hope to better them; I try
To pinpoint with a clever turn of phrase
The precious, subtle glimmering within each moment's sight
This tingling, vivid, sensual pulse of Marvel and Delight
The turning, turning, turning of the days
The rushing-forth of always-changing forms
The flashing-by of sunshine and of storms
Oh Starry Night! A thousand poems have offered you their praise
And now I've writ another, nonetheless.

Josh

Datta: What have we given?
My friend, blood shaking my heart
The awful daring of a moment's surrender
Which an age of prudence can never retract
By this, and this only, we have existed

from What the Thunder Said - The Wasteland, T.S Eliot
(editors note: 'Datta' is the Sanskrit word for 'give')

How Zen Masters Are Like Mature Herring

In the cherry blossoms' shade
there is no such thing
as a stranger.

Kobayashi Issa

So few become full grown
And how necessary all the others;
gifts to the food chain,
feeding another universe.
These big ones feed sharks.

Gary Snyder

An Ecology of Mind

This letter was written before the Copenhagen Climate Conference of December 2009. Ed.

Ecology has been described as “the interdisciplinary scientific study of the interactions between organisms and the interactions of these organisms with their environment”¹

So ecology could be seen as a study of interdependence or co-dependent origination, our mutual arising with the universe.

The vast majority of ecologists involved in exploring human impact on the warming of the planet have concluded that humans have a large part to play in this due to the massive amounts of carbon dioxide we are releasing by burning fossil fuels.

Our next chance to make a big difference on an international level will be the up coming summit in Copenhagen. This has been predicted to be hailed as a new era in international cooperation to minimise the ecological crisis of global warming. The same people who expect this message to be trumpeted also expect that lots of speeches will be made but that no actual binding agreements will be signed and so ironically, the summit is likely to just add more hot air to the already warming planet.

Global warming and the unexamined human behaviour that contributes to it, I propose are symptoms of our human consciousness, aspects of the Big Mind.

If this is so, where does that leave those of us who study ecology in the context of Buddhist teachings?

We have an opportunity to embrace the immediate crisis we find ourselves in, to study ecology in our unique context, after all, “to study the Buddha way is to study the Self”. This study is the study of the compassionate and the uncompassionate. In our attempts to embrace the wholesome and the good, we become aware of the unwholesome and the evil. We are taught that this is the study necessary to realise the boundless transcendent compassion of the Buddhas. It seems to me that we need Buddhas in the world right now and our current crisis invites them, would you like to invite them also?

Please join me in the practices of reducing consumption, recycling, avoiding unnecessary air travel, planting seeds and all types of beneficial activity, not in a vain attempt to save a world which will one day be swallowed by the Sun, but as an offering to all the Buddhas of past present and future, to realize the boundless freedom of Buddha nature so that when we go, we go loving one another rather than fighting for the last cup of water and breath of air...

With a bow,
Angyu Devin Ashwood

¹Begon, M.; Townsend, C. R., Harper, J. L. (2006). Ecology: From individuals to ecosystems. (4th ed.). Blackwell. ISBN 1405111178

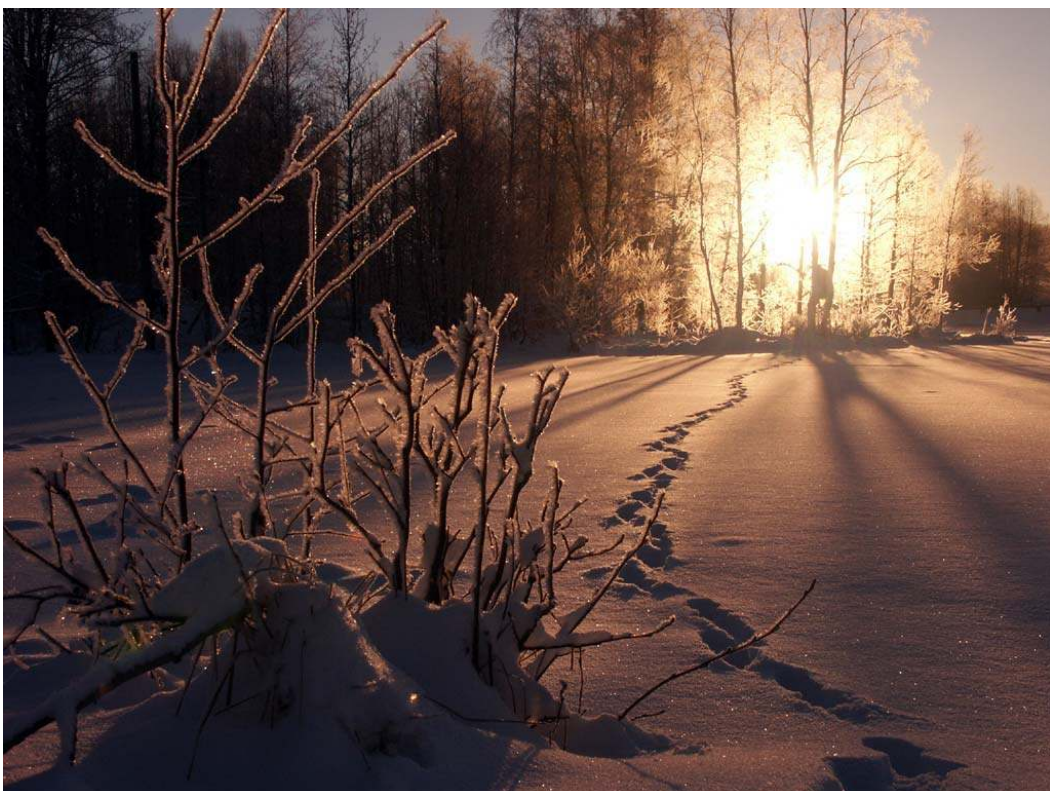
Thoughts on the Copenhagen Summit

Last Friday 18th December marked the end of the COP15 Climate Change Summit in Copenhagen.

Watching daily broadcasts from the Bella Centre (the official conference site) and the Klima Forum (the "peoples" conference) via Democracy Now, I felt I was witnessing the unfolding of a drama unprecedented in the history of human life. Although there have been smaller climate conferences in the past, this one brought together representatives of countries and nation states (around 175?) from the most economically rich and the most resource poor nations around the world. It brought those representatives together in conversation about the years of devastating effects of the oil-based industrial growth economies of the rich north on the lives of those in the global south.

The unfolding story of the climate crisis, growing resource depletion and environmental degradation had enfolded within it a story of action and consequence on a global scale - of the devastation of lives in one part of the globe, through the effects of climate instability largely generated/unleashed by the greed-based actions of those in another. Rather than face shame, regret, and fear of loss of the convenience and comfort of life in the north, those representing the rich industrialised nations chose to continue business as usual with some small concessions over being touched by the last ditch, desperate appeals of the drowning. Towards the end of the fortnight, the thousands of people who had gathered to voice their concerns were nowhere to be seen or heard having been "dispersed" by the police. Heads of international NGOs such as Friends of the Earth and the World Wildlife Fund International were refused entry, despite having official passes for the summit. Many had travelled from warmer climes and were left to wait outside in subzero temperatures without food or water - people fainted; in short, dissenting voices were silenced.

Carol Hunter.
Shin Ryu Setsu



Telling the Untellable

I offer this article as an invitation to conversation. It will not be an authoritative treatise on the climate emergency, but a personal gesture towards my fellow practitioners, an appeal for us to both individually and collectively turn our minds toward this most urgent of crises. It takes as read an understanding of the importance of so called "inner practice" as a condition for wise and compassionate action in the world.

Susan Murphy, practitioner, teacher and member of the Diamond Sangha writes:

"Climate damage constitutes an act of harm toward all sentient beings on such a scale that it surely must rivet the urgent, critical attention of anyone who takes the Bodhisattva vows on a regular basis - or teaches Dharma."

How do we respond to this assertion? Does it seem too extreme? Too shrill, even hysterical?

Returning to the concept of Crisis, there is a suggestion that the opportunity of the situation is revealed by the willingness to come close to the danger:

"I have also said over and over again that if we open to the dangers that surround us, that opening at the same time is an opening to the opportunities around us. If we close to the dangers around us, we close to the opportunities."

- Reb Anderson Roshi ¹

"The unprecedented enormity of this crisis has occasioned a movement of collective denial of corresponding opacity."

How do we attend to the dangers within this crisis of climate emergency? It may mean actively seeking information. It will, for most of us, mean opening variously to feelings such as disbelief, shame, anxiety, impotence, hatred, grief and indifference. The unprecedented enormity of this crisis has occasioned a movement of collective denial of corresponding opacity. Susan Murphy writes:-

"In one way, every trauma on such a scale, in which the secondary and subsequent "inter-generational" nature of the rippling effects of traumatization are so massive, is by nature a kind of untellable non-story; almost impossible to get our heads around because the anxiety and shame it arouses is so strong it confiscates the issue from thought for much of the time." ²

This rings true in my experience. On turning my mind to writing this small article, I find my thinking swamped by the scale and complexity of the problem. I find that my writing won't form itself into an integrated whole but instead insists on presenting itself as a series of reflections and corresponding questions.

"The opportunity of the situation is revealed by the willingness to come close to the danger."

Joanna Macy, a much respected Buddhist practitioner, teacher and activist, speaks of the importance of a grounding in the Buddhadharma helping us to “keep from shutting down or succumbing to wishful thinking. Practices that steady the mind and open the heart help us to be more present to our world”. Yet she also encounters practitioners “whose notions of spirituality hinder them from engaging with the world and realising their power to effect change.” Macy outlines three main “spiritual traps” we may fall into as practitioners ³, as follows (somewhat paraphrased):

That the pain and demands on us of the phenomenal world are less real than the tranquility we can find in transcending them.

That suffering is a mistake and derives from our own attachments. According to this view, freedom from suffering is attained by non-attachment to the fate of all beings, rather than non-attachment to matters of the ego.

That we create our world unilaterally by the power of our mind. Grief for the plight of the world is negative thinking. Confronting injustice and dangers simply creates more conflict and suffering. And the corollary, that the world is already perfect when we view it spiritually.

It seems to me that the responses described above also constitute understandable strategies of denial. Facing the intensity of world pain may tend to unbalance us. Donald Rothberg outlines the consequences of such unbalance as follows:

“We may lose easy access to joy, wonder and a sense of beauty - becoming depressed, overly grim or serious. We may tend to glorify our own pain, over-emphasising our sacrifices, becoming morally self righteous in demanding similar sacrifices of others”

⁴

So what is needed to face facts? Where do we go for the facts, what faculties need to be mobilised? How do we rouse ourselves when our own smaller self interest is at stake? How do we, both individually and collectively, address the unpalatable fact that the development of our Sangha in this country is apparently dependent on the environmentally harmful activity of air travel? Do we have to indulge in some kind of double think which says that our ends are ultimately so beneficial to the world that the harm caused by the means is justifiable? Or do we find a way of minimising the effects of such activity in our minds despite the compelling evidence to the contrary?

I have always found the stories of the journeys of seekers of the way both moving and inspirational. The scale in terms of effort, time, hardships endured and distance corresponds with the epic scale of the internal journey. These stories are often set tellingly within the context of the natural world, its trees, rivers and mountains. Gary Snyder writes:

“We learn a place and how to visualise spatial relationships, as children, on foot and with imagination. Place and scale of space must be measured against our bodies and their capabilities. Automobile and airplane travel teaches us little that we can easily translate into a sense of space.” ⁵

“Practices that steady the mind and open the heart help us to be more present to our world.”

It seems to me that the extensive scale and hazardous nature of these journeys were commensurate with the depth of longing to meet the teacher necessary to ensure completing them - there's a sense of a right relationship to effort and energy which is not evident to my mind through the intensively fuelled journeys of air travel.

Does the ease occasioned justify the cost or is there some inequity here? What might we be faced with as individuals if we were to decide not to make further plane journeys in support of our practice, and collectively in relation to the maturing of our practice as a Sangha?

I don't say I have an answer to this and I'm all too aware of the danger of these views achieving the status of an article of faith and so have been cautious about voicing them - I know I am grateful, beyond the power of telling, to Reb for travelling to this country to offer his teaching, and that I willingly share responsibility for the effects of the air travel it occasions. I also know that it is a temporary phenomenon and I and we will, in time, have to face the end of his visits.

Again, Susan Murphy:

"I think all people right now sense that the present abuse and despoiling of the life resources of the planet by our species are approaching intolerable and unsustainable levels. Why not begin with the issue most in our faces, which also happens to be the primary driver of this process - the likely effects of our massive over consumption of carbon upon planetary heating; the demonstrable effects of that upon acidification of the oceans, pollution of the atmosphere and accelerating loss of species; as well as the obvious speed at which it is at present driving population growth and propelling a mentality of "necessarily" exponential economic growth that seems entirely willing to turn a blind eye to the consequent destruction of people, animals, rivers, oceans, the air we breathe?"

“How do we go about addressing the vast institutionalisation of greed that we are part of?”

I would add to this list the fact that we have been and are dependent on oil from increasingly unstable parts of the world and that their instability has primarily been driven by our greed for the convenience, comfort and economic wealth we have become accustomed to, such that it feels like the “the way it is,” the status quo, or, to use a more recently appropriate analogy, “business as usual.”

How does this feel? How do we go about addressing the vast institutionalisation of greed that we are part of? I am brought back to Reb's talk on Crisis referred to earlier; quoting the Czech novelist, Milan Kundera, he says:

“ ‘The stupidity of humans comes from having answers for everything. The wisdom of the novel is having questions for everything.’ So he writes the story and says this is what happened. What happened? What is happening is turning. The opportunity, the danger, of faith is that we take it literally. Actually, we have to take it literally. But then you don't have to keep taking it literally. You can take it literally and then let it turn, or take it literally and then bring up another story so that the two literal stories can start turning each other. But to take it literally and hold it literally and say that it is true when there is no conversation is dangerous. That can lead to war among people.”

And so another story, phoenix like, is emerging as the apparent collapse of the Copenhagen talks gives way to the story of the growing care and effort of ordinary people, of civil society in response to the perplexity of human generated climate instability. This “untellable non-story” of our collective addiction to the benefits of the industrial growth society has been shown so eloquently to all who watched or listened, that people around the globe have responded on an unprecedented scale, largely enabled by the energy dense technology of the global internet.

As we strive to understand this unprecedented crisis that is anthropogenic ecosystem destabilisation, our human tendency to oscillate between the poles of idealisation and denigration will doubtless continue to challenge our willingness to meet the uncertainty of the situation with the equanimity necessary to support wise action.

For inspiration and to finish, I return with gratitude to the words of Joanna Macy and her following evocation of Gautama's response to Mara's demands to know by what authority the Buddha-to-be seeks the cessation of suffering in the form of two hand gestures or mudras:

“...the one about to become the Buddha quietly touches the Earth (The Bhumi Sparsha mudra). Instead of offering any personal credentials ... to show his worthiness to awaken for the sake of all beings, he touches the Earth, our ground of being. The central doctrine that he will teach, our dependent co-arising with all things, gives us that same authority. Our inseparability from all that is gives us power to act on behalf of all beings. Stemming from that profound understanding comes the second gesture of the Buddha that calls me into life. It is the abhaya mudra. With right hand raised, palm forward, it means Fear Not. Don't be afraid. You will never be severed from the web of life, for that is what you are. When the perils and tensions of this planet-time seem hard to bear, these two mudras with all they connote help me to stay present to my world.”

I welcome your stories and responses.

Carol Hunter.
Shin Ryu Setsu

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In Love with all Life

Being Buddhist, Being Green

It would seem there ought to be some kind of relationship between living as a Buddhist and caring for the Natural World given that, as Mahayana Buddhists, we are encouraged to devote ourselves wholeheartedly to all beings, and all the beings we are generally aware of are reliant on the health of their natural environment for their survival. So, I would like to say a few things about what I think it might mean to be an 'Environmentalist', and to draw some parallels between that and being a 'Buddhist'.

*"God is a Pregnancy giving birth to the sacredness of Nature."
Hildegard of Bingen*

From a personal point of view, I have to say that being 'Green' and being 'Buddhist' are two branches of the same tree. I would say that the trunk of that tree is a felt sense of the sacredness of all life, and its root is the Reality that my own beingness and the beingness of everything else in the whole Universe all arises together, inextricably interwoven, moment after moment, as the manifestation of a Great Mystery, which is boundless, limitless, unknowable – and yet seems to pervade everything everywhere with bright energy and great love. I became a 'Buddhist' because the Buddha's teachings and – most importantly, some living Buddhist teachers – seem to understand and embody that Great Mystery.

It took me some time to come to Buddhism, in great part because some other religious and spiritual traditions seem to more clearly express a definite relationship between the Ultimate – or Divine – nature of things, and the sacredness of the Natural World: this is expressed especially clearly in many Native American traditions and other tribal, 'indigenous', cultures, and also in Taoism. One can also find many great expressions of this in the history of Western culture and religion. This finding of God alive in Nature is wonderfully conveyed in much romantic poetry, such as Wordsworth:

*"And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts: a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things."*

From 'Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey'

***"Being
'Green' and
being
'Buddhist' are
two branches
of the same
tree."***

***“This body
and its
environment
are one
inseparable
seamless
continuity.”***

I suspect that this “sacredness of Nature” has been at the core of most folk religion since time immemorial. Cultures which are deeply affected by this view are likely, almost by definition, to act with care towards the Natural Environments within which they live. Some feminist historians have traced the roots of an exploitative attitude towards Nature - in most European and Western Asian cultures - to a shift from religion based primarily on reverence for Mother Earth, towards worship of warlike male ‘sky gods’. Be that as it may, I do think that the roots of Nature-abuse in European culture are much older than the modern scientific age, or even the Christian period. Certainly the deforestation of England began at the very latest with the Anglo Saxon invasions. The significant change in modern times in our relationship with Nature is not so much a change in attitude, as the massive increase in our capacity to do harm, due to the power of modern technologies and the ever-growing numbers of human beings. Under the pressure of our huge population, and equipped with modern industrial technologies, it is surely only a change in our fundamental attitude that can enable humans to live in harmony with the rest of life and restore good health to our planet.

*“I am not a somebody, I am not a nobody,
I’m a cell in one Body, filling all space.”*

Theo Simon, ‘Child of the Universe’

The kind of viewpoint, and behaviour, that we need in order to bring ourselves back into harmony with the rest of life on Earth would seem to me to be based on the recognition of two fundamental facts of life. These two facts form the basis, for me, of ‘Environmentalism’, of being ‘Green’. The first is that we humans are not separate from Nature, but part of Nature, and entirely dependent on the health of our natural environment for our existence. The second is that the whole Earth is one living system.

This body is not something separate from Nature. It is not even enough, really, to say that this body is thoroughly interconnected with the Natural World, or that it is entirely dependent on Nature – on air, water, food and sunlight - for its existence in every moment. This body and its environment are *one inseparable seamless continuity*. A human body is like a wave, formed out of the body of the Earth, taking a particular shape for a while and then returning fully to the Earth in due time. Just like a wave formed by the sea, this body has an apparent shape but its constituent parts are constantly changing, always being re-constituted out of the environment within which it appears. Taking note of this fact is important, because what it means is that one’s true body is the whole Earth – in fact, the whole Universe. If I want to truly care for the health of my own body, or for the health of my family and friends, then I need to care for the health of this greater whole. If the health of the whole is undermined, all of the smaller bodies that constitute it will also be inevitably affected.

Following this line of thought inevitably leads to the recognition that all of life is One. The Gaia Hypothesis, developed by Lovelock and others, carefully examines and describes the living processes and systems of the Earth to show that the Earth as a whole acts as a single living entity. This life of the Earth as a whole is not by any means a new idea, but has long been recognised by peoples of many nations, and there is a great deal of consensus, amongst many cultures, in calling this living being, 'Mother Earth' (hence Lovelock's adoption of the word, 'Gaia' – one name for this Earth Goddess).

A view of the interconnectedness of all life – that no part is separate, that everything continuously flows into and out of everything else – is, of course, a significant part of Buddhist view. However, Buddhist philosophy and teaching goes beyond the interconnectedness of apparently external phenomena, and also says that all the phenomena we ordinarily experience are in some sense illusory, are projections of our minds, created by causes and conditions (karma). Perhaps there is a parallel between recognising this body as a temporary manifestation of the greater Body of the whole Universe, and recognising this apparently individual consciousness as a momentary wave of the vast Ocean of Consciousness – the One Mind. It is interesting that in Zen, in particular, – as in Taoism – there is an emphasis on harmonising body and mind, as a significant part of the process of awakening to our True Nature.

Buddhism teaches us that no true happiness is to be found while we cling to the reality of these illusory phenomena. During our retreat with Reb Anderson Roshi at Gaia House earlier this year, Reb said that even if we sort out all the environmental issues, "It will still be the Burning House." (a reference to a parable in the Lotus Sutra, on which Reb had been teaching). That is, even if we were able to solve all our social and environmental problems, we would still be caught in delusion and its consequent suffering. There would seem to be some disjuncture between viewing our perceptions as deluded, and yet seeing that all life is sacred. As someone engaged with Buddhist practise who senses that all of life is, indeed, sacred, I make it part of my practise to open to this paradox.

One way in which our perceptions are illusory is that they are caused by our particular, human, arrangement of sense organs and brain. It is obvious that other creatures, such as insects, fishes and birds, must each perceive this world in very different ways, and we can't really say that our perceptual universe is more truly real than theirs – it is only what seems real to us. Remembering this can help environmentalists to break out of an anthropocentric point of view, in order to deeply consider the needs of all beings. We can never

“Even if we were able to solve all our social and environmental problems, we would still be caught in delusion and its consequent suffering.”

actually experience the perceptual universe of another species, and yet our actions in our perceptual universe have impacts on the perceptual universes of all other beings. Even when we notice we are having such an impact (and so often we do not), we can never actually understand how that impact is perceived by these other beings – and so this recognition of the limited nature of our perceptions can remind us to act with great care in our relationships with the natural world, as the impacts of our actions may be invisible to us, but hugely significant to others.

Although the story of interconnectedness in Buddhism seems to be more profound and subtle than that which is the basis of Environmentalism, nonetheless, there are further parallels which can be drawn. Firstly, both views suggest that our problems are primarily problems of consciousness – of incorrect ways of perceiving and thinking about our world – and that is primarily our consciousness which needs to alter if we are to solve our problems. Secondly, both suggest that we need to also change our actions, to make them more coherent with the correct view which we aspire to understand and to embody.

Our environmental problems all stem from a failure in the modern consciousness to recognise our place in the Natural World.”

“The impacts of our actions may be invisible to us, but hugely significant to others.”

Despite teaching an ultimate view of the illusory nature of our perceptions, Buddhism gives us ethical precepts, ways to be in the world, and enjoins us to care for all life – even though our perception of this life is deluded. These precepts, in turn, because they help us to honour our connectedness to all life, lead us towards awakening from our delusion. However, if a religion is *only* founded on good conduct, and does not contain an aspect of cultivating our True Nature, then it will never lead to ultimate happiness and freedom. Likewise, Environmental issues are often painted in terms of what we need to do, or not to do, but it seems fundamental to me that our environmental problems all stem from a failure in the modern consciousness to recognise our place in the Natural World. However concerned we may get about particular Environmental issues that are apparent right now, we can properly address these issues without repairing our felt separation from Nature. Even if we were able to effectively address these issues, in the meantime we would inevitably be sowing the seeds of the next lot of environmental problems because, as a society our actions are so *big*, so powerful, and we pursue them with so little, if any, consideration of what it really means to be a human being, of our true place in the natural world.

There are so many grave environmental concerns in our time: global climate change; loss of habitat and biodiversity; over-fishing; pollution of land, water and air; what to do with all our waste, and so on. I would strongly suggest that all of these are just symptoms of a deeper malaise. We are treating the Earth as a lifeless mass of materials placed as if by

accident and available for us to use however we like, when actually the Earth is a living body, of which we humans are merely one part. Of course there are going to be negative consequences. We have the ability to dig, drill or tear huge volumes of materials out of their place in the Earth's body, and then we use them for a while, transform them into something other than what they were and then dump them in a different part of the Earth when we are finished. If the Earth was a lifeless heap then this might have no consequences, but as the Earth is a living body, this is clearly a recipe for disaster. Climate change is occurring because we treat fossil fuels in this way, burning them and putting the smoke into the atmosphere. Despite the mass of scientific evidence, some people still argue that there is no man-made climate change, but the key point here is that this behaviour is *bound* to have significant negative consequences. If it wasn't climate change, it would be something else. Indeed, there are certain to be many and various negative consequences due to our mass extraction and burning of fossil fuels – it just happens that climate change is the one getting most of the attention at present. It is no surprise to me at all that new potential ecological disasters seem to loom their heads at a faster and faster rate; these are all just symptoms of this deeper malaise.

In the long term, I do believe that we will only resolve this by finding ways for all human beings to once again live in close proximity to Nature. It is very hard to get a genuine felt sense of our deep connectedness with all life while living in a city, working in an office and travelling everywhere by car. It's not impossible, but it is very hard. Just as in Buddhism we see the need to put some effort into reconnecting with our True Nature through practice – in order that our actions in the world can become ever more beneficial and harmonious – so also, if we are concerned about environmental issues and we wish to discover how we might make a difference, then we could perhaps make a real effort to spend more time amongst Nature, and also look to see how we can help others to do this. As our body is never separate from Nature, then it is also very beneficial to make the effort to re-connect more with one's own body. I would strongly suggest that trying to walk whenever possible – ideally as one's primary mode of transport – can be very beneficial both as Buddhist practice and to re-connect with our Natural home. When we walk on the Earth, we reconnect with Her in a very primal, pre-conscious way. One of the simplest and most profound ways to re-awaken one's awareness of unity with Nature is to take a walk over some distance, for a few weeks (or months, if you are able). For countless centuries, followers of many religions have undergone pilgrimages on foot as part of their religious observance – so it would seem fair to suggest that this may well have some spiritual value as well.

***“It is very hard
to get a
genuine felt
sense of our
deep connect-
edness with all
life while living
in a city.”***

And then, the more we deepen our sense of connection with Nature, the easier it will be to see how we might act to be in harmony with this connectedness; and as we bring our actions into harmony with this connectedness, we will consequently deepen our understanding of it. I feel sure that this can be a significant part of the spiritual path for people of all religions in this time and place, but I wouldn't presume to try to set out exactly how this relates to Buddha's Dharma.

*"The Earth does not belong to us,
We belong to the Earth."*
Attributed to Chief Seattle

Ethical conduct for an environmentalist begins with the question: who owns this Earth; this land; this water; this air?

***"In my view,
blackberries
are freely
given:
oil buried
hundreds or
thousands
of feet
underground
is not."***

One of the key precepts of all schools of Buddhism – and most other religions – is not to steal: not to take what is not freely given. In my view, blackberries are freely given: oil buried hundreds or thousands of feet underground is not. I would say that, as humans born on this planet, we have a right to create a shelter on a piece of land, and work the land to provide for our needs, but to what extent are we entitled to exclude other forms of life from the land we consider 'ours'? Is it really ethical for us to cover vast swathes of land in concrete and tarmac for our own convenience, thus rendering it unusable for every other life form on the planet?

It is my view and belief that everything is imbued with consciousness, and there is a consciousness of the whole of the Earth, that we may rightly call Mother Earth. Furthermore, I have little doubt that all aspects of Nature are imbued with consciousness, and that the animist view of places, landscapes, individual trees etc. as being inhabited by conscious entities – sometimes called, 'Nature Spirits', also 'devas', 'protectors of the land' and many other names – is broadly correct, and based on the actual experience of many people in many times and places. That people have experiences of these entities does not mean that we necessarily understand what they are. Many societies where Buddhism is the prevalent religions seem to maintain practices which honour and respect these beings. I was once present at a smoke-offering ceremony before the building of some meditation houses at a Buddhist Centre in Brittany, belonging to the Drukpa lineage of Himalayan Buddhism. The smoke is blessed with mantras and visualised as a vast offering of every imaginable desirable substance, which are offered to the spirits and protectors of the land. His Holiness Gyalwang Drukpa, conducting the ceremony, explained that these beings are the true owners of the land, and we have to make offerings to appease them, when we are having an impact on the land – for example cutting down trees or constructing buildings or roads. He added that many natural disasters, such as

extreme weather and earthquakes, are a result of angering these beings, who usually maintain harmony in the Natural World. They are especially upset by the pollution or degradation of the land, water or air where they dwell. I have no idea how much this view is shared in the Buddhism of other cultures.

Many people in our modern 'rational' times find it hard to believe in such beings, but the little anthropological study that I have done would seem to suggest that those peoples who live really harmoniously with Nature do believe in such beings, and often have some kind of active relationship with them, through ritual and ceremony. I would say that their close connectedness with Nature leads them to be aware of dimensions of being that modern people are generally closed off from, but it could also be that it is rather that their belief in such beings leads them to respect their environment.

However, these 'spirits' are not the only invisible beings affected by our actions. Everything we do affects countless beings that we don't see because they are small or far away. The information age that we live in gives us a hugely increased opportunity to study and look deeply to see the consequences of our actions, such as the choices we make as purchasers of goods and commodities. This can be a real mixed blessing, because if we look carefully into this we will see that we are continuously causing harm to others, and there is really no way to avoid this while we remain alive. And yet, followers of Buddha are called on to refrain from harmful deeds and to engage in beneficial actions. Each of us has to find our own way, but if we truly want to take responsibility for our impact on others, we need to make the effort to look carefully at our actions and their consequences.

The burning of fossil fuels is an excellent example to use for this, partly because it is so central to our lives, these days. These fuels have to be explored for, extracted, transported and refined, and then they are burnt. At each stage there are significant ethical implications which we, as the ultimate purchasers, need to take some responsibility for. In the extraction, there is the issue of who the oil belongs to. Fundamentally, I believe it belongs to the Earth. It is part of the living body of the Earth, and almost certainly has some function in maintaining that body's health. Some have suggested that its function may be to store excess solar energy, to maintain a stable atmospheric temperature. I have a personal crazy and unsubstantiated notion that it may serve to lubricate between tectonic plates, or some-such. In any case, within healthy living systems, in general, each part usually has a number of different functions – and we simply don't know what role subterranean oil plays in the healthy functioning of our planet. In purely human terms, the land where the oil is found is often inhabited by a community of people. Where

***“We need to
make the effort
to look
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actions and
their conse-
quences.”***

these people have little economic or political power, it has often been the case that they will receive very little, if any, of the wealth from the sale of the oil, and also that little care is taken to avoid contamination of their land during extraction. Should they complain about this, in many cases they have been subject to considerable violence and oppression by governmental or paramilitary forces. The Ogoni people in the Niger Delta are a very well known example of this, but other examples include El Salvador - where there was horrific violence and oppression in the '80s and '90s - and Columbia. There have been innumerable wars and coups because of oil wealth, with many murderous regimes being propped up by support from oil companies and Western governments. Examples include Saddam Hussein, the Shah in Iran and the Indonesian occupation of East Timor. Many people would consider that the recent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq probably have more to do with oil than anything else.

Then, when the oil is transported and refined there are many opportunities for pollution of land and sea, due to carelessness and/or bad luck. There will always be a certain amount of this, and we have to accept responsibility for this as well. Then, when the fuel is burned it pollutes

the air, upsetting the balance of gases in the atmosphere, increasing risks to ill health in all the creatures that have to breathe the air and creating large-scale dangerous phenomena such as climate change, acid rain and the acidification of the oceans .



Markus Kvist

Finally there is the issue that this is a finite resource and we

are using it at a much, much faster rate than the Earth is creating it, meaning that the convenience and opportunities that it gives us today will not be available for future generations. Both this, and the creation of long-term atmospheric damage, are a kind of theft from future generations. The potential destabilisation of the atmosphere through unpredictable climate change is surely a theft, on a huge scale, of the natural birthright of countless future beings: humans as well as other forms of life.

This story of fossil fuels is just one very powerful example of the activities of the global industrial economy, in which we are constantly participating. The mining and processing of many other minerals have similarly destructive effects. A number of wars have been fought in Africa, most famously in the Congo, in recent years, mainly due to competition for mineral resources – including substances vital for mobile 'phones and laptops. These have been some of the most bloody and horrifying conflicts in history, with widespread massacres of civilians and the use of child soldiers. The desecration of the land and the harms to human beings and societies go hand in hand, because they stem from the same lack of care for our world and other beings, driven by the greed for money on the part of 'producers', and the never-ending desire for

luxury, convenience and distraction on the part of we 'consumers'. I don't have some ready solution for how all Buddhists ought to respond to this, but I do feel that we ought to acknowledge it, acknowledge our part in it, and not turn away.

To analyse the effects of our actions in this way and to intellectually explore the way we are connected with all beings is undoubtedly important, but still may be quite limited in its effect on our ways of behaving. By contrast, if one is able to develop a genuine *felt sense* of one's interconnectedness with all life, then it becomes progressively more psychologically unpleasant to be aware of causing such harm to others. One begins, then, to *choose* to act ever more ethically - with increasing care and concern for others - simply because it is becomes too emotionally painful to do otherwise. I have no doubt that the regular practice of Buddhist meditation is one very effective way to open to this felt connectedness.

Three final thoughts:

Firstly, Buddha said, "With our thoughts we make the world." This is, I think, one description of the law of karma. Perhaps it is the case that the more we humans view our Earth as lifeless and treat it as an object for our greed and exploitation, then the more it will appear to us as degraded, unhealthy and inhospitable. Whereas, perhaps, the more we view the Earth as sacred and precious and treat it with reverence and care, the more it will appear to us as beautiful, bountiful and nourishing. However, this will still be "in the Burning House," I guess.

Secondly, one of the great gifts that Buddhist practice can bring to all forms of social and environmental concern and activity is some understanding of the partiality of our views and beliefs. I strongly believe in what I have written here, but I know that other people have different views, and it is my practice to let go of clinging to my views, so that genuine communication may be possible.

Finally, I wish to end with another quote, from the late, great Tibetan Buddhist Master, His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche:

*"To bring benefit is not so easy.
First try not to do harm."*

Thank you.

Josh

“The more we view the Earth as sacred and precious and treat it with reverence and care, the more it will appear to us as beautiful, bountiful and nourishing.”

The First Peace

“The First Peace is that which comes within the souls of people when they realize their relationship, their oneness, with the Universe and all its powers...”

Black Elk, Oglala Sioux. 1863 – 1950



I was recently reading an old copy (from 1976) of *Wind Bell* (the journal of the San Francisco Zen Centre) loaned to me by Francis Checkley. The first pages are taken up by a lecture given at Tassajara in Spring 1973 by Yamada Mumon Roshi (1900-1988) who was an influential Rinzai teacher. He begins his lecture with these words:

“At first we have to die, but then we have to be reborn. When rebirth is realised, there must be some touch with the objective world. Shakyamuni Buddha said that when he became enlightened, he saw the morning star. But before he saw the morning star his mind must have been zero. In order for him to forget all of his experiences before that time, his mind must have been very pure. He had had no experience of that morning star; he had no information about it. And that pure mind of the Buddha was reborn when he suddenly saw the morning star. That star was the first star for Shakyamuni Buddha after he was born. The star had no name. There was no discrimination between the star itself and Shakyamuni Buddha who saw the star. They were one. He saw the star as if he himself was shining – not the star. Then because he saw himself truly everything could be seen – flowers, insects, trees. Then he realised that every existence belonged to him. In Buddhism we call it ‘sunyata,’ or emptiness. Human beings exist in this zero, and to know this zero completely is Zen.”

These are momentous times for our planet especially for the generations yet to come. The 'first peace,' of which the First Nation medicine man Black Elk speaks is still hidden from many on earth.

As I write, the United Nations Climate Change Summit (7th to 13th Dec 2010) is in its second day. Quite coincidentally, also the 8th December is traditionally the day of the Buddha's enlightenment and the termination of Rohatsu sesshins that are held in many Buddhist monasteries! The aim of the Copenhagen meeting between the countries of the world is to work out a system whereby world carbon emission are cut by 25 to 40% relative to 1990 levels with further cuts of 80 to 95% by 2050. According to most scientists these are vital if planetary warming is to be kept below the dangerous 2c mark.

There is no doubt that such meetings and deliberations are a vital part to the solution of the problems that have arisen out of mans over-exploitation of the natural resources of the planet . However I would suggest that we all need to ponder the wisdom of Black Elk and Yamada Mumon Roshi if we are to really solve the environmental problem. We need to recognise the zero that we really are in order to achieve the first peace. Mumon Roshi's zero is a wonderful metaphor to explore the meaning of our upright sitting. The Muslim Moors brought the Zero symbolising nothingness from India to European mathematics in the 12th century. We may note that a circle or ellipse, an infinite curved line, embraces the empty O and surely represents connectedness.

In 1968 during The Apollo 8 moon mission we were given a potent vision of the frail delicate beauty of our planet as it hung a blue green O in the darkness of space. Perhaps this should have been a wake-up call to all of us to care for this ethereal circle of light. If we had we may have avoided the dangerous, edgy situation in which we find ourselves today. But clearly this unique magical view of our frailty was not enough to cause us to reflect on the damage our activities were doing to the planet. The recent controversies over the 'truth' of global warming are enough to illustrate this especially when concerns about economic growth being stifled are expressed as an argument not to change our burning of fossil fuels! It is clear that an intellectual or even a scientific appraisal of the situation is not enough to overcome our blindness and habitual way of being in the world.

Which brings me back to the comments of Yamada Mumon Roshi and Black Elk. These suggest that we just have to continue with our upright sitting for the sake of all beings letting our vows inform our practice. I am reminded of the story Reb Anderson Roshi recounts in his book 'Being Upright,' in the chapter on not misusing or wasting resources of the

“We need to recognise the zero that we really are in order to achieve the first peace.”

community or the natural environment. There were two monks Chinshan and Xuefeng who were on a pilgrimage in the mountains of China. Chinshan, a little weary and foot-sore, stopped to wash his feet in a clear mountain stream that was rushing by. Here he noticed a cabbage leaf floating along and realised that there must be a 'man of the way' close by. He was overjoyed and said to his companion, "let us follow this stream for clearly there is a sage living near. Let us seek him out." Xuefeng, pointing at the leaf sternly, retorted, "Your eye of wisdom is clouded. Later on, how will you judge others? If his carelessness about natural blessings is such as this, what is he doing living in the mountains?" Then they saw a monk running furiously down the mountain beside the stream to catch the cabbage leaf. Seeing such care and energy devoted to natural resources, the two pilgrims were delighted and decided that they must after all visit this hermit.

Our great teacher Dogen was assiduous in his care and devotion to the trees that surrounded his monastery of Eiheji, and Shakyamuni Buddha suggested that monks should plant and care for five trees during their lives. The first nation people of North America have a tradition that when a decision is made, its consequences for the unborn down to the seventh generation should be considered wisely. For aeons then we have had messages from many wise sources in different traditions that we should take care of our world, but we have not heeded them.

“It is good to remember that we need Gaia more than she needs us”

“Shakyamuni Buddha suggested that monks should plant and care for five trees during their lives.”

Professor James Lovelock, the scientist who first conceived of our planet as 'Gaia', argues that such things as the level of oxygen, the formation of clouds, and the saltiness of the oceans may be controlled by interacting physical, chemical and biological processes. He believes that the self-regulation of climate and chemical composition is a process that emerges from the delicately balanced evolution of rocks, air and the ocean - in addition to that of organisms that keep the Earth a place fit for life. Lovelock adds, "If we see the world as a super-organism of which we are a part - not the owner, nor the tenant, not even a passenger - we could have a long time ahead of us and our species might survive for its 'allotted span'. It all depends on you and me. It is also good to remember that we need Gaia more than she needs us, she will undoubtedly continue without us." So both scientists and the practitioners in our tradition believe in the interconnectedness of all things!

Perhaps to best care for our planet we need to become that zero of which Yamada Mumon Roshi spoke and awaken to a new unnamed world which is us so that everything can be clearly seen: plants, trees, insects, fish, birds.

Michael Elsmere

Envisioning Weekend, Totnes, 14th-15th Nov 2009

Minutes from the weekend

Bev Eatwell kindly put together the main points raised over the weekend, gently sprinkled with her unique humour which I have retained in the notes for your appreciation. Ed

Charitable status

There was a general feeling that it would be good to drive for charitable status, before a lot of money is invested in the sangha, in order to get the potential gift aid money benefits. Frances Collins is to look into it and she was encouraged to delegate further research or tasks to others as necessary. The aim is an electronic update for the end of December from her, and another sangha meeting in February to discuss developments. Everyone else is to keep eyes and ears generally open and to sound out potential trustees.



Chris Hannah

Inviting a priest over from San Francisco Zen Center

This would be for six months starting next Autumn. The idea was to help to support and develop the sangha. The priest would be based in Totnes, but with the possibility of travelling around country. The initial six months will be funded by the Totnes sangha, with voluntary contributions from others. We felt that it would be good to contact Reb's assistant, Connie, with more information prior to three of our sangha members going to Green Gulch this January, so that she could circulate the word to as many potentially interested parties as possible in all three practice centres over there. If done properly this could be the dining room talk of the week (interesting gossip is often sparse to non-existent). Once we have representatives there, it would be good to have resources to show them: pictures of the sangha/Totnes etc. and written material from sangha members, so that they can make an informed decision. Any written material should be sent to Michael and be no longer than 500 words.

Financial situation

At one point during the weekend, direct debits were handed around to those that hadn't managed to first leg it out of the house! There will be more attempts to get payments for the newsletter, especially in aid of printing and posting hard copies. When the resident priest and charity status drive has progressed, it would be good to have a fund raising campaign, possibly by phone. Frances is to put the fear of god into any tough cookies by using a strong Northern Irish accent and heavy breathing; the money is expected to roll in. Sun-faced buddha, moon-faced buddha, you've got to be cruel to be kind etc. etc. [*Editor's note: this is not the policy of Dancing Mountains :)*].

There was also talk of taking on guidelines (moral, ethical, dispute procedural, financial etc.), based on those from other sanghas such as those in Belfast, Gaia House, and SFZC, once we have grown to pre-empt any potential problems like Devin emigrating to South America with our direct debits (imminent) [Editors note: Devin currently has no plans to emigrate to South America with our direct debits, which we are assured will be handled in a responsible manner :)].

Temple

Francis Checkley proposed that some rooms above the bank in Totnes could be rented for the priest if only simply modified, and they rent for about £300 a month. The sangha proposed instead to knock down a downstairs wall in Francis' house to enlarge the zendo whilst he and Bernadette are sleeping one night, and move the priest into their house. Sun-faced buddha, moon-faced buddha etc....

The following are letters from members of our sangha who attended the weekend. Ed.

Hi Everyone,

Thanks for a lovely weekend. I left feeling we had grown and developed as a sangha. Thanks again to Bernadette, Francis and Michael for all their amazing efforts.

Bev

Xxx

Thank you Bev for the comprehensive minutes delivered in seconds. May all have journeyed safely.

Regarding any feedback, here more concisely are the three questions I was banging on about:

Given the intention for the weekend as being one of "Sharpening the Vision, Strengthening the Sangha", to address the questions:

- What worked for you in meeting the intention?
- What didn't work for you in meeting the intention?
- What elements/activities would you change in order better to meet the intention? (to include the possibility of altering the intention).

Great well wishing to all,
David

Reflections

An emergent theme seemed to me to be that of welcoming. Starting off by being so generously welcomed by our hosts Bernadette and Francis and our facilitator Michael, the activity of cultivating a continuous flow of welcoming seemed to permeate through the two days. Clare and I had the good fortune to arrive on the Thursday and spend time with Bernadette, skilfully guiding us in starting out on our Rakusu sewing, whilst observing Francis and Michael preparing for the weekend, exuding a loving friendliness as they danced together through the day's activities. A morning and evening sitting period welcomed us to the depth of peace to be found in this homely zendo.

As Sangha members arrived through the evening and the next morning, so the strength of what it means to be together as Sangha began to unfold. As guided by Michael, we began to peel through the layers of each other's stories to meet the fullness of our offerings. As ideas were expressed, so the process of engagement with each began to grow, and the need for inclusion and to feel connected brought forth time being given for "here and now" sharing of why we were here and what were our hopes and dreams. Accompanying this process there was a sense of holding back from expressing more hardened already-formed ideas in order to allow spaciousness, imagination and playfulness to show itself.

As the longing for a place we could call Temple and a person we could call Priest began to be expressed, so hearts were opened to the multiple meanings of commitment and what these might mean in terms of future ways of living and practicing together. In offering our invitation for a priest to come and spend a sustained amount of time with us, it seemed that we were warming the context for her or his arrival, and laying out the welcome mat through our intimate and upright conversations.

Thanks to you all for a wonderful weekend.
With love, Chris Hannah

Hi Michael,

A few reflections on the weekend.

What worked in meeting the intention

For me what was most important was being together, practicing together and sharing our ideas. So our shared practice enabled a

depth of connection and a shared vision to emerge. I liked the simplicity of taking a few small steps together - strengthening our commitment and sense of Sangha.

It would be good to have a regular schedule of times when we met and caught up with each other - but I realise that distance may make this difficult. In future meetings maybe we could hold the meeting in the morning, leaving the afternoon and evening for longer practice sessions - and some free time.

That's all for now.

Thank you Francis, Bernadette and Michael for your generosity - it was wonderful.

Love and Bows,
Clare Hannah

To follow up this meeting there was a suggestion about a further meeting at another venue in February. By this time Frances Collins & Francis Checkley will be back from Green Gulch. Any ideas or suggestions about this to Michael (melsmere@hotmail.com, 01803 732761).

Visit to Grimstone Manor

During the Envisioning Weekend, it was evident that there was some support for the possibility of finding a building to establish as a temple for the sangha. Here Francis and Bernadette Checkley describes one property they viewed with this in mind. Ed.

On the 16th of December Michael and I approached Savills (the estate agent) regarding the possible viewing of a Georgian property built around 1820 in Devon. Grimstone Manor, perhaps a good 30 minutes stroll from the nearest village of Horrbridge, admittedly has a sort of Adams Family ring to it, but knowing some aspects of its more recent history, its location and price, we felt a visit would, at the very least, be an education!

We set out (Bernadette & I) on a clear, sunny day and followed directions along the A38, following signs for Tavistock. Around Derriford (north just outside Plymouth), and as we approached the Moors, the skies darkened and rain threatened. Travelling along a narrow country road we finally arrived at the manor's entrance. To one side was a small stone lodge and along side was a very unassuming stone signpost. The driveway, perhaps a quarter mile long up to the manor, was unpaved, rough and in need of some care.

We were met by one of the two owners, a woman who had bought the property two years ago from an "intentional community" which had been there since 1990. They had lived and grown through many upheavals and challenges, and had offered Grimstone as a venue for a whole variety of courses and workshops right up to the time of its sale. Our first impression was of a rather fine stately home which had long since lost its



former glory. Apart from the kitchen, which was small for the overall size of the property and was heated by an oil-fired aga, only two other areas were warmed by wood stoves: one was the owner's office, a studio in the attic, and the other a long narrow room next to the indoor swimming pool, jacuzzi and sauna. So although the Community had spent many thousands (60) on the rewiring and re-plumbing so as to provide central heating throughout, the cost of oil at today's prices would be exorbitant, if not completely prohibitive, unless huge amounts of income were being generated on a regular basis. As we were being shown around the property, it was soon clear that the number of bedrooms stated in the description was somewhat underestimated. Several were large and could be described as small dormitories. Unlike Gaia House, there are showers and toilets everywhere, and wash basins in many of the bedrooms.

So, in terms of actual real estate, with the 20 acres of ground, the price of £1.25 million seemed very reasonable. What was also surprising was that the whole property had been re-roofed & re-wired so that the former owners, being unable to afford the bill, had been forced into selling the lodge to raise the funds.

The indoor pool had a solar heating facility (panels on the roofs) but was not being used because large trees shadowed the solar collectors and the owners had neither the time nor the inclination to prune them back - a simple procedure which would save perhaps thousands of pounds in running costs. Later into the tour we were to find that a bridled path at the rear of the property, although owned by the estate, gave legal right of way to anyone wanting to take a short cut to gain access to nearby fields used for grazing animals and horse riders. For some prospective buyers this has been a deal breaker as it affected the aura of privacy which they thought should come automatically with an estate of that size. By the owners own admission it was also responsible for the lower than expected price tag.

Just above the bridle-path was quite an extensive walled garden with a lean-to greenhouse along the northern wall. This was still in use but was in need of some restoration and repairs. Last summer's crop had evidently been devastated by local families of rabbits who must have found the wrought iron gate at the entrance a most welcome invitation to everyday free

“Our first impression was of a rather fine stately home which had long since lost its former glory.”

meals. The 20 acres of land was a mixture of woodland, pasture, a pond, many beautiful flowering bushes (in season) and a fast flowing brook carrying water from the Moors. One of the owners said that she actually agreed to buy the property after walking around the gardens and before even setting foot in the Manor House. Not advisable to repeat this move.

In conclusion, Grimstone could possibly offer much to any dynamic group of people with the energy, vision and financial backing required to realise its undoubted potential. Whether a return visit might be of interest to other sangha members will soon be explored.

Gassho,
Francis & Bernadette Checkley

See <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/property/3350721/Growing-apart-together.html> for an illuminating account of a group of people previously experimenting with community living at this location.

Retreat reflections

Soto Zen Retreat with Tenshin Reb Anderson at Gaia House, Devon, August-Sept '09.

A personal account

This was my second retreat, and easier than the first, which is normal, probably - whatever 'normal' looks like when you're sat immobile on a cushion for around eight hours every day! I'd almost not come for fear of not being able to negotiate my 'customised' version of the schedule with Reb. He'd let me off with that the first time, but would he allow it now that I was no longer a 'retreat virgin'!?

The interesting thing about this trivial preoccupation with my perceived needs and limits is that on one day, I think it was Wednesday, I actually ripped them up completely! I actually, to my continuing disbelief, walked every walk and sat every sit on that 6am to 9pm schedule (apart from dashing in and out to the loo twice during the walks).

And the way this was achieved (except for the ocean of support provided by fellow practitioners, Reb, the Buddha, the Lineage and Gaia House, of course) was a kind of softening... like I softened myself enough to mould to the discipline and the structure, which is exactly the opposite of what my education and logic tell me I should do... I should exert and force, and 'make' myself do it, according to that lot...

And yet the more I received myself, the more I made room for 'me' to arrive any way I wanted to on my cushion: tired, dishevelled, unfocussed, confused; and the more I somehow seemed to attract a certain kind of pliant dignity that graciously conferred on me the capacity to sit and walk and sit

and walk all thru' the day... All thru the day, welcoming myself like the ever-changing sky, and feeling this whole-heartedness birth itself thru' me as we chanted the various scriptures.

I felt the cloak of scepticism and withholding (you know – the one that keeps you safe from being laughed at in the playground) falling from my shoulders, and instead I was the Queen of the Castle, and the laughter was reversed, and I was on the inside looking out: becoming one with joy and with belonging, and the sceptics were on the outside with pitiful begging eyes, longing to be invited in.

Rumi says:

*'I'm knocking madly on a door, it opens:
I've been knocking from inside.'*

It seems there's been a softening theme to my summer. It began a while back when my man and I participated in a couple's group for a week. We had to say what our intention was for the duration of the course, and I'm like, secretly baulking, all bluster and indignation in my brain:

"Er, isn't my presence enough?? You don't actually expect me to steer myself in any way, do you? I thought that's what I'm paying you for, I thought I could just, kinda, sit back and enjoy the ride?!"

As we fret, wrinkle our brows, and reach into the slimy can of potential- intention-worms, Elizabeth, or maybe Joseph suddenly propose that *softening* might be an appropriate intention for both of us... It doesn't seem very grand or purposeful really, and yet I know that it fits. For us both.

***“If I run away
from the group,
or run towards
the group, I
will always be
vulnerable.”***

And in allowing this intention to continue to work on me, I find myself on the retreat opening to my pain, opening to my tears, sitting on a cushion at the front, in front of you all, talking to Reb, crying my confusion and fear of rejection, expressing my complete bewilderment around friendship and intimacy and how to create it... saying I often feel that I'm standing too close, or standing too far away, and that I don't know how to mediate this distance between myself and the other. I tell Reb that I want to run away from this group I'm in, that I feel rejected in it and it hurts so much, and yet I will judge myself a coward if I run.

And Reb tells me that if I run away from the group, or run towards the group, I will always be vulnerable. And I have an image of a huge giant with a merciless club in her hand and a forearm as long as the Forth Road Bridge, and I am an ant, a Fetish Ant at that, teetering on the high heels of fear and delusion, imagining I am going to escape. He gets me to see that my vulnerability just is, and I feel at peace and

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accepting of it... The teetering somehow stops and I take off those ridiculous shoes, and feel the grit and moist earth beneath my bare feet. Yes, I must walk carefully and when I breath well I feel how deliciously, how irrevocably, my feet dwell on this earth and how there is a quiet nectar offering itself to me between the soles of my bare feet on the earth and my belly, my heart, the palms of my hands, the sky.

There is nothing to do except weep and confess and soften and expose myself to you all as you generously receive me, my sangha, my life blood, my red thread.

And so in this place of delicate willingness, as I expose myself, falling apart, whilst opening and softening to a deeper facet of what dwells within, these 4 vows seem to constellate inside my universe:

- I vow to give up my addiction to destructive and unfulfilling relationships with men in this life-time.
- I vow to cultivate a loving, authentic and fulfilling relationship with the man I'm with.
- I vow to cultivate family and belonging wherever I am and whoever I am with.

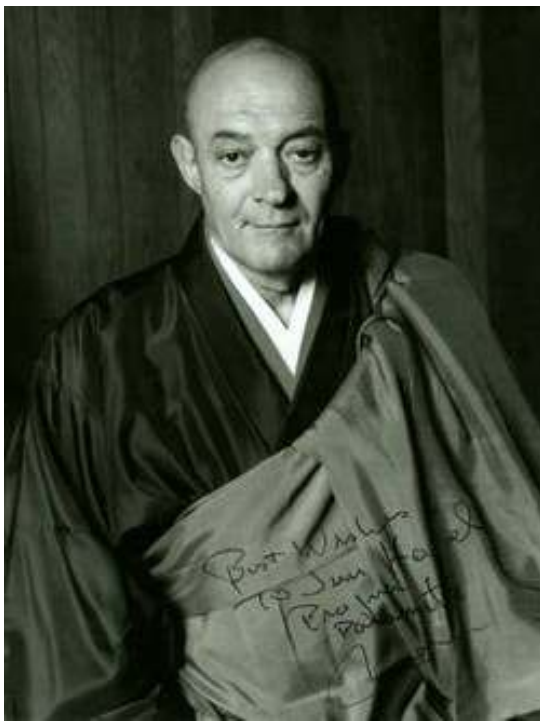
I vow to let myself be ambushed and ravished by softness at unexpected times, and in unexpected places (!)

It takes me a long time to get these vows out this second time I take the hot seat in front of you all. I'm crying so hard from all the accumulated pain of failed past relationships that I have to reach thru' it all with a giant arm, an arm as long as the Forth Road Bridge, an arm that says:

Stop the suffering. This has gone on long enough. There is no more analysis that can be done on this. You have analysed long enough. There is no more playing around with these toxic dramas any more.

Admitting, and clearly seeing, my past behaviours as a kind of addiction, my vow is a fierce passion, a clean break with the past, a laying before me of a road where the facets I will reveal of myself, to myself and to the world will be cleaner, freer, fresher and more conscious. These vows emanate from a wild and liberated heart, wild as in wild herbs, not wild as in broken glass. And as I walk this way, barefooted with the silent nectar of these vows coursing thru' me, there is still broken glass, everywhere and always, and I sow amongst it wild herbs, knowing this deeply and intuitively to be the right way, knowing that these herbs will cushion our feet eventually, collectively, as we walk, and even better, as we bruise them and caress them with the soles of our feet, they release unimaginable and incomparable perfumes. These are the nourishment and the reward, wholesome, simple and yet somehow indescribable perfumes that are the effort and the gifting together both, of this journey we call The Buddha Way.

Francoise Elvin



Obituary

Daido Loori Roshi

“I won't say life; I won't say death....”¹

When this day has passed, our days of life will be decreased by one. Like fish in a little water, what sort of comfort or tranquillity can there be? Let us practice diligently and eagerly as though extinguishing a fire upon our heads. Let us contemplate impermanence and not squander our actions.

- from the Nenju service

The Zen Master, author, photographer, scholar, Abbot of Zen Mountain Monastery in New York, died on 9 October 2009. Daido Roshi's contribution to Western Zen is immeasurable. A gifted artist, a pioneer in American Buddhism he was a man of great intelligence and courage.

Here are some of his words:

“The Buddha's experience was that when you go beyond the skandhas, beyond the aggregates, what remains is nothing. The self is an idea, a mental construct. That is not only the Buddha's experience, but the experience of each realized Buddhist man and woman from 2,500 years ago to the present day. That being the case, what is it that dies? There is no question that when this physical body is no longer capable of functioning, the energies within it, the atoms and molecules it is made up of, don't die with it. They take on another form, another shape. You can call that another life, but as there is no permanent, unchanging substance, nothing passes from one moment to the next. Quite obviously, nothing permanent or unchanging can pass or transmigrate from one life to the next. Being born and dying continues unbroken but changes every moment.”

“Clouds and rain are liberated from plum blossoms; past, present, and future are plum blossoms. Spring is activated from the power of plum blossoms. Where do you find yourself?”

“The only limits that exist are the ones we set for ourselves. Take off the blinders, release the chain, push down the walls of the cage and advance a step forward. When you've taken that step, acknowledge it, let it go, and advance another step. And when you finally arrive at enlightenment, acknowledge it, let it go and take a step forward. That is, always has been, and will be the ceaseless practice of all the buddhas and ancestors. By doing this, you actualize their very being, their very life. You give life to the Buddha.”

“Bright and bright, clear and clear.
Do not seek only within the shadow of plum blossoms.
Rain is created and clouds are formed throughout past and present.
Past and present, solitary and silent.
Where does it end?”

Books by Daido Looi Roshi

- The Way of Mountains and Rivers
- Hearing with the Eye: Teachings of the Insentient
- The Zen of Creativity : Cultivating Your Artistic Life
- The Eight Gates of Zen : A Program of Zen Training
- The True Dharma Eye : Zen Master Dogen's Three Hundred Koans with Kazuaki Tanahashi (Translator).
- The Heart of Being: Moral and Ethical Teachings of Zen Buddhism
- The Art of Just Sitting, Second Edition : Essential Writings on the Zen Practice of Shikantaza
- Celebrating Everyday Life: Zen Home Liturgy
- Making Love with Light, a book of nature photography.
- Riding the Ox Home : Stages on the Path of Enlightenment
- The Still Point: A Beginner's Guide to Zen Meditation
- Cave Of Tigers : Modern Zen Encounters
- Invoking Reality: Moral and Ethical Teachings of Zen
- Path of Enlightenment: Stages in a Spiritual Journey
- Two Arrows Meeting in Mid-Air: The Zen Koan
- Mountain Record of Zen Talks
- Teachings of the Insentient: Zen and the Environment

¹ From “*The True Dharma Eye: Master Dogen's Three Hundred Koans*”, translated by Kazuaki Tanahashi and John Daido Looi.



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 (Bromham)
Chris and Clare Hannah
channah1@btinternet.com

Brighton
Bev Eatwell
07730 030233
beatwell69@hotmail.com

Cambridge
Wendy Klein
wklein02@hotmail.com

Chester
Frances Collins
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Devon (Totnes)
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Dorset (Poole)
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jasonthemiller@hotmail.co.uk

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

Gwent (Chepstow)
Edwin Green

07868 709163, edwin-green@gmail.com

Hebden Bridge (West Yorkshire)
Sundays 7-9 pm
Rebecca 07970 425932
Rufus 07984480224

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

Somerset (Glastonbury)
Devin Ashwood
01749 813969 / 07875 155464
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)

£2
 £5
 £10
 £20
 £50
 £other
 each month
 each year

Please post me paper copies of Mountain Silence each issue

I prefer A5 A4 format

Signature:

My contribution is for:

Newsletter publication

Ceremonial texts\equipt.....

Zen Centre development.....

Any Dancing Mountains work.

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 7pm
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

Salford Zen Group are meeting monthly from February onwards, exact days to be confirmed. Contact Chris Brown at chrisb.by.name@gmail.com

February

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

March

Sat 13 - Sat 20 Retreat with Rev. Myo Denis Lahey ***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.

Stop Press

Meiya Wender is unable to lead the retreat at Gaia House in March as planned. It will instead be led by Rev. Myo Denis Lahey. Otherwise the form of the retreat remains the same. To register for this retreat contact Gaia House at www.gaiahouse.co.uk or +44 (0)1626 333613

The Ten Oxherding Pictures: Stories of Zen practice ancient and modern. Saturday 13 March - Sat 20th March 2010.

Cost: £262 (£223) £314

Rev. Myo Denis Lahey

We will practice with traditional Soto Zen forms of sitting, walking, standing, bowing, chanting and making offerings and traditional meal practices during the retreat. The daily schedule will include periods of sitting and walking meditation as well as traditional Zen services (bowing and reciting scriptures). Additional detailed instruction on how to hold Zen services may also be offered. Those who wish to receive such instruction are requested to indicate this when registering.

Biography. Rev. Myo Denis Lahey began Zen practice whilst still in high school in 1969, with a *zazenkai* started by Shunryu Suzuki Roshi in Los Altos, California. After thirteen years of lay practice during undergraduate and graduate university studies in Sanskrit, psychology, computer science and motor mechanics, he undertook full-time residential training at the San Francisco Zen Center's three campuses, receiving clergy ordination in 1986 from Rev. Tenshin Reb Anderson. He was *shuso* (head monk) at Tassajara Zen Mountain Center in 1989, and again at Green Gulch Farm in 1990. He received Dharma Transmission from Rev. Anderson in 1999, and began a tenure as *Tanto* (Prior) at Tassajara that same year. In 2002 he left Tassajara to be resident clergyperson at the Hartford Street Zen Center in San Francisco,

Next edition of Mountain Silence

Autumn edition with a theme around mindfulness and mindfulness-based therapies. We welcome your articles, poetry, pictures, letters, retreat reflections and book reviews! Spring issue publication date: 15th April, deadline for submission of material 1st April.

With thanks to: Tenshin Reb Anderson, Ryushin Paul Haller, and others at 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:

Chris Brown (Co-ordinating Editor)

07812 602794 (daytime) or 0161 7934844 (eve. & w/ends)

Address: 16 Wayfarers Way, Swinton, Manchester, M27 5UZ

chrisb.by.name@gmail.com

Web Development: Wendy Klein (wklein02@hotmail.com)