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Issue 13: Spring

Engaged Buddhism



Image from ['The Jizo Chronicles'](#)

Editorial

by Devin Ashwood

More than one article in this issue points out that 'engaged buddhism' is just buddhism. Particularly in the Mahayana tradition, working for the welfare of all sentient beings is emphasised but I don't know that the Theravada schools have not been doing this also.

Like many, I have worked and campaigned in the front lines in the market place; in human rights , animal welfare, ecological sustainability, social

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By Michael Elsemere

change for justice, health and transformation in prisons, addiction services, in the streets and on the internet. This lists a limited selection of the avenues in which many of us have sought to help ourselves and others since before practicing Buddhism. Some of us find we have expended less energy in the market place since starting committed practice but I don't know that we've caused any more harm or helped less as a result. Some of us have expended more energy in social activity since engaging in practise and I don't know this is a good or a bad thing. I remember intentionally moving away from certain direct action groups when I saw my own self-righteousness and anger reflected in others as we projected this in ways that seemed very harmful despite it being in the name of compassion and justice. Many evils are just people trying to do good in ignorant ways.

Practise not only helps to bring awareness to deluded action but transforms intention so although we may expend less energy when practicing, maybe the energy we do expend causes less harm and may even do some good.

I am very happy to support engaged Buddhism whether this takes the form of sitting still or people chaining themselves to railings; for without the encouragement and support to pay attention to our karma, to our motivation, we may unintentionally plant the seed for great evil in the middle of doing great works for good. As the Dharma talk by Reb Anderson Roshi in this issue suggests, it is this paying attention to our motivation that makes our engagement Buddhist.

There is still plenty of opportunity to get involved with sangha practice this summer. Although we are not now expecting to be inviting Paul Haller over at the end of the summer due to a lack of active support for this at this time, you can still come and engage with Dancing Mountains at the Trigonos retreat and meeting. For those of you who can't come, we will report back on important sangha developments in the next issue. Also Ingen Breen, a priest ordained by Norman Fischer who has been making connections with us will be leading a weekend in Hebden Bridge on June 25th. Diana Gerard is also still planning to come over and lead a range of events in the autumn. All this and you can even offer to help out with the running of the sangha by, for example, taking over editing the newsletter...? This is a wonderful opportunity that I thoroughly enjoy but wouldn't want to keep all to myself and there is so much else to take care of!

[Dharma Talk](#)

Poetry

[By Michael Elsmere](#)

Writing

[Supported by Catherine Gammon](#)

Upcoming Events

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

April 29- May 3

*Retreat and Dancing Mountains constitution and interim committee vote, North Wales.

June 18 - June 23

Chan Retreat on Dartmoor

June 25 - June 26

*Weekend retreat with Ingen Breen in Hebden Bridge.

June 20 - June 29

Reb Anderson, Nine day retreat, Felsentor, Switzerland

June 30 - July 8

Reb Anderson, Eight day retreat, Idoborg, Sweden

23 August - 28 August

Sesshins with Ryushin Paul Haller Roshi, Northern Ireland



Get involved

[Facebook group](#)

For general discussion and socialising about Dancing Mountains and related events on Facebook, please click the link above. Business matters and decisions are made separately via an email list - please contact us if you want to

Intention Transforms The World

by Tenshin Reb Anderson Roshi

People are smiling which is nice to see. But I feel that I must say that I think we are all in pain, probably over the war in Iraq and the war in Lebanon and Israel. The whole situation around power and the struggle for power in this world often comes in the form of fuel, the struggle over it and also the effects of using it. [Read more...](#)

Article

Buddhist Chaplaincy

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A little history may give some perspective to the work I engage with in prisons. In 1977, Ajahn Khemadhammo found himself in the old Hampstead Buddhist Vihara on Haverstock Hill after studying in Thailand for many years with the Venerable Ajahn Chah. [Read more...](#)

Article

Socially Engaged Buddhism

By Michael Elsemere

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Article

Non-Action Man

By Steve Roberts

It seems strange that anybody, not least someone of the stature of Thich Nhat Hanh, should have had to invent the concept of Engaged Buddhism. [Read more...](#)

Article

Pod Practice

By Wendy Klein

A number of years ago, when Dancing Mountains was a twinkle in everyone's eye, Reb spoke at one of the Gaia House post-retreat meetings of the importance of sangha pods [Read more...](#)

Book Review

12 Steps to a Compassionate Life by Karen Armstrong

By Michael Elsemere

In November 2007 Karen Armstrong an author and

be part of this.

Local Contacts

Visit the [Local Groups](#) webpage for details of Dancing Mountains groups in your area, and the [Diary](#) for their regular meeting dates and times.

Next issue

Summer issue publication date: 21st June, deadline for submission of material 1st June. Submissions to the Newsletter/Website: Devin Ashwood, 07875 155464 Address: 18 Westfield, Bruton, Somerset, BA10 0BT devin@dancingmountains.org.uk

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commentator on religion whose work I have long admired learned she had been awarded \$100,000 prize by TED [Read more...](#)

Poetry

By Michael Elsemere

If you come at winter's end
To sit black robed in
tender silence. [Read more...](#)

Writing

Supported by Catherine Gammon

Pieces written in Stoke Ferry Church and elsewhere as a writing exercise guided by Catherine in August 2010...

Every cell, hard and cold. I hear I am called stone.
[Read more...](#)

Next issue of Mountain Silence

The Summer edition will have a theme around "Love". We welcome your articles, poetry, pictures, letters, retreat reflections and book reviews! Summer issue publication date: 21st June, deadline for submission of material 1st June.

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

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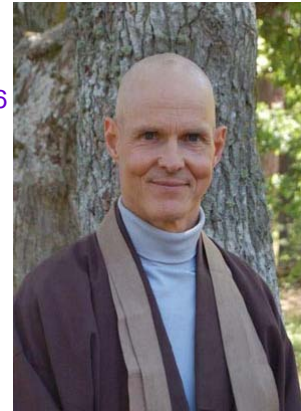
MOUNTAIN SILENCE

Issue 13: Spring

Dharma Talk

Intention Transforms The World - August 12th 2006 at No Abode Hermitage

By Tenshin Reb Anderson Roshi



Transcribed by Frances Collins
Edited by Devin Ashwood

People are smiling which is nice to see. But I feel that I must say that I think we are all in pain, probably over the war in Iraq and the war in Lebanon and Israel. The whole situation around power and the struggle for power in this world often comes in the form of fuel, the struggle over it and also the effects of using it. It's easy for the thought, or the concern, to arise in the mind 'what can I do?' or 'how can I contribute to lessening the violence, greed, disrespect and lack of appreciation among beings?'. I don't identify with this kind of language, but the word powerlessness comes to mind. It seems like the mind wants to measure whether one is making any significant positive contribution to the situation. The mind imagines a positive contribution and imagines measuring it. It wants to make a big positive contribution to a world where there are so many people right now who are suffering so intensely. Various people or beings have ideas or understandings of what would be helpful. I don't know about measuring what contribution our actions make but when the thought arises what can I do, I try to remember not so much what can I do as what am I doing? I really did oppose this war in Iraq. I really did oppose the whole thing but that doesn't mean I wasn't part of it happening. What I was doing before, and what I've been doing since, still is contributing to the world in which this war exists. I feel responsible for it and I think that the way I think moment by moment and the way that I have thought moment by moment has contributed and is contributing to the current situation and the future situation. I think that my thinking is responsible for this world and I think that your thinking is responsible for this world. My ability to go on in this world of suffering is supported by meditating on the proposal that my thinking and your thinking, which is the same as my intention and your intention, which is basically the same as my vow and your vow and the same as saying my request and my wish, your request and your wish moment by moment, all these wishes, requests, intentions..... make the world.

They have made this world of misery and it is through this same type of

phenomena called intention, called vow, called aspiration, basically pseudonyms for me....it is through them that the world is and will be transformed and is being transformed. In a way it seems as though the world has recently been transformed in a negative way. By recent I mean in the last six years. It seems that way. I can't measure really and if I measure I can't say if my measurement is correct. I feel that lots of negative transformation occurred. But whether the overall impression is a negative transformation, I can't say. What I am saying to you is a way of thinking and a vision about a way of thinking. I am suggesting that a transformation of our vision of the world is the basis for transformation of the world and that the vision for the world is the basis for intentions for the world. The thinking about the world and the intention for the world forms the world and transforms the world. This is a proposal that, as far as I know, has been thought about and imagined for a couple of thousand years at least in the tradition of the Buddha Dharma. This is an old story about how the story about the world contributes to the world. The story is that the story that we have about the world forms the world. Many people, as far as I can tell, do not have the story that their story of the world forms the world. Many people do not think that. However they still have a story which is contributing to the world. So another proposal is that not only does everybody's story contribute to the formation of the world, but if you are not aware of your story and you're not aware of how your story forms the world, that your contribution is relatively harmful. Whereas, if you are aware of your story aware of your intention and aware that your intention contributes to the formation of the world.... then your contribution is relatively positive. The more that we are aware of our intentions or aspiration and how it transforms the world the more positive is the contribution, and the less we are aware of our intentions and their transformative and formative power, the more harmful, generally speaking, our contribution. But in either case living beings are constantly influencing the formation of the world and the transformation of the world.

This is a proposal from my understanding of this tradition, from the teachers of Shakyamuni Buddha and all the other buddhas that he is related to. This is my understanding of his teaching... partly. So in a sense you could say it is a faith for some people and maybe somewhat a faith for me. But, for me also, it is something that I am experimenting with and receiving some experimental data on. However you may know that in science when you have a theory, and you do an experiment where the results of the experiment uphold the theory, that does not prove that the theory is correct. You cannot really prove that a theory is correct because in the next moment the theory could be disproved. You can disprove a theory but you can't really prove it! This is a theory that I am enjoying testing and the testing of it seems, to me, really appropriate for the world today and always. The teaching is that the world or the worlds (for we have new worlds in every moment) represent consequences of aspirations and actions. Actions are intentions of living beings. All of us are contributing.

Another aspect of the teaching is that not only does every intention that arises in our consciousness contribute to the formation of the world and not only does every aspiration that arises in our consciousness contribute to the formation of the world but it contributes also to a path of aspiration. When an aspiration arises one of the consequences of its arising is the formation of world. Another consequence is that it tends to influence further intentions. Stories tend to reproduce themselves and intentions or karmic paths are formed. Not only have they formed the world but they also form paths of

bondage within the world whereby people are stuck in a rut about how they're contributing to the world. The alteration of the path of our contribution comes through intention. Intention or aspiration is what alters the paths of intentions or aspirations. If you have certain karmic paths they are determined by karmic actions of body, speech, and mind. Not only are they influenced by momentary intentions of body, speech and mind but the paths are altered through body speech and mind. They are altered by intentional body, speech and mind actions all the time. Your own personal path and the worlds that are created by everybody's personal path are transformed by further body, speech and mind intentional activity. Once again, the transformation is negative; your own personal path becomes negative through not noticing the intention and not noticing how it is evolving. Your own path evolves positively and your contribution becomes more positive as you notice the path and how your current intention works with that.

There is some appearance in the history of Zen where some Zen teachers seem to not be concerned with attention. Some people think that the Zen school deemphasizes paying attention to intention and it may be that it is the case that some Zen practitioners seem to be doing that. I myself don't see that. What I do see is a middle way between rejecting the importance of intention, or attention to karma on one side and on the other side being so concerned with it that you are substantiating the process, substantiating the intention of the aspiration. Although the teaching is that whatever intention or aspiration that you have right now has consequence, what that intention is, is not said to be a substantial thing. As a matter of fact there isn't even much emphasis on what your intention is since emphasizing what your intention is, is already emphasizing talking as though your intention is somewhat substantial. So we have to be careful if we hear that noticing our intention tends to have a positive evolutionary influence that we would then think that the intention we are noticing is substantial. I think that when some teachers are rejecting attention to intention, or attention to karma or to the teachings of karma, they may be doing that because students have thought too much about what intention is and what the teachings of karma are, rather than noticing how intention comes to be, how karma comes to be and how the teachings come to be. Because of people substantiating and reifying the teachings they have rejected them, hopefully just enough so that people don't reify them and not to actually have people not pay attention to their intention. I think that Zen teachers sometime talk this way of rejecting it in order to protect them from substantiating or having a substantialistic view of what they're up to in the moment. But they live in a monastery where people are getting feedback all of the time on their intention and they don't mention the monastery because they are in it and they are giving feedback to the people by telling them to not pay attention to their intention. So when they don't they get feedback.

Actually part of what's involved in the way of working with this attention, or mindfulness and contemplation of intention, is to work with someone else attending to the intention. So you can work with it and look at it inwardly which has a long-term positive influence. But also it is good to work with it interpersonally so that other people could check to see and give you feedback on whether you are being too substantialistic about your intentions. So you, together with others, can express your intentions in such a way to each other as to mutually alter each other's trajectories and paths of karma. Another way to say this is to express your stories to each other so that you can modify each other's stories and to watch this consciously as an interpersonal

transformation of the vision of the world.

This vision of the world, of putting our stories out, inviting others to put their stories out to the world and seeing how they affect each other, is a process that reflects a story about how the world is formed. In a way perhaps this is more in accord with reality and bringing peace and harmony. This is a story about how to realize peace and harmony which will include me allowing my story about peace and harmony to be altered and influenced by yours, particularly your story about how that was a substantialistic story. It could be just about how it is stupid, religious or naive.... or whatever. There are lots of things you could say. You could have lots of stories about my story. This story that I told is a story that would welcome that feedback and that would welcome disagreement. The story that I told, which is my understanding of the Buddha's story and is not really my story, arises not from me but from the interaction of this body in a world in which the Buddha's teachings exist and in a world in which you all exist. My intentions and aspirations arise as this body interacts with your bodies and all the teachings, all the suffering, that gives rise to my cognitions which come with intention. If my body was not bouncing off, or in relation to the teachings, I think my intentions would be different, maybe even better, but they would be different.

In a way this is how I keep myself buoyant as I'm contemplating the horrific transformations of the world which I see, how I keep myself appearing again and again, willing to live in this world, trying to make better and better contributions helping others to make better and better contributions to forming this world. (26.47 mins)

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MOUNTAIN SILENCE

Issue 13: Spring

Article

Buddhist Prison Chaplaincy

By Devin Ashwood

Angulimala, the Buddhist Prison Chaplaincy Organisation

Angulimala was one of the first formalised Buddhist organisations in the UK that might be said to have been set up with a specific mission of engagement in a particular domain of society. A little history may give some perspective to the work I engage with in supporting Angulimama.

In 1977, Ajahn Khemadhammo found himself in the old Hampstead Buddhist Vihara on Haverstock Hill after studying in Thailand for many years with the Venerable Ajahn Chah. This happened to be the Buddhist contact address for the Prison service, so when a couple of prisons requested someone visit Buddhist prisoners for the first time in that year, off he went. But as the years progressed and the number of Buddhist prisoners grew, it became clear that the newly appointed 'Visiting Buddhist Minister' would no longer be able to see everyone and more people would need to be involved.

Angulimala, the Buddhist Prison Chaplaincy Organisation was founded on Magha Puja Day in February 1985. Following consultation with the Prison Service Chaplaincy, Angulimala was recognised in March of the same year as the official representative of Buddhism in all matters concerning the Prison Service in England and Wales. Angulimala has since been referred to as the Buddhist Nominating Authority and is now officially the Religious Consultative Service to the Prison Service for Buddhism and the Prison Service contributes to its costs.

Angulimala does not favour any form or school of Buddhism over another and has the backing of most major Buddhist organisations in the UK. Membership is open to anyone in sympathy with its aims, whether they wish to play an active part or not. We usually have about fifty chaplains working in around a hundred and twenty of the penal establishments in England and Wales. A committee that meets quarterly and which helps with the wider organisation oversees our several activities. Currently Lord Avebury is the Patron, Rev. Saido Kennaway of Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey co-ordinates the appointment of Buddhist Visiting Ministers and is the Secretary, Dharmachari Sunanda is the Treasurer, John Preston co-ordinates Angulimala Scotland and the Venerable Ajahn Khemadhammo is the Spiritual Director. There is present in Britain a wide diversity of Buddhist schools and practices, and were it necessary to provide ministers representing all of these it would be a

nightmare for us and for the Prison Service. Fortunately, this diversity is represented within Angulimala's membership and amongst its chaplains and there is broad agreement that what should be offered is a basic Buddhism with provision when necessary for whatever school or form of practice that might be required.

Experience of a Buddhist Chaplain

Like all Buddhist chaplains to the prison service, I offer my time as a generic Buddhist chaplain. This means that I avail myself to support Buddhists from a wide range of backgrounds. Having grown up in the Soto Zen tradition, to be the most service I can be, I have enjoyed finding out about a wide range of Buddhist practices and perspectives. Buddhists from around the world find themselves in prisons in the UK, all with stories to tell, stories that reflect the ever-smaller global village we live in. A Theravadan man from Thailand accused of trafficking women for prostitution, a Vietnamese Mahayana Buddhist national allegedly trafficked here by organised criminals to work in a cannabis factory, a Chinese man who found himself in trouble trying to get by in a country that no-one can agree whether he has the right to be in or not. Some prisoners who are new to the country speak English well, but many not at all. I imagine that being locked up in a strange country with an alien culture with which one cannot even communicate must be a frightening experience.

I have come across a second-generation western Buddhist returning to practice after a life of drugs and chaos landed him at the mercy of the justice system. Every one who comes has a story but most don't share their past, maybe preferring to leave painful memories behind or maybe not wanting to invite yet another person to judge them for their past karma.

Those above were born into Buddhism and their approach is often different to the majority of Buddhist prisoners: those that came to Buddhist practice in the prisons themselves. Maybe seeking an entertaining diversion, maybe seeking a way out of the samsaric revolving door of drugs, crime and incarceration or maybe even offering themselves to a practice for the welfare of all beings?

Most of the men I see have used drugs or in the past and many still are. A good few have been to prison many times before and all are subject to an institutional system that offers a mix of punishment, rehabilitation and public protection; how much of each is intended is may not be well understood by those that send them let alone those who serve the time.

I sometimes ask myself, what do I have to offer by going into a prison and meeting with a group of men who for various reasons identify with a similar label to myself? I have no formal authority to teach in the tradition I have grown up in but have stumbled into a role as a Buddhist chaplain, a role people look to for guidance and support. This stumbling was in part due to a desire to realize support for my own practice in the absence of opportunities for extended residential practise, however, the acknowledged selfish motivations seem to be less to the fore as the years pass and I realize not only that support is always present but also that the practice is one of devotion.

This devotion doesn't know if it is helpful, but I hold a space for silence, sometimes giving guidance to encourage people to sit upright and still in the centre of their experience, sometimes we talk about Buddhist teachings but

interestingly, I feel that never is my practise more evident and what I have to offer so distilled, as when I am serving a group of people who do not speak any English. Here, with the koan of how is the teaching expressed without words? It is somehow most clear that all I have to offer is myself in the moment of meeting. My only method of communicating the teachings I receive is through a mindful and compassionate attention to my physical presence with them. The way I greet people, unlock the door, walk into the room, offer incense, bow, sit and ring the bell, these simple, physical activities are my only opportunity to realize our connection and so demand a deep commitment to practise, a physical, devotional practise that I hope to engage in all aspects of life.

Devin Ashwood
Angyu Daichi

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MOUNTAIN SILENCE

Issue 13: Spring

Article

Socially Engaged Buddhism

By Michael Elsmere

Socially Engaged Buddhism

Socially Engaged Buddhism as practised in the West refers to Buddhists who are seeking ways to apply the insights from meditation practice and dharma teachings to situations of social, political, environmental and economic suffering and injustice.

The question may be asked how could a Buddhist practitioner not be engaged in his or her society rising from practice to extend a Bodhisattva's compassion and wisdom to those in need? Why then has this term and the wide network of 'socially engaged Buddhists' arisen? Perhaps we have to go back to the early history of Buddhism to discover in part the answer to the question.

When Mahayana Buddhism began to develop possibly around the first century C.E. the combining of the doctrines of 'dependent co-arising,' and the 'bodhisattva ideal' occurred. From this there perhaps evolved a stronger recognition that we truly belong to each other, that we are all indeed bodhisattvas and that moreover this was our true nature. It does seem to be the inherent moral and practical imperatives within the teachings that over the centuries has encouraged Buddhist practitioners to reach out to those in need or distress. In a not dissimilar manner this also occurred in Islam, Judaism and Christianity although it is clear that one does not need to be the adherent of any faith in order to act in a humane and compassionate manner. 'Do unto others as you yourself would be treated,' is a common moral theme in many societies and cultures.

Despite this strand of social engagement running through Buddhist history at times, what we now recognise as Socially Engaged Buddhism seems to have evolved from the work of Thich Nhat Hanh during the Vietnam war 1965 to 1975. Here he and his sangha attempted to alleviate practically the terrible suffering they saw around them as a result of the war at some personal cost to themselves. In an attempt to define this work and its vision Thich Nhat Hanh drew up a set of fourteen precepts that practitioners would attempt to live by.



See footnote

An important early advocate of Socially Engaged Buddhism probably even before this term entered our vocabulary was Robert Aitken who founded the Diamond Sangha in Honolulu, Hawaii in 1959. As far back as the 1940s Aitken was prominent in the protest movement against nuclear weapons, vigorously criticised the Vietnam war during the sixties and was one of the first to recognise the importance of the impending ecological crises facing the planet. He co-founded the Buddhist Peace Fellowship in 1978, an organisation that still devotes itself to obtaining conflict resolution across conflict zones of the world.

With the rapid development of Buddhism in the West particularly in U.S.A during the 1970s the fundamental ideas that had evolved in Vietnam under Thich Nhat Han were developed by Bernie Glassman. He had been a student of Taizen Maezumi in Los Angeles. In 1982 Glassman opened Greyston Bakery in New York in an effort to help alleviate the widespread homelessness in the area. The proceeds helped to fund what he called the Zen Community of New York, who would transform condemned or old buildings into new housing areas for the homeless.

He employed low-skilled workers, many of whom were homeless themselves, and sold his bakery goods to shops and restaurants in Manhattan. This later developed into a highly successful business which was the basis for a Foundation which presently offers HIV/AIDS programs, job training and housing, creches, educational opportunities, and other endeavors.

Roshi Joan Halifax founded the Upaya Community in 1990 in New Mexico after a lifetime in anthropology and social protest. Here caring stewardship of the land and its resources have been a constant factor in the development of the centre and is a direct powerful expression of the community's practice. Joan Halifax has also done extensive pioneering work on 'being with dying,' and her 1997 book of the same title is a seminal work on the topic that has profoundly influenced the attitudes to care of the dying in the medical profession in USA as well as offering an inspiration for the developing hospice movement.

San Francisco Zen centre has for many years had a wide number of outreach programmes that include distributing food to homeless people; providing dharma books, pen-pals, and meditation classes for prison inmates; working with families in transitional housing; enhancing cultural diversity within Zen Centre; facilitating the formation of satellite sitting groups; and advocating for compassionate action on social and a wide number of ecological issues.

The term Socially Engaged Buddhism is a useful one but by its nature can be limiting. Through our practice and deep felt awareness of co-dependent arising and our Bodhisattva selves we are enabled to take ourselves into society and do what we can at all times. When we are truly abiding fully in each moment what else can we do?

Footnotes:

The 14 Precepts of Socially Engaged Buddhism propounded by Thich Nhat Hanh:

1. Do not be idolatrous about or bound to any doctrine, theory, or ideology, even Buddhist ones.
2. Do not think the knowledge you presently possess is changeless, absolute truth. Avoid being narrow minded and bound to present views. Learn and practice non-attachment from views in order to be open to receive others viewpoints.
3. Do not force others, including children, by any means whatsoever, to adopt your views,

whether by authority, threat, money, propaganda, or even education. However, through compassionate dialogue, help others renounce fanaticism and narrow-mindedness.

4. Do not avoid suffering or close your eyes before suffering. Do not lose awareness of the existence of suffering in the life of the world. Find ways to be with those who are suffering, including personal contact, visits, images and sounds. By such means, awaken yourself and others to the reality of suffering in the world.
5. Do not accumulate wealth while millions are hungry. Do not take as the aim of your life fame, profit, wealth, or sensual pleasure. Live simply and share time, energy, and material resources with those who are in need.
6. Do not maintain anger or hatred. Learn to penetrate and transform them when they are still seeds in your consciousness. As soon as they arise, turn your attention to your breath in order to see and understand the nature of your hatred.
7. Do not lose yourself in dispersion and in your surroundings. Practice mindful breathing to come back to what is happening in the present moment. Be in touch with what is wondrous, refreshing, and healing both inside and around you.
8. Do not utter words that can create discord and cause the community to break. Make every effort to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.
9. Do not say untruthful things for the sake of personal interest or to impress people. Do not utter words that cause division and hatred. Do not spread news that you do not know to be certain. Do not criticize or condemn things of which you are not sure. Always speak truthfully and constructively. Have the courage to speak out about situations of injustice, even when doing so may threaten your own safety.
10. Do not use the Buddhist community for personal gain or profit, or transform your community into a political party. A religious community, however, should take a clear stand against oppression and injustice and should strive to change the situation without engaging in partisan conflicts.
11. Do not live with a vocation that is harmful to humans and nature. Do not invest in companies that deprive others of their chance to live. Select a vocation that helps realise your ideal of compassion.
12. Do not kill. Do not let others kill. Find whatever means possible to protect life and prevent war.
13. Possess nothing that should belong to others. Respect the property of others, but prevent others from profiting from human suffering or the suffering of other species on Earth.
14. Do not mistreat your body. Learn to handle it with respect. Do not look on your body as only an instrument. Preserve vital energies (sexual, breath, spirit) for the realisation of the Way. (For brothers and sisters who are not monks and nuns:) Sexual expression should not take place without love and commitment. In sexual relations, be aware of future suffering that may be caused. To preserve the happiness of others, respect the rights and commitments of others. Be fully aware of the responsibility of bringing new lives into the world.

The Three Tenets which serve as the foundation for the Zen Peacemaker's
Work and Practice.

Entering the stream of engaged Spirituality I vow to live a life of:

- Not Knowing thereby giving up fixed ideas about ourselves and the universe
- Bearing Witness to the joy and suffering of others
- Loving Actions towards ourselves and others.

Useful links

Plum Village

www.plumvillage.org

Buddhist Peace Fellowship

www.bpf.org

Upaya Zen Centre

www.upaya.org

Zen Peacemakers

www.zenpeacemakers.org

San Francisco Zen Center

www.sfzc.org

Michael
Ko Gan Mu Ju

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MOUNTAIN SILENCE

Issue 13: Spring

Article

Non-Action Man

By Steve Roberts

It seems strange that anybody, not least someone of the stature of Thich Nhat Hanh, should have had to invent the concept of Engaged Buddhism. Many of the cardinal tenets of Buddhism, such as compassion and Dana, would lead any tyro to naturally assume that adherents of the Dharma were to be found in the front ranks of charitable or voluntary works; always heading to where the danger or the greatest need lies.

For those attracted to the path of Chan or Zen this strangeness is compounded if Taoism, that midwife of Zen, is taken into the equation. The Tao Te Ching alludes repeatedly to the principle of 'non-action'; which is not, of course, a state of persistent inertia, but one of doing what needs to be done (and only what needs to be done) in the present moment and in the place where you find yourself in that present moment.

Given these positions we have to seek reasons why Buddhists may be considered to be ascetic, or withdrawers, or not those particularly famed for charitable endeavour; and why such a concept as 'Engaged Buddhism' had to be propagated in the first place. One explanation can surely be seen in the very grounds of Dana and non-action. These twin virtues are insistent that acts carried out in the spirit of compassion are to be done without the most fleeting thought of repayment, massaging the ego or earning merit.

Few of us are so saintly that we could really claim to be achieving such nobility, but it must go some way to providing a rationale as to account for the paradox mentioned in the beginning of this article. Zen Buddhists do not - or should not - act to proselytise their beliefs, shout their tenets from the rooftops or seek to convert others away from their own beliefs to join ours. We go out into the world to do what we can, where we can, with whom we can; to labour the point, and pilfer shamelessly from John Malkin's interview with Thich in the Shambhala Sun of July 2003, "Engaged Buddhism is just Buddhism".

It could perhaps also be noted that Buddhism has not always done itself great favours when considering the hoary old image of the ascetic monk turning away from the world and choosing instead a life of meditation in some forest glade; not that Zen or Taoism are equally short on sages who wished nothing better than to forego the world and live on Han-Shan's equivalent of Cold Mountain.

I'm sure few of us would wish to live on Cold Mountain even if we had the opportunity. Like me, many would not wish to bid adieu to central heating, or the electric oven. We find ourselves in the maelstrom of the modern world,

having to earn a crust and get by with people of all beliefs and none, and hopefully not upset too many of them along the way. And, similarly, we find ourselves in a world with millions crying out for help, where the gifts of money, time or work can go a long way to alleviating distress.

Twenty years ago I spent several months travelling through West Africa, which had one effect of taking colossal poverty and ramming it in my face in a way that a thousand TV documentaries or news reports could never have done (another effect, which never left me, was to teach me how precious a jewel water is). Although I was wise enough to realise that I could not save Africa single-handed it didn't prevent me from continuing my quarter-century career of industrial drug-taking, a career that calls for some superhuman measures of selfishness.

The few pieces of voluntary work or charitable endeavour that I did manage to carry out in those years could be safely banked away in my mind to puff up the ego in especially low moments. Replay those wonderful acts and be assured of what a fantastic chap you really are!

I got off that particular bus six years ago now, and embarked on some intense volunteering as though to play catch up on all the years lost to narcissism (not being Andrew Carnegie, I can only throw out a few pounds at any one time in the way of financial help). My interest in Buddhism and Taoism had been blossoming for some time, and thus the concepts of Dana, non-action and Engaged Buddhism were ones I was happy to try and apply to these new efforts.

Why was I doing what I was now doing? I hoped, in true Taoistic fashion, that I was doing these voluntary works merely because they were there. They had great spin-offs, to be sure; prison work saw me on the ramparts of Strangeways Gaol; conservation work took me to the sand dunes of North Wales and the mountains of Cumbria; library work had me dissecting the late lives of local socialists and trade unionists; and, above all, child care work had me facilitating the thorny reunions of children with their estranged parents.

This latter example I have done for five years now, and I have always hoped that I did it for no element of reward, be it mental, financial or spiritual. However, I spotted early that our clients seemed to assume that we were paid staff, and I had my mantra, should any customer complaints come our way, all too ready to rattle off: "we're volunteers, and if we're not giving up our own time freely then no child is meeting any parent anywhere". Ah, here was the ego making itself triumphantly known!

But then, perhaps, the reason is secondary to the act – the important thing is it gets done, and let the motives fall where they may. We can sort out those fine details later; talking of which, our three chickens in the back garden need feeding and watering right now. Now, is that selfless compassion, or am I just interested in the eggs?

Steve Roberts

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MOUNTAIN SILENCE

Issue 13: Spring

Article

Pod Practice

By Wendy Klein

A number of years ago, when Dancing Mountains was a twinkle in everyone's eye, Reb spoke at one of the Gaia House post-retreat meetings of the importance of sangha pods – local sitting groups around the country that would help to build the country's Zen sangha while supporting local community practice and minimizing travel costs.

At that time, I was new to the UK and quite idealistic if not a bit naive about what was possible as far as creating a nation-wide sangha and possible national Zen Centre, a dream since first visiting San Francisco Zen Center after meeting Reb in the UK ten years ago. I have found the geographical distances in the UK and costs of travel in terms of money and time more prohibitive than I anticipated (this coming from a Canadian!) and the prospect of sitting together with zen friends close by increasingly appealing. Others from “the East” joined the local band wagon and “Dancing Mountains East” (DMZE) was realized evolving into a wonderful group of sangha friends living in Cambridge, Stoke Ferry (Norfolk) and Bedford, and in time expanding to include Brighton.

Catherine Gammon's visit in August kick started DMZE's more formal gatherings. She sat in the teacher's seat and led five of us in a glorious 3.5 day residential retreat in a deconsecrated church in Stoke Ferry. Our schedule was fairly rigorous in the mornings and then the afternoons and evenings combined periods of silence with sharing circles, walks and stimulating and challenging writing exercises led by Catherine. The church turned out to be a magical retreat venue offering the austerity that helped support our small number with the services we did throughout the retreat. I admit to being pleasantly surprised at how much momentum was created by a small group of friends with the help of a resident teacher and how keeping the schedule and forms deeply nourished the non-silent discussion and writing exercises. We were also really fortunate to have beautiful meals cooked for us and each had our own bedroom.

Then, in February six of us retreated for 2.5 days at Chris & Clare's home in Bedford – another new experience as we were without a teacher in situ – Reb was present in the form of recorded talks that we listened to from the Green Gulch practice period I attended last January. We were relaxed and flexible with the schedule, taking care of one another in an easy way. We even watched a lovely Korean film one evening. We had dharma discussion and services and kept to a schedule even though it would have been easy to keep discussions going past mealtime. I think I can say for all of us that we found

this aspect of the retreat very useful – watching the tendencies to carry on with stimulating discussion for just a little longer and then the value of stopping with the bell and going into silent sitting again. To me, this aspect offered more valuable real-life experience than being on a completely silent retreat might. We also enjoyed getting to know each other more and deepening our sangha friendship.

The group in Brighton is gathering momentum as well, currently meeting for a day once every 6 weeks – the group includes a few members of the Brighton International Zen Association UK and I can see more collaboration between our two groups in the future.

Our dear teacher, by not coming to the UK this year, has allowed us to step back and look deeply at how we engage with each other and with the practice. I feel that DMZE's activity has slowly and steadily helped to make a difference to the confidence we have to practice and evolve the forms, share zen and zazen with non-zen folk and help to more fully express and develop a uniquely UK brand of zen practice. Importantly, too, it has also helped to minimize the ecological cost of travelling to practice.

In the wake of the disaster in the country that is home to our root temple, taking care of each other seems the ultimate concern – Suzuki Roshi said, “I don't pay any attention to whether you're following the precepts or not. I just notice how you are with one another.” May our teachers and ancestors notice how we are with one another.

Deep bows of gratitude,
Wendy Klein
Gyoka Zenhyo

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Book Review

12 Steps to a Compassionate Life by Karen Armstrong

By Michael Elsmere

In November 2007 Karen Armstrong an author and commentator on religion whose work I have long admired learned she had been awarded \$100,000 prize by TED (Technology Entertainment and Design) a private non-profit organisation promoting ideas worth spreading. www.ted.com Apart from the money the recipient is also granted a wish for a better world which TED will do their best to make happen. Karen knew immediately what she wanted which was to build a global community in which all peoples could live together in mutual respect; yet she saw that religion which should be making a major contribution to this was often today seen as part of the problem. She knew from her deep knowledge of the world's faiths that all insist that compassion is a test of true spirituality and that this could bring believers into a state of transcendence which they might call, God, Brahman, Nirvana or Dao. She also discerned that there always seemed to be a universal 'golden rule,' which very simply stated meant 'always treat others as you would wish to be treated yourself.' Karen's concern was that to a marked extent the place that was once occupied by the wiser aspects of many religions had now been drowned out by fanaticism. Certain aspects of scientific fundamentalism also seemed to insist that compassion or altruism were romantic nonsense, that we were inescapably, deterministically selfish.

Yet in the 'global village' so electronically 'wired up' we are able to see perhaps more clearly than ever before the results of discrimination, war, poverty and ecological degradation as well as the fact that we are all truly connected in so many varying and deep ways. TED was asked to help her create, launch and propagate a Charter for Compassion that would be written by leading thinkers from a wide spectrum of faiths with a view to restoring compassion to the centre of our lives. The Charter was launched in November 2009 in many locations throughout the world in synagogues, mosques, temples and churches as well as the Sydney Opera House and the Karachi Press Club. www.charterforcompassion.org

The title of the book '12 Steps to a Compassionate Life', will immediately evoke the 12-step programme of Alcoholics Anonymous for good reason. We are all in our conditioned state addicted to egotism to that sense of separateness from the world and others. Asking us to accept this addiction the book then proceeds to outline possible steps we might take to help us move towards the compassionate life in the company of others. Much of what is suggested will be familiar from our practice but the allusions to the work and teachings not only of Buddha but also Confucius, Mohammed, Jesus, Socrates and many other great spiritual teachers is absorbing and inspiring. This task of restoring the 'golden rule,' to the centre of our western civilisation

is a formidable one but clearly needs to be undertaken. I can think of few people better equipped to take on the task than the author. This is a passionate and wise book that deserves a wide audience. You may want to go to the Charter for Compassion website above and affirm your support for its intentions. Thank you.

Michael
Ko Gan Mu Ju

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Poetry

By Michael Elsmere

Gaia Rooks

If you come at winter's end
To sit black robed in
tender silence.

Still.

Ripsaw
hot metal life
crashes
through the glassy spaces
of emptying afternoons.

If you come at summer's end
to sit black robed in
tender silence.

Still.

Shrieking
caw rushes jangle
morning chants
as rooks tip and turn
Westwards.

Black robed.

Cloud catching seekers
like you.

Deep Intimacy

Early morning
two deer
leaping free.
A rook calls.

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MOUNTAIN SILENCE

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Writing

Inspired with support from
Catherine Gammon

Pieces written as a writing exercise
guided by Catherine Gammon in August
2010

Please click on the authors name to
read their work.



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[Ji Den Dai U](#)

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