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# MOUNTAIN SILENCE

## NEWSLETTER OF THE DANCING MOUNTAINS ZEN SANGHA

Issue 16: Winter 2011/12

### Compassion

#### Events 2012

##### February 15 - 18

Retreat: Ingen Breen in Norfolk.

##### April 5 - 9

Retreat: Ingen Breen in Sweden

##### June 8 - 13

Retreat: Tenshin Reb Anderson Roshi in Sweden

##### June 15 - 24

Retreat: Tenshin Reb Anderson Roshi in Felsentor Switzerland

##### August

Major Dancing Mountains Retreat to be confirmed.

Visit the [Diary](#) for further details.



Chenrezig

#### Editorial

by Michael Elsmere

*"Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva is the Hearer of the Cries of the World. And one of the characteristics of Avalokiteshvara is that she manifests herself in accord with the circumstances. So she always presents herself in a form that's appropriate to what's going on. In the Bowery, she manifests as a bum. Tonight, in bar-rooms across the country, she'll manifest as a drunk or as a motorist on the highway, or as a fireman, or a physician, always responding in accord with the circumstances, in a form appropriate to the circumstances. How is that? Every time there's a stranded vehicle on the side of the road and a motorist stops to help Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva has manifested herself. Those characteristics of wisdom and compassion are the characteristics of all beings. All Buddhas. We all have that potential. It's just a matter of awakening it.*

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##### Ingen Breen - November 2011

[By Michael Elsmere \(Kogan Muju\)](#)

*You awaken it by realizing there's no separation between self and other. Do not think of the bodhisattva as a being separate from yourself. When we see and hear the suffering of others and respond to that suffering, we are the heads and arms of the bodhisattva."*

John Daido Lori (June 14, 1931 – October 9, 2009)

As our northern world slowly tilts into midwinter darkness in this sixteenth edition of Mountain Silence we explore the meaning of compassion, one of the four pillars of Buddhism. The original Sanskrit word is 'karuna,' which means 'active sympathy, gentle affection and a willingness to bear the pain of others'. When The Buddha was asked by one of his followers if compassion was a part of their practice.

"No," the Buddha answered. "The cultivation of compassion is all of our practice."

The quote by great western Buddhist teacher John Daido Looori heading this editorial perhaps captures the essence of the ideal of compassion. Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva is not some ethereal presence out there, not separate from us; her potential expression is there wherever suffering is found.

One teacher recently also grounded the ideal very pragmatically when he advised; 'when you come upon a situation that leaves you bewildered, or questioning how you can help, ask yourself what would Avalokiteshvara (that is (I)) do here?' If we can do this; 'We are the heads and arms of the bodhisattva. By developing experientially these deep, powerful feelings of compassionate connection with others we may discern, however dimly, the subtle but beautiful reflections of universal interconnection that are symbolised by Indra's Net.

Despite the materialism that is so evident in our culture at this season there does glow in the depths of our being that human desire to be kind to each other. This light cannot be completely extinguished despite the global suffering we witness within us, through our relationships, and around us.

In Buddhist monasteries all over the world a Rohatsu Seshin is held between the 1st and 8th of December. This celebrates Sakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment as he saw Venus, the morning star, arising at dawn after 40 hours of deep meditation. A potent reminder that even in the deepest darkness our essential Buddha nature can shine through as when we see another's suffering and alleviate it with skilful means.

## The Call of the Sea

[By Guido Montgomery](#)

## Koan Wordplay

[By Angyu Devin Ashwood](#)

## Compassion

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Dharma Talk  
**Continuous Compassion**

By Reb Anderson Roshi

I'll begin with a story that I tell many times. It's a story that occurred supposedly in China maybe 1200 years ago. [Read more...](#)

#### Article

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By Francis Checkley, Anryu Ciu

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### Bhadrapala and the Radiant One – A Tale of Long Ago

By Kogan Muju

"It is wonderful, truly marvellous, how serene is the good Gotama's appearance, how clear and radiant his complexion, just as the golden jujube in autumn is clear and radiant, just as a palm-tree fruit just loosened from the stalk is clear and radiant, [Read more...](#)

#### Article

### Upaya - Compassion in Action

By Ji Den Dai U

*"Let me respectfully remind you:  
Life and death are of supreme importance.  
Time swiftly passes by and opportunity is lost.  
Each of us should strive to awaken. Awaken!  
Take heed! Do not squander your life..."* [Read more...](#)

#### 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 [Read more...](#)

#### Sangha Update

### Hebden Bridge Sangha

By Kate Bell

The Hebden Bridge Sangha continues to flourish and grow. We are still meeting twice a week and invariably welcome newcomers to the group on a Sunday evening. [Read more...](#)

#### Sangha Update

### Dancing Mountains Zen Sangha (Totnes)

By Francis Anryu Chiu

As in life, Sangha is a continually changing phenomenon here in Totnes. We meet each Tuesday evening for two 30 minute periods of Zazen, walking meditation (kinhin) and chanting. [Read more...](#)

#### Teacher Interview

### Ingen Breen - November 2011

By Michael Elsmere (Kogan Muju)

I'm walking towards the medieval courtyard of Dartington, Devon with Ingen Breen a teacher from San Francisco Zen Centre who is here in Totnes to hold two practice days with the local Dancing Mountains Sangha. [Read more...](#)

Poetry

## The Call of the Sea

By Guido Montgomery

The sea is calling, I know what to do:  
Go to her and give her my all.  
For she is so loving, faithful and true,  
I trust her to cherish my soul. [Read more...](#)

Poetry

## Koan Wordplay

By Angyu Devin Ashwood

Is it this? [Read more...](#)

Final Words

## Compassion

By Albert Einstein

A human being is part of the whole,  
called by us Universe,  
a part limited in time and space. [Read more...](#)

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## Next issue of Mountain Silence

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

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

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# MOUNTAIN SILENCE

Issue 16: Winter 2011/12

## Dharma Talk

### Continuous Compassion - February, 2010, at No Abode Hermitage

By Reb Anderson Roshi



Transcribed by Frances Collins  
Edited by Devin Ashwood

I'll begin with a story that I tell many times. It's a story that occurred supposedly in China maybe 1200 years ago. Two noted Buddhist teachers were talking. One is the teacher of the other. The teacher is named Gweshan and the student is named Yangshan. Gweshan says to Yangshan if someone comes and says all sentient beings just have karmic consciousness boundless, unclear and disorienting with no fundamental to rely on, how would you test that in experience? The student Yangshan says, if someone comes I would say, hey you! If she turns her head I would say, what is it? If she hesitates then I say, see, all sentient beings just have karmic consciousness, boundless unclear and disorienting and there's not even any fundamental to rely on. Without going over this story too much I just want to point out that when we say that this karmic consciousness, this thinking mind which is all we have to work with, has no fundamental to rely on, that is characteristic of all phenomena.

Nothing has a fundamental to rely on. But the fact that this karmic consciousness has no fundamental to rely on means that it can change. It can be transformed. It can become something that is not attached to, something that is not abided in, not dwelled in. The basic practice that I offer you over and over is whatever is coming to us in the present, no matter what it is, practice compassion with it .....or towards it. Its hard to say compassion-ate it. That's why I say love it. It's hard to make a verb out of compassion. Let's make a verb out of compassion. How shall we say it....compassion it? Any suggestions? Compassionate it.....whatever comes, compassionize your self. Whatever comes, compassionize yourself! Whatever comes be compassionate with it. Love it, not like or dislike it. If it's a like, love it. If it's a dislike that comes, love it. Whatever comes be compassionate with it. When compassion is mature it's complete and then you won't dwell in whatever it is. If you don't dwell in it then there will be the observation of the true dharma. There will be the receiving of the true dharma and then there can be the transmitting of the true dharma. The work, or the play, of the bodhisattvas is to receive and to transmit the true dharma. That's what they come to the world to do – to receive and to transmit the true dharma in order to help all beings be free of suffering.

The foundation, (and there is no foundation to rely on) of the Buddha way is great compassion and great loving kindness. Great means no exceptions. Horizontally or vertically no exceptions; throughout the entire universe, there are no exceptions to kindness and compassion. Based on that, we come to not dwell, and in not dwelling we open to the perfection of wisdom and receive and transmit the dharma. This sounds pretty simple to me but I'm not saying it's easy. It isn't easy to be compassionate right now with whatever comes. It's not easy to be compassionate with everything. But, simply, that is what I'm bringing up to practice. In a fairly intense way, since the year started, I've been emphasising over and over that the first step in compassion toward anything is to be still. Being still is not separate to all the other dimensions of compassion. I just want to emphasise starting with being still with whatever you are wishing to practice

compassion with. Along with the stillness practice silence with whatever comes. So be still and silent as soon as possible before the next moment comes. Be still before any comment or movement. Be still and silent with the moment.....and now this one. Being still is not different from being generous and gracious. It's not different from thank you very much. It's just being gracious and still before saying thank you. After you're still and don't say anything, then you can say thank you. Be still and then you can say thank you just to test your stillness...or to unfold it. Be non-violent with whatever comes. Be gentle with whatever comes. Be calm with whatever comes. Give up trying to control whatever comes.

This morning I was told that one of our friends got upset and angry here today and I didn't hear about it until it was already over. I just saw him being driven away by one of his friends to go home because, I guess, he was still very angry. I heard he wanted to come to the talk and that would have been okay with me. At the same time I understand that when he gets angry and upset that might upset people here to see him angry and frightened. He's been practicing with us for a long time. He's really having a hard time. He tries to come to No Abode and he'll call me tonight probably and say, I'm really sorry. He's coming here to try and practice compassion. He's coming here to try to be friendly with you and to be kind to you and then he gets angry. It's very sad to see his efforts crushed. He's really having a hard time learning how to be kind to what is coming up for him. So he offers us the opportunity to keep being kind to him and we don't know how many years it will take for this kindness to get through to him. But he'll probably keep coming back to No Abode. He's coming here to relax and open to you. Then he gets here, tenses up, closes down and gets angry....then he calls me every night and apologises and reaffirms his intention to practice kindness. I say I hear you Bob and we try again.

Something came up this morning which I thought was interesting. Someone heard this teaching of practicing stillness. In the midst of her difficult life and in the midst of her karmic consciousness she sees herself comparing her self to others. Sometimes others are not as good as her and sometimes others are better than her. Having some discomfort in this comparison between her self and others she remembered the teaching of being still and then she started looking for where the stillness was. I said its okay with me if you look for where the stillness is. I don't mind. You're welcome to do so. However, you will never find it! You may think you find it. If you think you find it, show it to me, and I'll help you to look again to see if you have really found it. You cannot find stillness. You cannot find silence. You cannot find greed; you cannot find hate; you cannot find confusion; you cannot find anything if you really look carefully. You won't be able to find it. No dharmas can be found. If you are kind to your process of looking for them, not only will you be kind to not being able to find them, you will realize that they can't be found. Not finding something is not the same as understanding that they can't be found. Understanding that things cannot be found is the same as understanding the ultimate truth. Not being able to find things is not the same as understanding ultimate truth.

The way to understand that nothing can be found is by being kind, for example, to yourself when you are trying to find something. So if you're trying to find stillness, that's okay, you don't have to look for it. But if you're looking for it, just be kind to yourself and you'll realize that nothing can be found and that would be good for all beings.

But what I really thought was interesting is the statement that arose which is:- although we can't find anything .....we can't find kindness and we can't find cruelty...although you can't find them you can be wholeheartedly devoted to things that cannot be found. You can be wholeheartedly devoted to compassion even though you can't find it. You can be wholeheartedly devoted to practices that are empty of inherent existence. You can also be wholeheartedly devoted to cruelty which can't be found. However if you realize that it can't be found you will no longer be devoted to it. You will be devoted to compassion because it is only by being devoted to compassion that you realize the truth. Only by being compassionate do you stop dwelling. If you're energetic and you're not kind to your energy you will cling to it. If you're clinging to it that will interfere with your kindness but you won't stop it entirely. You can be clinging to your energy and still practice kindness toward it. You can have some really nice energy ball and still be clinging to it. It's possible to cling to something nice isn't it? If you keep practicing compassion toward yourself and the clinging, to your clinging self, to your karmic consciousness which is clinging to some nice energy ball, you will give up clinging to it, I predict. When you stop clinging to it, you will open to the true dharma. If we cling to our wonderful energy balls.....if we ever have one....the clinging will interfere with the opening to the dharma. If you have low energy, yukky energy, swamp of miserable poisonous energy and you're not kind to it, you'll sink into it and cling to it like it's a bad place but I'm clinging to it....I don't want to .....but I am. If

you're kind to yourself clinging to your yukky energy you will stop dwelling in your bad energy. If you stop dwelling in your stagnant stinky energy, right there in the no attachment to the pollution, you'll open to the true dharma. I really don't know which is easier to be kind to and not to dwell in, the nice energy or the stagnant energy slums. I don't know but they're both supposed to be practiced with in the same way with great compassion. Suppose you wish to attain supreme perfect enlightenment .....you need perfect wisdom and to have perfect wisdom we have to stop abiding in things. In order to stop abiding in things we've got to practice great compassion.

The things that are being offered to us to practice compassion toward come in the field which we call thinking consciousness or karmic consciousness. That's where we work. Karmic consciousness has infinite varieties from the most palatial exalted joyful states to the most horrible tormented states. All those are karmic consciousnesses and, again, number one is be still with them. Each moment be still and have that stillness mean thank you very much for this opportunity to practice stillness, to practise compassion, to practice perfect wisdom, to practice the Buddha way. I've heard that situations like this are where it's practiced.....and any other situation is also where it's practiced. Stillness is not something that you have to make. It's already the same as you being you. You being you and me being me is stillness. It's already the case. Stillness is not constructed. It's not fabricated. So this basic quality of compassion is actually us being what we are right now which is very generous. The whole universe is generously making us what we are. But we have to practice that. We have to enact that. Otherwise we miss it. Moment by moment we have to receive the transmission of stillness. Moment by moment we have to transmit the practice of stillness and receive the transmission of kindness which makes us what we are. We are made by kindness and by generosity. We receive this person and transmit this person. We receive the stillness of this person and transmit the stillness of this person. In that mode we receive the dharma and transmit the dharma. If we miss being still we practice compassion toward missing and the Buddha way is again transmitted to us. This is the essential art of practice enlightenment in the Buddha way.

There are eight million ways to tell this story. This is one of them.....

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# MOUNTAIN SILENCE

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## Article

### A few Thoughts on Compassion

By Francis Checkley, Anryu Ciu

Just to hear the word "Compassion" is evocative of noble actions, altruistic concern for others, charitable endeavours towards those who suffer physically, mentally or emotionally. So whether it is our neighbour next door returning from a gruelling hospital visit, recently made redundant, having lost a loved one, or someone made homeless in Japan, we find ourselves wanting to reach out. At some level in our being, we are "touched" by their suffering and it is because we know that we too are vulnerable and defenceless in the face of life's misfortunes that at certain times our seeming sense of alienation is seen for what it is, a delusion.

The truth is, that at some level, we are all "the walking wounded" trying so desperately to hide our fears and anxieties, to put on a brave face as if we alone were haunted by such dark thoughts and emotions. So for many of us (and here I consult my recently acquired thesaurus) feelings of care, concern, warmth, tenderness, humanity and kindness, don't always shine through with any kind of constancy. Rather, they're more accessible when we're "hit between the eyes".

Recently, Steve Jobs (before his death) spoke of his sense of "nakedness" when told of his extremely poor prognosis with liver cancer and how his life suddenly had a new and different perspective. He went on to say how many ways we all find to hide, run from, postpone, cover over our inherent nakedness. That we each do this individually is one thing, but that most of us are complicit in convincing each other is surely testimony to our shared delusion of "self" and separateness.

So how do we stay awake to our tendency to sleepwalk through our lives of denial?

How do we wake up to the first noble truth of our suffering?

How do we wake up to the realisation that we're all in this together?

The Buddha and thousands more in our lineage have proposed the triple treasures of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha as the way par excellence. In our tradition, sitting upright facing a wall is part of our practice that we do in community. We sit together and gradually or sometimes very suddenly awaken to our own and the suffering of those around us. In this context it is very difficult to hide from each others discomfort. Of course we know that our suffering is of our own making due to our clinging, but as sensitive human beings we have habits and compulsions that hold us tight. As Reb once said "our hearts are made for bleeding".

And it is in this context of our shared humanity that our empathy, warmth and big-heartedness with others is made manifest.

Perhaps yet another way of describing compassion is to speak of "perfected virtue". The Precepts that we receive from our teacher are "perfected virtues" and have been transmitted to us since the time of Buddha through until today. It is this preceptual vein of the Bodhisattvas, revealed and affirmed through generations which is said to be the "single- great- causal- condition of the Zen Gate" through which we realise our oneness with all beings.

So, when receiving the Precepts we vow to observe the preceptual - lineage of the Soto and Rinzai Gates, which is one track without side roads. To protect and hold them so that they are not lost, and to cherish and actively guard them.

Our practice then is the practice of compassion which often requires our putting aside of personal differences,

strongly held opinions, views we tenaciously subscribe to even to the point of hostility, even though our pride may be hurt. For our dear ancestors and those who will follow us, I hope we can remain true to our



VOWS.

Deep bows, Francis, Anryu Ciu

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# MOUNTAIN SILENCE

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## Article

### Bhadrapala and the Radiant One – A Tale of Long Ago

By Kogan Muju



**“It is wonderful, truly marvellous, how serene is the good Gotama's appearance, how clear and radiant his complexion, just as the golden jujube in autumn is clear and radiant, just as a palm-tree fruit just loosened from the stalk is clear and radiant, just as an adornment of red gold wrought in a crucible by a skilled goldsmith, deftly beaten and laid on a yellow-cloth shines, blazes and glitters, even so, the good Gotama's senses are calmed, his complexion is clear and radiant.”**

#### Brahmin Sonadanda

Long, long ago beloved ones in a land far, far away where the great mountains of the eternal snow touch the blue sky with their hoary heads there lived the old sculptor Bhadrapala, who made statues for temples and shrines. By his craft he earned enough, only just enough to keep a roof over his head and to buy enough rice and lentils to feed his wife Candrabhaga and him. They lived far away from the city, far away from the towns, far away from villages. In fact they lived quite alone in the middle of a deep jungle amidst the great baobabs, sals, teak, walnut and sheesham trees where all day and often all night the wild creatures would play. Beside the simple bamboo house thatched with palm leaves a river bubbled and sang its way down the hillside on a journey to meet the mighty Brahmaputra. Far away the waters of these rivers would merge with the vast salty ocean which spreads in the 16 directions. The old man and his wife were content living here quite alone with only the animals of the forest and the songs of the river for company. Occasionally a priest or a monk from one of the temples would come to order a statue or to take a finished one away on the big ox carts they brought with them. The sculptor and his wife would bring rice and palak paneer on banana leaves and serve their guests fragrant tea in the beautiful bowls he had made. Many a time a priest would ask if he could buy one of these bowls but the old man always politely refused saying that they were flawed, certainly not good enough for the lips of holy men and eminent teachers. Although they always enjoyed these visits the couple were glad when they could once more have time to rejoice in the animals and birds at play amidst the trees of their jungle home where the songs of the river lulled them to sleep.

Once a year the sculptor would make the long journey to the city of Isipatana where he would buy the special tools he needed for his work. This journey took several days and often wearied him. It was at such a time that something strange and wonderful happened to him beloved ones. Indeed it was so strange and wonderful that his life and the lives of countless others since were changed by the event. It was on his journey home that this occurred. The sculptor had awoken early, washed in the cold clear water at the fountain and eaten a simple meal of rice and chapatti. Taking around his strong shoulders the heavy basket of tools he set out as the sun in the east tipped the mountains with light. Ahead of him he saw the morning star rising in the shadowy blue of the west. He was quite alone. At this early hour the air was cool and beneath his feet the track was damp and soft. It was then that he felt the ground dance, a slow meditative dance, with the earth stepping gently. Then he felt it turn, curtsey and return to stillness again. He put down his bag and looked around wondering at his lack of fear. There was no danger just this graceful movement of the earth gently lifting as it were the hem of her sari as she stepped across a puddle. Bhadrapala waited but the monkeys chattered as usual in the trees, and the birds flew in the sky as if nothing had happened, yet he knew something had happened. He felt it in his heart. A great event had

taken place but he had no idea what it was. He took up his bag and walked slowly on wondering about all this. He approached an ancient Pipal tree that he recognised for it was a welcome sign that his home was but half a day's journey away. The great tree hung its dark leafy shadows and gnarled limbs over the track. It was then that he saw beneath it against the massive trunk sitting upright was a handsome young man, his body strong, his dark hair curled on his head, his hands folded sedately in his lap, a smile of deep serenity on his face. Then oh beloved ones Bhadrapala saw something beautiful and wondrous! Around this beautiful young man was a radiance, a soft golden radiance that pierced the shadows and illuminated them with peace, joy and compassion. Bhadrapala fell to his knees and prostrated himself many times.

The young man remained in his posture steadfast and upright the radiance growing in intensity so that it attracted the deer of the forest who came and sat at his feet and birds of all kinds came and alighted on his shoulders. Bhadrapala had many questions he wanted to ask but as time passed he thought of his wife Sandrabhaga worrying about him and reluctantly decided he must continue his journey home. He laid one of the delicious ripe mangoes he had bought for his wife at the feet of the holy man and walked on. He pondered deeply on all that had occurred and especially about the young man beneath the Pipal tree. It all meant something he felt that in this heart but even as he described the journey to Sandrabhaga it became more and more puzzling, more enigmatic.

The next morning Bhadrapala set to work gathering the mud from the river bank kneading and working it so that all the stones and grit were removed. When it was dark and perfectly smooth he began to shape it with his strong sculptor's hand. He remembered again the radiant young man beneath the Pipal tree, the dance of the earth beneath his feet, the brightness of the morning star. Then his hands began to move as if in a trance. He no longer thought about what he was doing, a powerful energy moved through him, through his shoulders and arms and inspiration shone from his eyes. He would not stop his work even when Sandrabhaga called him for his meal at noon, he did not cease until the sun began to sink behind the jungle trees. Then he was finished, the statue was complete. The couple gazed at it with amazement it was like nothing that he had ever made before. It was not a striding lion to guard the temple gates, not one of the fierce guardians at the shrine doors, not even one of the many sacred gods of the inner shrines. This statue was of a handsome young man sitting steadfastly upright, a golden glow surrounding him, his eyes half closed, his lips smiling and his right hand raised in blessing. Immediately Bhadrapala knew it was his finest work, indeed that that this was his life's work. When Sandrabhaga questioned him all he would say was, 'it is the young man I saw beneath the Pipal tree on the road home.'

It was then that problems arose. The only statues that Bhadrapala would now sculpt were of the young man. All of these were as beautiful and graceful, as blessed, as the first one but no one would buy them. Priests and monks would often admire them and would ask him what strange deity or god this was but Bhadrapala always answered in the same manner as he had answered his wife. The couple became poorer and poorer as the years went by. The little workshop became full of these wonderful statues. It was then that the couple quarrelled. They had little food, the roof of the bamboo house leaked during the rainy season and Sandrabhaga asked her husband to make at least one statue for the local temple she knew if she went to the priest it would sell immediately for Bhadrapala's work had once been renowned. The sculptor shook his head. He could not do it. It was no longer his work. This was his work and he nodded in the direction of the rows of wonderfully sculpted figures sitting upright in deepest contemplation. Sandrabhaga hissed in frustration and walked away. The sculptor went back to work. He shaped the strong torso and shoulders crafted carefully the folded legs, the right arm raised in blessing and then began to work on the head. It was then that disaster struck Bhadrapala shaping the left side of the face let his thumb slip in dark cool clay. In an instant the features of the statue were disfigured the left eye drawn down the fine cheek bone destroyed but the smile the serene smile escaped. The sculptor was dismayed and despairing. He took up the statue intending to throw it in to the river but as he approached the bank the statue seemed to become heavier and heavier until he was forced to put it down. In despair he came back to the house and the couple ate the last of the rice together in heavy silence. As the moon rose the old sculptor arose and took his wife by the shoulders and they walked down to the river which shone and glistened in the moonlight. Putting his warmest shawl around them they sat together watching the water listening to its songs. Together they sat, the statue beside them, through days and nights that turned into years, decades and centuries. They sat in deep peace and love until the jungle grew dense around them, upon them the leaves fell, creepers wound around them and the dark earth encrusted them.

Many aeons passed and it was then beloved ones that Avalaokiteshvara the bodhisattva, the great being was passing around the earth with her starry cloak of compassion flowing behind her. She, with her lustrous eyes, noticed far, far below a radiance piercing the deep shadows of the green jungle. In a swirl of glowing jewels she swung down and landed gracefully on her white feet at the very place where

Bhadrapala and Sandrabhaga had sat together for many centuries and now were dissolved into earth and sky. Avalaokiteshvara the bodhisattva, the great being, with her infinite wisdom saw their purity of their hearts shining out. Beside them was the Buddha with the damaged face, its left eye drawn down, its cheekbone broken but she saw also the gentle smile, as beautiful, as peaceful as ever and around its body strong and upright there was a golden radiance. She prostrated herself numberless times at the feet of Bhadrapala and Sandrabhaga and the simple earth statue shining with such a pure light. She lay a white palm in blessing above the old sculptor and his wife and took the statue in her long white arms and ascended with it to an old, very remote ruined monastery high in the mountains of the heavenly snows. There it remains to this very day an object of veneration to pilgrims who travel from the farthest ends of the earth to sit within its radiant glow. So it was beloved ones in the days of old when the earth was young and the birds in the sky were numberless, the fish in the sea and animals and trees were beyond counting. In those days when we were very, very few.

Kogan Muju

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# MOUNTAIN SILENCE

Issue 16: Winter 2011/12

## Article

## Upaya - Compassion in Action

By Ji Den Dai U



*“Let me respectfully remind you:  
Life and death are of supreme importance.  
Time swiftly passes by and opportunity is lost.  
Each of us should strive to awaken. Awaken!  
Take heed! Do not squander your life...”*

### Evening Gatha

Arriving at Upaya Zen Monastery, in darkness under a clear sky lit up with stars was truly magical. Santa Fe, literally ‘holy faith’ is the principal city of New Mexico, the oldest and highest state capital with an elevation of 7000 feet. Upaya monastery is just two miles from downtown Santa Fe cradled in the quiet east valley and the peace of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Upaya rises, always fresh and new, to meet you out of the desert night.... dignified, simple and beautiful. Uniquely individual adobe buildings, creatively turned woodwork and fired art are immediately welcoming. The energy of Upaya is creative and enlivening, truly living up to its name which translates as skilful means, embracing and weaving threads from all traditions into a blanket for humanity.

A training centre dedicated to wisdom and compassion expressed through Zen practice and engaged social action, I guessed I was in the right place as I had become inspired by the mission of the founder, Roshi Joan Halifax, to provide an organic and evolving landscape for engaged community practice. In particular training programmes in the areas of death and dying, prison work, the environment, women’s rights, and peace work are expressly dedicated as true effort to fulfil the vision of the Five Buddha Family Mandala as an integrated, interconnected, and process oriented weaving of spirituality, education, right livelihood, path of service, and community into one whole cloth. Around the same time as my application to Upaya was accepted I received a gift of a thanka of the five Buddha families bought in Bodhgaya from a good friend just back from a trip to India. How wonderful!

‘The world is depending on people like you!’

Roshi Joan brought 75 clinicians into the zendo in a moment with these words. Silence....presence....the eight day training ‘Being with dying’ had begun. Since 2007, training for health care professionals in the compassionate care of the dying has been dedicated to the promotion of partnerships and the development of clinical sensitivity toward authentic care giving for dying people and their care givers.



Completely unique and organic each year this programme has invited new speakers and contributors. Engaging in these teachings sinks into our bones and changes our understanding of living and dying in a way that I really don't think would be possible in any other setting. It sets us on fire, reclaiming our own lives.

Skill with language contributes to a truly visionary way to offer boundless teachings in a non threatening way to a damaged and pathological view of being bodies, living and dying. The term 'contemplative care' is embraced as it cuts through definitions and can be accepted in any setting. It cannot be owned by any latest trend, group or culture. Despite the setting in a Zen monastery a secular emphasis is successful. Compassion has no religion or boundaries. Practicing together, witnessing our fatigue and dissatisfaction with healthcare systems without judgement or blame proved a great relief to all present.

Roshi Joan reminds us of how our care giving can become sick when we are not present to our own suffering. Bearing witness to ourselves as well as to others allows us to transform deep suffering. Ancient wounding from the day to day taking in of suffering year after year can and does contribute to unhealthy ways of coping. Reference to the research literature is a wake up call that neglecting awareness of our own inner processes can harden via vicarious or secondary traumatization into a culture of horizontal and vertical violence, more common than any of us would want to acknowledge.

The practice of self compassion begins with being present.....

Sitting with this breath.... 'a thread that brings mind and body together.....and your life is hanging on it.' A team of experts in their fields together gently remind us how to be what we trained all our lives to be, demonstrating as if through an embodied, interdependent and transparent relational field. The love, flexibility and respect for each other models exactly what we all travelled here to learn. The intentions and sincere practice of each individual participating from front line care of the dying from fields of medicine, nursing, psychology, social and allied professions creates a powerful container for nurturing and healing.

*"The spiritual life begins with contemplation of death."*

Plato

Discussing our own dying wishes opens hearts to the sorrow of our own mortality and potential to take care of our own precious lives and do no harm. Looking at my own worst case scenario opened me to a terror of my last moments in this body being helpless, in a clinical setting with intervention that I would not wish for, speechless and at the mercy of hands that feel uncaring, dehumanizing or cruel.

Aware of a best case scenario in deep and gentle silence supporting bodhisattva vows with sangha and loved ones until my last breath awakens an immediacy to inform loved ones of my wishes and thus relieve them of any burden of not knowing.

Changed by the experience of Upaya, a determination to develop further the insights that have arisen has led to an application to the chaplaincy training programme. Like a strand of Upaya's giant web, supported and supporting aspirations have sustained a heart to develop as a fully human being, aware of the deep privilege of service and to share some strands of the teaching with others in caring professions.

I trust what is needed to support this aspiration will arise.....out of the desert.....

Ji Den Dai U  
Compassion Field

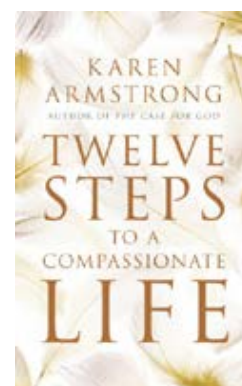
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## Book Review

### 12 Steps to a Compassionate Life by Karen Armstrong

By Michael Elsmere

***This book was previously reviewed in MS 13 but is reproduced here due to its relevance to this issue and because it is such a powerful and clear call for compassion to be at the heart of our culture.***



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](http://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](http://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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# MOUNTAIN SILENCE

Issue 16: Winter 2011/12

## Sangha Update

## Hebden Bridge Sangha

By Kate Bell



Image: Rachel Hawthorn

Drawn as part of a meditation live art event at Hebden Bridge  
[Click](#) to see a larger version



The Hebden Bridge Sangha continues to flourish and grow. We are still meeting twice a week and invariably welcome newcomers to the group on a Sunday evening. We have had an exciting couple of weeks with a contingent travelling to Manchester to sit with Brad Warner (author of Hardcore Zen) for a weekend and then a blissful week with Ingen Breen who led our first residential retreat on the theme of 'Living Zen'. The thrill of pulling it all together, the silence, the sitting, the eating, the dancing, the stillness and the noise, provided the tableau for our mindfulness practice. It was an awesome retreat and we would all like to say a big thank you to Ingen for leading the first dance!

Kate Bell

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# MOUNTAIN SILENCE

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## Sangha Update

### Dancing Mountains Zen Sangha (Totnes)

By Francis Anryu Chiu



As in life, Sangha is a continually changing phenomenon here in Totnes. We meet each Tuesday evening for two 30 minute periods of Zazen, walking meditation (kinhin) and chanting. We begin with the Robe Chant and Purification and close with the Heart Sutra and the Refuges in Pali.

Over the last few years our coming together has evolved. Nowadays, we try to keep talking to a minimum both before and after Zazen and only meet once a month for tea, biscuits and conversation.

Until now, the format is not one of a study group but more of a sharing of aspects of our lives we feel

comfortable in voicing.

Perhaps the difficulty in giving up a smoking habit, finding accomodation, frustrations at work, the training for roles in the Zendo, retreats experiences in other traditions, the meaning of Sangha and how this varies from person to person.

This last aspect can be quite complex as I suspect for some of us our motivation for "Sitting" together is not always clear.

In this respect, Reb's guidance for us to practice with the Bodhisattvas Vow to save all beings as our Koan, points the way towards a clarification of our intention. Initially, we may feel that this Great Vow makes no sense or is unfeasible or impossible but according to Suzuki Roshi, it is precisely for this reason we should dedicate ourselves to it.

As I write this, I'm becoming more aware of how many of us tend to place more emphasis on our altruistic actions while hoping that they will result in beneficial outcomes. However, according to Reb, it is in the dedication of our efforts to save all beings which frees us. That is, it is the Vow rather than any results of our actions which liberates us.

Recently, we welcomed Ingen Breen, a Zen teacher from Zen Centre San Francisco who received transmission from his teacher Norman Fisher in 2009. Ingen arrived on the Tuesday prior to the weekend retreat we had invited him to lead.

He flew from his hometown of Dublin to Bristol and then took the train to Totnes, arriving at lunch-time. The same evening, the Sangha sat together and later shared an informal meal with Ingen who responded to questions. During the week, he offered practice talks with members of the Sangha, familiarised himself with Totnes town, sampled local coffees while generally offering advice on how we might strengthen our sense of community.

We rented the local church hall as a venue. Early Saturday morning (Nov. 19th) many of us who would be sitting together over the weekend, transformed the rather bare space into a warm intimate setting for the next two days ahead.

On both days, twenty people attended, some just for one day, but most for both days. The central location meant that several people could simply come on foot, and the 10:00 start and 18:00 finish, judging by the feed-back, seemed very convenient. During each day Ingen was available for private practice conversation, a question and answer period, as well as giving a talk.



Having spent several days prior to the retreat in Totnes and having shared some time with members of the Sangha, Ingen seemed to have his "finger on the pulse" of people's unspoken needs and his talks, I believe, reflected this. In speaking with others who have shared time with him, I feel there is a sense of Ingen being a teacher of great warmth, openness and genuine compassion, and we wish him well for his future life in San Francisco if that is to be. However, were the Universe to conspire otherwise in his life, perhaps we will all meet again in a not so distant future.

At the moment, he is scheduled to lead the "Rohatsu" sesshin in Venice, Italy in December. I hope I can speak on behalf of our Sangha in wishing him a safe and fruitful journey.

At this point, I would like to personally thank everyone who participated in the planning, organisation, publicity and everything it took to host this event. Together over the months and even years of practicing together, I have been so deeply moved by the kindness and compassion of many people who have participated in our small local Sangha.

For those who read this article, I hope our sharing brings as much happiness and meaning to your lives as it does to mine.

Deep bows,

Francis Anryu Chiu

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# MOUNTAIN SILENCE

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## Teacher Interview

## Ingen Breen - November 2011

By Michael Elsmere (Kogan Muju)



I'm walking towards the medieval courtyard of Dartington, Devon with Ingen Breen a teacher from San Francisco Zen Centre who is here in Totnes to hold two practice days with the local Dancing Mountains Sangha. We had intended to walk through the park with its huge old trees now winter gaunt and dripping but the rain is heavy. We decide to divert to the Roundhouse café and take the stroll later. As we enter the distinctive voice of Johnny Cash pours out of the CD player and we talk with the woman serving us about the music she loves and recent films we have all seen. I tune in to the gentle Irish burr in Ingen's voice which reflects his origins. He was brought up in a working class family devoted to Roman Catholicism with an elder brother and two sisters in Dublin. Tragedy struck this happy close knit family early. Ingen was only eight years old when his father died.

"This sensitised me," Ingen says "to notice in an intuitive way aspects of and the beliefs of my Catholic faith. I would go to evening mass but always sit at the back, part of the mystery but at the same time slightly aloof, wondering."

When his brother took up Yoga Ingen became interested and began to practice and later followed this with TM meditation. In his secondary/High school studies his favourite subjects were maths and physics and he took up Aikido which is still an important part of his investigations into life.

When he left education he became an apprentice electrician but continued his interest in rationalism by reading thoroughly Plato's Republic which led him to question his own faith at a deeper level, since, in his view his Catholicism seemed in part to be based on the Greek philosopher's views and theories about human nature and being. All this led to what he calls the first great koan of his life

"Could I be happy if it was incontrovertibly proved that there was no life after death?"

He was now beginning to recognise that much of what he believed was simply what others had told him was true and posed the question:

"How do they know?" Which led him to his second koan

"Why do you believe in life after death?"

As his apprenticeship neared its end Ingen had considered three possibilities as careers; engineer, teacher or priest. He realised that the latter was now impossible since his constant interrogation of himself and his faith had led to the realisation that he was an atheist! He went to college to study electrical engineering but his studies were interrupted by serious health problems and during this time he started meditating again using a simple technique he learned from his Yoga practice. At this crucial time in his mid-twenties his mother died and he came across Shunryu Suzuki's classic text 'Zen Mind Beginners Mind'. This opened up a new universe of possibilities for the young seeker. He realised that he could live his life in a new way within the vast potential offered by Suzuki's teaching. He found a teacher and sangha in the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order and sat with them as they explored the fundamental teachings of Buddhism such as the four noble truths whose rationale and pragmatism resonated strongly with him. He then reasoned, there are plenty of electrical engineers in the world but not many dharma teachers, so moved to Vajrakuta, an FWBO retreat centre in Wales, to deepen his studies. Ingen remained in residence for one and a half years whilst also exploring other traditions such Theravada and Zen including time at Throssel Hole

Buddhist Abbey in Northumberland, England. A motorcycle accident in 1993 resulting in minor injuries came with the realisation that if he was to continue to explore the 'suchness,' of all things he needed to take care of his physical being more carefully! The search went on and eventually led him in 1995 to San Francisco Zen Centre's temple at Green Gulch in California (SFZC was founded by Suzuki Roshi in the sixties).

"I was impressed by the egalitarian nature of the centre and the wealth of practice, teachers and teachings that would be available to me."

His mentor throughout the long and arduous training was Zoketsu Norman Fischer from whom he received dharma transmission in 2009.

Ingen observed with a smile that life had seemingly laid out the circumstances of his spiritual search perfectly.

"If I had gone to Green Gulch first with its many forms, rituals, bells and incense I would almost certainly have rejected it as too closely mirroring my former Catholic faith. However the grounding I derived from the Western Buddhist Order gave me the insight and patience necessary to overcome a misunderstanding and rejection of these forms."

At present temporarily based in Dublin Ingen travels in Ireland, U.K., Sweden and Italy offering dharma teachings, sesshins and practice days.

The interview over we walked through the Dartington gardens with the trees scattering golden offerings in the puddles across our path. I reflected with deep gratitude on the blessings committed teachers such as Ingen Breen brings to us all.

More info on Ingen at: [www.everydayzen.org](http://www.everydayzen.org) and [www.stresspionage.com](http://www.stresspionage.com)

Interview & article by Michael Elsmere (Kogan Muju)

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## Poetry

### The Call of the Sea

By Guido Montgomery

The sea is calling, I know what to do:  
Go to her and give her my all.  
For she is so loving, faithful and true,  
I trust her to cherish my soul.

I thus go forth from suffering and pain,  
Let go of anger and grief.  
Memories and dreams soon quit my worn brain  
As I swim through the waves toward peace.

No more do I need to rehearse who to be,  
What to think, how to feel, what to say.  
As future and past wash away in the sea,  
Here now I realize the way.

I relinquish desire, attachments and strife.  
To the swell of the sea I offer my life.

November 2011

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# MOUNTAIN SILENCE

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Poetry

Koan Wordplay

By Angyu Devin Ashwood

Is it this?

It is this.

It this is.

Is this it?

This it is.

This is it!

There are no other permutations.

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# MOUNTAIN SILENCE

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Final Words

## Compassion

By Albert Einstein

"A human being is part of the whole,  
called by us Universe,  
a part limited in time and space.

He experiences himself,  
his thoughts and feelings,  
as something separated from the rest -  
a kind of OPTICAL DELUSION of his consciousness.

This delusion is a kind of prison for us,  
restricting us to our personal desires and  
affection for a few persons nearest to us.

Our task must be to free ourselves from his prison  
by widening our circle of compassion -  
to embrace all living creatures and  
the whole of nature in its beauty.

Nobody is able to achieve this completely,  
but the striving for such achievement is, in itself,  
a part of the liberation and a  
foundation for inner security."

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