

# MOUNTAIN SILENCE

## NEWSLETTER OF THE DANCING MOUNTAINS ZEN SANGHA

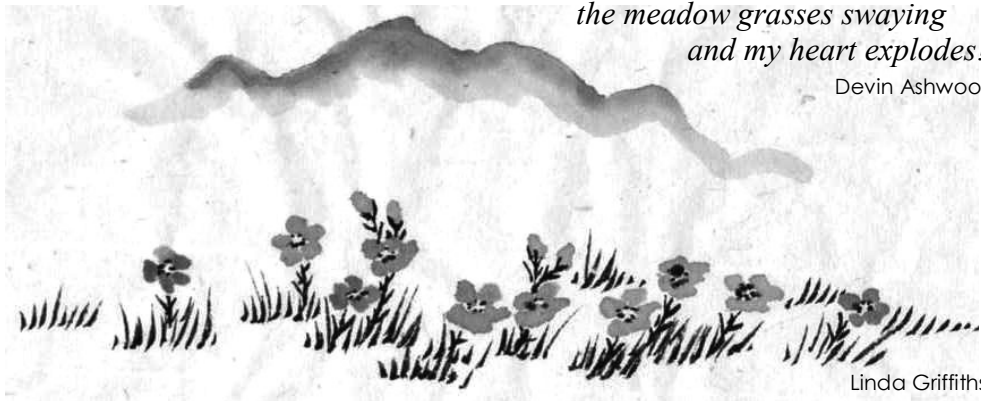
Issue 2

Summer

### Happiness

*Gentle summer breeze  
the meadow grasses swaying  
and my heart explodes!*

Devin Ashwood



Linda Griffiths

In this second edition of Mountain Silence, a spectrum of perspectives is presented on the experience of *happiness*, its causes, and its effects on ourselves and our world. While our personal experience of suffering and our empathy with the suffering of others can often lead towards darkness and despair, the overall momentum of this edition is to propel us towards a more encompassing and yet non-attached perspective. Within this perspective the only sane response to the world of suffering is compassion and loving-kindness. Roshi Reb Anderson, in a transcription of a talk entitled *Happiness*, uses compassion as a departure point for a discussion of how proper meditative absorption on the self, far from being an escape or distraction from the world, allows us to enter into engagement with the world more fully and with greater clarity. To illustrate our theme, a number of works of poetry, personal perspectives

on practice, and book reviews from the Sangha grace the remaining sections of the newsletter. We are grateful to the Sangha for their contributions to this newsletter, and look forward to increasing the representation of individual Sangha member's activities and reflections in future editions.



Dancing Mountains 1st weekend retreat  
26-27th April, Shekinashram, Glastonbury

### This issue

- 1 Editorial
- 3 Dancing Mountains taking form
- 3 Poetry & a Zen Diary
- 4-10 "Happiness" - a talk by Roshi Reb Anderson
- 11 Stop Press—formal sesshin in England
- 12-13 Faith and forgiveness, a personal perspective
- 13 Advertisements
- 14 Book Review: Beyond Happiness
- 15 Membership
- 16 Diary of Events
- 16 Contacts



Hotei by Gyokusei Jikihara Sensei

*"Entering the marketplace  
barefoot and unadorned.  
Blissfully smiling, though covered  
with dust  
and ragged of clothes.  
Using no supernatural power,  
you bring the withered trees spontaneously into bloom."*

Master Kakuan (1100-1200 ad)

## Dancing Mountains: Taking Form

For some time now consideration has been given to the need for some sort of organisational structure to represent the Sangha. The immediate requirement has been for a formal body that could open a bank account and hold monies and it was thought that the best vehicle for that was an unincorporated association. That then gave rise to the need for a constitution and the appointment of officers. At the end of the weekend retreat in Glastonbury on 26th and 27th April Devin invited anyone interested to attend a meeting to consider those issues. At the meeting a draft constitution was considered and approved and the following agreed to act as officers: Michael Elsmere, Chair; Francis Checkley, Treasurer; and Devin Ashwood, Secretary. The name is Dancing Mountains.

However, what started as something of a bureaucratic necessity has given rise to a much more meaningful debate as to what Dancing Mountains, the organisation as opposed to the broader Sangha, actually is and could in the future become. I will try to summarise the current thinking on that below.

Needless to say Dancing Mountains is currently an organisation of limited resources but it can still make a valuable contribution to the life of the Sangha. At the moment Devin and Bev have been working on a liturgy for use during retreats. It is being adapted from that used at San Francisco Zen Centre with guidance from one of SFZC's priests. Developing that liturgy and making it available to the wider Sangha could well be an activity adopted by Dancing Mountains, similarly the organisation and any future funding requirements for the newsletter. Also, thought is currently being given to the possibility of Reb or another priest from SFZC visiting the UK to lead a more formal Zen sesshin outside Reb's annual visit to Gaia House. That again could be something organised through Dancing Mountains as well as any other national events organised for the Sangha as a whole. And then there is the possibility eventually of a centre and that too is likely to be a Dancing Mountains initiative. In short it is thought that Dancing Mountains would be a central resource supporting the life and daily practice of the wider Sangha.

Dancing Mountains would be affiliated to SFZC and would benefit from being part of the network of centres set up in the tradition of Shnyryu Suzuki.

There would still be local events, organised by individuals within the wider Sangha (e.g. the Chagford retreats organised by Michael and Francis and the Glastonbury ones organised by Devin) and it is hoped that in due course there will be other such events as Sangha members come together in other parts of the country. The role of Dancing Mountains in relation to those local events would be to offer support through, for example, making the Dancing Mountains Liturgy available and offering guidance on its use.

It would be possible for those Sangha members who wish to support the aims and objectives of the organisation to apply for membership (more on that shortly) so that they can be involved in its activities and future direction and generally to ensure as wide a representation as possible.

I think we have an exciting opportunity here to be involved in the creation of something of tremendous value and any thoughts in relation to any of this would be gratefully received.

Alan Wood



Linda Griffiths

## Happiness

*grass  
light  
the sudden flight of swallows*

*a smile of recognition - an old friend  
and the sweetness left behind after she departs;  
a feeling of tranquility, alone again in my house.*

*the voice of my teacher  
connecting me back through time  
uncompromising, kind and clear  
like a crystal chime.*

*hope for the future  
Knowing I only need to take care of now -*

*these things make me feel  
happiness.*

Hilary Heriz-Smith

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## Notes from a Zen Diary

Sitting in meditation, any meditation, for me is a paradox. What could be easier? Just sit and breathe! Yet at the same time I find it is the most difficult thing I can do. This mind of mine is a hurricane of thoughts, feelings and sensations. Somewhere I know the sense of separation and of self are illusions, that time and space are concepts of our monkey minds. But how do I experience this, really experience it down to the marrow of my bones to the essence of my multi cellular being? Just sit and breathe. Watch the breath with no effort, mind and body dissolving in effortlessness. Expect nothing. Eat when you are hungry, sleep when you are tired. Is this the meaning of life our true Buddha nature? Is this what it is to become intimate with one's self to know the wind playing across the tops of the apple trees in full blossom? Is this how to befriend the rain plashing against the window, to touch the white clouds rolling across the blue heavens? Yes, separation is an illusion. Just sit and breathe. Be yourself. No effort. Just sit expressing your true original nature.

This notion time is also an illusion? I sit then minutes are hours or disappear into nothingness. The sounds of the bell to begin and end become one sound. I watch the aches and pains in my body come and go, transient products of my fear, my grasping, my expectations and my desire for comfort.

My breath connects me with the universe. I breathe in atoms that once kings, queens, saints and sinners breathed, my molecules star-born some millions on millions of ages ago. The cosmos streamed down towards my oneness my beingness in this place this time, a miracle among the many miracles around me every minute of every day. And this black cushion is the place from which I watch and experience the paradoxes of this life. Just sit and breathe. To become completely still in effortlessness is to make the whole journey in one step!

Michael Elsmere

## All Inclusive

*Right now, there is always  
here to return to  
Like a parent.  
No matter how far I've been  
Or wish to go,  
No matter the anxiety  
That keeps me, in my trying,  
Anywhere but where I really  
am,  
It's all right. Sh-sh, it's all right.  
Frantic toddler-mind,  
Afraid, excited,  
Angry or sad,  
Here, there is always now to  
return to  
And it's going nowhere.*

Gill Jackman

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## Meditation

*Right now, reaching out  
Beyond confined imagination  
To be carried by the inflow  
Of a great inspiration.*

*Nebulous mind clouds  
Free-floating, one by one  
They collide, coalescing  
And a world is born.*

*In the fullness of mind  
Keeping a watchful I  
To calm a storm brewing  
That's opaque to the eye.*

*Yet without interfering,  
The wisdom of weather  
Flows endlessly unimpeded,  
Worlds arise and fade forever.*

Chris Brown

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## Haiku Corner

*warm loaves baked this night  
to crickets' insistent rhythm.  
i want nothing more*

Guido Montgomery

*Please share my happy thoughts  
I give them with love.  
My heart is open – help yourself!*

Linda Griffiths

# Happiness

A Talk By Reb Anderson Roshi

*This Talk was transcribed by Frances Collins in May 2008 and edited from a talk given at No Abode Hermitage in the United States on February 3, 2007.*

Is it in the Declaration of Independence where it is stated that all men are created equal, the declaration of independence from colonial domination by the English empire? Now this wonderful country has become an empire, it seems. I've heard that in the 18th century, what was meant by the phrase 'all human beings are created equal' was that we are all created equal in our capacity, or in our nature, for compassion. This is one understanding of what they meant at that time by equality. They didn't think that men and women are equal or that free people and slaves are equal, but in the realm of the ability to be kind, the understanding that was circulating among them was that all human beings had this ability to be kind, to be compassionate and to love. One of the main authors, elaborating on this point while looking at a young slave boy, commented on how kind the boy was, that his ability to be kind was quite well developed even at such a young age.

Sometimes people ask me where the buddha way starts. It's hard to say where it starts but I think the seed of it is compassion. So then I might be asked if it really starts with suffering and I say, okay it can start with suffering. That's fine. So there is suffering in the world and the

buddha dharma is con-

cerned with teaching people the causes and conditions of suffering; but this teaching comes from compassion. So there is suffering, but then there is a feeling that maybe a certain type of suffering would be good to become free of—if it is possible. It's not about freedom from pain in childbirth; it's not about freedom from pain when you have an infection in your mouth. These are useful pains—they tell you go to the dentist or they tell you that the baby is coming and to get ready. A pain in your ankle is telling you to stop walking because you've sprained it; a pain in your fingers is saying don't close the door any more on my fingers, and so on. Pain is a useful aspect of life. But even when we don't have painful sensations, we sometimes are afraid and miserable. Sometimes we experience the possibility that we may become free of this suffering; then we come to a place where we want this for ourselves and for others, and finally we think of becoming really skilful so that we could really work full-time on helping suffering beings.

The current Dalai Lama has a way of making the buddha dharma very simple by saying that it is kindness, basically compassion, and that this is not separable from wisdom. But it is possible without highly developed wisdom to feel a lot of compassion. The practice is basically to let this compassion be fully developed, to allow all the skills of compassion to become fully developed. In order to do that we need wisdom, so that



***“Sometimes people ask me where the buddha way starts. It's hard to say where it starts but I think the seed of it is compassion.”***

the compassion that is the seed of our practice can grow and blossom to its full potential.

The essence of our practice, the essence of a religion that is about happiness, is compassion. The heart of a religion about happiness is compassion. I think Buddhism is a religion of happiness. The Buddha was talking about happiness 2500 years ago. He was also talking about suffering, but not just suffering, also happiness. Not all religions talk about happiness, maybe... I don't know. But this one does mention happiness way back before happiness was discussed in many cultures. I feel that compassion is basic because it is our nature. The way we are actually is compassion. It is our nature to nurture and be nurtured. That's the kind of thing we are: we have the nature to nurture and be nurtured. We are actually the consequence of being nurtured and nurturing. However, it is also our nature that when we do not understand what I have just said, we suffer in a very painful and unnecessary way; painful in the sense that when we do understand our nature we are free of suffering. Even though suffering may still be there it is no longer a problem—it is an opportunity. It's our job and we love it. It is our nature to be nurtured and to nurture. It's our nature to be compassionate toward others and it is our nature to receive compassion from others. We are here because we do receive the compassion of others. That's what brings us here into being, and we are compassionate towards others. That is also what brings us into being. That is our nature and we need to understand this.

***“The practice is basically to let this compassion be fully developed, to allow all the skills of compassion to become fully developed. In order to do that we need wisdom”***

天真全機

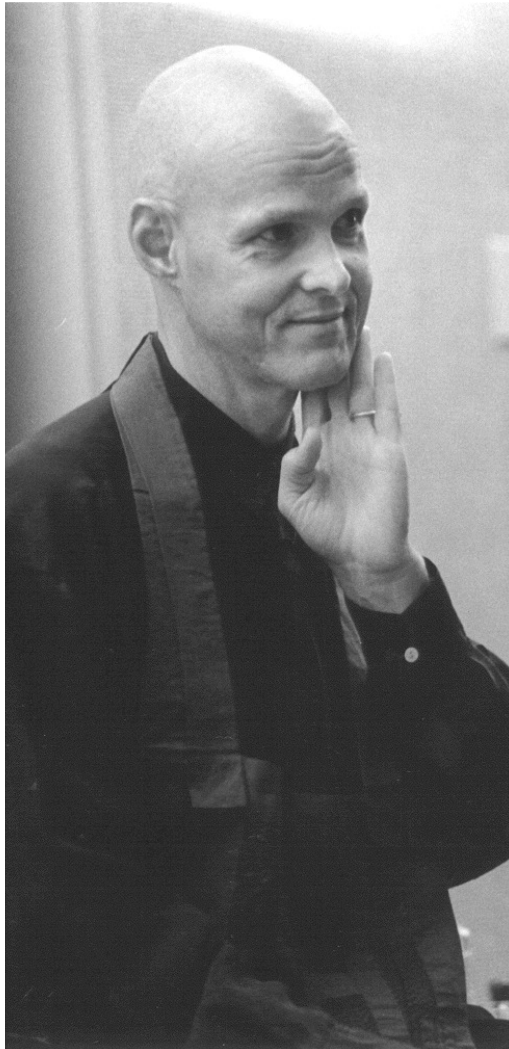


One of my favourite Chinese characters, *she*, or *setsu* in Japanese, can be translated as compassion. But literally it has many different meanings. Basically it means to embrace, sustain, and nurture. It can also be quite clumsily translated as to be embraced and to be sustained; to be embraced and to be nurtured. It means both those things. It goes in both directions. It means to care for children, to nurture them and to help them grow up. It also means to receive the Buddha's teachings and the Buddha's compassion and to be matured to happiness by receiving the Buddha's compassion. It is giving compassion and receiving compassion. It isn't usually translated as compassion because it is emphasizing the giving and receiving dimension of compassion. It's telling us that you do embrace other beings and that you do sustain other beings, and they embrace you and sustain you. This is the character that is used in the bodhisattva precepts, the three pure precepts. This is the character that is used with regard to the forms of Zen practice, and the ceremonies of Zen practice—the ceremonies of the Buddhist practice. So you embrace and sustain the practice, first. You are embraced and sustained by the practice. Then you embrace and sustain all sorts of good activities, which are not formally speaking the practice, and you are embraced and sustained by them. These are all the kindnesses that people do informally, untraditionally, randomly, as we say. Lastly, this is what you do with all sentient

beings—you embrace and sustain them and this is what they do with you; they embrace and sustain you. They mature you and you mature them. The Sanskrit for this is *sattva-krya-samvara-sila*. *Krya* means to purify, work or develop. *Samvara* means discipline, or training. It is actually an exercise programme. This kind of *sila* is the precept of exercising this mutual maturing between yourself and all beings. It is referring to the actual exercise process of compassion. It also means to collect. It is like our word “sesshin.” Sesshin means to collect or gather your heart, gather your mind. But it also means to collect everybody’s heart and everybody’s mind.

The Declaration of Independence also says that you have an inalienable right. It is not just people in the United States that have this inalienable right—everybody has this inalienable right. When making this declaration on this continent it was stated that we have this inalienable right to life, to liberty and to the pursuit of happiness. I appreciate it being pointed out that it says life and liberty and the *pursuit* of happiness, that it does not say life, liberty, and happiness. It says the pursuit of it; that’s a bit of a problem. Also, may I point out that the word ‘pursuit’ in the 17th and 18th century did not mean what it means today. It had a dark meaning of pursuing with hostile intent, pursuing like a fugitive. That aggressiveness is in that word, which is a problem for our history. Another word that we can use in buddha dharma is that you have the right to seek happiness and it is a right, I would like to mention today, that you should pass up on. You do have the right to seek happiness, but I recommend that you do not seek it.

***“From ancient times it has been observed that those who seek happiness for themselves are not very often successful”***



From ancient times it has been observed that those who seek happiness for themselves are not very often successful. You are entitled to seeking, but...don't seek it. If you want it, don't seek it. In ancient times they saw that seeking it was not good for the seeker; realised people have realised it without seeking. Generally speaking, seeking happiness is not conducive to achieving it. What is conducive to achieving it is thinking about the happiness of others without seeking it. Compassion, wanting others to be happy, feeling our suffering, feeling joy at the thought of their happiness, wanting others to be free of suffering without seeking that—that is conducive to happiness for one and all.

Another way to put it is that what is conducive to happiness is absorption in your activity, being absorbed in your activity without seeking. Seeking is a distraction from being absorbed in your activity. Being absorbed in your activity is basically happiness—concentrating wholeheartedly on what you are doing, on your activity. The first level of happiness that comes is being absorbed on your breathing. That will bring you concentration, absorption and happiness. However, if you stop concentrating on your breathing you might flip right back into your usual understanding and be unhappy again. So the concentration

that I most highly encourage is concentration on your activity as it actually comes to be. In other words: concentration on how you are embracing and sustaining everybody and how everybody is embracing and sustaining you. Being absorbed in how you are actually functioning, how you are actually acting, will be the deepest happiness, which cannot be disturbed even if you are not focusing on your breathing or some other object.

Somebody said that happiness is regarded most usefully as a by-product of absorption. I can see that it can be a by-product, but I also think that absorption is the activity, which is happiness—both. As we become more absorbed in what we are doing we come to see that what we are doing we are not doing all by ourselves. When you first start looking at what you are doing you probably think that you are doing it in relationship to the world. As you study more, you get closer to the realisation that you and the world together are your activity, that you are acting together with the world.

But we start by admitting that we think that we do something in relation to, or toward, the world and we just keep on looking at that until we get over it. Paying attention to the movement of your body, or your speech, or your breathing can lead to a concentration, which is happiness. When you are absorbed you can start looking at what you have been concentrating on. So you're not only absorbed in what you are doing, but

you're starting to examine the nature of what you are

doing. I would say that the nature of what you are doing is the same nature as what you are. You are made into an active being, and as an active being, you embrace and sustain all beings and you are embraced and sustained by all beings. So you start by looking at your activity in any way you can and become absorbed in that. Be happy—it should be happy. If you don't get absorbed, you don't feel happy. If you don't feel joy then you are not yet absorbed in what you are doing. Once you are joyful and absorbed then you can look at what is the nature of what you are doing. That brings a deeper level of happiness and also unleashes your capacity to help others, which comes with being able to see how you are helping others and how they are helping you.

We use forms as ways for us to bring our attention to our activity and to see if we happen to view our activity, for example, as “I'm doing this and it's not doing me”; or “I'm embracing this and it's not embracing me”; or “it's embracing me but I'm not embracing it”; or “I'm embracing this but I'm not embracing everything”. You get to see your view of what you're doing, and by studying it you will realise the emptiness of your activity, the selflessness of every action of your life and the selflessness of everybody else's actions. It will become clear that nothing has independent self, that at the centre of that light of clarity is compassion, now unhindered by your ideas of what it is and



Linda Griffiths

***“If you don't  
feel joy then  
you are not yet  
absorbed in  
what you are  
doing”***



everybody else's ideas of what it is. Unhindered also means it's not any of your ideas, yet it's nurtured by all your ideas and nurtured by everybody else's ideas—everybody else's weird ideas about what emptiness is, about what Zen is and about what compassion is. None of them can be found anyplace and they all contribute to everything.

What I am saying is a ceremony to help us to find Zen or to find Zen meditation; to find happiness by passing up on seeking it. You can pass up on seeking it when you realise that you can't find it. So again I remind you that to find emptiness is to realise happiness by realizing that you can't find it, to want happiness for all beings and to realise that without seeking, because you know it cannot be found. Then it is realised and you want everybody to realise it. But don't seek that, because it is already here. We are entitled to the pursuit of happiness; we are entitled to something strenuous. I would like to see us being strenuous without seeking. It's hard to learn how to exercise strenuously without seeking, but this we need to learn. A lot of people can be not strenuous when they are not seeking. A lot of people can say, "Hey, I'm relaxed. I'm not pursuing anything." But to be strenuous and exercise your energy completely with no gaining idea is what we are challenged to learn.

***“to find  
emptiness  
is to realise  
happiness by  
realizing that  
you can’t  
find it”***

The buddha way is how to realise compassion. Learning is a wisdom practice, and I just want to say again that basic happiness is being absorbed. Basic happiness is a by-product and an activity of absorption. And I would say that if you want to learn the buddha way, you have to be happy before you can learn it. If you're not happy you can try to learn it, but I recommend before you try to learn the buddha way, before you start to learn about yourself, first of all be happy. How do you be happy? Be absorbed. Be concentrated. Be tranquil. Be relaxed and happy. If I were happy why would I want to learn the buddha way? Well, because you are not completely happy and you notice other people need help and they are suffering and if you're happy you might want to help. You see suffering and you want to help, because the happiness that comes to you is compassion. Because you are absorbed it is not enough. The happiness that comes to you is not enough. You're happy but also there is a dent in your happiness. The etymology of the word *karuna* means dented happiness. So you're happy; you're compassionate. Compassionate people are happy. Uncompassionate people are not happy. You're compassionate; you practise absorption; you're happy. Now, the absorbed concentrated happy person is going to start learning about the self. How do you learn about the self? Look at what you are doing! Pay attention to your activity; study it; learn about it. Learn about the mental activity and how you see yourself in relationship to the world. Now you are studying the self.

At first, whenever you look, it seems as if the self is separate and that continues for a while. You see your body separate from other bodies: my body, other bodies—two. Then you practise for a long time and finally you see: my body, other bodies— not two. So you practise and you think “I'm separate from other people,” or “I'm helping some people but not all people,” or “Some people are helping me, but not all people.” As you know, some people look and say, “I'm not helping anybody, and nobody is helping me.” This of course is the most horrible situation for human beings. This is hell. Then we want to commit suicide because we see that way, and we believe it because we haven't learned about it. Most of us don't have such a terrible picture. So we see that we are helping some people and that some people are helping us. It's not totally horrible. The human realm is kind of like that. Some people are helping me and others aren't. Some are my friends and some are my enemies. That is the human world. Learning about that pattern of consciousness is learning about the self.

The more you study the content, the more you see it is dynamic. When you first look at your men-



tal activity it doesn't seem very dynamic. In fact it looks like you're doing the same thing over and over. When you keep watching, and you think that you are doing the same thing over and over, then you see that you are not doing the same thing over and over. You'll see that actually the activity is constantly changing. So by giving close attention to studying this in a concentrated state you get to see that your self and your activity are not abiding and not graspable. You realise the impermanent selfless nature of all your mental activity. Basically that is your mental activity that you are attending to in the process of learning about the self. But you have a short version of it; you look and then you say, "Oh!" Just look and you wake up. Some people are actually that fast but most people take a little longer. Most people have to have quite a few moments of noticing that they don't get that the self is not separate.

In the path of purification, the *Visuddhimagga*, when it teaches loving-kindness meditation, usually you start with yourself: "May I be happy; may I be free of fear and anxiety; may I be buoyant in body and mind." It starts with the self in that text. When some Mahayana practitioners hear about people wishing themselves well, they say that isn't Buddhism. They say Buddhism is about wishing well for other people's welfare. But I think this comes from a culture where people naturally wish themselves well. They grow up wishing themselves well. They know how to wish themselves well. Then Buddhism comes along and says enough of that. But these people grow up in a simple society where it is very clear that their mothers love them and they love their mother. They are not so evil as we are here in America where people say, "I hate my mother or my mother is a monster. I don't want to be like my mother." They don't talk like that in some cultures. They are in a different place. They teach people how they love themselves because their mothers showed them how to love others. But in the *Visuddhimagga* teaching it says if you can't love yourself, pick someone that you do already love or respect. So start with a teacher that you respect. Then when you can wish your teacher well, you can move to yourself. Then when you can do it with yourself pick someone neutral, then pick someone you have some affection for. If you start

***“your self and  
your activity are  
not abiding and  
not graspable”***

by choosing someone you have affection for it can turn easily into lust. So warm up to the people that you find very attractive by working with yourself and neutral people first. Then start working with people who you believe have hurt and betrayed you, abandoned, attacked and mutilated you. That is, of course, the hardest generally. But even focusing on someone you find attractive is very hard to remain focused on their welfare, rather than beginning to focus on being with them and having more of them, which is not what loving-kindness is about.

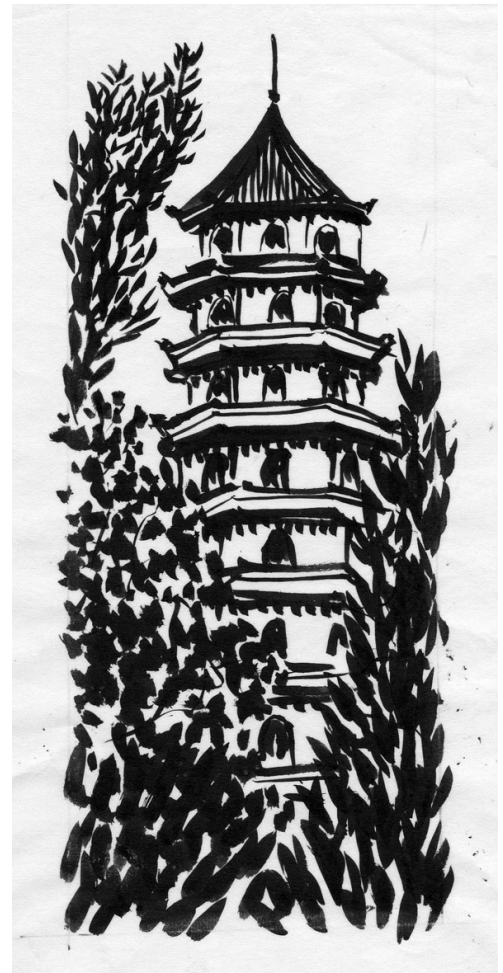
It's a bit like being on an aeroplane. If you're travelling with people who need your assistance you've got to put your own oxygen mask on first. The Buddha gave an example of acrobats where the father acrobat says to the daughter acrobat, "Now you take care of me and I will take care of you." She says, "No father, you take care of yourself and then you will be able to take care of me. I'll take care of myself and then I will be able to take care of you." The Buddha said that the apprentice is right; first practice the four foundations of mindfulness: pay attention to your own posture, your own breathing, and your own feelings. First you tune into your body and your feelings, and then pay attention to your karma, your intentions and your actions. Then you will be able to help others. So how can we take care of others? If you take care of yourself in this way you can care for others.

How do you take care of others in such a way that it takes care of yourself? It's not the same, it's a little different: take care of others with non-violence, loving-kindness and patience. When you relate to others that way, that is the way you take care of others, and that takes care of yourself. But if you don't take care of yourself, if you don't keep track of your own stories, your own mental activity, then you see others doing various things, hurting themselves or hurting each other. You see that but you don't realise that this is your version of what is going on there because you're not taking care of yourself. It goes like this: I have this story that these people are blah blah...

***“When you are  
meditating on  
your nature and  
when you  
understand it, it  
will be natural  
not to seek”***

and you become impatient because you believe the story. You're not aware that you are angry with them because of the way you are thinking about them. But when you are aware that you are angry with her because of the way that you are thinking about her, then you can think, “I should be restrained here. I'm like someone who is on the verge of impatience. It's hard for me to practice loving-kindness now because of the way then I'm thinking about what this person is doing.” This is mindfulness of my own state, awareness of my mental activity. If I am absorbed, I can see that this is a story that I have. But here is another story. This is the story that is not really true because what I think about you is not what you are. That's another story. That's not true either but it puts me more into a questioning mode. So when I see you I can say, “What are you doing?” I can say this non-violently, lovingly and patiently because I have studied and confronted my own story and other stories. Now I have more of a question about you; I don't see you as my story. I see you as a question and I am interested because I am taking care of myself and I am basically happy. So this early Buddhist teaching is to take care of yourself in such a way that you can take care of others, and take care of others in such a way that it takes care of you. It goes both ways. Embrace and sustain others and see how they embrace and sustain you. If you don't see it yet, become calm, concentrated, and joyful and then study. Learning this is learning the buddha way. It is not just learning concentration, which is basically part of our job as happy beings, to be absorbed. When we are absorbed we can go to work and try to practice these precepts.

When you are meditating on your nature and when you understand it, it will be natural not to seek. Sometimes you take a break—the world makes you into someone who is not trying to get something out of life for a moment and you experience what a relief it is to actually experience something without trying to get anything: *It happened just now. How great! It can happen.* When you understand, it will be that way all the time. You will be doing good things without trying to get anything out of them. Before that you will be doing things sometimes not trying to get anything out of them, and sometimes trying to feel happy by doing something that is good and not trying to get anything; just doing it because it's good. You're doing good to do good. Period. But sometimes we're doing something that is perfectly good but we are doing it to try to get something. So we ruin it; not completely but just a little bit. We put this little pollution in there of seeking, which is antithetical to the happiness. Now if you want to be unhappy, then seeking goes really well with it. It helps it a lot. If we notice that we have this element of seeking and grasping, then we confess and repent that, so that we evolve out of it more and more over the years.



Linda Griffiths

## Stop Press!

Dancing Mountains Retreat  
Gaia House 25 to 29 March  
2009

As many of you will be aware after Reb's retreat at Gaia House in September 2007 all attending were invited to a meeting at which the future of the sangha in U.K was to be discussed. Out of this meeting came a number of proposals to develop a firmer foundation for Soto Zen practice in the tradition of Shunryu Suzuki. Reb said he was prepared in any way that he could to support our desire to do this.

We have just heard from Reb that in response to a request from Dancing Mountains Sangha, Meiya Wender, the tanto (head of practice) at Green Gulch, is to travel here to lead a retreat at Gaia House from Wednesday 25 to Sunday 29 March 2009. This will follow the pattern of Reb's retreats but with more emphasis on liturgy and ritual than is usual. This is an important step in the development of the teaching here and we encourage anyone who can to make a commitment to support the retreat. Gaia House brochures are usually sent out in October.

This activity builds towards manifesting the vision many of us have of a full time priest and zendo in the U.K. as soon as possible. If you feel that you want to develop your own role in this please let Francis, Devin or Michael know. Our contact details can be found at the back of this publication.

## Gaia House Retreat 25-29 March 2009

In this retreat we will explore the role of traditional Zen rituals and forms as vehicles for realizing the wisdom and compassion of the Buddha. We will consider questions such as:

- What is the historical role of ritual in Zen practice?
- Can ancient rituals be helpful to us today?
- How does ritual help us to realize our deepest intention, express our gratitude, our feelings, clarify our inter-connection?

We will practice with traditional Soto Zen forms of sitting, walking, standing, bowing, chanting, making offerings, as well as variations on traditional practices such as eating meals and drinking tea.

The daily schedule will include periods of sitting and walking meditation as well as traditional Zen services (bowing and reciting scriptures). Additional detailed instruction in how to hold services will be available for those who are interested.



Meiya Wender

This retreat will be led by Meiya Wender who is the Head of Practice at Green Gulch Farm Zen Center. She has practiced at Zen Center since 1972, was ordained as a priest in 1986 and received Dharma Transmission in the lineage of Shunryu Suzuki Roshi from Tenshin Reb Anderson in 2002. She has also trained in traditional Soto Zen forms at Zuioji in Shikoku. She has studied the Way of Tea for many years, including a year at the Urasenke Midorikai program in Kyoto, and teaches Tea at Green Gulch. She also teaches the traditional practice of sewing of Buddha's Robe (rakusu and okesa).

***“In each moment our lives are an act of generosity in which we are presenting both our purities and our impurities to the Buddha Light”***

Through my interactions with various teachers over the years, I've come to appreciate how symbolism within Buddhism can serve to bolster our cultivation of the Way. In this article I present a personal perspective (although one that has been obviously influenced by great teachers, including Reb), on how this symbolism can help in cultivating the path of happiness through an act of faith; faith in ourselves, faith in others, and especially the faith to forgive ourselves and others.

By using the word *faith*, I must be careful not to elicit an idea of dependency, or of 'buying into' a particular perspective for which we have no personal experience. So the question arises: Faith in *what* exactly? For devout Buddhists, one may say that we must have faith in Buddha. However, there are difficulties in the use of such as term, because of the various images that can come to mind and our attachment to them.

It may be helpful to think of the meaning of Buddha as light. This light is what gives us life, and we can either use this light in worldly ways or we can use it for spiritual purposes. We have to find a balance between looking after our physical world and

self, e.g. looking after our health and our possessions, and looking after what our soul needs. This light is not just a light, but it carries with it warmth, like the rays of the sun. This light has the warmth of love and compassion for ourselves and other beings, and is what we need in order to forgive. But if we are imbalanced and are too concerned about our physical bodies, possessions, and our social status, we may neglect the spiritual dimension and find it harder and harder to forgive ourselves and other people. My job is to learn to recognise that the Buddha Light is within everyone, no matter how difficult it is to see it in them. The word *forgive* contains the word 'give' – hence it is an act of generosity. We are allowing ourselves to be just as we are; recognising our mistakes as mistakes and allowing them to be mistakes, not trying to turn them into something, justify them, or make excuses for them. If we make excuses (even if they are very reasonable ones) then our level of acceptance is conditional, i.e. it depends on circumstances and our interpretation of events. By just allowing mistakes to be mistakes without adding anything to them our acceptance is unconditional. And through such unconditional love and acceptance, the Buddha Light permeates every aspect of our being and brings us into accord with the highest happiness.

And yet, this light doesn't belong to us, and we can't make a possession out of it. Rather, it's much closer to us than something that we can possess, and for that reason we may have trouble seeing it. Jesus hinted at this when he said, "While we are on Earth, we are the guiding light". The light isn't something that we have or own, but rather it's the very nature of our being. We don't have to rely upon a supernatural being who is separate from us to tell us what's good to do, we can rely upon our own conscience.

Another aspect of Buddha is analogous to water. In traditional Chinese culture, water often represents wisdom. Within the symbolism of water is a pureness that we can learn to cultivate. How do we do this? The classic method demonstrated by many of the world's religions is by cutting off our attachments and negative characteristics, and cultivating right action, honesty and sincerity. However, true faith and forgiveness can take us further than this. In each moment our lives are an act of generosity in which we are presenting both our purities and our impurities to the Buddha Light. In return, Buddha accepts us and allows us to forgive and be forgiven. If we treat our impurities like something we have to make war with, something that must be eliminated

at all costs, then we end up creating more evil in the world. Sometimes when faced with evil we must act; other times it is best not to act, or to delay action. But in any case we must accept and forgive wholeheartedly. Then the pureness and coolness of wisdom can manifest, and we become flexible and adaptable with obstacles in our life, in the same way that water, by its very nature, negotiates objects in its way by effortlessly flowing over and around them.

Years ago when I was studying karate I was given a passage by my Sensei which gave advice about how to study martial arts:

"At all times accept life as the willow tree accepts the wind [*wind represents the turbulence of our lives*]. Rather than fighting the inevitable by being immovable like the Oak Tree, the Willow will bend, not suffering any hardships, whereas the Oak will fight and in the end, be destroyed by its own stubbornness [*the oak tree is like someone who makes war with their attachments and delusions*]. Tomorrow after the wind has calmed, the Willow will bounce back to its original straightness, whereas the Oak will have the unhealable scars of the day before."

This is a message not to stubbornly fight with our own delusions, with our own desire and ill will towards others. The more we can accept ourselves, the more we become like the willow tree and can overcome any hardships.

So, although we may sometimes feel that our lives are a battle against the evil forces in our world, we can also recognise how other people's generosity and greed are helping us equally in our practice of compassion. Our heart must be big enough to love and accept others despite their faults, and to accept all types of people no matter how different they seem to us on the surface. This all-encompassing aspect of compassion is often symbolised and embodied in the representation of Guan Yin (Japanese: Kanzeon), the Bodhisattva of Compassion, or Goddess of Mercy. Guan Yin extends her compassion not only to human beings, but all sentient beings. Often pictures of Guan Yin are found in vegetarian restaurants in Asia. Her role is that of a saviour, who listens to the cries of the world and rescues beings from their sufferings. Although she is often regarded in devotional terms by traditional cultures, she can also be regarded as a principle of compassion within oneself. For example, a merciful, compassionate, loving individual is Guan Yin. A meditative or contemplative state of being at peace with oneself and others is also Guan Yin.

The Goddess of Mercy is often depicted on a lotus blossom, which traditionally symbolises purity of body, speech, and mind, floating above the muddy waters of attachment and desire. Even though the lotus is pure and perfect, it arises from the mud of our lives. So even though we are faced with desires and impurities everyday, we must learn how work with them in such a way that they nourish the roots of the lotus blossom, which is our purity and wisdom. How do we accomplish this? Through acceptance and compassion. We can then sprinkle this wisdom onto others in the sea of suffering by encouraging them to perfect themselves, whilst at the same time remaining humble and conscious of our own potential for delusion.

And so I come back to where I started: the aspect of cultivation that leads to compassion, and ultimately happiness, is based on faith. True happiness is not to be found in seeking for the way beyond what is given, but rather in having the faith that what we receive in life is the most appropriate way that Buddha can teach us in this moment.

## Ads

### Zafu £10

Meditation cushions Fabric and sewing fairly traded from India, stuffed with kapok. Phone: Devin, 07875 155464

### Incense £6

Japanese incense as used and sold at San Francisco Zen Center.

Phone: Devin, 07875 155464

### Sutra books

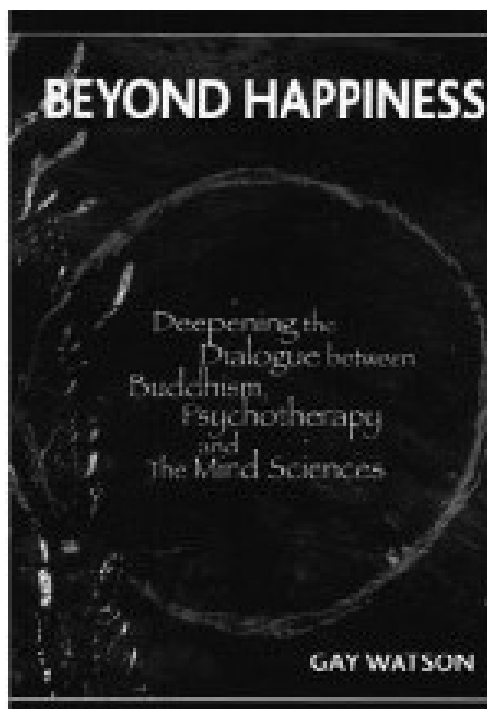
Sutra books are now available for people who would like to learn our chants. £7 for the concise or £8 for the full liturgy as used at San Francisco Zen Center.

Phone: Devin, 07875 155464

### Solitary Retreat

Rustic cottage in central Portugal available for solitary retreats. Email, [guidoboico@gmail.com](mailto:guidoboico@gmail.com)

## Book Review: Beyond Happiness, Gay Watson



The subject of 'happiness' appears to be much on the minds of the media in Britain. Over the past few months I have read several long articles in the press and heard a number of more or less serious features about the subject on the radio. It would appear that British children are the 'unhappiest' in Europe, that Norwegians or Icelanders are the 'happiest' populations on the continent. Most of these items express worries that despite the fact that most people in the West are materially better off they don't seem to get happier. At the same time there appears to be no clear definition of what 'happiness' consists of. The word apparently derives from the Middle English 'hap,' meaning 'chance or fortune, that which occurs', 'haps' are what happens, events, things the very stuff of life. I am reminded here of a story told of Shunryu Suzuki who was asked by one of his senior students if he could reduce Buddhism to one phrase. The sangha was astounded when he answered, 'everything changes,' in other words 'happens! It is the happenstance of life and how we relate to it that engages Gay Watson in her book 'Beyond Happiness'. Watson is a long time practitioner of Buddhism and also a

psychotherapist and she makes the proposition that happiness or well-being is a view of life that is dependent upon our emotions even whilst accepting that these same feelings have been formed by our early experiences of life. How then, she questions, can we positively intervene in this cycle whereby we are caught in the whirlwind of stimulation and rapidly changing events? Most of us will recognise that the Buddha offered a solution to this some 2,500 years ago.

It is fashionable even common today if one is troubled or worried, to seek the help of a psychiatrist or psychotherapist. Watson gives an overview of the development of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy in the West and covers recent developments such as Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy. This overview suggests that there is a convergence taking place between therapeutic practice and neuroscience that draws explicitly on the findings and experience of Buddhist practitioners down the centuries as well as modern science.

Many of the great teachers of Buddhism in all its forms honed their powerful intuitions regarding consciousness and the nature of mind through the process of zazen and a close relationship with the natural world. Modern cognitive investigators however have functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) and Positron Emission Tomography (PET) scans which have revolutionised studies on the brain, the mind and to a much lesser extent the nature of consciousness itself. This has led some neuropsychologists such as Paul Broks to suggest that, 'minds emerge from process and interaction, not substance. In a sense we inhabit the spaces between things. We subsist in emptiness. A beautiful liberating thought and nothing to be afraid of.'

Watson points out the close relationship of such statements to Buddhist thought as expressed by Dogen in Genjo Koan 'to carry the self forward and experience myriad things is delusion. That myriad things come forth and experience the self is awakening.' The new findings in cognitive science are challenging many of the modern world's materialistic views and long held beliefs about what it is to be human in much the same way as Newtonian conceptions of the nature of matter were challenged by quantum mechanics in the early years of the 20th-century.

In her conclusion the author suggests that this is the time for Buddhism, psychotherapy and neuroscience to form even stronger alliances in the search for the chimera that we call happiness.

This book is a fascinating summary of Buddhism's encounter with psychology and cognitive neuroscience and challenges us to continue our own inquiry through 'just sitting'. I would recommend that you buy this book but its outrageous price of £19.99 for 193 pages prevents me doing this! Borrow it from your local library!

Beyond Happiness  
Gay Watson  
Karnac Books  
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ISBN 978-1-85575-404-1  
£19.99



## Dancing Mountains Membership

As a sangha, we have discussed how to best take care of supporting our practice collectively. The entity which we have called Dancing Mountains has developed to the point that a degree of accountability and responsibility have been placed in the hands of a core group who co-ordinate the newsletter and events. To make this a more inclusive process, most of us feel that Dancing Mountains should have a membership which would be voluntary and open to anyone who is committed to our aims as a sangha. What has been proposed is that we have a structure similar to that at San Francisco Zen Center (SFZC) where anyone is invited to join, but people only receive voting rights after being a member for three years. This helps to preserve the consistency and integrity of the organisation. At SFZC, people vote to elect a board who run the organisation but we envisage that membership would vote on much more issues than simply electing officers. Obviously, at its inception, Dancing Mountains couldn't have any voting members for three years unless we have some kind of criteria for founder members to be voting members. One suggestion is that if founder members have attended three retreats, at least one of which has been led by a priest or teacher authorised by the San Francisco Zen Center, then they may have voting rights from the start. Part of the reasoning for having a formal membership was so we could receive donations and have a structure in place that ensured these funds were used in accordance with the donors wishes. An accountable committee and legal structure puts us in a much better position for raising the kind of funds that will be needed to set up a residential centre.



Linda Griffiths



Linda Griffiths

This may involve a concerted fundraising drive, legacies, donations and eventually gift aid should we successfully incorporate as a charity.

It was decided to have a voluntary contribution for membership with no upper or lower limit so people assess their own resources and value they placed on Dancing Mountains as an organisation. This seemed the most fair and flexible approach and in keeping with the Buddhist tradition of Dana.

If you would like to be involved in the development of Dancing Mountains and help to set the direction in which we grow, please contact the editorial team with your response to these proposals or send in your own.

Devin Ashwood



# Diary of Events

2008

## Every Monday

Glastonbury Chan/Zen Group meet at Shekinashram 7:00pm  
Phone: Devin, 01749 813969

## Every Wednesday

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

## Monthly:

### Dharma Discussion Group:

Study and discussion of Buddha's teaching and its application in daily life. Email: Alan, woodap@btinternet.com

## June

**Mon 23 - Sun 29 Jun: \*DM**

**7 Day Retreat: Zen Meditation As Bodhisattva Vow with Reb Anderson Roshi**

Felsentor, nr. Lucerne, Switzerland. Email: info@felsentor.ch  
Phone: +41 41 397 17 76

**Sun 29 Jun: \*DM**

Zen Retreat in Chagford.  
Phone: Michael 01803 732761 or Francis 01803 866735

## August

**Fri 22 - Fri 29 Aug: \*DM**

**7 Day Retreat: The Teaching of Totality—Reb Anderson Roshi**  
Gaia House, Devon, England  
generalenquiries@gaiahouse.co.uk Phone: 01626 333613

**Wed 27 - Sun 31 Aug:**

**5 Day Sesshin with Ryushin Paul Haller Roshi at Black Mountain Zen Centre, Belfast.**  
sesshin@blackmountainzencentre.org  
Phone: 028 90244010

## September

**Sun 14 Sep:** Chan day retreat  
At Shekinashram, Glastonbury  
Email: reiter@clara.co.uk  
Phone: Ned, 01458 833663

**Thu 25 - Sun 28 Sep:**

Dogen Sangha Annual Retreat, Nr Glastonbury:  
Email Mike: mjl@gol.com.  
Phone Mike: 0117-924-3828

## October

**Sat 4 - Sun 5 Oct: \*DM**

Zen Weekend Retreat in Glastonbury, Phone: Devin, 01749 813969

## November

**Sun 9 Nov: \*DM**

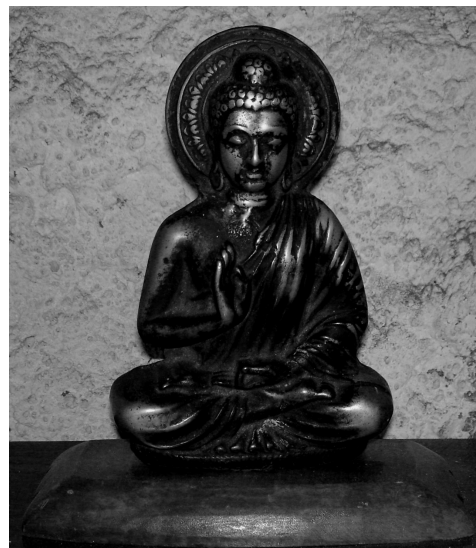
Zen Retreat in Glastonbury,  
Phone: Devin, 01749 813969

2009

## March

**Wed 25 - Sun 29 Mar: \*DM**

**5 Day Seshin: Soto Zen Forms and Ceremonies – the Practice of Deep Intimacy.—**  
Meiya Wender  
Gaia House, Devon, England  
generalenquiries@gaiahouse.co.uk Phone: 01626 333613



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With the theme of "Generosity"

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**ALSO AVAILABLE ON THE WEB:**  
[www.dancingmountains.org.uk](http://www.dancingmountains.org.uk)

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

