

# NEW CHAN FORUM

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***Dharma Adviser***  
*The Venerable  
 Chan Master  
 Dr. Sheng-Yen*

***Teacher***  
*Dr. John Crook  
 (Chuan Deng Jing Di)*

***Editors***  
*John Crook  
 Marian Partington  
 Simon Child*

***Photographs***  
*Fiona Nuttall  
 John Crook*

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## Second Wind

In this issue we take a close look at ourselves as an institution in relation to our practice and understanding. The Western Chan Fellowship has much to be happy about in its achievements yet is this enough? What errors or inadequacies may infect us and how can we proceed into the future transmitting the Dharma to upcoming generations?

Our lead article asks a number of crucial questions and the remaining pieces respond to this or develop that response in various ways. We discuss old and new initiatives and provide some important Dharma commentary. Among new themes we have suggestions regarding solitary retreats, meditations on landscape intimacy and an experiential approach to the Heart Sutra. Shifu provides a profound examination of the meaning of the Vows that lie at the heart of serious practice.

This issue provides important reflection for our readership and we warmly invite discussion.

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## THE LEAPING HARE

Peter Tatham

*On a soft spring day, as I made my way  
From the banks of the stream to the hill.  
Upon my path, not a yard 'n a half away,  
Sat a hare so still.  
And she looked at me so invitingly,  
As she sipped and snuffed the air,  
That I dropped my load and I took to the road  
To follow the leaping hare.*

*We ran through the fields and we dodged and wheeled,  
So our tracks in the grass entwined.  
And when I had run till my breath was done,  
I followed her in my mind.  
Her image plain would wax and wane,  
Like a moon on the night time air,  
As together we went, till I knew what it meant  
To follow the leaping hare.*

*Now you often hear that she knows no fear  
And will run through the flames of a fire.  
But if caught in a pen, she is terrified then  
And will dash to her death on the wire.  
As a springtime bride at Eastertide,  
She lays eggs on a land so bare.  
But when autumn corn is stacked and shorn,  
T'is the death of the leaping hare.*

*And it may seem odd that the hare is the god  
Of the hill and the field and the ditch.  
But at the very same time, t'is certain I am  
That the hare is a friend to the witch.  
If the themes I've picked should contradict,  
To express is half way there;  
That you never can know which face to show  
When you follow the leaping hare.*

*Oh I turned my head as I breakfasted  
A couple of days ago;  
And there, on the lawn, that sunless morn,  
Sat a hare, regarding me so!  
My cry she hears, for she's flicked her ears  
With the knowledge which we share  
That life's no game, but it's never the same  
When you've followed the leaping hare.*

Peter is a Jungian analyst practising near Totnes but his talents extend into song writing of exceptional ability, which he sings to the guitar. We are delighted to present one of his lyrics here. He has attended retreat at Maenllwyd.

## **Dharma ending Age or Path to Maitreya? Having Confidence in the Western Chan Fellowship**

**Jake Lyne**

The objects of the Western Chan Fellowship are:

*To advance the education of the public in the principles of Buddhism by providing training in Buddhist meditation, Buddhist philosophical insight and Buddhist precepts by means of the teaching, practice and transmission of the Chinese Linji tradition of Chan, as transmitted through Master Sheng Yen, and as a supplement to such training:*

- i. to provide training in Buddhist meditation as developed in Tibet and elsewhere and*
- ii. to provide facilities for the investigation and study of Buddhist theory, psychology and practice, and its relation to contemporary Western thought.*

It would seem to be an insurmountable problem to advance a religion, the cultural roots of which are declining<sup>1</sup>, in a global context of increasing spiritual indifference and where violent conflict in the name of religion is common. Mahayana theory, psychology and practice developed in many phases following the initial flowering between two thousand five hundred years ago and the middle of the first millennium CE in India and China. Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism underwent a complex interaction in China to produce Chan which flowered in the activities of great masters and moved to Japan as Zen. The Tibetans created their own synthesis of indigenous shamanism and Tantra in the 14<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. There have also been many instances of decline, sometimes violent and sudden, and of stagnation, during which there was a failure to develop Buddhist thought, art and literature beyond established forms, or to be open to new ideas.

Buddhism has flowered again in the last 50 years, due to the energy and creativity of a relatively small, but significant number of talented people from East and West, in a cultural context in which intellectual openness has been a given. There are many reasons for this: people are disturbed by the spiritual vacuum that has been created by a focus on technical development and scientific materialism; familiar Christian beliefs are hard to reconcile with a scientific view of the world; and Zen and Tibetan Buddhism seem mysterious and promise much. But will this flowering continue? The modern world is goal directed and we expect things to happen quickly; an emphasis on sudden enlightenment and results in Chan, Dzogchen, Tantra, Zen Buddhism and the Nichiren sect is consistent with this expectation, but for most people, Buddhist practice turns out to be a slow and steady process. Sudden results are important and made much of in Zen literature, but the meaning of these fleeting experiences can be easily lost unless there is a more gradual and deep change of values and priorities, supported by practising Buddhist precepts.

Particularly important to this recent success of Buddhism, has been the role of the first generation Western Buddhist Teachers, many of whom spent years living with and learning from Japanese, Thai, Vietnamese and Tibetan Buddhist Teachers. These people were pioneers, and many have become skilful teachers themselves. One such is John Crook, the founding Teacher of our Western Chan Fellowship.

The Western Chan Fellowship is a new organisation, founded on a small group of people who attended retreats at the Maenllwyd in Central Wales, during the 1970s and '80s. These retreats offered disciplined training, but in a context where orthodoxy was less important than discovery. Though the welcome was warm, the Maenllwyd, perfectly situated in a wild and beautiful part of Wales, used to be rugged and not too comfortable – no electricity or hot water and variable sleeping conditions. Many of the retreatants were inspired by the

blend of disciplined practice, psychotherapy as an aid to practice and imaginative leadership. This was largely dependent on John's skill and character as retreat leader. It was not clear how this would live beyond the original Teacher, but the formation of the Fellowship in the Chan tradition has ensured that Maenllwyd retreats have become grounded in an authentic Buddhist context, and provides the potential for continuity.

John has made countless journeys to the East, met Tibetan Buddhist Yogins in the mountains, spent time in ancient Buddhist communities that must surely adapt to the modern world or die, experimented with transmitting Buddhism to the 1960's generation in the West and identified a Chan Master as his own primary teacher. Master Sheng Yen is himself a first generation Buddhist Teacher, in the sense that he is one of the first Chan Masters to bring authentic Chinese Chan Buddhism (which has somehow survived hundreds of years of decline in China) to America, and latterly through John's influence, to Europe.

John Crook and Master Sheng Yen are now "passing the robe" to the second generation, many of which are well established in different walks of life. If the Fellowship is to survive and develop, others will disseminate Chan Buddhism and lead retreats. Part of the success of first generation Buddhist teachers is the fact that they presented a bridge between the ancient origins of Buddhism and modern Western society, to a generation that has been able to look to the distant past for meaning. But most of the world's remaining ancient human cultures, including Buddhist ones, are fundamentally changing and losing the connection with the context in which they originated. Because of this it is not clear whether present and future generations will be able, or even want to look to the past in the same way.

In any case, whatever the insight of second-generation Teachers, they are less likely to be able to bring the origins of Buddhism alive in the same way that John and the other first generation teachers have, simply because most have not had direct contact with these ancient societies before they began to change fundamentally. So is it necessary to present Chan Buddhism differently, in a way that will appeal to a new generation and that is not so much at odds with modern thinking that it fails to be widely credible?

Can the Western Chan Fellowship survive and flourish in spite of the prophecy of the Dharma Ending Age? Certainly, the obstacles to future success are considerable, but on the other hand the Dharma has proved remarkably resistant to decline many times before.

The distinctive feature of the Western Chan Fellowship is the lay Chan Retreat: disciplined, silent practice in a framework that is designed to create the conditions for what would be called Gnosis in Christianity, enlightenment in Buddhism, or spiritual insight. This is the touchstone for the Fellowship that people can turn to in order to rediscover meaning in what can seem to be a culture devoid of meaning. The Chan Retreat is a tough encounter with the self, but is founded on certain values of openness, generosity and kindness, and a view that holding to these values will make for a worthwhile life. It is also founded on a practical philosophy, underpinned by the development of insight through meditation, that attempts to describe the human condition, and in so doing points the way to a solution to the mental unease associated with ignorance, greed, fear, the transience of happiness, hatred and arrogance. To be safe and effective, a Chan Retreat relies on competent leadership in the hands of an experienced Teacher. Equally importantly, it depends on the personal responsibility of the retreatants who make a contract to use the opportunity for practice. Essentially, the practice is a private matter – in one sense the Teacher should only be "the fool by the signless signpost pointing out the way".

The fundamental question that faces the Western Chan Fellowship is how to bring these two aspects of Chan Buddhism – insight and kindness that are developed on retreat and

followed up through personal practice – into the lives we lead, and convey them so that they can be taken up more fully in our society.

Padhmasambhava used magical powers to tame the demons of Tibetan society by incorporating them into the Buddhist Pantheon. Our society has demons too: consumerism, media obsession, conflict and moral degradation. Buddhists must and do find ways to contend with or relate to these. But Western values are not all bad by any means; political constitutions and institutions are founded, in principle at least, on values of equality, freedom, democracy and justice; and modern technology is a tremendous aid to the communication of ideas.



By contrast, some of the values and ideas that are features of Buddhism are open to question. Many lay Buddhists are uncomfortable with ideas that were compatible with and essential to a monastic viewpoint, but say little to a society in which monasteries ceased to be a significant social structure 500 years ago. The most obvious of these is the Buddhist emphasis on escaping the cycle of existence. Traditional Buddhist writings have little to say about intimacy, emotional love, bringing up children and family life, probably because of this emphasis on the role of attachment, or “entanglements” in binding us to Samsara and its endless cycle of existence. This way of viewing life poses no problem from a monastic perspective; in fact it serves as an affirmation of a difficult choice. But it is not an affirming idea for lay Buddhists, or for most adults in our society. This is not a new problem for Buddhism: the relegation of the significance of the family in Buddhism was a central point of conflict in the long struggle between Buddhism and Confucianism in China.

It is not too difficult to present this idea in a more modern way, and for many ideas in the world’s religions, it is essential to see behind the form of the idea to uncover its many meanings. The escape from the cycle of existence is often taken to mean that if we are consumed by envy, desire for what we don’t have and dissatisfaction with what we do have, then we will most certainly be dissatisfied and may cause needless harm in our attempts to compensate for what we perceive to be our hard luck. However, if we can learn contentment and gratitude, a kind of detachment, then indeed we will be free in ourselves and will discover the capacity to love. But I am more concerned with the unconscious power of ideas such as the need to escape the cycle of existence, to frame the overall

attitude that Buddhists take to life, the effect this has on them and people around them, and the consequent confusion that can be created in the minds of people new to Buddhism.

This is not a criticism of any individual's desire to become a monk or nun, or of Buddhist monasteries; on the contrary such a choice is an admirable and important one with many benefits to the individual and the Sangha. However, it is necessary to recognise that the probable function, or at least an important benefit of the Buddhist idea of escaping cyclical existence, was to make monasticism possible; this construction is not necessary and could even be unhelpful for lay practitioners, who wrestle with the important task of making Buddhism part of every day life.

Reincarnation is another stumbling block for some people. While much circumstantial evidence is cited, there are convincing arguments for not taking reincarnation literally<sup>2</sup>. Is it essential that Buddhists believe in reincarnation in the literal sense and can one be a Buddhist without this belief? Christianity is losing touch in our society for many reasons, including some of its ideas, which are completely unbelievable to most young people - virgin birth, God, Jesus as Son of God, miracles, heaven and hell. There is a danger that Buddhism will encounter a similar fate for similar reasons. An alternative proposed by Stephen Batchelor<sup>3</sup> is to take the stance that we don't know what happens after we die. This is perfectly reasonable and probably a wise position to take, but those who have serious doubts about reincarnation are more likely to be influenced by the question of probability; how likely is it that reincarnation is in some literal way true? We could take the same stance with the Virgin birth of Jesus – we don't know for sure whether Jesus was or was not a product of miraculous conception, but how seriously do most people take such ideas? Another stance is to examine reincarnation from the perspective of emptiness, in which case ordinary ideas about reincarnation can fall away as in the following beautiful observation: "How could love and compassion not automatically arise when one senses this unity with all beings in space and time throughout eternity?"<sup>4</sup> And there are other points of view that allow for a non-literal insight into reincarnation, including the idea that reincarnation is a continuous process within a life let alone between lives, but is it important to be concerned with the word reincarnation at all?

Many Buddhists, like many Christians, argue that the old religious stories and beliefs are not the essence of the religion, and I would certainly agree with this, but the presentation of such ideas is important if people are to be persuaded to take Buddhism or Christianity seriously.

A willingness to question and be sceptical is a fundamental principle in the modern world, and is entirely consistent with Buddhist empiricism and its emphasis on testing teachings through personal experience; this consonance is probably one of the main reasons for the popularity of Buddhism among Western intellectuals. A sceptical attitude is also the foundation for the central Buddhist philosophical ideas and methods that constitute Madhyamaka philosophy, which uses different forms of argument to disprove extreme positions about the nature of self and other. I personally find this one of the most satisfying and profound themes in Buddhism, but it is very difficult to convey clearly and for example, in the form of the Heart Sutra, is presented as a kind of riddle. There is some value in this of course – the Heart Sutra is a very good reminder that there is something mysterious to be discovered beyond our ordinary understanding. But can this also be conveyed in a more direct, simple and relevant way?

David Loy, in a fascinating essay<sup>5</sup>, shows one way in which this can be done by pointing out a distinction between viewing the world from positions of fear or love. In the former we rather hopelessly (in the face of death, loss, sickness) try to make our "self" secure. In this

mode we are most likely to place emphasis on dualistic notions such as good and evil, and I and thou, as being true, and make them the basis for our actions and decisions. The other way of viewing the world is more open and adaptable, less concerned with protecting our “self”. This is most likely to be possible if we have some insight that our self is not what it seems to be, i.e. not separate and distinct and permanent, but unbounded, a part of all things and dependent on all things. In this mode there is no sense of having to defend a self. From a Buddhist perspective this is perfectly natural, because Buddhism is based on a philosophical position, and ultimately an insight, that although we exist, there simply is no self to defend. According to Loy, when this “no-self” mode is taken to its conclusion we become love. Loy’s essay is about the conflict between Islamic fundamentalism and American imperialism, but it could be about any conflict. So one of the most relevant and essential messages of Buddhism is to begin to question the ordinary ideas we have of self – to a point where we may see that the ordinary way of viewing the world as “I in here and it/you out there” is simply a model, not the truth: a model that if believed without question can deepen fear and reinforce all kinds of conflict, and yet a model that is so open to question that it is remarkable how real it feels.

At present the Western Chan Fellowship continues to be reliant on its founding Teacher, Dr John Crook, to further its objects. He does this by leading retreats, writing, travelling and training new retreat leaders and teachers. But we have moved a long way since the foundation of the Fellowship: there are new Chan Teachers, and more people are active. This activity is increasing and diversifying in the UK and Europe through writing, contact with other Buddhist groups and organisations, meditation sessions for young people, and the work of engaged Buddhists.

Most human beings have very little power, but ideas can be truly powerful. Buddhism and Buddhist philosophy encapsulate important ideas and practices. An emphasis on empiricism is shared between Buddhism and science, making Buddhism congruent with the modern world and quite attractive to many scientists, albeit Buddhist empiricism is rooted in subjective experience. The proposal that there is a causal relationship between desire and suffering is also fundamental to Buddhism. This idea that was so revolutionary 2, 500 years ago is immediately accessible and is particularly pertinent to a consumerist society that is predicated on satisfaction of desire. Madhyamaka insight into the nature of self and emptiness and the revolutionary implications of this are more rarely encountered and seem counterintuitive, but there are related Western philosophical traditions and David Loy has indicated one way in which the Madhyamaka viewpoint can be made more accessible.

Experiences that are central to Buddhism, for example, the value placed on contemplation and interrogating silence, are no longer central in our society, although fortunately by no means lost to it either. But Chan Buddhism and other Buddhist traditions go beyond this by regarding these essentially calming approaches to practice as a route to the Buddhist insight of “seeing the nature”, an insight that goes beyond any framework, including Buddhist philosophy. This is the spirit at the heart of Chan that has been rekindled in the Maenllwyd since 1975, and one we must not lose sight of in our many and varied attempts to “advance the education of the public in Buddhism.”

After all – where is the robe that passes from generation to generation?

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1 Buddhism in Decline: *news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/asia-pacific* April 7th 1998

2 Ian Wilson. *Reincarnation? The Claims Investigated*. Penguin Books 1982

3 Stephen Batchelor 1997, *The Agnostic Buddhist*. New Chan Forum No. 14, 3-8

4 Simon Child 1994, *Birth and Karma - A Meditational Viewpoint*. New Chan Forum No. 9, 16-20

5 David R. Loy 2002. *On the Nonduality of Good and Evil: Buddhist Reflections on the New Holy War*

## **Passing down the Robe**

**John Crook**

### **Introduction**

The Maenllwyd, our retreat farmstead in Wales, had been home to "Zen" retreats for some years prior to the arrival of Master Sheng yen on that wet April day in 1989. I had been presenting Western Zen Retreats (WZR) based on Charles Berner's "Enlightenment Intensives"<sup>1</sup> at the Bristol Encounter Centre since the mid seventies and these had found a natural base in the Welsh hills. Newcomers were faced with lamps and candles, holes in the barn dormitory roof, haylofts for bedding, cold winters and sometimes a lot of snow. These "toughies", as we later called them, had a fierce zen streak in their genes it seemed, for, in those immediately post-hippie days, such people would tackle anything for a glimpse of enlightenment. Yet these Zen events were hardly orthodox and legitimate questions could be asked as to whether they were Zen or Buddhist at all.

It was with this doubt in mind that I first attended Master Sheng yen's Chan retreats in New York. Not only did I have a personal need to deepen my understanding and experience of Buddha Dharma but I felt that if I were to continue my retreat presentations at the Maenllwyd I needed to know how they stood in relation to orthodoxy. I believed that what I was doing was no mere idiosyncratic, self indulgent, and possibly dangerous group process as adversaries were prone to suggest, but a very real contribution to the personal development of others. How to check this? In the event Master Sheng yen was interested in my work and recognised the utility of the method but he agreed that the WZRs could not be considered to be Zen unless they included Buddhist vows and led on to the taking of Precepts.

After I had trained with him on several retreats and he had seen our work in Wales, he asked me to lead orthodox Chan retreats at the Maenllwyd in addition to WZRs. I was to be, as he put it, his "representative." And so our story began. The Bristol Chan Group was formed by a small group of enthusiasts<sup>2</sup> who asked me to be their teacher (NCF 1. 1990). One of these was Jake Lyne who, in this issue, now presents us with a valuable and searching examination of our endeavour since those exciting first days and our subsequent creation of a national charity - the WCF. It is significant that we conduct such an examination now, not only because some of our senior members have come through a controversial period, but also because both Master Sheng yen and I will be 72 this year and "time waits for no man". Furthermore I face personal questions as to how best to fulfil the trust placed in me by Master Sheng yen consequent upon his transmission to me of the Chan Dharma (NCF 9. 1994 p 2-4) in the Dharma Drum lineage.

Among the questions Jake raises are matters concerning the relevance of our activities to our time, the effectiveness with which we attempt to fulfil our constitutional objects and the question of transmission to 'second generation teachers'. Implicit in considering these matters is also the need for a clear definition of the particular focus in Dharma teaching which the Teacher is endeavouring to convey.

### **Making the Dharma relevant to our time**

We live in a peculiarly materialistic age dominated by scientific reductionism and an economic system rooted in the unsustainable maximisation of profit by competitive private companies. In such a world spiritual values of traditional religions have become largely ignored, sentimentalised or distorted into dogmatic belief systems of social intolerance.



Certainly under the impact of social changes led by these forces the cultural roots of Buddhism, and perhaps all major religions, are declining - as Jake has suggested.

Yet there is ample evidence of an increasingly vivid awareness of something lacking in our modern world. Not only are the times exceptionally violent with problems of control over weapons of mass destruction, but poverty is inexcusably widespread, politicians fail to deal with the major issues of environmental degradation world-wide, and the capitalist ethos of the modern world view offers no remedy leading towards long term solutions. The result is commonly a personal sense of alienation, confusion as to values, drug addiction, a macabre fascination with rape, murder and child abuse and, among thinking persons, existential anxiety and a sense of cultural failure. Peter Reason, in an article in the last issue of this journal, quotes a student essay which told him that "despite a whole array of 'graduate opportunities' there is a growing sense of claustrophobia and sense of powerlessness; for all the relative luxuries of the western world we are still unsatisfied: there is an unmistakable sense of longing, a deep craving for some kind of release or escape" (Sara Atkins). And Reason locates the source of that craving for escape in the "all encompassing frame of the modern world view - which stops us listening to the world" and which therefore requires us to confront the entire modern set-up. This widespread search includes a lively interest in Buddhism in all its forms.

So is Buddhism, and especially the zen of this essay, relevant? Jake correctly points out that some traditional themes in Buddhist teaching do not sit well with a scientific understanding of the world nor with the modern needs of self enhancement in career, family, the gaining of credentials of all kinds. Classical ideas of reincarnation and the monastic emphasis on asceticism look strange to contemporary entrepreneurs, and career climbers, even when they themselves feel an alienation of mind from heart. These issues do need to be reframed and understood anew and a deep acquaintance with Buddhist philosophical psychology can certainly clear the way.

One of the useful ways of understanding "reincarnation" is to consider this theme as a metaphor for the descent of cultural traits and problems from one generation to another<sup>3</sup>. I once heard Shifu remark to a Chinese doubter that perhaps many of the traditional ideas concerning reincarnation need not be accepted as literally true, but he insisted that to be a Buddhist one needed some idea of "continuity". The kind of continuity I believe he meant was the way in which, for example, the character of a great grandmother can so warp that of her daughter that her children develop odd characteristics in adult life which are ultimately responsible for some of a descendant's own oddities at the present time.

Awareness of such inter-generational descent can give a broad picture of the onward passage of "karma" (although this view differs in some important ways from traditional formulations). Likewise the descent of cultural themes can impel karmic roots from the past into the present; for example the way in which the British imperial period is significant to an understanding of multicultural modern Britain; and, correspondingly, the way in which the history of democracy and the labour movement in Britain influences the character of that multicultural scene. Interpreted in this way the notion of "karmic retribution" in the present for (mis)deeds in the past retains its meaning and its relevance. Who but the British can be held responsible for our own history and our current state? Only I can undo the karmic confusion engendered originally by the character of my grandmother. We cannot set aside these ancient themes without a deeper penetration into their meaning and their relevance today.

Furthermore, to avoid Buddhist ideas and to stress only those physical methods that relieve stress and reduce anxiety is equally a faulty path. Efforts at "mainstreaming" Buddhism

through introducing mind calming meditational practices to prisons, hospitals etc without the teaching of the ideas of the Dharma can only cheapen Buddhism - much as yoga tends to become an activity of beauty parlours. This is not to say, of course, that any effective remedial treatment should not be used in helping distressed minds - but this is a presentation of psychophysical medicine, not of the Dharma path of the Buddha.

An interest in the asceticism of the monastic life is today actually quite lively. Athos is almost booming and Christian monasteries are receiving attentive interest if not necessarily ardent recruits. Asceticism is based upon a principle of restraint. Within the extraordinarily successful Indian order, the Brahma Kumaris, for example, there are many European adherents otherwise active in careers and family life who choose the path of celibacy in direct opposition to the near pornographic sexuality of so much of the social scene. Many others see in periodic withdrawal from the world, in nature, solitary cottages, retreats or monasteries, a means of facing the alienating pressures of city and corporate life. Monastic asceticism in itself seems unlikely to be a barrier to an interest in Buddhism. Furthermore, Tibetan Tantra emphasises a way of transformation through mindful participation in life rather than self denial, although a wise lama will tell you that this is barely possible without a mind also trained in restraint.

A romantic Western fascination with monastic practices, especially those of Japanese Zen monks on heroic retreat, has blinded many enthusiasts from the fact that no Sangha ever existed without a substantial lay following and support. The Buddha himself had much to say to his lay followers and, in both China and Tibet, enormous congregations would attend the reading or chanting of lengthy sutras or the giving of empowerments. Such events supported the 'everyday practice' of laypersons in their homes and work places. Buddhism has perhaps never focussed particularly on family problems, but it has never been unfriendly to family affairs.

The key practice for a layperson, whether at home or at work, is to maintain 'self at ease' at all times however difficult or fraught with tension. There are many ways to facilitate 'every day' zen: daily sittings of short duration with family participating; the maintenance of a family shrine; etc but it is true that few contemporary western practitioners bother with such things, especially when the spouse /partner may not be a practitioner. Until they do so, they are dependent on bringing home with them the good practice uncovered on retreats. Our own intensive retreats certainly function to a degree in this way as retreat reports often testify. Shi fu has remarked with humour on a westerner who, when asked why he came on retreat, replied, " Well, you see, Shifu, after a retreat there are a few days during which I do not quarrel with my wife!"

A deeper problem concerns the disproportion in the numbers of each gender that come on retreat. There is a paradox here in that women who do our retreats certainly get as much value from them as men do (see p 27-32 and p 36-41 in this issue): but the proportion of women attending retreats is low and seemingly falling. Yet women occupy a disproportionately large number of leadership roles in our Sangha: so that while we need more women members, we also need more suitable men to come forward as leaders.

The reasons for these anomalies may well lie in the reputation "zen" has for being a particularly masculine type of activity - and it is true that, so far as monasticism is concerned, it has been a predominantly male one. There are therefore good reasons why women need to investigate what forms of practice are most suitable for them. If there are unconscious male biases at work then our women practitioners need to come forward with their own suggestions and preferences so that they can be carefully considered. There are reasons for thinking that womens' groups function differently in self exploration than do

predominantly male ones and we do need to investigate this in the context of our own fellowship. It is interesting that gender ratios are at parity for our Mahamudra retreats which involve basic Tantra. There are clues here which we need to examine.

Yet, when this is said and done, it may be that our Chan retreats are particularly well related to male problems in our current society wherein many young men seem disoriented and uncertain in ways that lead to an unpleasant "laddishness" that has now gone so far as to generate government concern.



Buddhism comes to the west in many forms, Chinese, Japanese, Indian etc and each arrives festooned with cultural concomitants, festivals, liturgies, meditation methods etc. Different individuals will find some such aesthetic accompaniments attractive and others not. The *smorgasbord* of Buddhism can accommodate many tastes and provisioning such preferences becomes the basis for a developing marketplace of superficial spirituality. In bookshops, magazines, films, we find innumerable means of providing for such a range of preferences - all the way from smiling lamas to new types of meditation cushion or a new "western" way of doing things and making them easy. The main Buddhist journal in America, *Tricycle*, is, for example, full of such adverts and presumably largely financed by them. The market soon catches up on Buddhist taste just as it did with the aesthetics of the sixties. It is not easy to escape what Trungpa Rinpoche styled "Spiritual materialism".

The question emerges as to what is meant by 'relevance'. It is certainly no part of traditional Buddhism to pander to the aesthetic tastes of a market in sentimentalities. Nor is Buddhism deeply concerned with the therapeutic adaptation of individuals to a more socially acceptable or acquiescent life. The Buddha proposed a remedy for suffering out of his own experience of suffering. Is that remedy relevant to the suffering of today?

We need always to return to the core teachings when considering this issue of relevance. Suffering remains with us in ever more complex forms. The Buddha said again and again

that the only thing he knew was the relief of suffering - metaphysics, history, the origin of the Universe, were not his brief. So what is relevant today can only be the "great doctor's" prescription for the relief of suffering. We return then to the Law of Co-dependent Arising, the Four Noble Truths, the basic formulae and their emergence in the Prajnaparamita sutras and Madhyamaka philosophies of the Mahayana, for these provide a profound analysis of the human condition of suffering. Furthermore the Buddha stated no dogma, things that had to be believed to achieve salvation, rather he suggested a path and invited individuals to test it. His open ended offering of a spiritual empiricism remains basic to Buddhism today - although not all institutions fully understand it. Does the WCF teach this effectively? Are these themes being presented in the "direct, simple and relevant way" that Jake envisages?

### **Retreat and practice in the Western Chan Fellowship**

The WCF is a young institution and we can be reasonably happy about our development so far. We have created a fine Chan hall for retreats at our meditational base in Wales, we hold many retreats, we have a number of small but active city groups in most regions of Britain, and we run an internationally recognised website and a challenging journal. We seek to open up questions concerning lay Buddhism in the West and have not failed to criticise what we consider to be corrupt, inadequate or failing practices. Although we have had one or two internal rows and individual defections, the warmth of our Sangha was well expressed at my birthday party in November 2000 for which I feel great gratitude. In addition I run retreats in a number of European cities and Simon Child and I are again to run a WZR in 2003 at Pine Bush - the heart of Chan in America. So far so good - but are our approaches and methods effectively representing the Dharma and conveying it to those who join us?

The main message practitioners need to receive remains the core insight of the Buddha as contained in the basic formulae. The source of suffering and our sense of alienation lie within the self and its habitual attachment to self-concern rooted in profound illusions about its nature. This is true whether one is speaking of personal self or institutional self. Impermanence implies that the self is empty of inherent existence as a discrete entity. Rather the mind and all things exist within a universal flow as described by the Law of Co-dependent Arising. Attachment to things as if they could be permanently acquired or safeguarded remains an illusion and this illusion is the prime cause of our sense of lack in a world focussed on acquisition. Such a world therefore needs challenging by an alternative image. This means that the self of which we are so fond needs to be confronted as the very first step in practice. And this is why newcomers at their first WZR immediately face the question "Who am I?" And we can say that twenty years of these retreats certainly shows that individuals can be greatly changed through this practice gaining new views on themselves and the world which may lead on to further Buddhist investigation.

Table 1 (below) depicts the range of training that the WCF provides for its practitioners. These retreats offer experiences of calming the mind and insight into its nature, which thereby facilitate self -confrontation through various well-tried routes. Retreats are supported by activities in local groups.

Unfortunately the deep import of such training quite often remains misunderstood. The prevailing culture biases people towards the satisfaction of needs and wants, often with little awareness of the difference. We hear that zen can provide wonderful experiences, we want them; zen seems to imply a hierarchy of ever deeper and wonderful realisations, we want them; we want relief from a troubled mind; we want to "get" an answer to our problems. Me, me, me. Sometimes on retreat we do indeed find some relief and for a while the self is satisfied. The dog has his bone. But to encounter the basic source of the

confusion in one's own mind requires high levels of mindfulness not only in the retreat process but also in one's everyday life. The practice and the teaching has to inculcate a way of thinking and being in the world that makes a difference through satisfaction of a deep need ; not merely a selfish want. This deep need is for a fresh comprehension of what being a self actually is and how it operates in illusion and in insight. No easy job.

### **Taking on the training**

The difference between the life of a trainee monk and that of a western lay practitioner lies in continuity. The monk has the monastery always in his face. The casual retreatant may return to his office to begin advertising new brands of some commodity to feed new addictions without being fully aware of the discrepancy between his quest on retreat and the social negativity in his employment. There are countless variations on this theme. Yet, only in the intimacy of ones personal life can the world as self be confronted.

In monastic training the mind settles for long periods and a fresh understanding of increasing insight and clarity emerges. A truly new attitude may arise in which the diminished self allows an opening of the treasure house- as Dogen puts it. And out of gratitude for this peace of mind, clarity of awareness and freedom from bias, attention turns to others - and indeed the social system. To care about others and the world more than about one's self is the discovery of the truly "awakening mind" (bodhicitta) of the Bodhisattva. At this point one's stance in the world may indeed begin to make a difference.

How to facilitate this transition? It seems that the requirement for longer/deeper continuity of practice, which can facilitate the emergence of such an opening, implies something like a (necessarily limited) monastic endeavour. For this reason I am proposing the provision of solitary retreats within the WCF for those seeking this dimension of change (See p 25). In a supervised solitary retreat the gains from group retreats and daily training can deepen and become entrenched as wisdom begins to replace ego - exactly as Shifu describes it. And once established, this may last. In this practice the almost addictive desire for high religious states and insights falls into the background as an attitude of kindness and selfless compassion takes their place without thoughts of reward. One begins to experience 'self at ease' whether enlightened or not.

Of course it may be said that good-hearted souls can accomplish beneficial change without going on solitary retreats. True indeed. Yet intelligent personal and social engineering is not the same as a shift in the heart that eventually comes to influence others in a qualitatively quite different way. We can trace here a route back to an enchantment with the world through freedom from the obsessions of self. Life in relation to all things becomes a poem in which all participate. We are talking here of a spirituality in which a heart change creates another world - much as the appearance of HH the Dalai Lama, a man with so many responsibilities, can shift ones mind merely through the apprehension of his smile.

### **Transmission and passing down the robe**

In Zen there has always been an emphasis on "mind to mind transmission" whereby a master acknowledges the Dharma insight of a follower thus empowering him or her to teach<sup>4</sup>. There are no written examinations in Chan Buddhism; any testing is of a quite different nature yet, in its own way, highly sophisticated. Even so, this transmission of authority has been considerably questioned in the West in recent years and not without good reason. There are numerous examples in which Western and sometimes Eastern individuals suborned by the permissiveness of our culture have shown themselves severely lacking in the personal constraint which their acquired charisma as teachers demands of them. Financial and sexual scandals, disrobings and covers up have manifested not uncommonly. The result has been personal distress for many and serious doubts about the

whole matter of transmission. And I believe it has to be said that the masters passing down such transmissions have done so mistakenly - mistaking experiences such as kensho or personal devotion for a maturity in which ethical behaviour and compassion would have naturally developed.

Such faults have emerged particularly but not solely among the "second generation teachers" of Jake Lyne's concern. Yet younger teachers of great competence, inventiveness and authority have also been arising whose integrity can be respected. Among these we may perhaps list Reb Anderson, Bernie Glassman and Daido Lorie as well as Martine and Stephen Batchelor among a number of others whose creative teaching and personal influence has done much to sustain the reputation of the Zen Dharma.



A key feature of Zen necessitates a heart to heart personal confirmation from Teacher to disciple. This is because the essence of Zen is conveyed and realised in direct experience not in any indirect description, writing, gifts in verbal presentation etc. which are the hallmark of a more typical educator. Zen seeks to educate the mind in the immediacy of apprehending the world and not into some system of ethics, behaviour or dogmatic belief or even the holding of opinions. To find out whether a trainee has the capacity to convey zen insight in this manner requires face to face encounters in meetings of direct experiential sharing. It has to be 'now or never'. It is through such encounters and meetings that a master comes to trust the insights, and integrity of his or her follower and becomes willing to let them take on the job. "Passing down the robe" is not agreed upon in committee but through a master's discretion. Yet, as we have seen, and as some masters admit, mistakes can be made.<sup>5</sup>

The issue turns on an integrity that needs to be based in the long-term training we have been discussing. A young man dressed in flashy robes, sporting a reputation for being "enlightened" and giving verbally brilliant discourses may not be a teacher to trust.

Someone of warmth, few words, and tolerant of stupidity may be far more reliable. A true teacher will know this and it will be apparent in whom he may choose as a dharma descendant: well aware of the disappointment he may give to secretly ambitious others.



It is therefore not so important that "second generation teachers" provide talks that find ways of speaking Zen in the fashion-conscious "speak" of the time or who as a result of their personal contacts with great teachers can present a bridge to the older cultures now fading, the aesthetics of which may have diminishing appeal. A "second generation teacher" needs only to be true to him(her)self in an honesty which includes a profound personal acquaintance with both the actuality of suffering and the response to it through Dharma understanding and practice.

The way to "present Chan Buddhism differently, in a way that will appeal to a new generation and that is not so much at odds with modern thinking" lies through a rigorous training based in the easily comprehensible truths of the basic formulations of the Buddha. Someone who does this can meet others face to face and declare the presence of the moment without fear or favour. Of course mistakes will be made, inadequacies surface, karmic retribution strike, but the integrity of the intention to be true to the essence of mind is what counts here. The ancient folk beliefs of Asian culture are, in this context, merely an aesthetic background. The matter in hand is culturally present, simply because the Buddha's own insight was so cogent and relevant to the human condition in any culture and in any time.

So does our approach work? Well, at the last WZR at Maenllwyd the majority of participants were newcomers between the ages of around twenty and thirty-five. This is the new generation and they went away showing changes in attitude and experience much as had the generation before them. If a teaching has the psychological truth of suffering by the

tail, the response of one generation will differ little from another. How else could Buddha's teaching have survived 2500 years?

What changes in the world are contexts, fashions, opinions and modes of self-justification. Suffering has not changed, personal and social stress remain rooted in a psychology well described in the Buddha's basic formulae. It follows that adherence to the heart of the teaching and the practice is the way to ensure that Chan continues into a future generation. By all means change the decorations, wash the curtains but, above all, examine the foundations if you want to build a home.

### **The training of "second generation teachers"**

A correct understanding of the relation between personal insights and a role in the institutional transmission of Chan is essential. A person who has experienced a deep 'kensho' may not necessarily be a person well equipped to teach Dharma. Dharma teaching skills rely on an ability to gain the trust of practitioners, a certain attributed charisma that can only be earned slowly, an ability to interpret and empathise with the suffering of others, a strictly ethical but flexible life style and a lack of egoistic ambition. We are describing here someone who is maturing in wisdom with "self at ease" rather than someone bent on winning the credentials of spectacular insights. It is the intention to live life as a Bodhisattva in the service of others that is crucial here. Hidden, or even partially unconscious, egoistic ambitions to earn a title or be seen as "enlightened" must be rooted out if a would-be teacher is not to be quickly set aside by a discerning master. No holds will be barred by a master in attempting to ensure that this is so. Why? Because if he appoints a teacher who fails, the entire reputation of the tradition is questioned - as indeed it has been.

If we believe in the deep value of the traditional teachings, the manner in which they are passed on becomes crucial. No amount of glitzy mainstreaming will help - only an essential authenticity.

Master Sheng yen has made clear<sup>6</sup> what is needed for a teacher to be given a role in the transmission of the Chan lineage. Individuals with deep experience and Dharma understanding but without a 'kensho' experience may teach and lead limited retreats. They will perform a vital role since authenticated 'kensho' in a person also capable of teaching is rare. Only the latter however may be considered Dharma heirs within the lineage authorised to create future masters with the same or better qualifications than themselves. The reason for this is that the enlightenment experience of 'kensho' (however realised) can only be understood between two people who both know what is involved here. Yet this is not really a matter of ranking since kensho arises by "grace" and not by attainment. In this lies the shamanic mystery of transmission best left in many ways as mysterious- like the universe itself indeed.

Modern relativists are apt to negate the significance of lineage because of a belief in the value of individualistic effort. A number of westerners have styled themselves, or permitted their followers to style them, as Roshis or Rimpoches. While some such persons may have been splendid teachers they end by allowing the Dharma to evaporate into a form of self justification only too easily followed by practitioners not free from illusion. Adherence and understanding of lineage acts as a constraint on the ever-present tendency of the ego to inflate itself in endlessly subtle ways. Lineage is awesome when one considers the names on the chain. The attainments of great masters such as Hui neng, Han shan, Lin chi, Ta hui or Hung chih are so far beyond most Dharma followers today as to inspire an essential humility. As Master Sheng yen reminded me on my own transmission "Only in these difficult times could one with attainments as shallow as your own be considered even



useful for the transmission of Chan. Yet in these times a person such as yourself can achieve something in a world so set in illusion" This applies to all of us who read this text.

Similarly, I was once discussing Western interests in the Dharma with a Ladakhi yogin at Lamayuru Gomba. He said "The difference between a western lay practitioner and a yogin is that the yogin is a consecrated person". Here we get a glimpse of the life long commitment and total dedication of a true practitioner whether monk or lay. Consecration, furthermore, is a communal matter; one is recognised by one's fellow yogins and teachers because of a common attitude that has undoubtedly been hard won. In such company the careerist quickly exposes him or herself. And, although not necessarily immediately apparent, this difference becomes understood by others even if they cannot describe it exactly. This is something implicit rather than explicit.

Yet, we must not, through an excessive concern for authenticity, set the barriers too high for those genuinely touched by a wish to serve the Dharma. The root of the matter is a disposition to be kind to others and to be present for them in places of suffering as well as joy. What then should one with such aspiration do to fill the role of a budding Bodhisattva in the West of our time? The following matters need attention:

- i. Motivation. How is it that such an interest has arisen? What exactly is the intention behind this interest? Has one faced up to the inherent egoism in all such endeavours?
- ii. Training in retreat. Experiential training in a variety of retreat practices with qualified masters is essential and understanding must be confirmed in interviews.
- iii. Personal daily life practice. What is it? How does it relate to the practices of others and one's daily life and career? Does it work?
- iv. Dharma understanding. There is a need for thorough and ever deepening insight into the basic formulations of the Buddha and the Mahayana sutras. A good grasp of the meaning of the Heart Sutra and a number of fundamental koans is essential for any Dharma teacher who is more than a textbook repeater.
- v. Global awareness. It is important to break out of the parochial concerns of one's class, country or profession. The whole world is culturally and economically interdependent these days. The bookshelves are loaded with knowledge and one needs to acquire a global perspective on the relevance of Buddhism in our time. This means study, reading and discussion.
- vi. Pilgrimages. It is important to travel to India, Tibet, China, Thailand etc to appreciate the atmosphere of lands and societies where Buddhism has deep roots. Naturally this takes time, dedication and funding but it is important if one is to gain a global insight into the Buddhism of our time. Without this there is a risk of underestimating the depth of Buddhist tradition through misunderstanding the role of myth and metaphor in older civilisations; and hence to trivialise Buddhism within the seductive world of post-modern capitalism wherein we are embedded.
- vii. Never teach or even discuss that which one does not know. Dharma gossip is idle talk that aids no one. Back to the cushion of direct experience every time.
- viii. Receive direct teaching from a master on how to present Dharma effectively, how to teach meditation and run retreats and how to listen to practitioners who may seek one's help.
- ix. Recall the Aspirational Prayer given in NCF 26 and use it daily.

ith these nine points in mind "second generation teachers" can feel they can acquire the basis for a compassionate practice in the interest of others which in the end is their only qualification. Furthermore, as such training deepens, they will acquire a fund of anecdotes about experiences, places, teachers, atmospheres etc which can form the roots of their own inspired and spontaneous talks leavening the core of dharma with life and wit.

Of course such a programme cannot be fulfilled all at once. This is a developmental process over time. Yet, as one goes along, these points of focus can act as a useful guide.

### **A Chan Community**

The retreat leaders, guestmasters, local group leaders and meditation instructors are as important as the teacher in our Western Chan. Their efforts would have little effect without the practice and focussed understanding of practitioners all the way from beginners to "old hands." In the creativity of the Chan practitioner lies the future of the WCF. Already we have practitioners developing valuable means for helping others using their own initiatives based in their training. Most local groups arise in this way as an individual decides to offer a room where people can meet for meditation and feels able to help with instruction. This opening initiative is perhaps the first step on the Bodhisattva path, a sign of emerging *bodhicitta*<sup>7</sup>.

In the Bristol Chan Group, for example, a number of individuals have used their own initiative to create very useful Dharma activities; social walks to get to know one another; a Buddhist art exhibition and poetry reading; a dharma study group which ran for a year or so; short retreats for children and teenagers all carefully thought out; and a recent initiative with Ken Jones of Aberystwyth proposing a short workshop on the experience of ageing. Our 'Mount Kailas in Wales' expedition and Ken's inventive use of landscape (p 27 this issue) as a source for retreat meditation in semi-solitary conditions in wilderness are perhaps especially noteworthy. All these initiatives reveal that anyone can use their talents towards the common good if they set their minds to it. This in fact is the root of community, a sharing of talents and skills towards a common object, the well being of one another. In the end the test for the WCF is whether practitioners feel able to contribute to the common good, both Buddhist and more generally, in ways that reinforce communal feeling as well as gaining a personal benefit. If this begins to happen more widely we will have created the basis for a culture in the West with roots that can continue to grow.

October 2002

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<sup>1</sup> I had trained in the leadership of these retreats with Jeff Love at Quaesitor and other centres of the period and Jeff had approved my idea of creating a Zen retreat based upon the Communication Exercise, the main method of Berner's process.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Cohen, Hilary Richards, Jake Lyne, and Tim Paine. Of these two were medical practitioners, one a psychotherapist and one a psychologist.

<sup>3</sup> For an extensive earlier discussion of this issue see : S-C Kolm 1979. *La philosophie bouddhiste et les 'hommes économiques'*. Social Science Information. 18. 4/5 :489-588. Blackmore, S. *Beyond the Self: The Escape from Reincarnation in Buddhism and Psychology*. In: E and J Berger. *Reincarnation: Fact or Fable?*

<sup>4</sup> Master Sheng yen has provided a detailed examination of the details of Chan transmission in *Chan comes West*" (Rebecca Li: editor) Dharma Drum 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Which is why I have insisted that in the constitution of the Western Chan Fellowship there are clauses that can ensure the removal of a seriously faulted teacher.

<sup>6</sup> See discussions in *Chan comes West*.

<sup>7</sup> Bodhicitta means the quest for enlightenment through assisting others to achieve it before oneself

**FLOW CHART OF PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT IN WESTERN CHAN FELLOWSHIP**

**The WCF functions through Local Groups and through Retreats**

Structure	Function	Responsibilities	Nature of learning	Instructors qualifications
<b>BEGINNERS CLASSES</b>	To welcome beginners and provide basic meditation instruction suited to their interests but oriented towards development within WCF	Group leaders and Meditation Instructors	Through Sitting to develop mindfulness and reflection on own needs and actions counteracting reactive habits and emotional dependencies	Meditation instructors certificate
<b>WESTERN ZEN RETREATS</b>	Introduces individuals to self confrontation as the basic method and requirement for personal change through Chan	Teacher with Guestmaster and monitors.	Through Communication Exercises to challenge habitual assumptions about self, to discover one is not exceptional. Development of self in the world. compassion and "one-mind". Wisdom of being	Certification for leadership of WZR or EI mastership + Chan training.
<b>CH'AN RETREATS</b>	Based in meditation methods basic to Buddhism as taught in the Beginners Classes. Participants are introduced to Chinese Chan as in Dharma Drum Lineage. viz: Silent illumination, use of koans and hua-tous	Teacher with Guestmaster and monitors	Through traditions of Chan to develop the wisdom of sunyata, insight into one-pointedness, higher effects of practice and understanding the wisdom of "Seeing the Nature" if not that experience itself. Introduction to <i>Bodhicitta</i> and bodhisattva vows	Chan transmission or Permit to run retreats by a Master or Dharma heir
<b>MAHAMUDRA</b>	Teaches basic Tantra and meditation methods of Mahamudra to deepen participants practice and personal integration.	Teacher, Guestmaster and monitors	Development of greater heart through tantric visualisation and physical methods. Wisdom of "Big Mind"	Higher practice Empowerment from Tibetan lama or certification by an empowered Vajra heir.

Summary: There are several layers to training in the WCF and movement from one to the other is by practice and empowerment through personal recognition aided by interview. Permission to teach at any level is given by the elected Teacher of the WCF but open to comment in Committee as per the constitution. Current situation requires attention to be given to improving the classes for beginners through providing suitable materials. It is essential to be clear about the probable motivation of beginners: viz: sense of meaninglessness and quest, emotional distress or problems otherwise dealt with through counselling or romantic curiosity based in *folies de grandeur*. We live in a consumer age in which the predominant motivation is for self-satisfaction, indulgence or improvement rather than understanding through confrontation with illusions. Each of these has elements totally contrary to the thrust of Dharma. Unless a Dharma teacher is prepared to question and confront the very society in which we operate he/she is not worthy of that role. The skills required combine being a social radical with a compassionate understanding of illusion.

Chuan Deng Jing Di. October 2002

## The Four Great Vows

### Master Sheng-yen

*A Dharma talk delivered by Master Sheng-yen at Columbia University on December 10 1991 and reproduced here with permission. Very lightly edited.*

*I vow to deliver innumerable sentient beings.*

*I vow to cut off endless vexations.*

*I vow to master limitless approaches to Dharma.*

*I vow to attain supreme Buddhahood.*

At the heart of Mahayana Buddhism, which includes Chan, are the Four Great Vows. The intention to help all sentient beings liberate themselves from ignorance is the aspiration of a Bodhisattva, and one who follows these teachings follows the Bodhisattva Path.

Mahayana Buddhism did not come into its own until the first century C. E., but the origin of the Four Great Vows can be traced to the earliest records of Buddha's teachings, the Agamas (literally, Source of the Teaching). The Agamas encompass the basic teachings of the oldest form of Buddhism, which is now practiced primarily in South Asia. The Agamas present primarily the path to liberation and include the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, karma, and other concepts basic to the understanding and practice of Buddhism.

The Four Great Vows are based on the Four Noble Truths: (1) suffering; (2) the cause, or origin, of suffering; (3) the cessation of suffering; and (4) the path that leads to the cessation of suffering. First, all of samsaric existence is suffering. Second, suffering arises from desire and attachment. Third, by eliminating our craving nature, suffering will cease. Fourth, we can end suffering by following the Eightfold Path (1. right, or perfect, view; 2. perfect resolve; 3. perfect speech; 4. perfect conduct; 5. perfect livelihood; 6. perfect effort; 7. perfect mindfulness; 8. perfect concentration). We can accept and practice these truths to liberate ourselves, and we can practice them to liberate others as well. From the point of view of basic Buddhadharma - the Four Noble Truths by themselves are sufficient. However, if our primary intent in practicing Buddhadharma is to benefit other sentient beings, then the Four Noble Truths by themselves are, perhaps, not sufficient. Hence the need for the Four Great Vows. Mahayana Buddhism teaches that the primary impetus to practice Buddhadharma should be to help others. In the attempt to help liberate other sentient beings, we naturally and automatically benefit ourselves.

What is suffering? If a person has a headache, you might consider that suffering, but Buddhism makes a distinction between pain and suffering. Suffering is not physical pain. It is anguish, psychological distress, or the burden of vexations. Suffering can be caused by physical discomfort, such as the pain we encounter during birth, sickness, old age, and death. These are physiological realities we must all face. We also suffer when we are separated from people or things with which we wish to remain in contact, and when we have to deal with people or things we wish to avoid. When we cannot get what we want, we suffer; and when we cannot get rid of the things we do not want, we suffer. Finally, sentient beings suffer because they continue to repeat the process of birth and death - samsara.

The Buddha wished to help all sentient beings depart from suffering, and so he taught the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. If we strictly follow the Four Noble Truths, it is possible - but not necessary - to be concerned only with our own liberation. However, if we add the Four Great Vows, the emphasis of our practice is necessarily on alleviating the suffering of all sentient beings.

In the later sutras, the Four Noble Truths become transformed into the activities of bodhisattvas. One Mahayana sutra directs us to practice four bodhisattva activities: "Those people who do not know of suffering, help them to know of suffering. Those people who have not departed from suffering, help them to depart from suffering. Those people who do not practice the path yet, help them to practice the path." And finally, "Those people who have not attained nirvana, help them to attain nirvana." Here the meaning of the Four Noble Truths has been expanded and their emphasis changed. Eventually, in "The Ornaments of the Bodhisattvas Sutra", these four bodhisattva activities developed further into the four aspirations, or vows, of a bodhisattva, and are "officially" recognized as vows.

The two sutras I just mentioned teach us to use the Four Noble Truths to help sentient beings through bodhisattva activities. In the Mahayana "Contemplation on the Mind Ground Sutra", the Four Great Vows are independently mentioned and take the form we know today. This sutra makes it clear that the vow to deliver, or help, all sentient beings should be at the forefront of our practice. That is why it is the first Great Vow, and giving rise to this aspiration is called "generating Bodhi mind (*Bodhicitta*)."

The second vow is to cut off, or end, all of one's personal vexations. The third vow is to learn and master all approaches to Dharma. Why should we want to cut off all vexations and learn all Buddhadharma? If it were not for the first vow, the second and third vows could be self-benefiting goals. But the first vow makes it clear that the purpose of the second and third vows is to make us more capable of helping other sentient beings. Even though we learn and cultivate the Buddhadharma individually, it is for others that we do so. This is in the spirit of Sakyamuni Buddha. Sakyamuni decided to leave home because he witnessed the suffering of sentient beings and vowed to find a way to transcend it. He then learned and practiced many methods for years before becoming enlightened and attaining Buddhahood. His reason for embarking on the path was to find a way to help others. This is also the spirit of the Four Great Vows.

Chinese and Japanese Buddhism have further elaborated on the Four Great Vows based on the Parinirvana Sutra. The Parinirvana Sutra speaks of the three "bodies" of the Buddha, which are collectively known as the trikaya. "Body" is used metaphorically and does not refer to a specific physical entity. This important Mahayana concept, which can be traced back to the Agamas, explains that a Buddha is one with the totality of the universe and at the same time manifests in a physical form to help deliver sentient beings in a relative time and space.

The first body is the Dharmakaya (Body of Reality), the true nature of the Buddha, which is identical with the "absolute" (universal matrix) and beyond description and dualities.

The second body is the Sambhogakaya (Body of Beatitude), the body of the Buddha that is beheld by other deeply enlightened beings: bodhisattvas at the final stage of cultivation before becoming buddhas. Artistic representations of the Sambhogakaya usually include the thirty-two major marks and eighty minor marks of a Buddha and are used in devotional practice.

The third body is the Nirmanakaya (Transformational Body). This is the physical form that the Buddha takes in the world in order to pass on the teachings of the Dharma and help sentient beings. The Parinirvana Sutra raises and answers the question, "How does a bodhisattva attain these three bodies and the final fruition of Buddhahood?" Ultimately, the answer is based on the Four Great Vows.

The Transformational Body - or the body the Buddha took on about 2,500 years ago to teach the Dharma to sentient beings, when he was born in what is now Nepal - was attained by practicing the first of the Four Great Vows. This body is an ordinary physical body,

susceptible to the same pains and pleasures as our bodies. Being in human form, the Buddha is approachable and we can learn from him. This Incarnation Body helps Buddha to fulfil the first Great Vow.

The Body of Beatitude corresponds to the fruition of all the merit and virtue of the Buddha. It is visible only to bodhisattvas of the highest order. This body is attained because the Buddha spent lifetimes practising, learning, and mastering all Dharmas, the third Great Vow.

The Body of Reality manifests upon the cutting off all vexations. It is not a "body", but rather *sunyata*, or reality of emptiness. Emptiness, however, does not mean the non-existence of everything. Attaining Buddhahood does not mean that everything disappears. Ultimate emptiness is that which is neither true nor false, neither real nor unreal, neither existent nor non-existent. It is beyond all dualities and devoid of all characteristics. It does not cling to any specific existence. That is why the sutras say that one grain of sand is equivalent to an entire Buddha world and that limitless, empty space is also equivalent to a Buddha world. In other words, the Body of Reality of a Buddha does not occupy any physical space, but at the same time, it is not separate from any specific location.

The trikaya, the three bodies of a buddha, are the fruition of the Four Great Vows. What relevance do the Four Great Vows have for one who is on the Bodhisattva Path? In the Mahayana tradition, it is said that if one wishes to attain Buddhahood, one must begin by making vows that correspond to the Bodhisattva Path. This is generating Bodhi mind.

There are two kinds of vows. The first are the common vows, the Four Great Vows that everyone walking the Bodhisattva Path must make. The second are individual vows, which differ for each being. They are different in the sense that each person vows to help a certain kind of sentient being or to use specific methods or to manifest in a certain place in order to help sentient beings. In the Mahayana sutras, Sakyamuni Buddha talks about the many other Buddhas who fill the Ten Directions. Each has his own Buddha world, each uses specific methods to help specific kinds of sentient beings. Bhaisajyaguru, the Healing Buddha, has his world, Amitabha has his, and Sakyamuni, our historic Buddha, has his. For example, in the Western Buddha World, sometimes called the World of Ultimate Bliss, there is no distinction between male and female. Everyone is neutral. In the Eastern Buddha World, such a distinction does exist, so those sentient beings who cannot give up the idea of differences in sexes may prefer to be reborn in the Eastern Buddha World!

For we ordinary sentient beings, the common vows - the Four Great Vows - need to be repeated over and over again. That is why in most Buddhist centres and monasteries, practitioners recite these vows several times a day during services. This keeps the vows in the forefront of one's mind. Individual vows, on the other hand, may be made at any time. If you have a clear intention from the start as to why you want to practice you can make an individual vow then. Others wait until they have developed firm faith in Buddhadharma before making individual vows. Still others change their individual vows as their relation to the Dharma and practice evolves. You need not put pressure on yourself to make an individual vow. They should arise naturally.

How do Chan practitioners make use of the Four Great Vows? In the Platform Sutra, the Sixth Patriarch said that before practitioners become enlightened, there are sentient beings outside their scopes and minds that need help, there are vexations that need to be cut off, there is the Buddhadharma that needs to be practiced, and there is Buddhahood to be attained. Therefore, Chan practitioners need to take and practice the Four Great Vows in the same way that any other Mahayanists would. But for those who are deeply enlightened, the

Four Great Vows are different. At this point, there is nothing that is outside of the enlightened one. An enlightened being vows to "deliver sentient beings from self-nature," "eradicate vexations of self-nature," "master limitless approaches to Dharma of self-nature," and "attain supreme Buddhahood of self-nature." This why in our Evening Services, we say the Four Great Vows in two ways. The first way is that which is written at the beginning of this article; the second is that to which I just referred.

What then is the meaning of the Four Great Vows for those who are deeply enlightened? What does it mean to add this term "self-nature" to the vows? Self-nature is *sunyata*, or emptiness. It is the same as the Dharmakaya, the Body of Reality of the Buddha. As I said earlier, it is not limited to any specific place or time. Therefore, for people who are deeply enlightened, there is no such thing as sentient beings, vexations, Dharma approaches, and Buddhahood. Even though such people continue to help sentient beings, cut off vexations, cultivate Dharma approaches, and attain Buddhahood, these things are no longer perceived as having their own intrinsic nature or as existing outside of their minds. Enlightened beings do what is taught by the early sutras: for sentient beings who do not know about suffering, the enlightened person helps them to know about suffering; for sentient beings who do not practice, the enlightened person helps them to practice; for sentient beings who have not attained nirvana, the enlightened person helps them attain nirvana. Deeply enlightened beings continue all of their activities, and sentient beings benefit from their activities. However, from the point of view of enlightened beings, they are doing nothing specific for no one in particular. If this is not completely clear to you, it is only natural. You must first directly experience your intrinsic nature to understand these concepts fully.

What attitude or perspective should practitioners have regarding the Four Great Vows? When one is ready to begin practising, one must take the Four Great Vows. But during the course of practice - when you are actually practising - you do not have to repeat these ideas over and over in your mind. At that time, you are already engaging in activities toward this purpose. If you are about to embark on a trip from New York to Washington, it might be wise to be clear about where you are going before you start, but once you are on the road toward Washington, you do not have to keep telling yourself, "Oh, I want to drive to Washington, I want to drive to Washington." Likewise, those who are already enlightened do not need to repeat the vows, just as a person who has arrived in Washington need not continue saying, "I want to go to Washington."

The idea you have of the Four Great Vows at the beginning of practice and at the culmination of practice, when you are enlightened, is also different, because your perspective is different. A Chinese poet described a beautiful place in China called Yellow Mountain - Lu Mountain. In the poem, he says that by the time one gets to the mountain, one does not know what this place looks like. Why? Because one is already there. This is the final stage of the Chan perspective toward the Four Great Vows: for one who is deeply enlightened or has attained Buddhahood, the Four Great Vows are no longer relevant. At this level, the enlightened one is inseparable from the Four Great Vows. One need not remind oneself anymore. The vows will naturally continue. This is called the Four Great Vows of Self-nature. But let us begin at the beginning, by making the Four Great Vows and giving rise to Bodhi Mind.

## **The Conspiracy**

**Jo Horwood**

*What tender touch soothes  
The gum, as it sheds its bark?*

*What sacred promise tells  
The young bird to let go  
Of its baby feathers?*

*What reassurance encourages  
The caterpillar to enter the chrysalis  
To become the butterfly?*

*What knowing that we are  
Born to be magnificent  
Ever more expanded and majestic  
Urges the snake to shed it's skin  
And the chick to break the shell  
That it might find  
The new world awaiting?*

*This same Wisdom  
This natural conspiracy  
Shows me where I'm growing  
And speaks the words of assurance  
"All is well"*

*And I go on  
Go deeper  
Go further  
To uncover ever more  
The One I am.*



## Solitary Options

### A school for Yogins?

**John Crook**

*John has recently become the sole owner of his property in the Mendip Hills of Somerset. The farm is well suited for development as a meditation training centre and in this article John offers suggestions as to how he may augment the Intensive Retreat programme of the WCF with a provision for personal training in supervised solitary retreats.*



Winterhead Hill Farm lies on the western ridge of the Mendip Hills overlooking a gentle valley leading down to the Bristol Channel with distant views of the Welsh mountains. The location is surprisingly remote for this heavily populated area, tucked away together with two other properties at the end of a gated track and invisible from roads. The seclusion is perfect for a monastic setting. It is also quite beautiful with rolling pasture, bluebell woods and bare limestone hills providing excellent walking country. While the weather can be wet and stormy, there are many quiet, peaceful and sunny days too. It is within half an hour's drive from the cities of Bristol, Wells and Glastonbury and an hour from Bath. Access to M4 and M5 motorways is easy and Bristol Airport is twenty minutes away with access to the continent on KLM shuttle flights.

The farm has outbuildings sited around a courtyard and I sometimes dream about establishing nothing less than a small monastery here or at least a regional Chan Hall for the South West. Such a project would be quite possible but require considerable funding. Whether there is a demand for such a thing is however far from clear. The take up of the new facilities at the Maenllwyd for individual retreats has for example been minimal and a suggestion concerning a project in Southampton stimulated no interest.

My belief remains that a number of people would welcome intensive meditational training on a personal basis through solitary retreats under supervision in a small community of retreatants. Such a system does operate well for example at Gaia House for Vipassana, but is not particularly associated with Chan training.

I propose therefore to offer two new training opportunities for Buddhist practitioners familiar with the retreats of the WCF at the Maenllwyd and who wish to develop a deeper personal practice. My suggestion would be especially appropriate for any practitioner

wishing to undertake solitary practice in a small communal setting under supervision, any Buddhist facing a life crisis for which a period of withdrawal from the world with intensive practice seems appropriate, and people simply wishing to take their insight into the experiential Dharma to deeper levels only achievable through longer term seclusion. Many practitioners gain considerable insight from weeklong intensive retreats but are unable to sustain this for long on returning to an abrasive daily life. The following suggestions would allow insights achieved on 7 day sesshins to be sustained and better understood through incorporation into a daily life practice.

Supervised Solitary Retreats. Accommodation will be provided for individuals interested in furthering his or her existing practice through solitary retreat. The retreat schedule would be agreed with the director (Retreat Master) who would be available periodically for consultation. Methods of practice could be Chan mindfulness, Silent illumination, Koan work or Mahamudra.

Yogin Training. The practitioner undertakes to deepen his/ her practice of Chan or Tibetan Buddhism through a course of training modelled on the training of Himalayan yogins. Practices would include basic preliminaries, tantric visualisation, breathing yoga, bare awareness and Mahamudra. The practitioner would undertake to learn, receive and practice teachings in Mahayana meditation under close supervision. The idea would be to develop a yogin's orientation to life as a basis for daily life practice and the teaching of Mahayana meditation.

Currently three rooms (bed sitters) will soon be available for individual occupancy. Durations of stay would range from one to eight weeks, the eight weeks comprising a term after which the Centre closes for a period. Preference would be given to those registering for the longest period of time.

Accommodation will be on a self-catering basis with self-provisioning. Apart from the individual " cell", there will be a Buddha Room, a meditation area, a communal lounge and a kitchen available for retreatants' use. The contract will include a two-hour work period on the property per day. Individuals may use the kitchen communally or on a rota as desired.

Current estimated cost: £10 per day for those staying for eight weeks. £15 per day for between four and eight weeks, £20 for two to four weeks and £25 for one to two weeks. These values are based on similar charges at Gaia House.

Schedule. A simple monastic regime will be followed with a morning and evening communal meditation, sometimes with liturgies. Apart from the daily Work period(s), the programmes will be individually constructed with the Retreat Master so as to suit the particular requirements and endeavour of the retreatant. Except for an occasional supply run to local stores, retreatants will be expected to remain on the property with walks in the vicinity being part of the programme. Visitors and pets will not be allowed. The house will be 'silent' except for agreed periods.

The Director will be in (private) residence most of the time but may be absent running retreats etc. for periods. If there is more than one retreatant in residence, one will be appointed as Guestmaster during the Director's absence.

Suggestions, enquiries, exploratory applications are all invited. Start date -2003.

John Crook  
WCF Centre for Yogin Training  
Winterhead Hill

# **Green Mountains Walking**

## **A Training in Landscape Intimacy**

### **The Evaluation of an Experimental Retreat**

**Ken Jones**

#### **Background**

This event was devised in the light of my own experience alone in the Plynlimon hills for extended periods over several years. This led me to reflect on what might be the conditions and strategies for facilitating for others a deeper intimacy with landscape. Accordingly I hired a bunkhouse up in the hills, selected a variety of solo meditation "stances" (locations for practice) in different parts of the mountain and invited participants to a weekend retreat, from the evening of 14 June to the morning of 17 June, 2002.

#### **Aims**

The letter of invitation stated that "the aim is to enable you to feel more at-one with the landscape. By the end of the weekend you should have a deeper appreciation of Dogen's dictum, *"When the self retreats, the ten thousand things advance."* A second letter contained specific instructions, as follows:

#### **Landscape Meditation Instructions**

Please familiarise yourself with these and bring them with you on the mountain.

##### Setting up the Stance

You will be given a map and directions for finding your stance. With a bit of luck you will be on your own there for as long as six or seven hours on each day, Saturday and Sunday, with at least one visit from me each day. The stance will usually comprise a landscape feature and the area adjacent.

Select a meditation seat, which as far as possible, gives you a panoramic view, with foreground, middle ground and background features. This is your Home View. However, you may also need to frame a Supplementary View to meet these requirements, and spend some time becoming intimate with that also.

##### Three Contemplations

Most of the time you should aim just to sit and keep bringing your attention back to the landscape. It can be useful to have a foreground, a middle ground and a background feature to help focus the attention initially. Persist and eventually the landscape will hold you.

If and when the above becomes difficult, turn your attention inwards and follow your customary meditation practice for a while.

Work out one or two little contemplative strolls, to ease the mind, or exercise the limbs, or to warm up if the weather is bad (like down along by a stream, then up round a big boulder, and so on). Check your map and keep well clear of any adjacent stance. Such a stroll should not be longer than, say, five minutes. The aim is contemplation, not exploration. Stay with this route or routes all weekend.

Reading, photography and sketching are as unhelpful as they would be on a conventional retreat.

### Two Reminders

First, with all three contemplations, keep gently bringing the attention back to what is in front of you. And if this causes some agitation, then contemplate that for a while. Where is it coming from?

Secondly, depending on your mood, the time of day, or whatever, always try to find a middle way in this practice - not too pushy, not too laid back, not too tight, not too slack. Remember - the mountain is trying to woo you, but can only reach you if you are gentle, open and relaxed with yourself.

### Safety

By participating in this retreat you are undertaking to take full responsibility for your own safety and well-being. If you feel cold, wet, midge harassed, or in any way distressed, please do return to the bunkhouse. Do give yourself a generous margin of comfort and easefulness. Do take good care of yourself and do not hesitate to seek help if you need it; there will usually be another stance not far away. Remember that in many ways this can be a more demanding experience than a conventional group meditation retreat.

### **Outer and Inner Contemplation**

The above instructions can be read in the context of some controversy (or alternative perspectives *eds*) in Buddhism about the significance of landscape and other "direct contemplation" meditation. This is relevant to the evaluation of this event and merits a digression.

For some, like Master Sheng Yen, direct contemplation is an "auxiliary method" for use "at times when it seems especially conducive to do so". "As the focus becomes stable, the mind will become still and spacious" (See p. 114 and p. 94, *Illuminating Silence*, Watkins Publishing, 2002). It is argued that in direct contemplation the self becomes "invisible" but does not "disappear". In order to open to the liberation from suffering that lies in the experience of "emptiness" it is necessary also, when the mind is calmed, to turn the attention inwards. This follows Master Dogen's dictum

*"To study the Way is to study the self; to study the self is to forget the self; to forget the self is to be enlightened by all things".*

In an event comparable to this one, Geshe Tashi of Jamyang Centre, London, instructed participants first to calm their mind through landscape meditation, and then to direct their attention inwards.

The contrary view (as in the Dzogchen school) would give precedence to Dogen's

*"When the ten thousand things advance, the self retreats"*

over the other half of this saying of his:

*"When the self retreats, the ten thousand things advance"*

Here it is argued that authentic "unity consciousness" of subject and object, of self and landscape, is itself sufficient for liberative awakening, for body and mind to fall away.

There are questions at issue here, which go beyond Buddhism, to wider controversy around eco-spirituality and the inner path traditions. I shall return to this discussion at the end of my report.

## **The Participants**

Participation was by invitation only, to people personally known to me as most likely sustain this retreat and find it fruitful. Also the introductory letter was very detailed, to enable self-selection. However, the evaluation of the retreat revealed that the expectations of two or three of the thirteen participants conflicted with their actual experience of the weekend. The origin of this apparently lies in the following ambiguity.

On the one hand, all the participants were friends or acquaintances of mine, and orally I gave the impression that we were a group of friends come together to undertake an experimental project. This was true, but two very detailed letters made it clear also that this was to be a traditional, structured kind of retreat and that I was designing and leading it. Thus, an experienced Zen practitioner got hold of one end of this stick and complained that the event was too "regimented", whilst a Maenllwyd habitué felt that it was insufficiently "disciplined"!

Eight of the 13 retreatants were women. Five of the 13 were veterans of the comparatively rigorous Chan retreats at the Maenllwyd, whilst four others had attended those retreats at one time or another. Two other retreatants were experienced Zen practitioners. Of the remaining two one practised in a Tibetan Buddhist tradition and the other might be described as a free-floating eco-Buddhist.

## **The Programme**

The retreat followed a rule of silence, with one hour sittings at the beginning and end of the two full days. Each morning before breakfast everyone climbed the nearby crag carrying a couple of stones to add to the "sangha cairn". The event concluded with a fire puja up by the cairn.

After breakfast on the Saturday and Sunday the retreatants made up their lunch packs and set off for their stances by about 9.30. They were invited to return to the bunkhouse any time between 4pm and 5.30pm, depending on the weather and individual circumstance. In the evening the day's experiences were shared in a round-the-table debriefing. There were also orientation talks on the mountain, on the Chinese landscape tradition, and on relevant Dogen teachings (particularly his Mountains and Rivers text - from which the title of this retreat is taken).

The written assessment questionnaire enquired as to specific likes and dislikes in the programme. Six particularly liked the debriefing sessions (though with reservations about long-windedness) as against one who did not. Two strongly appreciated the fire puja. One singled out the talks for approval, and another dissented. The main complaint was about dampness and cold showers.

## **Evaluation**

This evaluation is based on observation, on the two evening debriefings, and on a thirteen-question assessment sheet to which each retreatant responded during the fortnight following the event. To keep this paper within bounds, no systematic and detailed report of responses is offered here. Instead, the responses have been compounded around the main findings. Moreover some of the questions were designed simply to assist in the organisational details of a future event (though in fact all participants felt that they had been well briefed for the retreat, and all thought it was well organised - though with some reservations here and there).

Apart from the fire puja evening, low cloud hung over the mountain all weekend, a keen and unseasonable wind never let up, and there were occasional light showers which

fortunately never degenerated into continuous rain. The bunkhouse was damp and uncomfortable, and the hot water supply was erratic. Fortunately our two Chan cooks kept us well fed, and this was much appreciated. Notwithstanding these conditions, nobody returned before the 4pm "flexitime", and several stayed on the mountain for as long as they could. Indeed, all the evidence points to sustained high morale and much positive energy on the part of all and strikingly evident in the concluding group photograph!

Both in the two debriefings and the written reports most participants made some distinction between their experiences on the first and on the second day. This was in part due to the need to settle in on the first day (even more so than on a conventional meditation retreat). And in part it was apparently due to my invitation on the Saturday evening to each, at their discretion, to feel free to relax my written instructions up on their stance, so long as a mindful awareness were maintained. I was motivated both by the harsh weather conditions and by a feeling that many apparently found the first day's regime too rigorous. In the event, for almost all the retreatants, it was on the Sunday that they had the most positive experiences and to which their assessments particularly refer. The following remarks by one make a distinction, which was shared by many:

*My state of mind moved from a rigid restrictive self-discipline on day 1, to a state of playfulness and openness and receptivity on day 2. Another way to describe this would be to say that day 1 was about doing something wilfully, where day 2 was about letting the environment do it for itself.*

*Day 1 was actively listening for something and hearing little, while day 2 was about being counselled by the mountain without asking for help.*

A clear and consistent picture emerges both from the anecdotal evidence of the debriefing sessions (but most notably on the second day) and from the questionnaire responses. All the retreatants had generally positive experiences up on their stances, though this was noticeably more muted in the case of four of the five men. Indeed, I was quite taken aback by the general enthusiasm and delight which came out of the round of oral reports on Sunday. Certainly for the women, what one described as "a free and open intimacy with the environment" seems to have been the experience of most if not all. "Playfulness", "focus" and "carefree unconsciousness" were typical experiences. The following description by one woman embraces some of the experiences of most of the women:

*Sitting, dreaming, listening, watching, walking around, looking, playing, activity - cutting reeds, plaiting them, moving stones, making patterns with them, making offerings. This allowed me to be open to the mountain and to be in a state of communication, relationship and intimacy, whereby when I left on the second day I would have liked to have given it a hug - but how do you hug a mountain?*

For another woman the weekend was "a bringing together of all the years I've loved the outdoors with my spiritual practice - a kind of 'permission' to meld them together in a way they haven't before." Some women appeared to have had quite intense experiences of landscape intimacy. One, not normally given to such flights of eloquence, reported as follows:

*The big views allowed the watcher to dissipate and simply be in the watching. Melding into an overhang of rock and joining the sheep droppings and mosses with a vast land and skyscape calling to some primeval space and point within one, took one beyond the body and yet within it, to an ancient unity independent of time and place. This seems an odd thing to say about a landscape experience, which has, by definition to be experienced "in the body". Nevertheless, it was the case. It was decidedly not an "out of body" experience*

*though. The physicality of it all required an attention to the body that was fairly acute. It certainly eased a way into an experience of unity where self-obsession was irrelevant.*

The stance had a huge range of options and presentations. It was protective and confrontational. It was gentle and severe. It was vast and intimate. It had flowing aspects and rigid ones. It was huge and tiny. It was enveloping and imploding. It drew one's attention to oneself and then threw that away while one laughed at the process and enjoyed it as the mountain chortled away alongside. It allowed and encouraged one to blend with it and shake off the trappings of civilisation. One felt insignificant and aware of the vast power present in the form of the mountain. The geological forces that shaped it were calling to a primordial memory almost in one's genes. Yet that connection did not allow for any fear for the self. A connection of physicality precluded it. At that moment, the rocks, water, bogs, lichens, insects, birds and humans were just there together, just then, in that spot.

However, only one retreatant (again a woman) referred specifically to turning the attention within:

*My single most important learning is a greater awareness in the practice of "holding attention". I practised holding attention inwards, outwards, and inwards and outwards together. Holding my attention on the landscape and in the vastness, I tried to find the still point of the turning world. I went back to my koan, "Soul Mountain lies beyond the Source of the Me River." It seemed apt to contemplate this from my cave. The Me River became less significant and I wandered Soul Mountain, holding my attention, looking for the Source, the pivot, the acupuncture needle. This search is lifelong, demanding, exhilarating, fascinating. Plynlimon has given me another perspective, an opportunity to practice in a different way. What an adventure!*

Typical responses of four of the men referred to "playfulness and energy", "becoming more focussed", and "from being constrained and self-concerned to being open and playful". However, the fifth man erupted off the mountain just as the Sunday debriefing session was about to begin, excited, wet and dishevelled. He explained that he had experienced "a sense of reconnection" and he added that "free landscape meditation is just as valid as formal practice - which can be very restrictive and lead to narrowness." He was vehement that it was in the face of the "advance of the ten thousand things" that the self withdrew. It is noteworthy that this retreatant did claim to have spent "much" of his time in "formal meditation" on the landscape.

The assessment paper included the question "Would you come again on a broadly similar retreat?" One retreatant said he felt he didn't really need to do so, since he was now practised in the method and could do it on his own. Two others, both women, were experienced landscape solitaries and preferred to keep it that way. Another man was lukewarm; he would return, "but more to help Ken than for myself"! The remaining nine were enthusiastic about attending another, similar retreat, and there was a general feeling that it should be longer - certainly four full days, or even six.

In response to another question there was general agreement that this kind of event was suitable only for experienced and robust meditators.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

(a) The retreat undoubtedly achieved its broadly-phrased aims, both in terms of individual experiences and the spread of those experiences across the group. There was much unselfconscious opening to the landscape, with feelings of release and delight.

(b) This is probably as much as could be expected of a two-day retreat. Even on conventional meditation retreats it is usually not until the third day that most participants

become settled into their practice. On this one I suspect that in the unfolding of a longer retreat our laid-back second day would have emerged as a necessary and valuable episode along the way.

(c) Nonetheless I must confess to a certain ambivalence about the whole event, particularly in the light of the remarks on "Inner and Outer Contemplation" earlier in this report. It is true that these refer to quite high states of consciousness, and so far as our modest intentions on this retreat are concerned I am content to remain agnostic in that controversy. However, had the retreat been longer I would have re-emphasised the first two of the "Three Contemplations" in my original instructions, as follows.

On the first day several retreatants reported experiencing with direct contemplation the kind of restlessness and resistance commonly experienced by beginners in traditional inner meditation practice. Two or three explicitly found the instructions too "prescriptive", (though in fact they were no more so than on a conventional Zen retreat). With persistence and determination direct contemplation does in fact become as open and easeful as a mature practice of inward meditation. And in my experience direct contemplation can lead to a very profound landscape intimacy in which the sense of self certainly falls away. Thus it is a misunderstanding to oppose the discipline required of direct contemplation in its initial stages by the relaxed playfulness of that second day. In my experience a well-established direct contemplation practice enhances those periods of unselfconscious playfulness (of which I am myself extremely fond), and vice versa. I believe that to abandon direct contemplation because it appears difficult and "unnatural" is to sell oneself short on the mountain.

Secondly, I would re-emphasize my "second contemplation", to turn the attention inwards, in two situations in which it can be fruitful. When direct contemplation makes the mind restless it can be calmed by turning inward in an established meditation practice, and taking time to examine the origins of that restlessness. And, even more important, at times when direct contemplation has calmed the mind it can be invaluable to turn inwards and investigate what is there, or, indeed, whether there is now any "inwards" or "outwards".

(d) Although the numbers were small, there was a distinct difference between the masculine and feminine experience of environmental intimacy. This was unsurprising, and reflects the wider gender experience of this kind. The feminine appears to enter more spontaneously and intuitively into landscape intimacy. Is the discipline of direct contemplation therefore less needful? And might the turning within be more needful? These are speculations worth further enquiry.

(e) Building on the experience of this first retreat there is a case for a further event, this time of four or five full days' duration.



## The Heart Sutra from A Functional Perspective

**Ron Henshall**

For the purpose of this discussion I am using two translations of the Heart Sutra. One used by the Western Chan Fellowship in retreats at Maenllwyd and the other from The Liturgy of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives for the Laity by Roshi Jiyu-Kennett. I am also calling upon an article by John Crook entitled The Heart Sutra-an Introduction (NCF 6, 7 & 8)

At the outset, you may well ask: Why another commentary upon a text which has been deeply considered many times and by, without a doubt, exceedingly more wise and scholarly people? Well, I have chanced across an approach to this wonderful Sutra that I feel may be vitally beneficial to Chan and Zen meditators in particular and Buddhist practitioners in general.

The approach I have chosen to adopt is one of a purely practical perspective, approaching the sutra in a functional manner rather than treating it as a descriptive account of a Bodhisattva's experiences. Throughout this paper, it is suggested that the reader become the experimenter to validate the given propositions by way of their own experience. It is my understanding that this is the main purpose of Shakyamuni Buddha in arranging this sutra. I am sure that, rather than filling Shariputra's head with lots of technical terminology and descriptive writing about what it is like to be enlightened, the Buddha wished to provide his disciple with a path out of his delusion and suffering. That being said let us tread the path given to Shariputra and see where we go!

O. K. Let's first set the scene: One of the Buddha's disciples, Shariputra, has asked for instruction. The Buddha first of all causes one of his foremost disciples, Avalokiteshvara aka Guan Yin (Ch) or Kwannon (Jp) to speak about his experiences, before going on to outline a path for Shariputra to follow.

The background story is that Avalokiteshvara became enlightened upon hearing the sound of the ocean waves meeting the shore whilst he was meditating. An entry-level explanation is that he heard the sound and realised that the hearing faculty is empty of any sound of its own and is empty of anything at all! In fact its nature is emptiness itself! It is capable of registering sounds, precisely as a result of its being originally empty.

This insight applied itself equally readily to the other senses and as a result, the edifice that appeared as the individual Avalokiteshvara fizzled away like the spray from the waves as they evaporate in the radiant light of the sun. Let's just stop there for a breather and check this proposition out for ourselves. Let us not take anyone's word for it. Not mine, Avalokiteshvara's or the Buddha's.

So. Please just listen to your present environment for a moment. Do you hear anything right now? O.K. If yes, attend to it as fully as is possible. Now bring your attention to THIS end of the hearing process. In listening, it is all too easy to focus 'out there' on the object and completely overlook the subject end, in here. So, whilst listening, be aware of the place where the listening is occurring. What is its nature? Has it shape, or form? What is it before the sound? What is it after the sound? Is it not as I find: Totally and wonderfully empty? !! Even if we hear silence, the hearing faculty, or the place where the sound or silence registers is clear, unclinging, non-judgmental, formless, impermanent.... in a nutshell: void!

*When the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara  
was coursing in the deep Prajnaparamita,  
he perceived that all five skandhas are empty,  
thereby transcending all sufferings.*

There it is; the whole picture; all of what happened to Avalokiteshvara presented in a nutshell. Problem is, it appears to be quite a tough nut so we had better get cracking hadn't we? There is potentially a whole lifetime's study needed to do justice to even just the first concept 'bodhisattva'. For the sake of this application we will content ourselves to say that Avalokiteshvara was already quite an accomplished meditator and well versed in the Buddha Dharma.

To avoid going into deep scholarly semantics, I will quote from the Jiyu Kennett rendition of this sutra here:

*'When one with deepest wisdom of the heart that is beyond discriminative thought, The Holy Lord, great Kanzeon Bosatsu knew that the skandhas five were, as they are in their self nature, void, unstained and pure.'*

Now we have an indication of what 'coursing in the deep prajnaparamita might imply: Our hero was operating from the 'deepest wisdom of the heart' and furthermore this wisdom is 'beyond discriminative thought'.

Remaining faithful to our practical approach, as I see it we have two potentially fruitful courses of action open to us now: The first of these approaches is to meditate until our thinking process has stopped.

Here, we could use one of the established *samatha* techniques e. g. breath counting or breath watching etc. Whilst this may be a ready option for some, it is my guess that for many of us, this might well occupy us for perhaps years until the gaps between thoughts were long enough for any depth of wisdom to arise, not to mention deep prajnaparamita! Thankfully, there is another option.

We need only to get beyond discriminative thought, not necessarily annihilate it. So then, what is discriminative thought? As I see it, it is all conceptual thinking, including discursive reasoning. The first discrimination in thought is arguably the idea of me and not me. I have an idea of what I am, maybe a body, mind, feelings etc. and also this presumes that every other thing in the universe is not me. I don't intend to get into any existential philosophising here; I am just being experiential. In the interests of being true to this functional approach to the sutra, can we just accept that the names we give to things are not the things themselves? They are convenient sounds (and visual symbols) that act as representations to allow us to communicate with each other and with ourselves. (Whatever that may imply!)

Having taken this stance, what I suggest we do is to by-pass our tendency to label and discriminate, even whilst it is happening. The best way to do this is to be aware that thought is taking place. Now, either observe the space in which thoughts arise and disappear or, if that is not possible, shift awareness to one of the senses, e. g. hearing, and listen purely at a basic, non-elaborating level as we did (I hope) when considering Avalokiteshvara's enlightenment. Let us experiment with this approach for a moment.

As we've already used hearing, (you can obviously use that again if it works for you) let us use one of the other senses, perhaps touch/sensation. Right now, become aware of any physical sensations. It will probably help a little if, when you've read through the following instructions, you close your eyes, but I don't consider this absolutely necessary. What can you sense (feel)? Focus directly on the sensation itself, overlooking any tendency to label or make value judgements. Now look to the awareness of these sensations. It is beyond thought and also beyond time; only present awareness.... but without any naming or commentary. Experience this now. No qualifications are necessary.

There then, - another sense is perceived to be empty! We are at the moment looking at the five senses, which are not in fact what are implied by the term skandhas. But please bear with me as we can use the senses here as a way into the wisdom of the sutra. I intend to go more specifically into the implications of the skandhas shortly when we look at the next section of the sutra.

Interestingly, note the shift into the present tense in the WCF translation: 'he perceived that all five skandhas are empty thereby transcending all suffering'. Having been a schoolteacher, had one of my pupils written this, in the interest of tense consistency, I would have corrected this to read: 'he perceived that all five senses were empty'. This could well have been an unintentional mistake, but it highlights for me a very important point: The nature of the skandhas (or in our case at present, the nature of the senses) is only to be perceived in the present tense. Thinking about them shifts us out of the present and into the past engaging us once more into discriminative thought.

What is the essential nature of the sense under observation right now? We now need to follow Avalokiteshvara's lead and check the remaining three senses: seeing, smelling and tasting. Whilst being aware of the emptiness of these senses, check that they are all at root, empty of anything at all, and that no labels or concepts can stick to this bare awareness. Is this the case for you too?

Now the sutra goes on to say that Avalokiteshvara is thereby transcending all suffering. Can we verify this for ourselves right now? Start again from the beginning: This moment become aware of the universe as it presents itself; sights, sounds, smells, tastes, sensations and thoughts. Can we acknowledge these events in their nakedness; unconditionally, without tinkering with either them, or with our understanding of them? Now look to each of the senses, either in turn or all together. Have they any form other than their objects. Are not the senses in essence absolutely empty of anything whatsoever? Does not the sensation arise with the object of sensation and the sensing of it, only to pass away completely, if not tinkered with by thought?

I am aware of the hum of my computer, now the sound of an aeroplane arises, but where was the computer sound that has just reappeared? And now, no aeroplane sound, only a thought leading to typing a word or two here. This sense is in essence completely empty.

What now of suffering? Right up until this thought arose, it didn't exist! There was (is) no me; only things, events, thoughts arising in awareness and passing away. Yes, pain may arise, no denying that. Also the sense of me being hurt may arise and touch many memories of similar hurt thus starting up the cycle of birth and death; a sense of history. But now, see this in, and of, and inseparable from empty awareness. All transcended- "the other shore" reached ! No need to say more for now. Let us take a break and see how things arise and pass away, remaining in touch with bare awareness; which Bankei called the Unborn.

Check it out now for yourself and see if this is the case or not. This prajna wisdom can only be current. Oh yes, and remember it is 'wisdom of the heart' we are pointing at here; which rules out any cool, intellectually driven detachment. This emptiness contains the whole universe! And loves it unconditionally. See if you agree.

## Retreat Reports

*Retreat reports are an integral aspect of our journal and one much approved of by Shifu. We print them mostly anonymously and are most grateful to our practitioners for sharing themselves so generously with us. In reading these reports we learn much about the experiences of others on retreat and they often provide pointers for our own understanding.*

### Koan Retreat October 2002

#### Where's The Sanctuary?

Why did I come to this retreat? I hoped to learn more about the Dharma, and to be challenged and opened in a way that could allow me to learn more about how to fulfil my Buddhist vows. What attracted me to the koan that I worked with? Maybe it was the word 'sanctuary' or maybe it was something about the relationship between the Buddha and Indra, a quality of that moment that attracted to me to this koan. There was a hint of seamless perfection about it.

The World Honoured One was out walking with the gods. At some point he stopped, and, pointing to the ground with his finger, said,

*"This is a good spot in which to build a sanctuary."*

Indra, the king of the gods, plucked a blade of grass, stuck it in the ground and said,

*"The sanctuary is built."*

The world honoured one smiled.

I took it slowly, knowing I had six days ahead. I spent the first two days trying to work it out intellectually, keeping its meaning at bay with my clever thoughts about Buddha trying to test the gods, or find out why they might need a sanctuary. And was Indra's gesture disrespectful? After all he could have given anything, being the god of creation. I found these questions began to bring the koan into my own life. I saw into the realm of gods. An amplification into eternity of exaggerated human characteristics. The use of power with no accountability. A power that becomes omnipotent and utterly susceptible to corruption and destruction, yet also capable of transforming, creative goodness. The jealousy, the eternal warring, the arrogance. I saw it in the present world of vengeful ignorance and I faced it in myself.

Myself as abuser of my power; as a mother, as a sister, as a daughter, as a granddaughter, as an aunt, as a niece, as a cousin, as a lover, as a friend. When I have not been accountable for nor aware of the harm that my thoughts and actions have caused others. Then the times when I have been abused by the corruption of power in others. How ugly, low, and worthless I felt. I was grinding myself into a dust of self-loathing, of loathing about human ignorance and the suffering it wrenches forth.

Then I got fed up with thinking about it, and angry with my mind for questing on, with its cleverness, as it does with such distracting expertise, blocking me from the simple truth of the koan. So I tried to turn my back on the koan. Ignore it. Just concentrate on the Silent Illumination meditation. And then it happened, when I gave up and turned away. A phrase jumped out and seized me. Hauled me back to face myself. "A blade of grass".

I saw it freshly pulled up, vulnerable and already beginning to wilt. A metaphor of impermanence. I could not avoid the fact of my own dying. Where is the sanctuary in the

face of impermanence? I suddenly knew that there are no walls inside or out that can offer safety nor sanctity, trust nor stability in the face of birth, ageing, sickness and death. A voice inside began to wail, "I haven't got a home any more". A pain spread across my chest, gripping my throat. Tears of self-pity began to stream. I was painfully alone and dying with no sanctuary. I stayed with the feeling of imminent loss. Crying. Everything must go, scanning the comfort blankets in my life. No home any more.



Suddenly I was aware of a disc of warm, golden light filling my chest. It spread with confidence and pushed the sad voice out through my throat. My fearful self gave up the ghost. Just a lovely, warm spaciousness which radiated from the centre and pushed 'me' out. It was time for the afternoon walk, and was the last day of a still Indian summer as I walked up the mountain, just treasuring this feeling in my heart. It began to feel like a lens that was filtering out everything harmful and sucking in everything of beauty. The circling buzzards, the tumbling ravens, the glistening cobwebs, the scarlet rowan berries, the endless blue sky. A crow caws, the rushes wave, a leaf falls. I taste my inner sanctuary, throbbing away with gentle assurance. It feels pure and lasting, receiving and giving as I walk and breathe. I feel grateful for the sanctuary of Maenllwyd, the teachings, the sangha.

Back on the cushion I felt as if I had received what I had come to find. Cracked the koan. But as soon as this thought arose the golden lens faded. The koan had cracked me and my pride had already denied this, returned me to a state of complacent arrogance. My mind sabotaged my sanctuary, destroyed it. I was plunged into the questioning again. On and on with relentless barbs.

I returned to the koan, focussing on the taste of it. It kindly revealed itself like the tip of an ice-capped, glinting mountain emerging from a cloud. This moment between Buddha and Indra is a moment of perfection, an intention, an attention, a seamless suggestion and response that has a feeling of completion and deep spiritual conjunction. The pointing to the

ground, the plucking of the grass, the planting of a symbol, immediately, spontaneously, what was to hand rather than a pretentious, elaborate, wordy imagining. The humility, the simplicity, the form and emptiness of it. John asked, how does it touch me? I said, "Too much grief".

I became aware of a terrible lack of seamless, spontaneous perfection in my own life. The self judgement began in earnest. I felt old, tired and uninspired. I thought of my writing which is lying underneath all my external activities and commitments, yearning for completion. And I found myself asking, "What are you offering? What are you waiting for?" And a feeling of that question, applied to my whole life, left me in a desolate place of never having quite fulfilled my potential, my meaning, my own koan. That lack of confidence that is our family karmic obstruction. So much to transform. A moment of hatred of my karma, but also a moment of knowing the deep necessity of this inner work so that my children may be freer to live with confidence.

How to find and trust the moment, the space beyond the walls of buildings, the space beyond the walls of fear and anger, judgement and all afflictive emotions, with clarity and wisdom? Then the realm of the hungry ghosts arose. My children, our children, with their wide mouths, narrow necks, empty, large bellies. All gasping, grasping for something which we must give them. How to help them to know the sanctuary which will remove their desire to be satisfied by the bottomless, insatiable consumerism that distracts them and distresses them, and us?

Maybe I have been in the realm of hungry ghosts for nearly thirty years. Every time I have not been present for my children I have neglected their emotional needs. The same for all my relationships, and with myself too. One flew over the cuckoo's nest. And the downward spiral of despair at myself and the terrible pain in the world took over.

After every meal I fed the hungry ghosts with increasing devotion. Carrying the heavy pan of slops out through the backdoor towards the wall, sometimes in the dark. Slooshing the water from the washing of our crockery, turbid with floating strings of porridge or scum of soup, over the wall. Imagining them all waiting. Plucked vulture necks, gaping mouths like Munch's Scream, craning over the wall, jostling and shoving like a football crowd. The water fell, splat. As precise as the tap of the fish in the Chan hall. Confidence: with trust.

I cried for the last day of the retreat. On and on. Releasing my rigid jaw and my headache. But also knowing that this is where I must begin, again and again, with renewed devotion. A moment of perfection returned to my mind. It arose during the Kin Hin exercise. Placing one foot slowly, precisely on the floor, the weight of my body following without thought, the motion of the next step following naturally, forward, I became aware of the silent concentration of our sangha. For a moment we encircled the hall like beads in a mala, joined by the thread of the intention of our breath, moving as one. All working with our experience of suffering towards a transformation of our karma so that we may be of help to all sentient beings. What am I waiting for? What are we waiting for? I bow to the wisdom of the koan, its history and its presence and the teachers who lead our steps from mala to mala, with confidence.

## **Western Zen Retreat 2002**

### **Not So Silly After All**

A few miles from the Maenllwyd I telephone home. I squirm like a little girl as I sign off with my partner who reassures me that I'll be OK. Going up the track I pass a departing taxi driver who clearly feels a kindly amusement at my foolishness. I pull into the yard and draw up my handbrake as I look at the seated men in my rear view mirror promising myself that I am not going to get out. With my best sociable face on I drag myself into public view and across the yard greeting them all uncomfortably.

Circulating the group. Hearing who, where, when and how. Feeling reassured by the people, and anxious about the glimpses of what's in store. Perhaps I should have trained up? Remembering, with faith, the encouragement of my trusted supervisor who suggested that I come.

Around the fire, feeling the first warmth and security of John's presence. Knowing things will be safe. Why have I come? How can I be honest and not hide behind some distant academic interest, yet not seem bizarre? Feeling stupid. Giving the wrong impression. Silly girl.

I accept the outlined plan of the retreat, and have a desire to learn, to wait and see. Some trepidation that we may have to sit forever, and that I would dissolve. Yet there is faith that being part of a long and grand tradition this has been done so many times before. I find it's surprisingly easy to calm the mind somewhat; surprisingly good to sit still. Relief from the pressure to talk and adjust myself in the face of others' needs. No tension. Permission to be free.

That night, so tired and in pain that I'm sure I'm being tortured. So angry at seeming to be made to sit again. So annoyed that two people bowed out of the retreat at the final hour. How dare they -when I'm such a good girl?

Put your question under your pillow! NO!! Only four days to go. Dig in. A test of survival.

Next morning, shake off anger and emerge early regaining a sense of calm. Sit again until invited to talk in an interview. Can only report how my ego has been calm, bruised, calm again. Don't know who I am. Want to go back and try some more.

Sitting, challenging my mind to respond to "Who am I?" That is; "WHO am I?" Ah yes, the WHO done it! There is no WHO. The WHO is my evaluator. Is it Him? Her? Mum? Dad? No, I am I. That's all. I am I. I just am. That's all. Ahh, there it is; my response. The internal monitor, the evaluator, they just fall away. No longer relevant. No Eureka! No fireworks! Just quiet realisation. Feel like a vessel through which Sensation simply flows.

Later, a walk up the hill. The warmth of the sun. The beautiful view. Suddenly, distracted by three birds above. Totally absorbed. Hear the beating of their wings through the air as though my ears are theirs. I'm not flying, but I'm experiencing their flying. It lasts ten seconds or so, and then I'm excited. What was that? I feel such immense happiness. Such bliss. I've never felt this feeling before. I literally beam. I'm alight. I grin. I am warmth and sun and happiness. I want to ask, have the others heard? If they did - wasn't it amazing? If they didn't - was it magic? Irrelevant. I heard it. I experienced it. I feel happy. No matter about others.

Keep asking "Who am I?" and discover that I can feel so deeply. Can be with my every rising sensation. Can hear others and share 'our' feeling rather than the transference of their emotion. This is not projection onto my cold, blank self but a sharing between us of a

feeling that originates with them. Like droplets of water colliding and becoming one. A prickly feeling passes over me as their painful feelings emerge, and tears come to my eyes.

At first, I feel that the newfound feeling is separate from my old persona. Then they integrate. Feel kind of fond of my persona. Feel that my persona is changed by the realisation of "I". Redraw the map. Terrain feels different. Want to sit. Want just to be.

Next day, go and talk to John and Jake. See that Johns nods; he understands my experience. He knows that I know. I'm sure too. Reassured that I don't feel that I'm clever or a good girl for doing so well, and answering my question, and having marvellous experiences. Just enjoyed them. Just enjoy this knowing. Just feel happy with it. Not for anyone else. Just like it.

Decide to ask "How is life fulfilled?" This fits, because through asking "Who am I?" I start to wonder "What now?" - for others and for the world. Unlike before, I don't NEED to answer the question. Not persecuted by it, just intrigued. Soon realise that the warmth that I feel within myself can just be turned outwards to shine on other people and things. A free gift. Sit with my first cup of tea in the day, and realise that I love my tea! My tea! Realise that I love the windowpanes that I clean each day. Want to stroke them and give them love. Realise that I'm completely loved-up for all. Can feel warmth towards every other person. Can wait patiently for them to be whoever they are.

I look at the moon. Someone mentioned that he sees the man in the moon. I see the man in moon. Never seen this before. He has two or three faces, which swap and change; but all friendly and chubby. Could look forever at the faces switching before my eyes. Feel smiley back at him. Look at the stars. They seem to reflect the moonshine. Now see them all connected reflecting the energies of one-another.

I begin to feel an immense loss. I know that in the here and now there is no real loss, but I feel so powerfully connected with the loss of my Dad. The loss of the idea of having a Dad. The grief of being rejected, neglected, and trodden on. Can't stand, can't eat, can't breathe. Have no self, no balance, just enormous aching loss. Totally consumed. Aware of the concern of others, but can't switch off. Nothing will do except one hug. One hug and it all passes away. Did I cut the monster loose or reach out for comfort? Believe that it wasn't avoidance, but some small resolution, or control, or passing. Didn't go up in smoke. Didn't dissolve. Felt it, lived with it, had enough, sought help, felt comfort, returned back to sense of balance.

I realise so many things that I have been told about in the process of professional training and development. I understand what my supervisor has been saying for so long. Always was in awe of his ability to feel, experience the moment, stop the chatter, survive immense pain. Didn't believe him when he said that he jumps off the cliff, risking drowning and being truly frightened every time, but also knowing that he will float. Now I realise that it carries on being painful. This experience isn't a cushion to protect myself from pain, but a greater confidence that I will survive it. In fact, a knowledge that I will be no longer haunted. A respect for pain, but not a terror of it.

A talk about attention, intention and ethics. Realise the huge importance of intention, now that I have attention. Ask "What do I stand for?" Realise that as a citizen of the world I have a lot to address here, personally, professionally, as a carer for vulnerable people. Realise later the importance of the retreat rules. Intention is about developing ethics internally, but the rules are there to hold us if our internal worlds are shaken. I now have enormous respect for the rules.



Experience a continuity of internal-external. Feel that the hall continues into my mouth, down my throat, and into my chest. Later, when facing a separation, I feel incredibly sick. Again, the feeling hurts but passes, replaced by compassion and hope for good things and happiness for others and those they love back at home.

Realise something about humanistic psychotherapy. I always believed that people are fundamentally resourceful and good. I now feel more of an understanding about intimacy being beyond the satisfaction of dangerous drives and being about love. Feel even more trusting and confident in people.

Time to leave. Feel so indebted and respectful. Feel choked. Want to stay forever. Want to return immediately. So touched by the warmth of others. "You're a lovely person! Don't forget that." "You're good at being a fairy." "I'll remember your ravens' wings." I know that we feel love for one another, and feel really humble and blessed. Last embraces – could continue forever. Again haul myself across the yard and into my car.

Back at home, got nothing to say. Aware that I'm freaking my partner out. He says that my voice has changed and my facial expressions too. He doesn't recognise me. Feel like an alien. Go to Tesco's and feel bombarded by sell, sell, sell. Feel that I can see people's auras. Feel scared at the realisation that my mind is so altered, so distant from everyone else's way of being. Want to cry. Want my partner to look after me, but feel so distant from him. Want to flee back to the retreat. Want to feel safe and share the vibes. Feel very alone and stranded, but I know that my partner will wait for me, and will stay by me, keeping me safe until later.

Next day, I feel balanced again. Can feel myself 'landing' a little more, but still little to say. Desperate to see my supervisor and share my feelings with him. For so long, I've used him as a transference figure to meet the greedy demands of my ego. Feel sad that I've never been me, and never let him be him. Want to tell him this. Want to talk to someone who knows.

Later on, see newspaper stories about war on Iraq. Feel frightened for the world. People are going to die. Horrible things are happening. Feel paranoid. See a man down a dark alley and know that I'm imagining that he's got demon-like eyes, but still feel a bit freaked by it. Can tell my partner. I know he believes me. I know he's there. What if he wasn't? How far away am I from totally flipping? See our friends and feel safe again. Coming down all the time. Feel sad that the pure way of being is gone. I know now about letting go of the old moments, and feeling the present, but enjoying memories.

At work, I feel a new awareness in my meetings with families. Feel so much more able to empathise and connect on a new level. Feel that I can sometimes be really therapeutic. Feel big enough or confident enough to contain whatever comes. Believe that others can feel it too, and that they trust me enough to be themselves.

I feel so privileged to have had this retreat experience. Feel fundamentally changed. Want to learn more, to expand and grow. Want to read, to listen, to practice, to be.

## Les Roches Fleuries

John Crook

*After moonset stars shine more brightly in the still air,  
Earth turns slowly rolling into day,  
the great fly-wheel spins,  
stars drift around the pole,  
western mountains rise against my feet  
and in the east the long horizon falls.  
Onward she rolls, vast galleon  
pivoted upon her pole,  
time in empty space sits still  
watching the moving dayline on the planet's rim.*

*Slowly, from the dark mass of brooding hills,  
the vineyards and the running brooks appear,  
dry, white rocks pierced by cypresses,  
grey to old gold the distant hills,  
sunlight greeting the trees  
yellowing the parched land.  
Last owl poops it's hidden cry,  
with hesitation first cicadas trill,  
breathless the air hangs waiting,  
the landscape unfurls.*

*Heat collects, stirs in the rock strewn  
valleys between pines, spills over,  
pushing the air around.  
Now under the baking sun  
breezes fleck silver the olive trees  
waves ripple over the lines of vines,  
toss in sudden squalls domed planes.  
Shuttered farms close inward  
keeping cool their dark interiors,  
the light hurts.*

*Crowning the hill top, Notre Dame de Graces  
sits in her oak groves, shadowy pines,  
short terraced gardens, crumbling walls  
for lizards, nooks for images.  
Resinous airs linger in the shade dark oaks incubate.  
Wind in the tree tops heralds an afternoon's mistral.  
Nobody about, empty the tables  
set with chairs upon the terraces,  
empty the gardens, pine shaded courts,  
the only discord here must be my own.*

*Nothing moves in the stone mind  
of the old centurion, guardian of the gates,  
stone is still, inactive information.  
A mason gave this rock a life that touches mine,  
these questioning eyes, forbidding gaze,  
"What are your credentials  
that, passing me, you wish to tread  
the steps to the sanctuary?  
Many there are who pass within  
making their noise  
polluting the quietened atmosphere.  
Go slowly now and make  
these few steps sure a pilgrimage.  
If rock has voice  
consider well the silence in the stone."*

*Not any wood would do -not any hill.  
Although I do not share the simple faith  
of these crude images  
I understand their transformations.  
Cicadas purr in your stone head as well as mine.  
Outside time you stand here guardian,  
whoever comes may read your face,  
your right to question, forbid frivolity.  
I come neither on my knees  
nor aesthetically sampling the handiworks of another age.  
I sense the stillness of your stone time;  
cicada cry among the oaks;  
wind drift resin in the wine;  
the hill top sacraments of fragile immortality  
where form and substance interact in history  
and shapes, frail in time's mistral, bloom.  
I bow in gratitude before these crude configurations  
constant recurrence, same place and time,  
here, there, somewhere,  
hands carving the connecting minute  
one arrow hits another in the air  
and all is gone.*

*Swallowtail curves a brief trajectory  
above the jagged aloe spears.  
Images flicker among breeze quickened leaves  
"Defence d'allumer du feu!"  
Why disturb a still pool?  
Endlessly spreading from still centres of place and time  
Cicadas call, circles radiate and disappear.*

*One man only  
peasant with a fruit basket  
has passed this gate  
in an hour of musing.  
A door slams along the hill;  
a breeze shifts leaves yet nothing moves;  
the air falls dreamlike into insect time.  
Ants make pilgrimages,  
flies from time to time  
alight on table top.  
The Virgin in the rocks  
hasn't moved and no birds sing.  
High above and passing  
a raven calls.*

*Under a cone-covered fir where the path turns-  
a wide-armed cross without inscription  
backed by the heavy foliage of an oak,  
bare wood, sun dried,  
rock the soil in which it's driven.  
The figure moves among the trees beckoning  
no words-a total statement.  
Death and time and history  
deep rooted in a believing land,  
the saviour's instrument.  
Where the lines cross the trail begins.  
Old lady coming from the house  
does not look at me, composed  
she passes by leaving the stranger quiet beneath the trees.*

*All but the desert plants wilt in the heat  
roses struggle along dried up terraces.  
Beyond the Cross the hillside drops away,  
the great view looms.  
Forests, rock cropped mountains,  
far distances jagged and curved.  
What is a World ?  
Down there the motorways exude  
the roar of cars, polluted air,  
the sea crazed industry generates its violent rhythms.  
Airplane flies along the coast  
dragnetting for customers  
"Patron -et trois Duvals."  
Crowding the beaches people are purchasing the sun.  
At Notre Dame de Graces almost no one.  
No price on this commodity -  
silence tuned by insects and the warm wind.  
A summer of opposites perhaps -  
within such silence human insects cry  
What is a World that contains all this?  
Here in the wilting rose garden  
the hardened plants need rain.*

*Wind falls with the fading light  
gold to slow silver the rising nightline comes.  
Day lingers greying the land, cicada silence,  
hill crest firs collect the remaining breeze.  
Down in the valley among the olive trees  
shutters open from white walls  
lights glimmer in dead houses  
the troglodytes emerge.  
Under deep well-heads dark water lies.*

Cotignac

To HR

Revised 26.12.93, 11.6.1996, 6.8.02

## IS ZEN FOR EVERYONE?

### Two book reviews

Saso, M. 2000 *Zen is for Everyone. The Xiao Zhi Guan text by Zhi Yi*. New Life Center, Carmel & Tendai Institute, Honolulu. ISBN 1-929431-02-3.

Haskel, P. 2001. *Letting go. The story of Zen Master Tosui*. University of Hawaii Press. Honolulu. ISBN 0-8248-2440-7.

The translation and interpretation of Zen texts from China, Korea and Japan continues apace demonstrating conclusively the wide range of views inherent in East Asian Buddhism. At first, when few works had been translated, interpreters tended, perhaps understandably, to produce simplistic understandings based on inadequate knowledge of the sources. Such mistakes are no longer so tolerable today.

In the first of the works reviewed here, Michael Saso provides a translation of a very early manual of meditation by the revered Tientai (j. Tendai) Master Chih I (j. Zhi Yi) who lived between 538 CE and 597. At this early date Chinese meditation was still strictly modelled on methods of Indian origin and lacked the later forms developed to suit Chinese culture. The Indian practices of Samatha (Calming the mind) and Vipasyana (Insight into the nature of mind) were known in China as the related activities of Stop and Look, terms summarising the nature of these twin approaches based in earlier Abhidharma literature. It was not until the Master Hung Chih Chen Chueh (1091-1157)<sup>1</sup> combined these two approaches into a common system known as Silent Illumination (Mo chao) that the modern practice of Chan meditation developed, being taken later to Japan and reformulated as Shikantaza by Master Dogen.

Chih I's presentation of Stop and Look is profound yet straight forward and certainly accessible to beginners, including lay practitioners. Indeed, using this text, it would be possible to start meditation without a teacher. He provides ten chapters detailing the manner by which a beginner can establish a good basis for meditation through purification of the senses and desires and harmonising body and mind through care in regulating eating, sleeping and breathing. He ends by relating meditational methods to teaching and by offering useful tips about meditation and health.

Essentially to Stop means to examine closely a present situation without judgement and to come to rest in the present moment whether this be on the cushion or in everyday life. Look means seeing experience in the light of the Buddha's teaching, especially the "Law of Co-dependent arising". This enables the practitioner to perceive in a heartfelt manner that all things are basically lacking in any inherent existence as entities but are rather all part of an ongoing process wherein cause leads to consequence under the influence of context. Such insight reduces the habitual tendency to attach to wanted things or people as if they were permanently available.

The text bases the practice firmly in the established thought of the Mahayana, particularly the Prajnaparamita and Madhyamaka literature. This creates a paradox when we find Michael Saso in his introduction arguing, as did Daisetz Suzuki early in the last century, that a Zen based in ineffable experience could be practised within any religion. Saso remarks, "Christians, both Protestant and Catholic alike, use and teach Zen methods in a purely Christian context. Zen is thus a contemplative method, not a belief system" (p xiii). It is this erroneous bias in Western understanding of Zen that has allowed so called Christian Zen to develop within a kind of philosophical vacuum- inadequate theology and non-existent philosophy adulating uninterpretable experience. To find Saso repeating this viewpoint is disturbing for, as post modern writers and contemporary Chan masters such as Master Sheng yen, have pointed out, no practice can develop without a relationship to the ideas that sustain it.

Of course the mere process of zen meditation, formal sitting and the regulation of mind, may be used by anyone of any religion and indeed has its parallels within most of the great world religions. And it is indeed beneficial. Yet the adoption of this method by Christians is a sign of a weakness that denies or overlooks their own meditative traditions. Chinese and Japanese meditation methods are rooted in the Dharma of the Buddha and cannot lead to an understanding of "enlightenment" outside that context. Whatever may be experienced by Christian meditators faithful to a deistic theology, however blissful or insightful, cannot be the same experience of liberation that comes through insight into sunyata (emptiness). It will be some other condition determined by the context of their faith. As Chih I himself says, the practice of meditation develops within reliance on the teachings of the masters.

Haskel's translation of the story of the Japanese Master Tosui introduces a parallel theme in which the question of the relationship between an institutional life of monastic formality and the nature of Zen insight comes into focus. In an extended and historically fascinating forward, he describes how Buddhism during the Tokagawa period fell under government control and became organised hierarchically as a highly formalised 'church' system. The free and open style of interaction between master and disciple had already become rigidified through the use of formalised expressions in the solving of koans and in the understanding of Dharma so that the spontaneity and naturalness of Chan was being replaced by a ritualistic and authoritarian form of transmission.

These social contexts of Japanese Buddhism seem to have been one main reason for the appearance of highly rebellious monks who deserted the formal institutions of their time to recapture a sort of crazy naturalness that accepted transience and mortality as the natural run of things. Their subsequent notoriety, fame and appreciation showed that these men were well and truly genuine practitioners of Zen. Tosui (d: 1683) seems to have been the first and perhaps the most extreme of such masters, perhaps becoming an exemplar for later revolutionaries such as Ryokan (1758-1832) and Ikkyu whose lives were in many ways similar to his. After severe training Tosui had become the abbot of a monastery yet he decided to leave and live simply as a beggar or cheap artisan, homeless and unkempt, among the ordinary people, shunning all who tried to trace his whereabouts and learn from him. So successful was he that relatively little is known about him.

None the less his notoriety as a great and exceptional master did not escape those remaining in more orthodox surroundings. The celebrated scholar and Soto Zen master Menzan Zuiho laboriously put together all that could be found out about Tosui and eventually published his Tribute (Tosui osho densan) which is the text translated here.

Undoubtedly the social conditions of Buddhism in Japan were the seed bed for the activities of these sensational masters who took the daily life of the poor as their environment of practice far from the securities of monastic or 'church' establishments. The fact that they manifested profound practice under conditions of an often quite pathetic daily life is a lesson for contemporary practitioners. Perhaps they show a way out of the sentimental New Ageism and self-comforting idealisms of many contemporary Westerners and suggest a View and a Way whereby the Dharma may confront the destructive trivialities of consumerism. These lives should be read and carefully considered by all of us who live so comfortably attending our sitting groups once a week and believing we know something of Zen.

John Crook

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<sup>1</sup> Hongzhi Zhenjue

## **Buddhist Journeys In The Himalayas 2003**

### **1) Ladakh: Mountains, Monasteries And Space**

Dr John Crook, Vice President of the International Association of Ladakh Studies, will almost certainly be attending the biennial conference of this society in Leh, Ladakh between July 21st-27th, 2003. Following the conference he may be prepared to lead a small group on a tour of the remarkable monasteries, art treasures, landscapes and villages of this Buddhist land. Apart from the main Gompas, we will probably visit a remote monastery where yogins practice, some mountain-ringed lakes only recently open to tourism, and penetrate north into the little visited territory of Nubra where we may do a short trek.

The tour is open to fellows of the WCF and others interested in Himalayan culture. The logistics of the tour will be organised by our old friends Tanu and Zorab Rigdzin of Highland Adventures, Delhi.

Approx dates: July 30<sup>th</sup> - August 12th. Guesstimate price around £2000

### **2) Trek To Mustang**

In a remote corner of northern Nepal a highland valley extends into Tibetan territory. Although politically part of Nepal, it remains largely under the jurisdiction of its own monarch of ancient lineage who lives in the little walled capital of Mustang known as Lo.

Unlike our tours to ancient cities in China, where most traces of anything older than thirty years is fast disappearing, Mustang remains totally medieval: no roads, no airport, no sewerage, no Western comforts -- starkly original and almost "untouched" by the crudity of the modern world. To go there is to go back many centuries into the cultural world of ancient Tibet.

The only access is by a long, quite strenuous five-day trek up the gorge of the Kali Gandaki river.

Although this is a demanding journey even at moderate altitudes by Himalayan standards (10-13,000 feet), it offers a quite unique experience which will probably not be possible within a few years as "development" moves ever onwards.

John and Elizabeth Crook plan to attempt this journey in the Autumn, approximate dates: 21 Sept - Oct 12th. London-London 22days. Trekking 15 days. Strenuous. Max altitude about 13,000 feet. They will be using ponies for part of the trek.

The trek will be organised by Himalayan Kingdoms and led by a Sherpa team. If sufficient persons apply the tour will be restricted to our own members. The cost will depend on whether one is sharing tents or going as a singleton and on whether a pony is requested.

Minimum participation 4. maximum 12.

Basic trek: approx £2850

Pony hire on trek: £20 per day. £300

Single room/tent supplements available. Approx £70.

**Please note: if you wish to travel with John to these lands on which he is an cultural expert you should apply this year. 2003 may be the last year he will lead visits to these altitudes.**

If seriously interested please put your name forward IMMEDIATELY so John can get an idea of numbers. Write to John at Winterhead Hill Farm, Shipham, Somerset, BS25 1RS.



## **Silence And Illumination**

### **An intensive training retreat in Chinese Zen**

#### **Haus der Stille, Hamburg**

**July 4th-12th 2003**

**Led by John Crook with assistance from Simon Child and Max Kalin**

Our retreat will endeavour to recapture the inspiration of two periods of traditional Chan training led in recent years by the Venerable Chan Master Sheng yen in Berlin (1999) and in Gaia House, UK, (2000) and will be led by his senior Western disciples each of whom has received transmission from him to teach as Dharma heirs in the Linchi (Rinzai) and Caodong (Soto) lineages of China.

The retreat will take place in the beautiful retreat centre of the Haus der Stille in wooded country south of Hamburg. The setting and the accommodation are exceptionally attractive and comfortable. We hope for an international gathering of Shifu's Dharma followers yet all meditators are welcome.

Silent illumination is a key to understanding the deeper reaches of the self. In a gentle process of calming the mind and watching one's illusions at play the participant gradually enters a world of clarity and insight leading to the development of compassionate wisdom. Needless to say this is no easy matter. Practitioners need to be strongly motivated and willing to experience both physical and mental confrontation with their engrained self-concern. In our strife-torn world Silent illumination opens a way to personal peace that does not avoid the problems of modern life.

The retreat is silent but includes interviews with the teachers. The programme begins in the early morning and continues till ten p.m. The method of practice will be carefully presented for beginners and adepts alike and will be supported by physical exercise, work periods, ritual and chanting.

Each day will include a Dharma talk. Food is vegetarian. Languages: English and German

The retreat will be led by John Crook who is Master Sheng yen's first European Dharma heir. He is the Teacher of the Western Chan Fellowship in the UK and leads Chan retreats regularly in the UK, in Warsaw, Berlin, Zagreb etc. He is the creator of Western Zen Retreats and Koan Retreats designed for Western practitioners. Together with Simon Child he recently led a Western Zen Retreat at Master Sheng yen's centre in upstate New York.

Simon Child is secretary of the Western Chan Fellowship and co leads with John as well as presenting his own retreats.

Max Kalin is the teacher of the Chan Group in Zurich and edits the Chan Zeitung. He will be the main interpreter (English-German) on this retreat.

Interpretation into Polish may also be provided if required. Interviews can be in English, French or German.

Applications direct to Frank Wesendahl at the Haus der Stille, e.V.:Muhlenweg.20, 21514 Roseburg, Hamburg, Germany.

Inclusive costs: Conference fee €120. Accommodation €288. (i.e. about £260).

Reductions are available. People who wish to apply for a reduction may request it from Frank Wesendahl ([info@hausderstille.org](mailto:info@hausderstille.org))

## **Old Book**

### **Republication of "Space in Mind"**

Chrysalis books are republishing a number of books originally produced by the now defunct Element Press as part of their new "print on demand" scheme. Titles include: Crook J.H. and D. Fontana (Eds) *Space In Mind: East-West Psychology And Contemporary Buddhism*. (Originally published in 1990 and unavailable recently)

This book contains a number of valuable essays including two chapters by John concerning the Western Zen Retreat. Other chapters are by James Low, Sue Blackmore, Guy Claxton, David Fontana, Lynn Goswell and others perhaps less well known to readers. The book has not dated with time and the essays still make sound reflective reading for all Dharma practitioners as well as interested others.

Cost: £12.99. Order from Carole Crampton of the sales department of Chrysalis Books, 64 Brewery Rd London N7 9NT (Tel 020 7697 3000 or fax 020 7697 3001)

## **New Book**

### **Illuminating Silence**

#### **Master Sheng Yen**

##### **Introductions and commentaries by John Crook**

This comprehensive work provides an introduction to the practice of Chinese Zen (Chan) by a great contemporary Chan master based on talks given during two intensive retreats at the Maenllwyd - the meditation centre of the Western Chan Fellowship in Wales. It provides a basic handbook for all concerned with an effective training in Zen for the West.

In his foreword Stephen Batchelor writes: "The discourses are lucid and direct, drawn widely on the sources of Chinese Buddhism, and speak in a refreshingly modern idiom. Perhaps because the setting was relatively small and intimate, the gentleness, warmth and humour of Master Sheng Yen radiate throughout the text."

Part One provides full details of the unfolding of a Chan retreat with details of schedule, liturgy and all talks by the Master thereby enabling the reader to sit in on the retreat as it developed.

Part Two contains a careful presentation of the meditation method of Silent Illumination (mo chao) which, taken later to Japan, there became the sitting style called "shikantaza" The talks here are based in the original presentations of Master Hongzhi Zhenjue (1090-1157).

Part Three comprises retreat reports written by the editor during his training with Master Sheng Yen and which thus provide the reader with an experience of what it is like to "sit" a training retreat with a Chan master.

John Crook, the Teacher of the Western Chan Fellowship and the first European Dharma Heir of the Master in the Linchi and Caodong traditions of Chinese Zen, has constructed the text from the taped English interpretations by Ming Yee Wang of the spoken mandarin. He writes: "I was engaging in an exercise in hermeneutics, an interpretation of the teaching in which my own subjectivity was highly engaged. I thus received the teachings many times over." John also provides commentarial introductions to each part of the text and an edited autobiography of the master.

Publisher Watkins. 20 Bloomsbury St. London. 2002.

Available from Watkins Books, 19 Cecil Court, London WC2N 4EZ. Fax 0207 836 6700 Tel 0207 836 2182, and all bookshops, or from [westernchanfellowship.org/books.html](http://westernchanfellowship.org/books.html) Price: £9.99 US\$ 14.95

## Submissions to New Chan Forum - Editorial Policy

We welcome your contributions, whether articles, poetry, artwork, retreat reports, letters, or whatever else. However we do not promise that we shall publish your contribution, or in which issue it will appear if we do so. Owing to the workload involved, our policy is that we do not acknowledge materials received. Where possible submissions by email to **editorial@WesternChanFellowship.org** are preferred for articles, poems, etc, since this obviates the need for retyping or scanning. For artwork email submissions are also useful, but in addition non-returnable copies or originals by post may be helpful since then if required we can rescan them ourselves at higher resolution than may be appropriate for email attachments. Thank you.

**The articles in this journal have been submitted by various authors and the views expressed do not necessarily represent the views of the Western Chan Fellowship.**

## Contacts for the 'New Chan Forum' and 'Western Chan Fellowship'

**WCF Secretary:** (also **NCF picture editor** to whom you can submit photographs, artwork etc) is: Simon Child, 24 Woodgate Ave, Bury, LANCS, BL9 7RU. Tel: 0161 761 1945, Fax: 0161 763 3221 (work). *Secretary@WesternChanFellowship.org*

**WCF Treasurer** Jake Lyne, 13 Belle Vue Terrace, YORK, YO10 5AZ  
*Treasurer@WesternChanFellowship.org*

**Membership Secretary, NCF Subscriptions (£10. 50 per three issues) Retreat Bookings**  
Peter Howard 22 Butts Road, Chiseldon, Wiltshire, SN4 0NW, Tel 01793 740659  
*Retreats@WesternChanFellowship.org*

**NCF Editor:** Marian Partington, Ty Lottyn, Llawr y glyn, Caersws, Powys SY17 5RJ  
*Editor@WesternChanFellowship.org*

**Chair of the WCF:** Hilary Richards, 8 Park Terrace, The Park, Nottingham, NG1 5DN,  
Tel: 0115 9242075, *Chair@WesternChanFellowship.org*

**Teacher of the WCF:** Dr John Crook, Winterhead Hill Farm, Shipham, N. Somerset, BS25 1RS.  
*Teacher@WesternChanFellowship.org*

**Subscriptions:** WCF Fellows receive NCF as a benefit of Fellowship. Others may subscribe at a price of £10.50 per three issues (we aim for two - three issues per year) by writing with payment enclosed (cheques payable to Western Chan Fellowship) to Peter Howard, 22 Butts Road, Chiseldon, Wiltshire, SN4 0NW. **Back Issues**, *except issue 15*, are available at £4 per issue from WCF Treasurer as above, otherwise please refer to the website [WesternChanFellowship.org](http://WesternChanFellowship.org) where most back issues are freely available online.

## LOCAL GROUPS CONTACTS

### *Affiliated Groups:*

**Bristol** Sally Mashedor 0117 924 8819  
**Bury N Manchester** Simon Child 0161 761 1945  
**Cheadle S Manchester** Ron Henshall 0161 4910612  
**Gillingham** Stuart McLeod 01634 571659  
**Glastonbury** Ned Reiter 01458 833663  
**London** Will Turner 020 8340 7278  
**Swindon** Hughie Carroll 01793 343447  
**York** James McCarthy 01904 330977  
or Jannie Mead 01904 628536

### *Associated Groups:*

**Aberystwyth** Ken Jones 01970 880603  
**Cardiff** Eddy Street 029 2069 1146  
**Guildford** Roger Taylor 01483 202422  
**Newbury** Dave/Aurie McKay 01635 46139

## Notices

### Improvements to the Bursary Scheme

The WCF is a registered charity and maintains a Bursary Fund to provide discounts (concessions) on retreat fees for low/unwaged persons. However feedback has suggested that the bursaries provided need to be larger to provide a real help.

- The WCF committee has decided to increase the standard bursary to up to 50% of the retreat fee (for maximum two participants per retreat).
- We have decided not to increase the standard retreat fees in order to recoup the extra funds laid out on bursaries, but instead to leave it to individuals who feel that they can afford to do so to make donations to support the Bursary Fund
- We therefore need to appeal once more for funds to maintain the bursary fund. To fund two 50% bursaries per retreat will cost about £1,500 per year.
- If you feel able to help, please send your donations to the Treasurer.

### Lifts to Retreats – Data Protection Notice

On most retreats some people are travelling without their own transport and either require or appreciate lifts from those with cars. To facilitate this, when you book a place on a retreat, we will give your contact details to others travelling from or through your area. If you prefer your details not be released then please state this clearly when you make your retreat booking.

### Transliterations of Chinese Characters

Typically in the past in New Chan Forum we have used ‘Wades Giles’ transliteration for Chinese characters. However the modern standard is to use Pinyin, as the Chan Center in New York have been doing for some time, and so we have decided to standardise on Pinyin. Some words will not change much, but some will seem very different. The first change is that *Ch’an* becomes *Chan*. By way of a mini-glossary here are a few more changes you may notice:

*Shih-fu* becomes *Shifu*,

*Lin Chi* becomes *Linji*,

*Tsao Tung* becomes *Caodong*,

*hua t’ou* becomes *huatou*,

*kung-an* becomes *gongan*, and

*Chi* (energy) becomes *Qi*.

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