



NEW CHAN FORUM
BUDDHIST JOURNAL OF THE WESTERN CHAN FELLOWSHIP

AUTUMN/WINTER 2022 NO.63

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Chan
Fellowship

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Contributions for future issues (articles, poems, artwork) welcomed. Please send to editor@westernchanfellowship.org.
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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

PAT SIMMONS

Welcome to the autumn/winter issue of *New Chan Forum*. You may notice we haven't yet caught up with our normal mail-out schedule, but we're doing our best!

I hope you'll enjoy the rich variety of the articles and poetry in this issue. It is particularly exciting to be able to include two reports from the first retreats at our new Peak District retreat centre, Shawbottom Farm. It feels like the beginning of a new era for the Fellowship, and I'm sure we're all grateful to Simon Child for all the work he's put into creating this centre, particularly given the difficulties created by Covid and lockdown.

I'm really grateful to all the contributors in this issue for giving their time and energy to producing material for it. And now I need more! As you'll see, there is a great variety of subjects covered, reflecting the variety of readers' experience and insight. So do please consider writing for future issues. Prose or poetry; personal experiences or understanding gained from reading the sutras – or, indeed, more modern writers. All (or most!) is grist to the Forum mill.

INVESTIGATING THE PRECEPTS

SIMON CHILD

An important component of Chan Buddhist practice is the practice of the Precepts. For lay practitioners the five lay precepts are the basis. There are several other formulations such as eight precepts, ten precepts, Bodhisattva precepts, and the monastic precepts which are counted in the hundreds. I shall leave those for another day and focus here on the basic five lay precepts of: not killing; not stealing; no sexual misconduct; no lying; and no use of alcohol or intoxicants. Behind these rather bald statements there is great subtlety and depth and this is to be explored.

Though precepts can sound somewhat similar to Christian commandments, it is important to understand that they are very different. In particular, these are not given by a god with the sanction of possibly going to hell as a sinner if they are broken. Instead, these are guidelines voluntarily and optionally adopted by practitioners because the practitioners themselves consider they may be helpful to their practice and to their lives. It is open to the practitioner to decide whether to take the precepts and how to interpret and make use of them.

There are two main aspects to the precepts. Firstly, and most obviously, they provide a behavioural code which will reduce the harm that you cause to yourself and others, leading to greater peace and harmony for yourself and for society. Also, adopting such a code may prompt you to reflect on your behaviour and your values and develop your own behavioural and moral code.



SHAWBOTTOM FARM

Secondly, the precepts act as a practice which helps in the cultivation of mindful awareness. Having taken a precept, you have a spur to be more mindful in order to notice whether you break it or are at risk of breaking it. Furthermore, having noticed yourself at risk of breaking it, you may be able to go a step further and observe the habitual tendencies in action, speech and thought, which lead in the direction of breaking the precept. You may go yet another step and see through the basis of these habits and be able to release them. This is potentially a deep practice, going beyond ‘mere’ good behaviour as it leads into a powerful investigation of mind and release of its fetters.

A key aspect of our practice is to cultivate both concentration and wisdom in all circumstances – the cultivation of Mahayana Samadhi. Attempting to maintain the precepts is an important support in this. Being motivated to be aware of our present thought and action improves our concentration. Seeing and releasing our habitual tendencies increases our wisdom.

We usually think of precepts as practices for our daily life, but they are also applicable during other practice such as on retreat and at any other time. Let’s look at each of them in turn.

1. The Precept of Not Killing

What are we not to not kill? Immediately we see that there is scope for personal interpretation in these precepts. Usually we consider that at the least it means not to kill humans, but is that all that it means? We could make it easy for ourselves by saying that we consider this precept to refer only to humans, and that we have never killed anyone, we don’t intend to do so, and we don’t consider there is any real likelihood of that chang-

ing. We might then regard the precept as ‘completed’ and tick the box and ignore it thereafter.

But what use is that? Your interpretation of the precept in this way has met the minimum requirements of society but has not achieved anything by way of stimulating your cultivation of mindful awareness, and has not revealed or challenged any of your habitual tendencies. Better to interpret the precept more deeply, so that it becomes more meaningful and challenges you.

What about not killing animals? If you interpret the precept in that way does that mean that you must become vegetarian or vegan, or do you consider it alright to use animal products where the animal has been killed by someone else? Some Buddhists interpret this one way and others another way.

And what do you understand as an animal? How about insects, bacteria, viruses? You kill insects when you walk around or drive, and you kill bacteria and viruses when you cook food. How about not killing plants, including vegetables? Will you eat only rocks? But then you would be starving and killing yourself, a human!

This precept is not so simple, unless you limit it to not killing humans which as explained above is not really helpful for you. How do you interpret it, what is meaningful and stretches you?

There is more. We can read it as including not killing hope, joy, etc. This can refer to the hope and joy both of others, and of yourself. Are you someone who is overcritical of yourself or others and in that way destroys hope, leading to hopelessness and giving up? Consider this in relation to your life and relationships in general, and also in relation to your practice. Do you tend to give up, feeling hopeless, when practice is

difficult or seems not to be progressing? Do you commit and apply energy to practice, or do you zone out and opt out?

We can also express it positively: that you commit to supporting life, supporting the environment, being aware of your impact on the environment with the attendant risk of killing all life on the planet. Looking at it in all these extended ways gives the precept an edge to make it meaningful and useful for you.

Mindfulness

You can see how this (and other) precepts are wide open to deep and subtle interpretation and extension, and it is essential to do so because a tickbox approach is simply not helpful for your practice. Consider each precept and find an interpretation which is meaningful and significant for you, and which challenges you in some way so that you are stimulated to cultivate clearer awareness to support maintaining your precept.

It may seem difficult or even impossible to achieve your stated precept. But if it is significant for you then you will be motivated to at least try your best and this will require you to cultivate continuous mindfulness to minimise errors and lapses. How can you hope to keep a precept if you are not even aware of your activity both bodily and mentally?

Mindfulness is important to give you an opportunity to keep your precept. It enables you to witness, understand, and release your habitual tendencies which generate reactivity which may lead you to break your precept. For example you may discover a tendency to kill hope by being inappropriately negative, based on negative life experiences in the past, or to damage the environment through ignorance or selfishness by being careless about your consumption and waste disposal.

Remember, you are not doing this for God or for Buddha, you are doing it because you have reflected on the precept and decided that you want to keep it to the best of your ability because you see the significance of it. This practice is a well trodden path, well tested by others, and applicable to you also.

2. The Precept of Not Stealing

Here is another with potential for a tickbox approach – I'm neither burglar, robber, nor shoplifter – tick! But maybe you can be greedy, taking more than you need and thereby denying it to someone else – this can apply locally or on a planetary level. Maybe you have a tendency to steal time, wasting the time of others. Maybe you steal the attention of others, diverting them from what is important for them, maybe even distracting them from their practice. Maybe you also steal from yourself, wasting your own opportunities.

On a retreat do you keep the rules strictly or do you break and bend them thereby disturbing others? Do you waste your own practice opportunities, delaying your own Bodhisattva cultivation, and thereby stealing from others as you leave the cushion less cultivated, less helpful and less open to others than might have been the case?

Also consider this precept in positive terms such as being generous, and giving of yourself in compassionate activity. Compassionate activity is an act of generosity to others, for example giving of your own time and attention, and is also a valuable practice for you as it highlights and confronts your self-concerned tendencies. Do you steal time by wasting your own time when it could be put to the service of others?



For most of us the self is treated as primary, with everything else taking second place or being at our service. How compassionate can you be, while sustaining a sense of self as primary? How much of yourself can you give, how do you set the limit? Even setting it at 100% doesn't work – you need to look after yourself as well as others – so how do you determine your limits? Committing to a giving approach triggers you to reflect on such matters and to see how you relate to others.

3. The Precept of No Sexual Misconduct

This is a very individual precept, which is personal, culture specific, and context specific, as individual and cultural rules vary considerably. As a starting point most people would take it to mean to do no behaviour which harms self or others. It can also be expressed positively in terms of cultivating loving relationships, being respectful and honouring others. It can be extended to avoiding other forms of lust – for gadgets, possessions, trinkets, and self-stimulating acquisitiveness in general.

Of course this is a very important precept in our everyday life, but it is also relevant on retreat, where long meditation periods may be distracted by wandering thoughts in the form of erotic fantasies. It is natural that these may arise, but how do you respond? Do you let them go, or do you hold on to them and indulge them for enjoyment or for distraction from difficulties such as leg pain in sitting?

4. The Precept of Not Lying

On the face of it this might seem a straightforward precept, but of course there are gradations in lies hence the phrase “the truth, the whole

truth, and nothing but the truth”. The gradations make this an interesting precept to explore and develop.

What about “white lies”, where you may tell an untruth in a situation where it does no harm and indeed may be beneficial in some way, such as protecting someone. If an assassin is seeking their victim and asks you where to find them, will you answer truthfully and be implicated in the death of their victim, or will you lie and divert the assassin?

This illustrates another interesting feature of practising with the precepts – they may conflict and situations can arise where you have to break one to keep another. The precepts are not absolute rules or commandments, they are guidelines. You could say that the purpose of the precepts is not to keep them but just to have them! Having the precept triggers you to monitor and reflect on your thoughts and behaviour and this is more important than adhering blindly to a rule. Still, we should know that like any other action breaking a precept has consequences and we may need to make recompense subsequently or untangle confusion that we have caused.

The correct response to any situation is not always obvious, and though we use our best judgement we are fallible and may fail to act appropriately. Doing other than what we consider to be most appropriate is even more likely to be wrong! Do what you honestly consider to be best and most appropriate, guided by the precepts, but have the humility to know that your actions and choices may still be imperfect. Continue to maintain attention so that you can act appropriately subsequently e.g. take corrective action.

Compassionate action is again an example we can consider. We could seek to excuse ourselves from compassionate activity on the grounds

that we are not yet enlightened and so our actions will inevitably be distorted by self-concern. But we don’t opt out, we do our best knowing that it may not work out and so we maintain mindfulness and take further appropriate actions subsequently.

The positive approach to this precept would be to emphasise honesty, openness and truthfulness.

In regard to our practice, are we lying to ourselves? Perhaps we are, if we are using practice to hide from difficulties, seeking refuge in a dark quiet cave disconnected from the world. It is not uncommon that people misuse methods of practice, sometimes unintentionally and sometimes deliberately, overemphasising ‘calming the mind’ to shut down the mind or some corners of it and thereby overlook and deny various issues. This precept points to the need to confront ourselves in our practice, to open ourselves up to the unresolved issues that lead to distortions in our thought and behaviour. How can we keep precepts and be aware of our effect on the world if our prime concern is in acquiring and preserving a quiet mind by the method of restricting our awareness? How can we be said to be serious practitioners if we misuse practice to avoid confronting our habitual tendencies and do not investigate mind so as to penetrate to the nature of our being - where is the truth in that?

Precepts can be challenging. That is their purpose, not a tickbox exercise. Use them to look deeply into your attitudes and behaviours, revealing your obstructions and giving you an opportunity to dissolve them. Confront your self with truth, openness and honesty, stop hiding and denying. Say yes, “I have done that”, “This happened to me”, or “I am experiencing this emotion”.



5. The Precept of No Use of Alcohol or Intoxicants

Though expressed negatively in terms of avoiding alcohol and intoxicants, more positively this precept is about cultivating and maintaining a clear mind. A clear mind supports deepening of practice but even a slightly clouded mind is less able to notice and release your more subtle habitual tendencies. The goal of a practitioner is a completely clear mind so why make it harder for yourself by chemically clouding the mind? Another aspect of this is that having a clouded mind makes it more likely that you will break the other precepts and do harm in other ways.

It is common that social and other pressures make this precept harder to uphold than the others. In social situations you may feel self-conscious and uncomfortable standing out as the only one refusing alcohol, and those with you may feel judged as their drinking is being highlighted by your abstinence. You may have become habituated to alcohol, perhaps using it to cope with some form of distress in your life, or it may be simply that you like the taste and drink it for enjoyment.

It is advised not to take a precept if not intending to keep it, because to take it and immediately disregard it devalues and weakens the whole system of precepts and may diminish your observance and respect for the other precepts. Acknowledging their intention to continue drinking alcohol, some people decide not to take the fifth precept.

Instead of the fifth Buddhist precept some take a ‘personal precept’ worded a little differently – for example not to ‘overuse’, or not to ‘abuse’ alcohol and intoxicants. For those who have a tendency to abuse/overuse this may be a useful halfway-house precept, encouraging them to monitor and modify their consumption. But for others it risks creating an easy tickbox, setting a ‘target’ which is already achieved,

i.e. institutionalising the status quo. There is no challenge in this, no development, no incentive to observe one's thoughts and actions and cultivate mindfulness, and meantime the mind is still being clouded by mild or moderate alcohol use – it is a dead precept.

However, some drinkers may go ahead and take the fifth precept, thereby expressing a commitment to reduce and stop their use of alcohol. They are not intending to break the precept, though they take it in full awareness that circumstances will likely arise when social or other pressures may lead them to break it, such as trying to avoid creating social discomfort for others. By taking the precept they are making themselves more acutely aware of their response to such pressures, and how they sometimes use these as excuses. In this way the precept is useful for them, in helping them to reduce their intake and improve their clarity of mind, as they realise that they do not need to drink so much or so often as they previously told themselves was the case.

If you take the precept, with the intention of keeping it but accepting there may be some failure along the way, this means that you will monitor yourself and at least minimise your intake. Master Sheng Yen used to say, “it is better to have a precept to break than to have no precept!” A precept taken into the mind is like a grain of sand placed in an oyster. It niggles away and is not easily ignored. An oyster may respond by producing a pearl. Perhaps in your case you may produce a Buddha!

We can also consider other forms of intoxicant – the mind can be intoxicated by entertainment media such as videogames, TV and films, obsession with acquiring possessions, and many other such things which take over and possess the mind. Sometimes we submit to these deliber-

ately, with the intention of the mind being taken over as a form of escapism – but is this the action of a serious practitioner? I referred earlier to how some practitioners shut off their mind in quietistic states, either deliberately or as a result of misunderstanding the practice. Here we see the opposite, the practitioner making the mind busy with the intention of creating distraction. Whether busy or dull, these are examples of a clouded mind, a mind which does not see clearly.

One specific trap for practitioners is to lust after and become intoxicated by meditational experiences – chasing experiences, generating pride regarding experiences, holding on to memories of experiences. When in this state, remember Master Sheng Yen's advice and say to yourself, “this is not what I am seeking”. Drop the attachment, clear the mind, and continue your practice.

Epilogue

We say that your practice is protected by precepts, and perhaps you can now see how this phrase fits. Your practice is also challenged by precepts, with no allowance for laziness, opting out, or slipshod and time-wasting practice.

Taking precepts seriously and with depth protects your practice. Most Buddhists observe at least the five precepts, and of course precepts are also open to non-Buddhists – behavioural guidance and aids to mind-training are useful for all. They are optional, but useful.

Even considering a precept and then not taking it may have some effect! If you make a choice not to take a particular precept you may carry with you the memory of having chosen not to take it, reflecting on that decision as you go through the events of your life, noticing occasions

when upholding the precept would have been more appropriate for you than you initially suspected.

As your cultivation of concentration and wisdom progresses, establishing your everyday Samadhi, you will find it jarring when you observe yourself contemplating or engaged in certain actions, or experiencing impulses to act in certain ways. Upholding of the precepts may become automatic and effortless, but until that process has matured, our lives and our practice can benefit from the support provided by consciously and deliberately practising the traditional Buddhist precepts.

LAYWOMEN IN BUDDHISM'S EARLIEST YEARS: CLUES TO THEIR SIGNIFICANCE IN THE PALI CANON

JEANINE WOODWARD

In the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, Mara reminds the Buddha, now approaching death, of his earlier words: 'I shall not come to my final passing away, Evil One, until my bhikkhus and bhikkhunis, laymen and laywomen, have come to be true disciples – wise, well disciplined, apt and learned, preservers of the Dhamma ...'¹ The role of each element of this Fourfold Assembly in preserving and propagating the Dhamma is then described in exactly the same terms, including that of female lay disciples. I propose to explore the question 'How significant were laywomen during the initial development and spread of the Buddha's teachings?' with particular reference to evidence in the Pali literature.

Context

A widely held, maybe traditional, view presents the area of northern India in which the Buddha was brought up, and where he subsequently taught, as an expanding world of urban and economic development, based on agricultural surplus, but a world nonetheless long steeped in Vedic civilization and its social values and hierarchies.² Conversely, a more recent view has emerged that Kosala, the Buddha's homeland, was in his time still on the eastern fringe of Vedic civilisation, which was not therefore as deeply entrenched as it was further west into its heartland, nor as it would become in later centuries.³ Recent scholarship points to

evidence of a localised Vedic School developing alongside a variety of religious and philosophical movements, including ascetics such as the Jains and, eventually, the Buddha.^{3 4} The *Kalama Sutta* describes a wide and confusing variety of competing teachers.⁶ Furthermore, Alan Sponberg argues that the stimulus of urbanization and the rise of mercantile and artisan classes undermining the traditional social order created potential for new roles for women too.⁷

If, on the contrary, Brahmanism was already the major influence in society, it must be borne in mind that this was not necessarily the repressive, openly misogynist, Brahmanism codified in the *Dharmasastras*, *Manusmriti* from the 2nd century BCE onwards.⁸ Up to and including the heyday of Buddhism, in Vedic civilisation, both Early and Later Periods, women appear to have enjoyed social status, economic freedom – and spiritual capacity, as witness the *Brahmavadinis*, dedicated female scholars, and a number of notable female sages, composers of Vedic hymns, such as Sulabha Maitreyi.⁹ However, by the time the Pali Canon was being committed to writing, and following the usurpation of the Buddhist Mauryan Empire by Pusyamitra Shunga (185 BCE), Brahmanism had become consolidated across the north of the sub-continent, but with the increasingly misogynist character exemplified in the Laws of Manu, *Dharmasastras*, *Manusmriti*, where women's rights to education, property, spiritual practice and independence of action generally were all removed.¹⁰

It follows that one must on the one hand be wary of ascribing to society in the Buddha's lifetime the attitudes prevalent at the time when the Pali texts were finally written down, but on the other hand be aware of the influence of those same attitudes on the compilation and editing

of the Canon. It is reasonable to conclude that the editors of the Pali Canon were led to reflect the attitudes of society at large – on which they were still dependent for material support. There must, therefore, be a considerable degree of conjecture regarding the situation of women in the Buddha's time, but the early texts (Pali Canon and parallel collections) do provide clues at least.

Sponberg has proposed a useful technique for sifting through the apparent inconsistencies, ambivalence and downright misogyny that characterise many of the references to women in the Canon by suggesting that 'what we find in the early Buddhist texts is not a single uncertain voice, but rather a multiplicity of voices, each expressing a different set of concerns current among the members of the early community.'¹¹ He then proposes identifying a diversity of views comprising soteriological inclusiveness, institutional androcentrism, ascetic misogyny and soteriological androgyny, the last of these relating to the centuries following the Buddha's lifetime and so outside the scope of this essay.¹²

The position of women in society in general

I. B. Horner begins *Women Under Primitive Buddhism*, thus: 'In the pre-Buddhist days the status of women in India was on the whole low and without honour.'¹³ In later years, she qualified this somewhat,¹⁴ but, more recently, Ute Hüsken still talks of 'an underlying view of women as inferior human beings, prevailing in classical Brahmin texts'¹⁵ with the implication that such views were similarly prevalent in the Kosala of the Buddha's day.

In the *Therigatha*, poems ascribed to some of the pioneering Buddhist nuns, there are descriptions of the lay life left behind. Mutta is 'freed

from the three things that bent me over: the mortar, the pestle, and my humpbacked husband.’¹⁶ Kisagotami recalls her relationship with her husband’s family who treat her with greater or lesser respect as her life unfolds from relative poverty and low status, to high status as the mother of a son, to loss of position on the death of the child.¹⁷ Isidasi describes at length her dutiful behaviour, ‘a loving, virtuous, and humble servant, getting up early, and working tirelessly,’¹⁸ of no avail against the antipathy of her husband.

The former lay life of these women is depicted as subservient to the husband and his family, hard-working within the home, given value by the birth of a son but vulnerable to loss of status and rejection. There is a flavour of the later repressive attitude epitomized in the Brahminic Laws of Manu. However, this does not mean that the same was true of all households and all marriages: these nuns were escaping particularly unfortunate circumstances, not necessarily the norm if Kosala was indeed experiencing a period of social and economic change. Besides, there will always be unhappy marriages.

While women flocked to the Nuns’ Order once it was established,¹⁹ many more – who none the less identified themselves as followers of the Buddha – evidently did not. The Pali Canon contains a number of descriptions of marital and household harmony, some of which will be considered below, which, while often promoted as ideals (particularly from the husband’s point of view), seem to indicate a degree of contentment, even happiness, for the parties – who will, of course, tend to be, or to become, committed lay disciples: *Upasika(f)/Upasaka(m)*. However, as we shall see, there are notable exceptions of female followers in ‘heretic’ households.

Clues to the Buddha’s own attitude to women

With regard to evidence of the Buddha’s personal attitude, as stated above, the Pali texts, as transmitted, must be read with caution and any conclusions treated as conjecture. However, Sponberg’s approach of identifying different voices may be of help in disentangling clues, bearing in mind the likelihood of unconscious as well as deliberate bias.²⁰

Soteriological inclusiveness, as described by Sponberg, implies that progress on the Path leading to liberation is open to all equally, regardless of sex. The account of the foundation of the Nuns’ Order is riddled with ambivalent and outright misogynist statements, whether reporting genuine hesitancy on the part of the Buddha or reflecting the concerns of later, presumably celibate, male editors.²¹ However, in the midst of this, one exchange stands out as inclusive to a degree that might suggest a memory of the Buddha’s original words:

Then Venerable Ānanda said to the Buddha, “Sir, is a female able to realize the fruits of stream-entry, once-return, non-return, and perfection once she has gone forth?”
“She is able, Ānanda.”²²

This is consonant with a similar attitude revealed elsewhere in the Pali literature: the Path to liberation is the same for any woman or man;²³ the murdered Queen Samavati and her 500 women are all identified as having attained stream-entry or more;²⁴ a laywoman can be an ornament of the Sangha equal to a monk, nun or layman:

These four competent, educated, assured, learned people – who have memorized the teachings and practise in line with the teachings – beautify the Sangha.²⁵

Moreover, this voice of soteriological inclusiveness extends to the partners in the lay household:

Mendicants, if wife and husband want to see each other in both this life and the next, they should be equals in faith, ethical conduct, generosity, and wisdom. ...²⁶

For Sponberg, this inclusiveness is arguably ‘the most basic and also the most distinctively Buddhist attitude regarding the status of women’ to be found in the literature.²⁷ However, arguing that there is no exact equivalence with the Buddha’s rejection of (hereditary) class distinction, he adds, ‘the willingness to include women appears to have remained bedded in a set of cultural assumptions about gender, assumptions that were never completely rejected.’²⁸ Equality on the Path did not necessarily entail equality in society which was irrelevant to liberation.

This brings us to Sponberg’s second ‘voice’, institutional androcentrism, which he identifies as a somewhat later development, reflecting the need for the now established monastic community to maintain acceptability in the external society on which it was dependent²⁹ and in which attitudes of male superiority were gaining or regaining ground – especially once its charismatic founder was no more.³⁰ The suggestion is that the Buddha’s attitude of inclusiveness was replaced by one where women might follow the monastic path, but only within a regulated structure that preserved ‘conventionally accepted social standards of male authority and female subordination.’³¹ This would, to a considerable degree, account for an underlying imbalance in the conventional status of women and men portrayed in the literature, but how far might this reflect the Buddha’s own attitude?

Again, any conclusions are largely conjecture, but we cannot rule out at least a trace of unconscious bias in the historical Buddha who must, to some extent, have been a product of his time and place and upbringing. Karen Armstrong, speaking of the sages of the ‘Axial Age’, including the Buddha, would have it that ‘It was not that the Axial sages hated women; most of the time, they simply did not notice them.’³² Jan Willis suggests that the Buddha’s initial aim was to establish a monastic organization of celibate males for the propagation of his teachings and that therefore women were of secondary importance in the early stages.³³ How much of a surprise to the Buddha, one wonders, was his step-mother Prajapati’s request for ordination and (although outside the scope of this essay) how much might this explain the hesitation in granting her request that is evident throughout the *Cullavagga* account?

In the *Uggaha Sutta*, the Buddha gives advice to his host’s daughters prior to their marriages. He enjoins them to rise before their husbands and retire after them, be obliging and polite, respect their in-laws and visiting teachers, be ‘skilled and tireless’ in their domestic duties, manage the servants and be prudent in financial matters.³⁴ This is echoed in the *Sigalovada Sutta*, in the same terms:

A husband should serve his wife as the western quarter in five ways: by treating her with honour, by not looking down on her, by not being unfaithful, by relinquishing authority to her, and by presenting her with adornments. A wife served by her husband in these five ways shows compassion to him in five ways. She’s well-organized in her work. She manages the domestic help. She’s not unfaithful. She preserves his earnings. She’s deft and tireless in all her duties. A wife served by her husband in these five ways shows compassion to him in these five ways.³⁵

There is reciprocity to some degree here, but the wife's obligations are clearly more arduous and, seemingly, unquestioned. The social contract is unequal but treated as the norm without any suggestion of deliberate discrimination. Indeed, in the *Sappurisa Sutta* describing the four qualities of a good man,³⁶ the monks are exhorted to be like a conscientious new bride – with clearly no irony intended.³⁷

The recurring descriptions of wifely duty are evidence of an unquestioned social assumption regarding the role of women and, notably, its use as a simile (*upama*, a characteristic of the Buddha's discourses) suggests it may have been an unconscious assumption of the Buddha too. That women themselves might disagree is not considered, except as a dereliction of duty.³⁸

When Mallika, the wife of King Pasenadi of Kosala gave birth to a daughter, the Buddha is reported to have said in consolation that 'a girl "may prove even a better offspring" than a boy.'³⁹ This has, on a number of occasions been cited as evidence of the Buddha's advanced views on the equality of the sexes and Horner suggests that 'here a real Gotama-saying, and not monk-talk, has survived.'⁴⁰ However, the rest of the verse makes it clear that a woman is superior when, a devoted wife, she honours her mother-in-law and bears a heroic son, so conforming with the stereotype of wifely virtue.⁴¹

Sponberg's third voice is that of ascetic misogyny, for the most part related to the demands of male celibacy and 'a shift in perspective away from the psychological soteriology of the earliest tradition back toward the purification soteriology of the ascetics'.⁴² He suggests this voice became more strident as monasteries became more autonomous and interaction between monastics and lay society reduced.⁴³ In other words, women were perceived

as an external threat to cloistered male virtue where this had become synonymous with purity and chastity. That the texts, as finally committed to writing, should reflect this development is hardly surprising, but it may present a 'red herring' in the search for any evidence of misogyny in the earliest years, when it was the attitudes of lay society that mattered.

There are negative and indeed vituperative descriptions of women in the Pali Canon both in the *Cullavagga* account of the foundation of the Nuns' Order and elsewhere. Women are 'irritable, jealous, stingy, and unintelligent.'⁴⁴ Women are at one and the same time the obsession of men and obsessed by men.⁴⁵ This could be said to sum up the celibate's fear for his vocation and supports Sponberg's argument, as does the growing consensus that the passage in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* where Ananda is advised to avoid women is a late interpolation.⁴⁶ It can fairly be argued that none of this throws much light on the Buddha's own point of view.

Overall, a picture could be said to emerge of someone who had an instinct for inclusiveness although hampered by the expectations of society and, in all probability, some personal but unconscious assumptions about the status of women, but whose legacy was, in the succeeding centuries, subjected to the stresses and strains of a growing emphasis on masculine superiority and the threat of the feminine to monks' virtue, specifically chastity.

Prominent laywomen

Householders and homeless alike,
Each a support for the other,
Both accomplish the true Dhamma –
The unsurpassed security from bondage.⁴⁷

From the outset, the renunciants were dependent on material support from the lay community⁴⁸ and, in view of the domestic arrangements outlined above, this would, in the majority of cases have meant the laywomen, certainly with regard to the daily alms round.⁴⁹ In return, teachings were offered, and a mutually beneficial symbiosis developed. However, the contributions of lay followers to the propagation of the *Dhamma* could and did extend beyond providing for the basic needs of individual monastics in various ways including making substantial donations, setting an example of lay life according to the Buddha's teachings and even transmitting those teachings to others. As we will see below, women featured prominently.

In the *Sattama Vagga*, the Buddha lists the ten foremost of his female lay disciples, including 'as a donor is Visākhā, Migāra's mother ... who are very learned is Khujjuttarā ... who are intimate is the householder Nakula's mother ...'⁵⁰ Who were these women who were accorded such praise – and survived the editors?

Visakha, described as 'wise, competent and intelligent'⁵¹ was a lay disciple of substantial independent means married into a household of 'heretics'.⁵² She was nonetheless permitted to invite the Buddha to preach, resulting in the conversion of all concerned. Fabulously wealthy in her own right, she obtained the Buddha's permission to offer eight special types of donation to the monastics, having convinced him of her spiritual motives,⁵³ and provided the funds to build a *vihara*.^{54 55} Visakha is recorded as being a regular visitor to the monks (as were other laywomen),⁵⁶ not averse to pointing out monastics' shortcomings⁵⁷ and even instigating changes to the Vinaya rules.⁵⁸ It was perhaps due to her status as a donor as well as to her intelligence and good sense, that the

Buddha evidently sought her advice on a number of occasions, including the resolution of a *Dhamma* dispute between rival factions of monks.^{59 60} While she features in a number of discourses relating to lay practice, particularly observation of the precepts,⁶¹ it is this mutual respect between teacher and disciple which is notable and illuminating, both as to the Buddha's attitude towards at least some women – good sense is not dependent on gender – and as to the influence that it was possible for a woman to have in the preservation and development of the *Dhamma* and the *Sangha*.

Nakula's parents are *upasika* and *upasaka*,⁶² depicted as the ideal of matrimonial harmony. The *Samajivi Sutta*, which exhorts the pair to be 'equals in faith, ethical conduct, generosity, and wisdom'⁶³ is specifically addressed to them as a couple. In other words, the teachings were available to both directly, rather than being conveyed at second hand to the wife later. In the *Nakulapitu Sutta* the husband, gravely ill, is first assured by the wife of her capability to run the household if he dies – we seem to be back with the traditional wifely virtues – but she then proceeds to reassure him that she will continue to see the Buddha, observe the precepts and cultivate serenity. She has trust in, and solid understanding of, the teachings and 'she is independent of others in the Teacher's instructions.'⁶⁴ In other words, a woman is perfectly capable of developing and maintaining a strong practice of her own – as the Buddha goes on to confirm to her now recovered husband.

It must be added that the *Nakulamata Sutta*,⁶⁵ regurgitates the familiar list of wifely duties seen elsewhere and does not sit well with the inclusive ethos of the other two *suttas*. A later interpolation maybe?

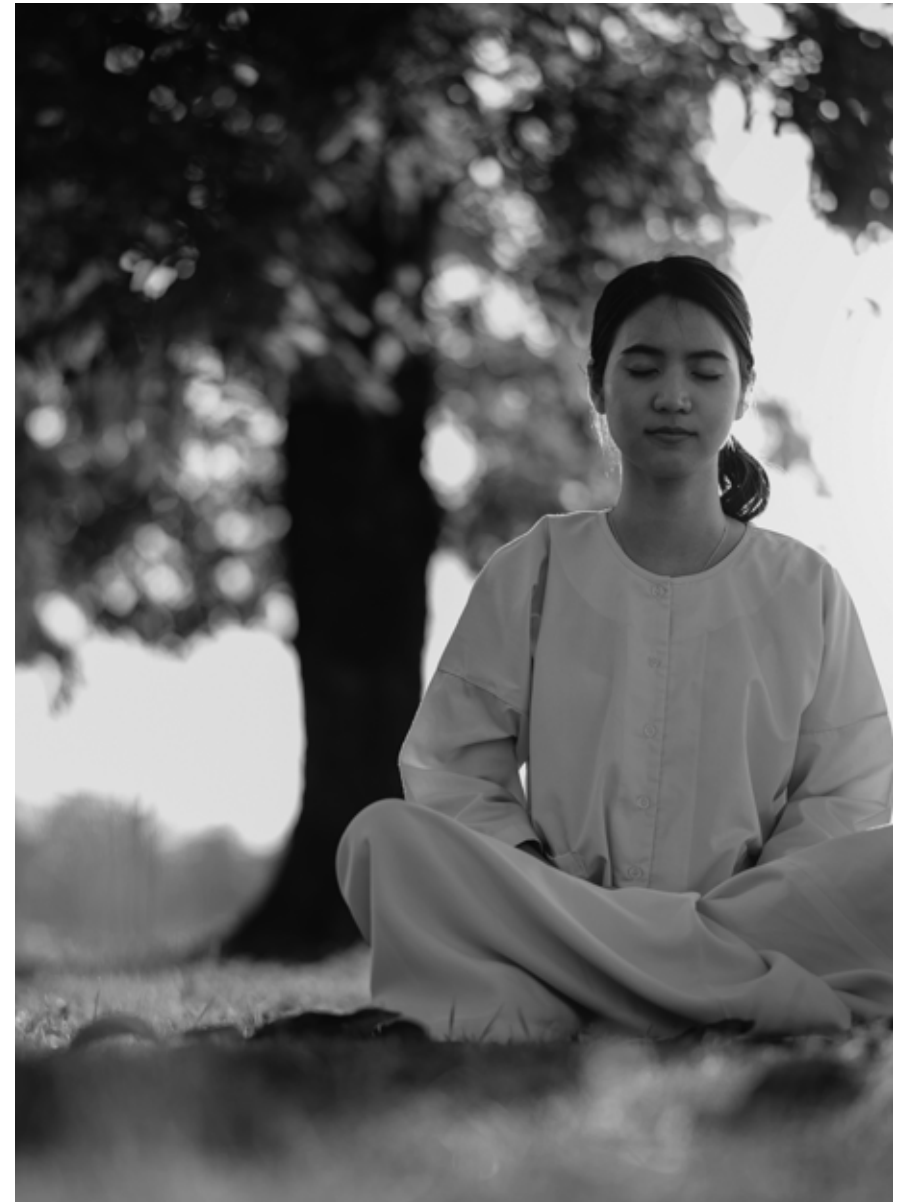
Turning finally to Khujjuttara, her story is told in the *Dhammapada* commentary.⁶⁶ A slave sent to buy flowers for Queen Samavati, she hears the

Buddha teach and is shamed into confessing to her mistress that she has been keeping money back for herself. Intrigued, Samavati sends her to listen to more discourses and repeat them to Samavati and her ladies, who all become lay followers and attain various stages of liberation.⁶⁷ What is fascinating is that in the *Khuddaka Nikaya*, the last collection in the *Sutta Pitaka*, the section known as the *Itivuttaka* or ‘Sayings of the Buddha’ is recognised as a compilation of Khujjuttara’s recollections of the Buddha’s teachings and is thus (apart from the poems of the *Therīgata*) the only collection in the Pali Canon attributed to a woman, and a lay slave woman at that. The teachings cover ‘a wide range of the Buddha’s teachings – from the simplest to the most profound — in a form that is accessible, appealing, and to the point.’⁶⁸ Small wonder that according to the *Ekaditu Sutta* ‘A faithful laywoman with a dear and beloved only daughter would rightly appeal to her, ‘My darling, please be like the laywoman Khujjuttarā...’⁶⁹

Conclusion

To return to my question: how significant were laywomen during the initial development and spread of the Buddha’s teachings?

Bearing in mind the lack of scholarly consensus, it is likely that the Buddha was teaching in an environment where either Brahmanism was not yet pre-eminent among a range of spiritual movements or at least the form it took was more liberal towards women than later developments. The Pali Canon displays attitudes towards women which range from inclusiveness on the spiritual (if not always the social or domestic) front, through androcentric and maybe unconscious assumptions of masculine superiority or feminine insignificance, to outright misogyny where the feminine is perceived as a disruptive threat to the purity of



celibate monks. This range of attitudes may be attributed to the interests of different groups voicing their concerns as the contents of the Canon were transmitted over time.

It is not easy, therefore, to identify what represents the Buddha's original attitude to women, but the material displaying an inclusive approach, at least as far as spiritual practice and attainment is concerned, may well come closest to representing his original and ground-breaking approach of a path to liberation open to all. The prejudices and expectations of the society on whose support the *Sangha* depended, coupled perhaps with a slight resurgence of unconscious personal bias, may have caused some modification of this attitude, in the surviving literature at any event. Nonetheless women, and specifically laywomen, were prominent as benefactors, paradigms and, indeed transmitters of the *Dhamma*, so it can be asserted with some confidence that laywomen were significant and indeed very influential in the development and spread of the *Dhamma* in the early years.

ABBREVIATIONS

AN	Anguttara Nikaya
DhpA	Dhammapada-atthakatha (Commentary to the Dhammapada)
DN	Digha Nikaya
Iti	Itivuttaka
Mv	Mahavagga
SN	Samyutta Nikaya
Thig	Therigata
Ud	Udana

NOTES

1. DN 16 at D ii 104 (<https://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.16.1-6.vaji.html>)
2. John Crook, *World Crisis and Buddhist Humanism* (New Delhi, New Age Books, 2009) pp 40 ff
3. Alexander Wynne, 'Review of Johannes Bronkhorst, *Greater Magadha: Studies in the Culture of Early India*.' Published on H-Buddhism (July 2011),
4. Alan Sponberg, 'Attitudes toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism', in *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. by José Ignacio Cabezon (Albany: SUNY Press 1992) pp 4-5
5. L. M. Bausch, *Kosalan Philosophy in the Kāṇva Śatapatha Brāhmana and the Suttanipāta*. (UC Berkeley. 2015) Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2940b93h> p 19
6. AN 3.65
7. Sponberg pp 4-5
8. Pal Bhaswati, *The saga of women's status in ancient Indian civilization*, <https://doi.org/10.2478/mgrsd-2019-0012> Published online: 31 Jul 2019 pp 5-6
9. Bhaswati p 2
10. Patrick Olivelle ed. *The Law Code of Manu* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2004) Extracts as quoted in <https://feminisminindia.com/2018/01/11/manusmriti-ultimate-guide-good-woman/> passim
11. Sponberg pp 3-4
12. Sponberg p 8
13. I.B. Horner, *Women Under Primitive Buddhism* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. 1930) p 1
14. I.B. Horner, *Women in Early Buddhist Literature: A Talk to the All-Ceylon Buddhist Women's Association* Access to Insight (BCBS Edition), 30 November 2013 <http://accesstosight.org/lib/authors/horner/wheel030.html>

15. Ute Hüsken, 'Gender and Early Buddhist Monasticism' in: *Saddharmāmrtam. Festschrift für Jens-Uwe Hartmann zum 65. Geburtstag*, eds. Oliver von Criegern, Gudrun Melzer and Johannes Schneider, (Vienna: Arbeitskreis für tibetische und buddhistische Studien (Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde, Heft 93), p 218.
16. Thig 1.11 (<https://suttacentral.net/thig1.11/en/sujato>)
17. Thig 10
18. Thig 15 (<https://suttacentral.net/thig15/en/sujato>)
19. Janice D. Willis, 'Nuns and Benefactresses: The Role of Women in the Development of Buddhism', in *Women, Religion and Social Change* ed by Y. Y. Haddad and E. F. Findly (New York, SUNY Press 1985) p63
20. An illuminating interview with Pragya Agarwal on *The Spark*, BBC Radio 4, 1 June 2020 deals with implicit/unconscious bias with (inter alia) specific reference to the patriarchal nature of Indian society, 'a world not designed for women'.
21. Analayo 'The Foundation History of the Nuns' Order' *Hamburg Buddhist Studies* 6. (Bochum/Freiburg, Numata Centre for Buddhist studies, 2016) passim
22. AN 8.51 (<https://suttacentral.net/an8.51>)
23. SN 1.46
24. Ud 7.10
25. AN 4.7 (<https://suttacentral.net/an4.7/en/sujato>)
26. AN 4.56 (<https://suttacentral.net/an4.56/en/sujato>)
27. Sponberg p 8
28. Sponberg p 11
29. Iti 4.8
30. Sponberg p 13
31. Sponberg p 13
32. Karen Armstrong, *The Great Transformation* (London, Atlantic Books, 2007) p xvi
33. Willis p 61

34. AN 5.33 (<https://suttacentral.net/an5.33/en/sujato>)
35. DN 31 (<https://suttacentral.net/dn31/en/sujato>)
36. *Purisa* m. (Pali): 'male', 'a man'
37. AN 4.73 (<https://suttacentral.net/an4.73/en/sujato>)
38. AN 4.73 (when the bride begins to 'kick against the pricks')
39. Horner p 20 quoting [SN 3.16]
40. Horner p 20
41. SN 3.16 (<https://suttacentral.net/sn3.16/en/sujato>) The child, Vajira, became queen of Maghada and the ancestress of Asoka, so one might surmise that a back-story has been created at some point.
42. Sponberg p 21
43. Sponberg p 24
44. AN 4.80 (<https://suttacentral.net/an4.80/en/sujato>)
45. AN 1. 1-10 (<https://suttacentral.net/an4.80/en/sujato>)
46. <https://discourse.suttacentral.net/t/what-the-buddha-said-to-ananda-about-women/5779>
47. Iti 107 (<https://suttacentral.net/iti107/en/ireland>)
48. AN 4.60 (<https://suttacentral.net/an4.60/en/sujato>)
49. AN 4.7 (<https://suttacentral.net/an4.57/en/sujato>)
50. AN 1. 258-267 (<https://suttacentral.net/an1.258-267/en/sujato>)
51. Mv VIII.18 (https://zugangzureinsicht.org/html/tipitaka/vin/mv/mv08/mv.08.18.khem_en.html)
52. Horner, *Women Under Primitive Buddhism* p 348. Supporters of the 'Naked Ascetics', probably Jains.
53. Mv VIII 18 (https://zugangzureinsicht.org/html/tipitaka/vin/mv/mv08/mv.08.18.khem_en.html)
54. Dhpa v53 (where her story is told at length)
55. Roebuck V. J. Trans. *The Dhammapada* (London, Penguin Books Ltd. 2010) p 132

56. SN 8.1
57. Horner *Women Under Primitive Buddhism* p 352
58. Mv III 13 1-2
59. Dhpa v160 (Roebuck pp 167-168)
60. Mv X 5.9
61. AN 3.70, AN 8.43, AN 8.49
62. Who evidently practise celibacy at home (AN 6.16)
63. AN 4.55 (<https://suttacentral.net/an4.55/en/sujato>)
64. AN 6.16 (<https://suttacentral.net/an6.16/en/sujato>)
65. AN 8.48
66. Dhpa vv21-23 (Roebuck p 123)
67. These are the murdered women in Ud 7.10 mentioned previously
68. Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Translator's Introduction to Itivuttaka* (<https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/iti/iti.intro.than.html#intro>)
69. SN 17.24 (<https://suttacentral.net/sn17.24/en/sujato>)

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TRANSLATIONS

Access to Insight www.accesstoinsight.org

SuttaCentral <https://suttacentral.net>



MY SHELTERED PLACE: A HAIBUN

ANDY HENDERSON

The fresh crisp morning air assails my senses as I quietly close the kitchen door behind me. The gravel crunches under my feet, yet all is silent.

I turn the corner of the street and the south-west wind rushes across my face.

I hear the sea before I see the sea, for all is still dark at this early hour.

The smell of wet briny beach is strong as I descend the steps to the beachside path and turn fully into the wind.

Striding now, arms swinging, legs stepping out, heart rate increasing, eyes watering, eyesight adjusting, vision expanding, I am off and in rhythm.

I notice the waves heaping up in the tidal stream – wind over tide... a roughcast texture of sparkly icing peaks dancing on an inky blue cake.

And the lights: white, flashing their numerical codes marking points of danger; red and green marking safe passage into safe harbour.

Wet wind whining,

Autumn gale batters the beach;

I am nothing.

Turning back, the wind now behind me, I see historic forts in the distance and ships at anchor awaiting the change of tide – or perhaps, a change in market prices?



And I am back at the steps. I find my sheltered place known only to dogs and their owners, and I begin Qi Gong.

Bank of undergrowth,
A lone honeysuckle vine;
Its fragrance enough.

Breathing deeply and stretching silently, my body awakens to the day. Reaching up I am aware of the sky, and the clouds, and the stars and the heavens and the universe and the void....

Bending, stretching, breathing, calming, I settle and melt into Tai Chi: two sections, 20 mins. Silence, breath, yin, yang and Wu Chi to end.

Striding out, I am back in my garden and it is time to sit.

Warming sun rising,
All is raised by one degree.
Another minute becomes.

RIGHT LIVELIHOOD

CLIVE RICHARDS

When I was asked several years ago to write a personal perspective on my career as a doctor in relation to right livelihood, I thought it would be easy. It is a huge privilege to work as a doctor with a livelihood dedicated to alleviating the effects of illness – we try and help people when they are vulnerable and are often admitted to their most private life events. The most useful advice I received is that a good doctor should “cure sometimes, relieve often and comfort always”. Medical graduates in the UK no longer swear a Hippocratic oath but are still bound by its main principles to treat the sick, to preserve patients’ secrets, to respect teachings and above all, to do no harm. These obligations are taught from an early stage and form part of the compact between medicine and society which is why self-regulation of the profession is taken so seriously by the General Medical Council. Under these circumstances, the matter of right livelihood might seem self-evident. However, the more I thought about this, the more I realized I didn’t really know the answer or understand how much the self is separate from professional identity.

Right livelihood is a moral judgment on how we earn a living. It comes under the teachings about personal discipline as part of the Buddha’s eight-fold path, along with right speech and right actions. Livelihood is simply a means of earning a living and it’s only one aspect of the tapestry of life. We could just as easily talk about right relationships, right financial dealings, or right interests and hobbies. Concepts

of right and wrong are human creations, and become hazy once we start to consider interconnectedness. They have no validity in ultimate reality. Morality, if it can be defined at all outside the duality of human existence, seems to be as much about intention as effect. It seems that the livelihood aspect of right living is just an external shell and that within that are all sorts of self-oriented actions that may or may not be defined as right.

Zen master Ikkyu once visited a rich person’s house dressed in his usual monk’s gown to ask for food. He was turned away. Subsequently he visited the same house clad in his abbot’s robe and was offered a sumptuous meal. He refused to eat the feast. He took off his robe and placed it before the food stating that the food belonged to the robe and not to him. Are all those who claim right livelihood just wearing the correct robes?

Choosing to become a doctor might be seen as an early step towards right livelihood but was not really a choice for me at all. Experience of childhood illness and seeing the power wielded by doctors and the respect that my mother gave them made me want to become a member of that important group, not to mention enjoying the encouragement and approval from my grandparents. Seeking power and approval, even in a young child, is not a particularly promising start for a career in right livelihood.

The choices we make in life, even though seemingly innocent and altruistic, are often underpinned by self-interest. For example, in my early career I had been fortunate to obtain a training place at a prestigious institution, and was therefore in a strong position to join a general practice in any part of the country. However, I did not apply for a part-

nership in a deprived area where health needs are greatest and doctors in short supply. Instead, I chose an established practice in an affluent seaside town with a good quality of life. By some right livelihood standards, that qualifies as a fail. However, we have to consider the duality of living in this world and take into account considerations of social and family relationships, schools and housing.

Even if all appears to be going well, there are many pitfalls in just unthinkingly accepting that certain careers are automatically better than others in terms of right livelihood. There is no immunity for doctors from ordinary workplace vexations such as greed, envy, anger or irritation. When does ambition become wrong? Asking for a pay rise or a budget increase is not intrinsically bad, but undermining others in order to obtain it would be. Helping others by exercising professional skills and knowledge is a power relationship, which can easily be abused. The gratification from helping others can become so intoxicating that wisdom and compassion disappear. The fifth bodhisattva precept to avoid intoxicants does not apply just to alcohol or drugs but to anything that is so addictive that the self loses mindfulness. It is a very slippery path.

Even mindful medical practice can throw out ethical dilemmas that some may consider wrong. Therapeutic abortion for example is highly controversial and doctors have to balance the consequences of a number of different actions. When faced with a choice, harms and benefits can accrue as much from not doing something as from doing it, and either way could be construed as part of wrong livelihood. During the recent pandemic, there has been an enormous increase in non-recyclable hygiene items sent to landfill. We all know about our responsibilities to minimize waste of resources but single use plastics and other

items have an important role in reducing cross infection. Who will judge the rightness of all of this?

Actions that directly harm others generally fall into the category of being wrong but even that is not straightforward. The avoidance of killing is generally taken to proscribe eating meat but the growth of crops has had huge deleterious effects on the diversity of the environment and on wildlife. I'm not criticizing vegetarian lifestyles – just illustrating that even apparently acceptable activities cannot avoid causing harm. Looking at the other side of the argument about what might constitute wrong livelihood, I can see very little upside to a way of life that involves profiting from addiction. Even so, we might feel confident in criticizing a cocaine cartel boss but how would we categorize an impoverished Afghan opium farmer keeping their family fed?

I have to conclude that there is no such thing as right livelihood. How we earn a living is simply just one aspect of the fabric of our lives. Some of us are fortunate in that events outside our control such as parental influences and schooling opportunities have made things much easier, but ultimately it's all about following the chosen path mindfully – and trying to minimize and learn from our mistakes along the way. Just putting one foot in front of the other seems to be sufficient.

RETREAT REPORTS

The first residential retreats have now taken place at Shawbottom, and a calendar of future retreats can be found on our website. The following reports describe the experiences of retreatants on two of the first retreats

RETREAT REPORT – SILENT ILLUMINATION JULY 2022

heatwave
only the butterflies
still busy

I am a chatterer, verbalising everything in my head all the time, keeping a running commentary going and explaining events to some imaginary listener. It took me a while to realise on retreat that the ‘Silent’ in ‘Silent Illumination’ was not the silence of nature but had to be the silence of me.

I was strict with myself and cut down the flow of the wordy stream. Eventually I broke through into silence of self, and at that point, quite quickly, a wonderful world was revealed. Nature, empty of me and my language, but observed by me, is modestly performing many complex miracles continuously. There are mysterious creative forces at work, and all mutually exchange with the forces that hold the earth in orbit and the life-giving sun in its place. The air is sweet to breathe. The sky is beautiful. The plants are good to eat. This earth is a paradise, and an extraordinary gift. The more you consider the complexity of how the particle physics interacts so snugly with the chemistry and the biologies and bota-

nies and astronomy of how things are, the more ridiculously improbable a miracle it all appears to be. You feel the wonder, as you breathe. The air around you is quietly animated. Stripped of my noisy forms, the emptiness is radiant, and flowers in ways far beyond my comprehension. How on earth did we find ourselves here? How many millions of universes would have had to struggle through evolutionary cycles for us to find ourselves on a planet that is so finely tuned? It’s staggering. And it’s right there, whenever you shut up.

Towards the end of the retreat I felt great affection and sympathy for someone who is currently furious with me.

I found myself doing prostrations, asking forgiveness from those I have bruised by not being sufficiently mindful.

all morning
without a word
the warmth

summer morning –
I’m in an invisible sea
my gills flared

dear slug, dear daisy
here in the grass, with thin rain
is it all just right?

skeleton tree
image of life’s ambitions
zany zigzag choices

RETREAT REPORT – KOAN RETREAT SEPTEMBER 2022

Planting a great oak at Shawbottom
and returning each year to say, “I did that”,
that would be something.

The sapling trees were ready in pots,
the spade resting against the shed.

I could only claim a short-lived success
weeding between the paving slabs.

About his many enlightenment experiences
Sawaki Roshi once said,
“they didn’t amount to a whole hill of beans”.

In my secret koan, “Tokusan’s Bowls”,
ego-jousting monks
cause trouble for themselves and others.

When the Chan Hall door opened and closed
it stopped me in my tracks.

Repetitive forms, the torrent of racing time,
contract the visit
to few, brief, moments of mind.

The crippled fly taking off out the window.
The approaching calf who seemed to know me.

Saddened to leave the serenity and the wilderness,
I gaze out over Grenoside Woods.

Mind still as a tree trunk.

The vast, cloud-wrinkled sky
knows it is time for a cup of tea.



BOOK REVIEW: THE ANGEL'S WOUND – COLLECTED HAIBUN BY GEORGE MARSH

EDDY STREET



In this book George Marsh, one-time editor of this journal, presents a collection of haibun. Those familiar with the muse and process of haiku and haibun will know, however, that you do not collect them, they collect you. So here we have the assembled work of someone that has been collected through the experiences and activities of his life including those of a Buddhist practitioner.

For readers who expect haibun to be a few paragraphs of prose punctuated by a traditional three line haiku verse which intensifies the themes of the prose, then this is a collection that will take you away from that anticipated route. George plays with both the nature of the prose and verse; sometimes the prose is in the form of a dialogue (who is speaking to who?), sometimes a number of points (who is the teacher? who is the listener?) and then comes a verse or at times several verses and not necessarily of the requisite number of lines. In their interplay with the prose the verses sometimes deepen the experience of the described moment and sometimes there is a rapid shift from one type of experience to the other. It is through its dissonances and unexpected juxtapositions that the freshness and indeed solidity of the stories is constructed. An approach that points us toward a full moment of awareness with its compendium of thoughts, feelings, sensations and being.

The conversation between the prose and the verse is always at the heart of haibun and here this dialogue/chat/shouting match is one that points to the way our life is filled with its ups and downs, its tragedies and hopes, just going along on its own idiosyncratic journey. There is violence and grief on the one hand and ordinary beauty and every day mundanity on the other. A whole range of emotions and senses are evoked by the prose, the stench of neglect, the horror of man's inhumanity to man, the pleasure in the discovery of a bees' nest. We meet experiences along the developmental path that we all are likely to encounter, if not yet; the first kiss, a parent's death, the pleasures of being a grandparent and coping with the aftermath of surgery. Then there are experiences that many of us will not encounter, meeting a man in prison who killed his wife, visiting a remembrance site where hundreds of thousands of Chinese were killed by invading Japanese troops.

Plum blossoms
thanks be thanks be
my life so easy

There is also a surprising piece about the Large Hadron Collider and the revealing of the Higgs boson, the science of which evokes the verse,

always roaring
the echo in me
of the wind between the stars

and then to sitting in a greasy spoon café. So, if you would like to reflect on that cup of coffee, its serving and other experiences of life then join George with his haibun, I'm sure they'll welcome you.

The Angel's Wound – Collected Haibun by George Marsh.
Published by Alba Publishing, 2022.

Order from George Marsh,
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About Us

Chan is the Chinese ancestor of Zen Buddhism. The Western Chan Fellowship is an association of non-monastic practitioners – a lay sangha – based in the UK and with contacts elsewhere in Europe and in the USA. Our Zen retreats and other activities are open equally to Buddhists and non-Buddhists, and we welcome everyone, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, class or disability. Our new retreat and meditation centre in central England includes accessible accommodation. (see below for new retreat programme)

Visit our Website

www.westernchanfellowship.org

This includes:

- introductory articles on Chan, Zen, Buddhism and meditation
- talks by Chan masters
- reports by participants at our retreats
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- contacts for local meditation groups

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www.westernchanfellowship.org/chan-meditation-groups/overseas-groups

Contributing to New Chan Forum

We are always delighted to receive articles, artwork, photographs, poetry etc. If possible please send as .doc documents, to the Editor, Pat Simmons, at editor@westernchanfellowship.doc. She will also be happy to discuss with you any ideas you may have for contributions. You do not need to be a Buddhist scholar: she would prefer something that springs from your own experience and insight.

Forthcoming Retreats

We are pleased to announce that we have now resumed residential retreats. You can read reports on pages 46–9 from the first retreats.

INVESTIGATING KOANS

Saturday 3 December to Saturday 10 December

Leader: Simon Child

ILLUMINATING THE MIND

Saturday 14 January to Saturday 21 January

Leader: Simon Child

WESTERN ZEN RETREAT

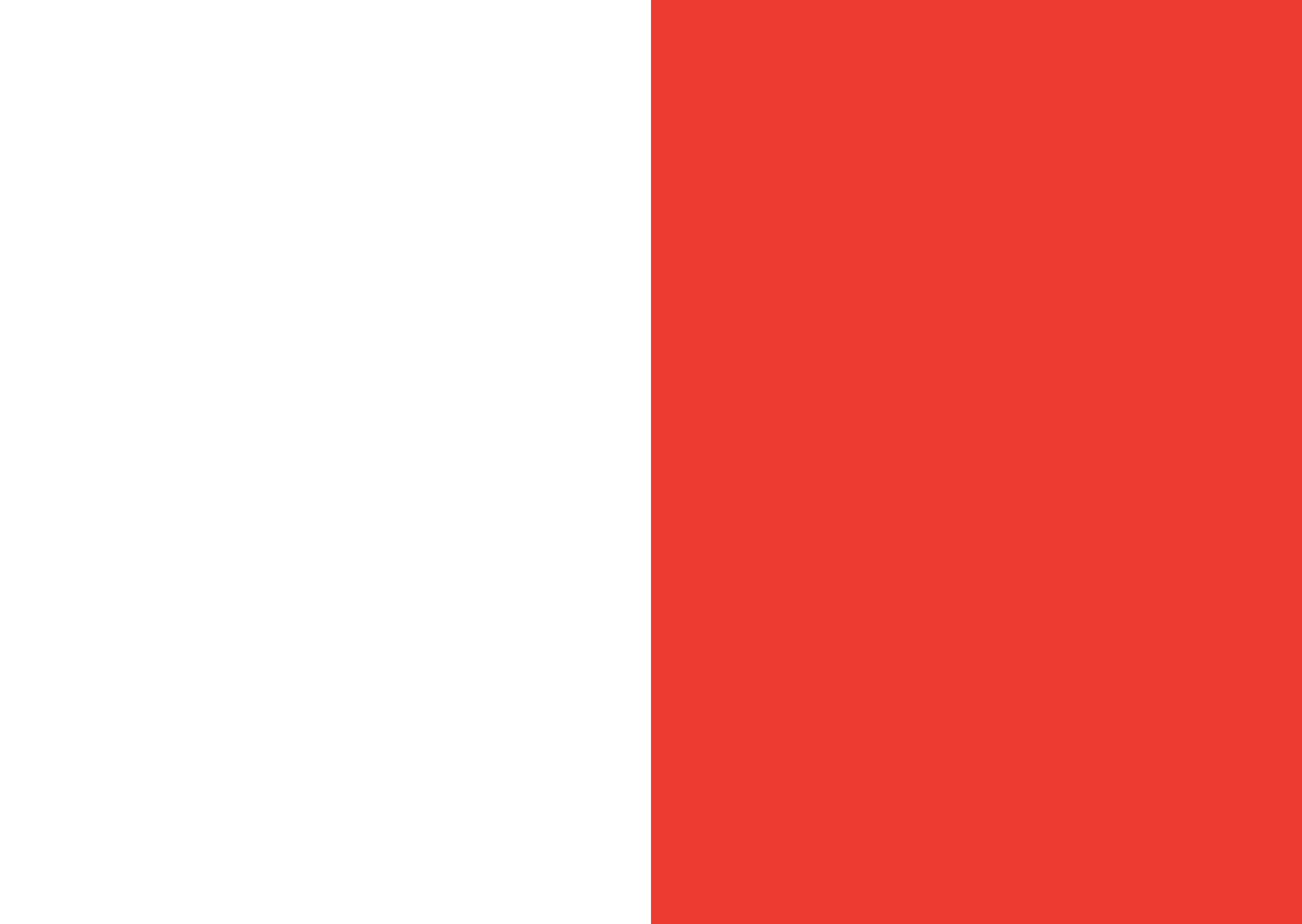
Saturday 11 February to Thursday 16 February

Leader: Jake Lyne

All retreats will take place at Shawbottom Farm, in Derbyshire. Please see our website for up-to-date retreat information. We look forward to welcoming you back on retreat.

NEW CHAN FORUM

Published by Western Chan Fellowship Charitable Incorporated Organisation (registered charity no 1166162)
Correspondence address: New Chan Forum, 22 Lilymead Avenue, Bristol BS4 2BX. Design: Rob Bowden





*See yourself in others.
Then whom can you hurt?
What harm can you do?*

*He who seeks happiness
By hurting those who seek happiness
Will never find happiness.*

THE DHAMMAPADA

