



Newsletter 23

One Year On

Already a year has passed since the sad loss of our founding Teacher John Crook. But the work of continuing the teaching goes on as actively as ever, as you can see from the many and diverse events listed in this newsletter.

In addition to practice events, our local leaders have been entrusted with responsibility for facilitating practice 'non-events'. I refer to the crucial daily-life dimension of practice which needs to continue in our everyday family and working lives, away from formal events such as retreats and time on the cushion at home, for which the phrase "23½ hour Zen" was coined at my talk to our AGM (see www.w-c-f.org/Q372-325) earlier this year.

Part of the support for cultivating 23½ hour Zen is to be found through Sangha, and we aim to develop our sense of Sangha through, for example, occasional more social Dharma gatherings such as the Wesak celebrations held by several local groups this year.

Sangha involves a sense of belonging, and requires participation. You are encouraged make contact with your fellow practitioners, whether informally or at local groups or Sangha events, both for your own support and to provide support to others. Remember that practice is not only about taking what you can for your own benefit but also includes practising generosity, part of which may be expressed through supporting others. I myself also hope to be more active in this way in the coming months, visiting some of our local groups.

Another way to participate is to offer help in the administration of WCF. We are always stretched to cover our workload and WCF could spread the Dharma more effectively if we had additional support in several areas. We'll be appointing a volunteer coordinator shortly and listing specific requirements (keep an eye on the website), but if you can't wait to get involved then you could contact secretary@westernchanfellowship.org now to put your name down. And we are also always open to more cooks joining the rota for retreat cooking (which is a paid role). If you have the skills and interest for that then please contact our cooking coordinator Flo at florenclifford@gmail.com

Simon Child, *Chuan-fa Jing-hong*, WCF Teacher

Retreat Programme Sept-December 2012

The 2013 programme is in preparation so keep an eye on the website where full details and updates will be posted.

Maenllwyd in Wales remains our main venue, but note that the early October retreat is in N. Yorkshire and the early November retreat is in E. Sussex.

The programme is subject to change (additions, amendments, and cancellations), so please refer to the website at www.w-c-f.org/Q342 for the latest version.

4th – 9th August: Western Zen Retreat

Leader: Hilary Richards. Venue: Maenllwyd, Wales

A simple monastic regime enables the mind to face the major paradox - Who am I? - in creative mutual questioning. People work in turns with each member of the group in exploring this fundamental Koan. The intensive focus drives each into a self-presentation that is difficult to experience in other ways. The outcome may be a profound sense of the unity of self and possibly a direct insight into the 'ground of being', in traditional Zen considered to be a glimpse of Enlightenment. Whether or not such an insight happens, participants share a rich experience in new self-knowledge and understanding others.

Suitable both for beginners and for experienced practitioners.

Sat 15th – 22nd September: Koan Retreat

Leader: Simon Child. Venue: Maenllwyd, Wales

This retreat uses new ways of investigating koans that are appropriate for Westerners attempting to uncover their enlightenment potential. A selection of koan stories is provided from which each participant is asked to choose one for their practice on this retreat. As this is a personal choice it tends to relate to the basic 'life koan' of each individual. The story thus becomes of profound personal significance. Placing the koan within meditation, the natural Western tendency to analyze meanings away and the possibility of profound meditative inquiry arises. As the 'Great Doubt' appears, deep insight into the Dharma becomes possible in the time-honoured manner.

Requires prior experience of intensive retreat.

13th Oct – 18th October: 5-Day Chan retreat

Leader: Eddie Street. Venue: Barmoor, N. Yorkshire

Every retreat gives the opportunity of developing the inner silence that leads to wisdom and compassion. These are the elements of practice that allow us to engage in our lives in an active and fully aware way that contains the inherent equanimity of our Buddha nature. With talks and instructions based on some traditional Chan teaching stories this retreat will allow participants to consider the attitudes and orientation that underlie an involved lay practice. Using a simple monastic regime of silence and regular sitting both beginners and established trainees will be able to work with the development of their own practice.

Suitable both for beginners and for experienced practitioners

27th October – 3rd November: Silent Illumination Retreat

Leader: Simon Child. Venue: Maenllwyd, Wales

This traditional week-long retreat will allow the time and space for serious practitioners to learn, practice and cultivate the Chinese Zen method of Silent Illumination. Simple yet difficult, within this space you may encounter an opening that allows you to come to rest and find freedom, peace and lucidity. This is not a place to opt out but enables effective engagement with daily life.

Requires prior attendance at a 5 day retreat.

1st – 4th November: Other people - conflicts, problems, enmities

Leader: Ken Jones. Venue: Hourne Farm, E. Sussex

Other people - conflicts, problems, enmities - How to resolve them and at the same time make them a beneficial part of a Buddhist practice. To turn muck into gold we shall employ meditation, small group work, role play and the like, in a warm-hearted and mutually supportive atmosphere.

Suitable both for beginners and for experienced practitioners

10th – 15th November: Western Zen Retreat

Leader: Jake Lyne. Venue: Maenllwyd, Wales

A simple monastic regime enables the mind to face the major paradox - Who am I? - in creative mutual questioning. People work in turns with each member of the group in exploring this fundamental Koan. The intensive focus drives each into a self-presentation that is difficult to experience in other ways. The outcome may be a profound sense of the unity of self and possibly a direct insight into the 'ground of being', in traditional Zen considered to be a glimpse of Enlightenment. Whether or not such an insight happens, participants share a rich experience in new self-knowledge and understanding others.

Suitable both for beginners and for experienced practitioners.

8th – 15th December: Shattering the Great Doubt

Leader: Simon Child. Venue: Maenllwyd, Wales

The ancient Chinese Zen practices of investigating Huatou and Gongan (Koan) are best practised in a supportive environment such as this intensive 7-day silent Chan retreat. As one becomes deeply absorbed in the practice, mental constructions drop away and one is confronted by a realisation that one does not know the nature of existence and one's fundamental assumptions of life are groundless. Staying with and cultivating this 'doubt', it can become all-consuming 'Great doubt' which may 'shatter', giving a direct insight into reality which may be what is known as an Enlightenment experience.

To progress in these methods requires a sustained focus and so this retreat is open only to those with previous experience of intensive retreat. Prior attendance at a Western Zen Retreat is recommended.

WCF Local Events

Several WCF groups organise additional shorter events from time to time such as day retreat. Keep an eye on their web-pages at <http://w-c-f.org/Q3>

Diamond Sutra Study Day, and Tree Planting Ceremony in memory of Chan Master John Crook

Sat 18th August 2012. Diamond Sutra, discussion facilitated by Jake Lyne, followed by planting of a memorial tree

"Thus shall you think of all this fleeting world:

A star at dawn, a bubble in a stream;

A flash of lightning in a summer cloud,

A flickering lamp, a phantom, and a dream"

Venue: Forest of Dean. For details contact jane-spray@tiscali.co.uk or Tel: 01594 861404.

Forest of Dean Day Retreat

Sun 19th August 2012. Day Retreat led by Hilary Richards

Venue: Forest of Dean. For details contact jane-spray@tiscali.co.uk or Tel: 01594 861404.

Hertford Chan Group Day Retreat

Sun 19th August 2012, Venue: Danaloka, Harlow

The Hertford Chan Group holds its day retreats in a Buddhist shrine room in Harlow.

Please go to Hertford Chan Group Page for an indicative programme and other information, including contact details. www.w-c-f.org/Q349

Herefordshire Weekend Retreat

21st - 23rd September 2012. A weekend retreat organised by the Cardiff Chan Group at Maitreya House in the Black Mountains, led by Eddy Street. The cost is £50.00. Stop Press: fully booked, for waiting list enquiries please contact Rob Stratton at: cardiffchan@westernchanfellowship.org. Details: www.w-c-f.org/Q487-165

Cardiff Chan Group Practice Day

Sat 10th November 2012, Venue: Dinas Powys Parish Hall, S. Wales, Leader: Eddy Street

Our practice days are designed to help practitioners - Buddhist or otherwise - develop their own meditation practice. We have developed a 'drop in' Practice Day format of gentle sitting, which both more experienced practitioners and beginners seem to find equally helpful. The day is organised so that individuals may come and go depending on their own needs and interests. Some stay all day, others for part of the day.

Meditation instruction for beginners is available before the start of the day and is best arranged beforehand. Interviews are available during the day if required.

Bristol Chan Group

Sat 24th - 25th November 2012. Mahamudra weekend retreat, leader Sophie Muir.

See www.bristolchan.co.uk for details.

Manchester Chan Group

Monthly Sutra Study Group, and occasional day retreats www.w-c-f.org/Q42

More Events of Interest

(NB These events are not organised by the Western Chan Fellowship)

- Silent Illumination Retreat, London, Ji Chern Fashi, Aug 26 – Sept 2, 2012
- Western Zen Retreat in New York, USA, Simon Child and Hilary Richards, Oct 12 – 17, 2012
- Silent Illumination Retreat, New York USA, Simon Child, Nov 23 - Dec 2, 2012
- Silent Illumination Retreat, Poland, Simon Child, March 2013.
- Silent Illumination Retreat, New York USA, Simon Child, May 2013
- Western Zen Retreat in New York, USA, Simon Child, October 2013

For details see www.w-c-f.org/Q367

Membership of the Western Chan Fellowship

Associate membership is available if you have undergone a formal Refuge ceremony with an authorised teacher and agree to follow the five Lay Precepts of Buddhism (not killing, not stealing, not lying, no sexual misconduct and not misusing intoxicants), according to your own sincere interpretation and to the best of your ability. It doesn't matter whether Refuge may have been taken with a teacher of the Western Chan Fellowship or in another Buddhist organisation. You also undertake to carry out a regular personal practice of Buddhism, and to support the Western Chan Fellowship and their local Chan Group if there is one nearby.

Full membership is available if you meet the criteria specified in Section E of the Constitution of the WCF – see www.w-c-f.org/Q122. Principally this refers to attendance at three or more of our retreats including both Western Zen and seven-day Chan retreats, and undertakings regarding personal practice.

To facilitate membership applications, particularly associate membership, Refuge ceremonies will be offered from time to time at local group events by authorised WCF retreat leaders.

Application / Standing Order / Gift Aid forms are available at www.w-c-f.org/Q31

Mailings

We have posted this programme to you because your details are held on our database as someone who has attended retreats in the past or expressed an interest in our programme. If you do not wish to receive mailings please contact our membership secretary Hugh Carroll admin@westernchanfellowship.org or c/o 18 Chandos Close, Swindon, SN5 6AH, UK.

You may register for occasional email updates and newsletters by logging in to the website at www.w-c-f.org/Q363 (create an account if you don't have one) and set your mailing preferences to receive mailings i.e. do not tick the optout box.