



www.westernchanfellowship.org

October 2015

Newsletter 30

Important Announcement for WCF Members

WCF is planning some major organisational changes. An email has been sent to all members about this, and we have set up a special webpage in the members' area of the website which holds a copy of this email and where we shall add further details and FAQ and similar. To access this webpage you will need to *login to the website first* (go to <http://w-c-f.org/Q363>) then go to <http://w-c-f.org/Q630>

Western Chan Fellowship AGM 2016

This will be held in Bristol on the morning of Saturday 5th March. Full details will be circulated nearer the time but please put this date in your diary now as this will be an important AGM.

A Place of Silence

Simon Child

Back in 1998 BBC Radio 4 featured Maenllwyd and WCF retreats in a 30-minute programme presented by Dr Susan Blackmore. Susan has only recently secured permission from the BBC to release that recording on her website. It includes sections by John Crook, Tim Blanc, James Monks, Phillip Wilson the local farmer, and myself.

<http://www.susanblackmore.co.uk/Media/silence.htm>

On the evening before it was broadcast the BBC phoned me to ask how to handle enquiries about retreats or WCF that may be stimulated by the programme, and asked if it would be alright to give out my telephone number. I didn't really expect much response but to avoid disturbance to my family I said it would be better to give out my address or that of John Crook instead of phone number. Two days later the letters started arriving, about 20 or more per day for the next ten days, and John also received a similar number! Some of those respondents turned up on retreats subsequently, and some are still attending now 17 years later.

Turn the Page for our 2016 Retreat Programme!

Please refer to the website at www.w-c-f.org/Q342 for the latest updates.

7th – 14th November 2015: Shattering the Great Doubt 7-night Retreat (FULLY BOOKED – waiting list available)

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 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.

5th – 10th December 2015: Western Zen 5-night Retreat

(FULLY BOOKED – waiting list available)

Leader: Fiona Nuttall. Venue: Maenllwyd, Wales

Who am I? Thoroughly confronting this question can take us directly to the centre of our being. Over the course of this five-day retreat you will investigate the question "Who am I?" within a standard retreat framework, using silent meditation in conjunction with a unique method of verbal inquiry. This format allows you to use words to go beyond words and thereby enter the main gate of Chan.

The intensive nature of this process of inquiry drives each practitioner into a self-presentation that is difficult to experience in other ways. To guide and support you, personal interviews with the teachers are offered regularly throughout the retreat. With whole-hearted engagement this retreat may lead to the acceptance of self, the experience of "self at ease," and may even provide an opportunity for direct insight into the ground of being.

9th – 16th January 2016: Silent Illumination 7-night Retreat

(FULLY BOOKED – waiting list available)

Leader: Simon Child. Venue: Maenllwyd, Wales

Silent Illumination is a profound meditation practice which leads to a mind of great calmness and insight, using ancient Chinese Zen methods which are just as applicable to the modern West. This seven-night silent retreat is an opportunity to learn and deepen this practice through intensive meditation, with instruction and personal guidance by individual interviews with an experienced teacher. Whether or not a breakthrough to Enlightenment may occur, establishing a practice gives a firm basis for subsequent ongoing mindfulness in everyday life.

6th – 11th February 2016: Western Zen 5-night Retreat

Leader: Jake Lyne. Venue: Maenllwyd, Wales

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unique method of verbal inquiry. This format allows you to use words to go beyond words and thereby enter the main gate of Chan.

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2nd – 9th April 2016: Shattering the Great Doubt 7-night Retreat

Leader: Simon Child. Venue: Maenllwyd, Wales

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May/June: Connected Practice

Enhance your practice in your own environment

Co-ordinator Hilary Richards

Join us in a commitment for a period of connected and enhanced practice. We will undertake this in our daily lives, whether at home or in the workplace, with the silent support of knowing that we are not practising alone. We intend to raise the tempo of our practice for this period, increasing our capacity to be aware in our daily lives. A Mindfulness Bell will be rung at noon every day, when all participants may pause and be joined in the silence that the bell marks. Members of our Sangha may use this opportunity in different and creative ways. Open to all.

Dates will be confirmed and announced on the website in a few weeks. To join in email: connected-practice@westernchanfellowship.org or phone 0117 3300581 nearer the time once the dates have been announced.

28th May – 4th June 2016: Silent Illumination 7-night Retreat

Leader: Jake Lyne. Venue: Bala Brook Retreat Centre, Devon

Silent Illumination is a profound meditation practice which leads to a mind of great calmness and insight, using ancient Chinese Zen methods which are just as applicable to the modern West. This seven-night silent retreat is an opportunity to learn and deepen this practice through intensive meditation, with instruction and personal guidance by individual interviews with an experienced teacher. Whether or not a breakthrough to Enlightenment may occur, establishing a practice gives a firm basis for subsequent ongoing mindfulness in everyday life.

25th – 30th June 2016: Western Zen 5-night Retreat

Leader: Fiona Nuttall. Venue: Maenllwyd, Wales

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The intensive nature of this process of inquiry drives each practitioner into a self-presentation that is difficult to experience in other ways. To guide and support you, personal interviews with the teachers are offered regularly throughout the retreat. With whole-hearted engagement this retreat may lead to the acceptance of self, the experience of "self at ease," and may even provide an opportunity for direct insight into the ground of being.

5th – 14th August 2016: Shattering the Great Doubt 9-night Retreat

Leader: Simon Child. Venue: Hourne Farm, E. Sussex

The ancient Chinese Zen practices of investigating Huatou and Gongan (Koan) are best practised in a supportive environment such as this intensive 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.

3rd – 8th September 2016: Awareness in the everyday: working with what arises

Leader: Hilary Richards. Venue: Maenllwyd, Wales

This workshop retreat will encourage everyday awareness as a fundamental Chan life practice. We will offer individual and group work to develop mindfulness allowing time for exploration and understanding of individual experience through the lens of meditation. Rising early each day, the retreat will also include teaching, silence, interviews and periods for exercise.

1st – 8th October 2016: Silent Illumination 7-night Retreat

Leader: Fiona Nuttall. Venue: Maenllwyd, Wales

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5th – 10th November: Western Zen 5-night Retreat

Leader: Simon Child. Venue: Maenllwyd, Wales

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3rd – 10th December 2016: Shattering the Great Doubt 7-night Retreat

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 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.

Day Retreats

Several local groups arrange day retreats and other events from time to time. See the website events page <http://w-c-f.org/Q342> and individual group's pages at <http://w-c-f.org/Q3> for details of events.

Retreats abroad with Simon Child in 2016

For details see <http://w-c-f.org/Q367>

- Warsaw, Poland: 7-day Silent Illumination retreat, February 19–26 2016
- Dharma Drum Retreat Center, USA: 9-day Silent Illumination retreat, May 2016
- Dharma Drum Retreat Center, USA: 5-day Western Zen retreat, Oct 2016

Mailings

If you no longer wish to receive postal mailings, please help us save printing and postage costs by notifying admin@westernchanfellowship.org

Twirl that pen!

Please send us material for the New Chan Forum

Articles: Any lively articles relevant to Chan learning and Chan living would be most welcome. We need to create the New Chan Forum for ourselves, in the way we want it to be. And please keep the retreat reports coming! They are very highly valued contributions to the understanding of the power of the retreat process.

Images: Artwork, drawings, photographs, and also poems, haiku and haibun would be very much appreciated.

If these or other ideas stimulate you then please contact the editors, Pat Simmons and George Marsh, who will be more than happy to discuss with you how any idea can be taken forward. Contact editor@westernchanfellowship.org

Retreat Booking Conditions

Last year we made two changes to our cancellation policy. Cancellations within two weeks of a retreat will result in forfeit of the entire fee; previously it was 50% of the fee. The other change is that we may still offer a refund, after deducting an administration charge, if there are significant compassionate grounds for a cancellation, but only with independent evidence such as a medical certificate, and even then this is at our discretion. Previously we would have offered a refund if a request was made in writing on compassionate grounds, without the requirement for independent verification.

The reason for this change is that we have noticed an increase in late cancellations recently. We are not alone; other Buddhist organisations have noticed the same problem. Many of these cancellations are for genuine reasons, but it seems likely that some people book in order to reserve a place for themselves in case they decide to come. Whilst people have emailed to claim significant compassionate grounds, some have not given any details, e.g. "I was not able to attend due to significant compassionate grounds", which leaves us wondering how significant those compassionate grounds were. Rather than tasking our admin secretary with an investigation to establish the reasons in more detail, we have opted for placing the burden of proof on the person cancelling, hence the need for independent evidence.

Many of our retreats are overbooked with a waiting list. Late cancellations don't usually give us time to alert people on the waiting list and so places that could have been filled by people who are keen to come on retreat are left empty. This is a shame and something we are keen to avoid.

More details at: <http://w-c-f.org/Q303>